

**How Teachers Can Support ELLs' Content Learning in the General Classroom**

by

Clarissa Bridget Rivera

May, 2024

Supervised by

Dr. Rosa Mazurett Boyle

A master's thesis capstone project submitted to the Department of Education and Human  
Development of SUNY Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in Education in TESOL or Bilingual Education

### **Abstract**

General classroom teachers often find themselves unprepared for working with English Language Learner students in their content area classrooms. It is imperative that general content teachers engage in training where they receive guidance on how they can support the content learning of ELLs. When teachers lack training, students are often left out of academic learning, leading to them falling behind their English-speaking peers. Students many times do not feel like appreciated members of their learning community. Literature suggests that teachers are also affected negatively, often lacking the confidence in their skills to educate ELL students. To mitigate the problem, I have developed a professional development session for general classroom teachers and school level administrators. The goals of the training are that teachers and administrators obtain tools that they need to make meaningful connections with parents, gain valuable background and cultural information about their students in order to support ELL students academically as well as culturally. When teachers possess the tools they need to implement academic and cultural strategies to support learning, they experience higher levels of confidence in their own skills. ELLs often perform better when their school integrates students' language, culture, and prior knowledge into educational activities. As educators implement various strategies to support ELLs and other students, their classrooms become environments that are more culturally sustaining. Further research is needed to determine the long-term education and emotional impact on ELL students and their families.

*Keywords:* English Language Learners, teacher training, content learning, support strategies, culturally responsive

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	2
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Problem Statement</b> .....	4
<b>Significance of the problem</b> .....	5
<b>Purpose</b> .....	7
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	8
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	9
<b>Adverse Consequences for ELL Students in the Classroom</b> .....	10
<b>Adverse Consequences for Teachers of ELL Students</b> .....	12
<b>Importance of Professional Development for Content Teachers</b> .....	13
<b>Cultural Strategies to Support ELLs in Content Areas</b> .....	16
<b>Classroom Strategies to Support ELLs in Content Areas</b> .....	18
<b>Studies Regarding Strategy Implementation</b> .....	21
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	24
<b>Chapter 3: Professional Development</b> .....	25
<b>Session One</b> .....	26
<b>Session Two</b> .....	29
<b>Session Three</b> .....	33
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	35
<b>Chapter 4: Conclusion</b> .....	36
<b>Introduction</b> .....	36
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	37
<b>Implications for Student Learning</b> .....	37
<b>Implications for Teaching</b> .....	38
<b>Recommendations for Future Research</b> .....	39
<b>Final thoughts</b> .....	41
<b>References</b> .....	43
<b>Appendices</b> .....	47

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Problem Statement

“Mrs. Rivera, I want to let you know that I am recommending Jeronimo Garcia (pseudonym) for retention. He can’t access this curriculum because his lack of English skills”. This exchange with a first-grade teacher made me wonder, how can we change this deficit mindset of low expectations by content teachers? How can teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) improve content learning in the general classroom? It has been my experience that, English language learners require more support than other students in order to properly access the content presented in the regular classroom. I also believe that content teachers need training that will guide them as they decide upon strategies to use during content lessons.

Therefore, the overarching research question that I want to address in this capstone is: How can teachers support English Language Learners’ content learning in the general classroom? The problem is rooted in the unpreparedness of general content teachers who teach ELLs in their classrooms while having little or no professional development related to teaching these students (Stairs-Davenport, 2023). Teachers are expected to teach these students but are often left unprepared for the task of educating ELLs in their classrooms (Villegas, 2018). Concerning teacher preparedness Villegas stated, “When teachers lack the knowledge and pedagogical skills this task demands, ELLs are positioned at a decided disadvantage in learning” (p. 132). This predicament can affect the school experience of ELL students and their academic progress since they are learning content and language simultaneously in a language which may not be fully comprehensible to them.

Stairs-Davenport found that in 2014-2015 in a north-eastern United States school district with approximately 5 percent of the population as ELLs, 87.5 % of the K-5 content teachers had

little to no preparation for teaching ELLs. Often times teachers are asked or assigned to teach the ELL cluster class or have a handful of ELLs in their classroom without the proper training about the linguistic needs of ELLs. General content teachers need more support in order to properly differentiate instruction so that the ELL students can access grade level content in a comprehensible way (Stairs-Davenport, 2023).

The term English language learner (ELL) refers to a student whose first or home language is not English. These students are learning the English language at school as they are learning the content material (Villegas, 2018). The terms general education teachers and general content classrooms refer to the general content education classroom setting where students learn content material for most of the day, which may be separate from the English language class or group taught by a certified English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher. Professional development (PD) refers to training that content teachers are given in order to improve their understanding of the needs of ELL students and to learn strategies that will support student learning in the general content classroom. Through a PD, this capstone aims to inform teachers on supporting ELLs content learning in the K-5 general education classroom.

### **Significance of the problem**

“ELLs are one of the fastest growing populations in US classrooms” (Sandilos et al., 2020, p. 1). More importantly, the ELL population in many states has been increasing even as overall student enrollment has been decreasing (Stairs-Davenport, 2023). As a result of these demographic changes, there will continue to be a higher prevalence of students in need of language support moving into the future. Teachers and administrators need to be prepared for these students within their schools. Students of various proficiency levels may require different

supports in the content classroom and teachers are curious about the best methods to reach their students.

Without teacher training, ELL students with lower proficiency levels are often excluded from accessing the content, which can result in larger achievement gaps for ELLs in the future, perpetuating a deficit view of ELLs as learners. When students finally become more proficient in English, many find that they have fallen far behind academically (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Students will continue to fall behind their monolingual peers' performance on classroom, local and state assessments when they are unable to access the curriculum (Manyak et al., 2021). This can result in lowered academic expectations of ELL students. Student self-esteem and confidence in the classroom can also be affected negatively when they repeatedly exhibit low academic performance (Sandilos et al, 2020; Villegas, 2018). Content teachers need professional development in order to properly understand and support the diverse skills and needs of ELLs in the general classroom, with the goal of reducing the number of long-term ELLs heading into middle and high school, according to Rodriguez et al. Von Esch and Kavanagh (2018) agree with Rodriguez et al. that ELL students enter the classroom with various levels of home language competencies and academic experiences which need to be considered when planning the best methods of support for each. Manyak et al. suggest students will actually be more engaged in the classroom as simultaneously expanding their language skills and learn content material with differentiated and scaffolded activities. Along the same lines, Von Esch & Kavanagh believe that it is important for content teachers to be able to combine their knowledge of content with appropriate instructional supports for ELL students to be more successful.

## **Purpose**

The capstone project includes a professional development (PD) designed for general content teachers. The purpose of this capstone is to shed light on the importance of training content teachers on various ways to support ELLs in the general classroom. The guiding document for the PD is the New York State Education Department's Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework, or NYSED CR-S Framework (2018). Teacher training positively affects students' progress as they learn content. The CR-S Framework centers content learning with a culturally responsive and culturally sustaining approach. Using appropriate strategies can encourage participation and result higher engagement during lessons and can also result in higher teacher confidence while working with ELLs (Stairs-Davenport, 2023). According to Villegas (2018), content educators often lack confidence in themselves when working ELL students which can lead to placing the teaching responsibilities onto the trained ELL teachers. However, all teachers who work with ELL students are responsible for their learning and progress, not solely the ESOL teachers (Rodriguez et al., 2021).

School administration and content teachers need to know the importance of incorporating support strategies and how ELL students are affected on their journey as learners. It is crucial that educators become made aware of the negative effects that the lack of training can have on ELL students in the content classroom such as falling behind academically, achievement gaps, and low self-esteem. In addition, providing teachers research-based strategies to involve students and families in their learning can be valuable. When ELLs receive the same educational support strategies and interventions as non-ELL students, they do not necessarily make the same amount of growth as the non-ELLs, most likely because of lack of understanding (Manyak et al., 2021).

ELLs need supports that address their linguistic needs and cultural resources in order to grow academically.

The professional development will aim to provide content area teachers with strategies that can be implemented in order to support the learning of ELLs in an inclusive general education classroom. At the start of the school year, the K-5 content teachers will be guided on the importance of learning background information pertaining to the home language and the culture of each student in order to determine strategies that can be used to support each individual based on strengths and needs. Teachers will be encouraged to tap into student information by collecting details including English language proficiency, home language proficiency, the household's literacy and numeracy practices, home/cultural information about the child from the parents, and other information using household questionnaires. Within the classroom setting, content teachers will discuss how to support students based on information gathered, then learn how to implement a usable record keeping and reference document. Later, teachers will engage in reflection of their process for information collection and strategy implementation.

### **Conclusion**

The problem addressed in this capstone thesis focuses on the need to support and train current content teachers who work with ELL students in the regular classroom setting. Teacher training is key when implementing strategies to support ELLs to access content instruction and gain knowledge in order to keep up with academic demands as they increase their linguistic competency. In order to mitigate this problem, I will provide teachers a research based professional development with information and strategies. Practitioners will use this information



to choose the appropriate interventions based on student language strengths, needs, family information, and academic needs.

In chapter two of this capstone project, I will review literature that focuses on the importance of supporting linguistic and academic competencies of culturally and linguistically diverse ELL students as well as incorporating cultural support strategies. In chapter three, I will focus on supporting the diverse skills and backgrounds of ELLs students in the content classroom. The professional development will guide teachers on collecting pertinent information such as family input, previous school records, and performance data. Content teachers will then have an opportunity to learn and implement content support strategies as well as cultural support strategies based on the background information of each individual ELL student. A usable document will be provided for teachers to record student information and choose support strategies that may be useful for each ELL student. In chapter four, I will present my conclusion and all professional development materials will be included in the Appendices.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In prior years, urban areas located in high immigration states contained high numbers of bilingual ELL students, while rural and suburban areas had much less students who are learning content simultaneously as they acquire the English language (Brisk, 2018). However, according to O’Keeffe (2020) and McNeill (2021) there has been a rise in the number of ELL students enrolled in rural and suburban areas, leaving untrained and unfamiliar teachers at a loss for how to reach and properly educate this growing, linguistically diverse population, especially when English is the only language of instruction. In fact, Statista Research Department (2023), reported that in 2019 there were about 5.12 million ELL students enrolled in public schools in

the United States, with Eichhorn et al. (2019) reporting that ELLs are the fastest growing population among K-12 learners.

For teachers who are unfamiliar with languages and cultures represented in their school population, it can be overwhelming as they try to meet the educational needs of their ELL students. School personnel often find themselves dealing with harmful perceptions about ELLs because of their lack of cultural knowledge and experience with ELL students. In order to challenge previously upheld inequalities, the New York State Education Department has created a *Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework* (NYSED, 2018). The purpose of the NYSED CR-S Framework is to provide a guide to schools and families as they create student-centered school climates that recognize racial, cultural and linguistic identities as resources. The framework guidelines encourage all members of the learning community to challenge deficit views, discontinue the silencing and exclusion of language and culture in the classroom, and encourage “equitable opportunities” (p. 6). To achieve a culturally sustaining environment, focus is placed on four fundamental areas including providing a welcoming and affirming environment, high student expectations, inclusive areas of study, and continuous professional development. All four of these areas contain crucial aspects of supporting ELLs in the content classroom.

### **Adverse Consequences for ELL Students in the Classroom**

With a lack of ELL training in preservice teacher programs as well as a lack of professional development provided to in-service teachers, school districts have been scrambling to meet the needs of the ELL populations. According to Lucas et al. (2018) and Villegas (2018), districts have been relying heavily on the trained bilingual and ESOL teachers not only for guidance but often placing the teaching responsibility of the ELL students solely upon them. On

the contrary, according to the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018), educational responsibility is shared among all stakeholders in order to properly support and meet the educational and linguistic needs of all students as they learn within the general content classroom.

Villegas (2018) as well as Montero and Newmaster (2018) believe that ELL students need educators who are able to make the content comprehensible to them, support their English language development, and who are able to view their primary language as a resource rather than a deficit. The NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) suggests that teachers create environments that value languages and cultures, and consider how their biases about ELL students might affect their expectations in the classroom. As student populations grow and change, I believe that professional development needs to be adjusted to fit the needs of not only the students but also the teachers who lack confidence in their skills when working with ELL and bilingual students (Brisk, 2018).

The scholarly literature acknowledges that without proper training focused on the needs of ELL students that ELL and immigrant students will continue to experience negative consequences in their educational journey (Brisk, 2018; Eichhorn et al., 2019; Jennerjohn, 2020; Lucas et al., 2018; Manyak et al., 2021; Sandilos et al., 2020; Villegas, 2018). The research provides several examples of negative effects that students can experience academically and emotionally. One example is that teachers may retain deficit views of ELLs and immigrant students resulting in low expectations, often affecting students' overall academic performance and growth. However, the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) encourages schools and teachers to hold all students to high expectations. The research literature argues that continued patterns of low academic performance will lead to maintaining or widening achievement gaps between ELLs and their monolingual, English-speaking peers. With slower skill development and lower

performance at school, ELL students' social and emotional wellness may be affected, causing feelings of lowered self-esteem as well as a lack in sense of belonging within the school community. Another problem that may arise without use of strategies for linguistic development and language acquisition are increased referrals for learning disabilities when students exhibit slower progress and continued misunderstandings (Brisk, 2018; Eichhorn et al., 2019; Jennerjohn, 2020; Lucas et al., 2018; Manyak et al., 2021; Sandilos et al., 2020; Villegas, 2018). Ultimately, ELL students end up facing many long-lasting hurdles that could prevent them from achieving academic success in the future.

### **Adverse Consequences for Teachers of ELL Students**

Teachers often have a lack of confidence in themselves when required to work ELL students are in their classes. In fact, a survey of 14 current teachers' self-perceptions performed by Grant et al. (2021) revealed that on a Likert scale of 0-5, the average response in reference to knowledge about ELLs was a 2.7. The average response in the area of familiarity regarding the best practices for teaching ELLs was a 2.5, illustrating a lack of confidence and understanding of the needs of ELLs. Along the same lines, Madler et al. (2022) also found that after one year, new teachers felt less prepared when faced with the daily responsibility of reaching ELLs, even though they had higher confidence at completion of training. To compensate, some teachers take much of their own time to research information on reaching ELLs and methods that they can incorporate into their routines. Therefore, many consider adding supports for ELLs as extra work when they plan their daily lessons. Unfortunately, in many scenarios, very little time is available for co-planning with ESOL teachers or for general content teacher to receive support from the trained ESOL colleagues. This can result in higher stress levels as teachers work to support students' growth and development.

Another factor affecting teacher stress is achievement test scores, which classroom educators are held responsible for in many states and districts. As students' language skills develop, the language level of the test may be much higher than student language levels, leaving them unable to access the test items, especially if the test is not available in the primary language of the students. Teachers may be penalized or reprimanded if their students do not make projected growth or score at levels lower than expected. In order to prevent such stress and negative viewpoints of the general content teachers, I believe it would be beneficial for teachers to receive district-provided training in order support and prepare them as they attempt to support ELLs in their classrooms.

### **Importance of Professional Development for Content Teachers**

In order to increase teacher skill regarding the approaches to supporting and making accommodations for ELL students, professional development is necessary to not only gain important knowledge about the students and how to support ELLs, but to also to provide a platform for collaboration, reflection, and implementation amongst all stakeholders. The NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) encourages teachers to engage in continuous professional learning opportunities. General content teachers often participate in online or face to face discussions, highlighting the importance of discussion and collaboration with peers, a learning strategy which can be implemented into the classroom as a means to support a variety of students, including ELLs (Brisk, 2018). Similarly, Ohara et al. (2020) suggest that educators engage in mentoring scenarios where content area teachers who have more experience working with ELLs are paired with newer content area teachers providing an opportunity for developing a better understanding of the needs of ELLs in the classroom. During the mentorship, new teachers are guided on the implementation of strategies that support the academic language growth of ELL students.

Researchers agree that professional development, which consists of content area teachers observing, analyzing, and critiquing live lessons and videos of each other, then providing supportive feedback, is a relevant way for teachers to grow and adjust their practice when learning to work with ELLs (Lucas et al., 2018; Manyak et al., 2021; Villegas, 2018). This type of mentoring environment provides a space for educators to discuss and adjust their teaching practice concerning ELL students under the guidance of a trained ELL educator.

In recent years, there has been an emphasis on the importance of cultural responsiveness within public schools which encourages schools to become more familiar with student diversity within their learning populations. Teachers and staff are asked to learn more about their students' backgrounds, languages, and cultures in order to incorporate more inclusivity into classroom lessons and educational materials. In fact, the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) suggests that teachers in New York engage in professional learning communities, book studies, and online trainings focused on diversity and inclusion for the benefit all students, including ELLs. Similarly, Carney et al. (2019) suggest that teachers and staff receive guidance focused on how to consider the language backgrounds and cultures of families in order to help solidify lasting relationships and an understanding of how to better connect with their children at school.

Other researchers advocate that general content teachers should become aware of the linguistic and cultural diversity found within student populations (Brisk, 2018; Lucas et al., 2018; McNeill, 2021). It is necessary to learn about each family's background information and history, including their life experiences before entering their current community. The same authors indicate that visiting the communities where students live and gaining insight into their individual abilities are ways of making connections to students' lives in order to create culturally responsive lessons that incorporate a wealth of cultural knowledge. Therefore, conducting

interviews and/or home visits are beneficial and informative ways to gather information about ELL students and their families.

Lucas et al. (2018) and Goldin et al. (2018) agree, stating that interactions between home and school lead to solidifying important relationships and they inform teachers when creating lessons that incorporate students' wealth of cultural knowledge. ELL students bring a great amount of cultural, linguistic, and general knowledge with them when they come to school, where that knowledge can be used as a resource for content learning. In addition, Jennerjohn (2020) encourages the formation of relationships between families and schools, believing that those connections will positively affect students in academically, socially, and emotionally. When general content teachers are involved in training that helps them find ways to learn about and understand ELL students and families, they will have increased confidence in implementing strategies in order to support student strengths and needs, realizing that they, too, are competent teachers of ELLs.

Lucas et al. (2018) and Brisk (2019) assert that when teachers learn varied and multiple methods to present content material, they will not only support the ELL students but others in the general content area classes as well. Lucas et al. add that content and language focused training is also helpful for teachers to dig deeper into the relationship between the content area they teach and the linguistic demands intertwined within. After involvement in training to support ELL students, not only will teachers become more comfortable at implementing strategies and changes into practice within their own classrooms, it is likely that this new understanding will positively affect their overall beliefs about teaching ELL students. Consequently, both Lucas et al. and Ollerhead (2016) found that there was an increase in the implementation of learning

strategies used to support ELL students in the general content classrooms after teachers had training and guidance from experienced teachers.

### **Cultural Strategies to Support ELLs in Content Areas**

In order to properly understand and address ELL students' needs, it is important for teachers to gather as much information about the students as possible. According to Eichhorn et al. (2019), the backgrounds and needs of ELL students vary greatly, even for students of the same language group, therefore it is pertinent that teachers find ways to inform themselves about students' home cultures and educational history. Learning about individual histories is important because of the variation of cultural and academic skills that can be present amongst students. For example, one student may have high literacy skills in their home language while being considered a novice in English language proficiency. On the other hand, a student with higher language English proficiency may have lower literacy and academic achievement levels. In the literature, researchers agree that teachers need to gather as much relevant student information as possible. They suggest learning about students' linguistic abilities, family culture and history, academic levels, language proficiency levels, as well as home literacy skills (Goldin et al., 2018; Hilliker & Washburn, 2021; Jennerjohn, 2020; McNeill, 2021; Shiffman, 2019; Von Esch et al., 2018). The same authors contend that gathering this type of information is necessary in order to best support content learning at school, increase and encourage continued parent involvement, make parents feel welcome when engaging the school, and encourage students' sense of belonging at school by integrating culture and knowledge that students possess. Researchers stress the value of gathering parent input by initiating various types of communication such as telephone calls, written notes and letters, emails, texts, meetings, and other forms of communication with the help of a translator, if needed, in order to create and sustain valuable



connections between the school and the home (Dunn Shiffman, 2019; McNeill, 2021; Jennerjohn, 2020). In addition, Carney et al. (2019) suggest that teachers and staff receive guidance focused on strategies to include and make connections with ELL parents. Similarly, the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) suggests that teachers attend community events to build relationships with families outside of school.

After gathering student information, researchers affirm the importance of introducing culturally relevant and culturally sustaining activities into the classroom, and building upon the cultural resources of students, therefore creating a non-threatening learning space (Eichhorn et al., 2019; Jennerjohn, 2020; O’Keeffe, 2020; Ollerhead, 2016). Likewise, McNeill (2021) suggests using student information in order to create more culturally responsive activities focused on what students are interested in, making connections to previous experiences, and familiarity of literacy skills. McNeill believes in the importance of building relationships with students, then incorporating their experiences into culturally relevant classroom activities, often resulting in higher motivation and positivity. Jennerjohn encourages the incorporation of texts that are culturally sustaining and pushes teachers to co-create culturally sustaining texts with the help of students and families, often outside of school. These texts can later be used within the context of the classroom for various purposes years later. In addition, McNeill (2021) and Gross and Crawford (2020) recommend incorporating supplementary materials and texts that connect to students’ lives as well as support their content learning. Similarly, Goldin et al. (2018), propose using student background and cultural knowledge that has been collected from families to later integrate it as a resource for content knowledge. Along those lines, the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) suggests inviting family members to participate within the classroom environment by reading or speaking about subjects that can be related to their culture. Eichhorn

et al. (2019) reaffirm that when teachers understand a student's home life, they are more likely to realize the resources that students bring to the classroom each day.

### **Classroom Strategies to Support ELLs in Content Areas**

Several authors identify strategies that are beneficial for supporting ELLs language and content learning within the general classroom setting. After reviewing literature on student achievement and after training opportunities, Lucas et al. (2018) suggested three main instructional practices for working with ELLs. The first instructional practice includes providing ELL students with more time talking to and interacting with peers. The second includes adding in more student-centered and inquiry-based activities. The final strategy involves providing different types of scaffolds. ELLs need meaningful, verbal practice using the new vocabulary and content that they are learning. Lucas et al. believes it is important to provide opportunities for students to collaborate, discuss, and interact using academic language with peers of the same home language or with bilingual, English-proficient peers. Similarly, both Ohara et al. (2020) and Lucas et al. agree with providing students with a platform where they are able to relevantly use new academic vocabulary within context related activities in the mainstream classroom. Ollerhead (2016) emphasizes the importance of providing students with opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions about content-focused topics before engaging in content-focused writing activities. Students will gain experience using content-specific language centered on the academic material before they are expected to perform writing tasks. Along the same line, Ohara et al. (2020) emphasize the "importance of explicit academic instruction and the need for students to be immersed in language use" (p. 31). Students need to be able to properly use learned academic language within meaningful classroom discourse pertaining to the content which they have been taught.

Primary language use in the classroom can provide support that is beneficial to students who are learning content as they simultaneously gain English language proficiency. The research acknowledges translanguaging, using one's native, or primary, language to discuss content with other same-language peers, as an effective strategy to support content learning of students who are gaining proficiency in the English language itself (Brisk, 2018; Mahan, 2022; Montero & Newmaster, 2018). The authors agree that an ELL student's primary language should be used as an asset in the classroom, rather than a deficit, a concept supported by the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018). Gross and Crawford (2020) and O'Keeffe (2020) support using the first language of students as a strategy when learning content in the new language. The authors believe in encouraging students to use their primary language in the classroom to help ensure their understanding. The use of bilingual materials and translations, which can be used as parallel texts, are ways to support student learning by encouraging use of their primary language. In conjunction with various forms of text, Gross and Crawford also suggest pairing text with audio, which will allow students to use their comprehension of verbal language to support their developing reading skills.

Visuals such as diagrams, flow charts, and illustrations are helpful additions that will help support learning in many content areas and with all types of literacy. The work of Gross and Crawford as well as O'Keeffe agree, suggesting teachers support students' content learning by providing charts with pictures and examples as well as visuals that can even be used to showcase sentence patterns. Graphic organizers and story maps are other types of visuals that aid learners in organizing material and can contain important academic language. Brisk (2018) has pointed out that many strategies such as the incorporation of images and visuals used to scaffold the

language and content learning of ELL students are actually beneficial to enhance the understanding of all students.

Furthermore, Ollerhead (2016) suggests supporting literacy and language development by implementing longer wait time and asking questions that promote higher order thinking. To reach higher levels of auditory comprehension in such classroom discourse, Gross and Crawford recommend that teachers support students' understanding by providing speech that they are familiar with. Speech can be made more comprehensible by using less unnecessary language while upholding the integrity of the content allowing students to better understand the questions and participate in discussions.

O'Keeffe draws attention to strategies that special education teachers used with their ELLs such as the use of projects, portfolios, and dioramas. These types of performance-based activities can be used to assess learning by allowing students to use multiple modes of communication, rather than relying heavily on expressive language. Gross and Crawford agree, suggesting that teachers provide various opportunities to demonstrate new learning, which may include alternate assessments when necessary. Teachers can find ways to assess student content knowledge without depending solely upon spoken and written language which could prevent many ELLs from sharing what they know and have learned.

The researchers believe in the importance of accessing students' prior knowledge, background information, and previous experiences by incorporating cultural knowledge into activities and assignments (Goldin et al., 2018; Mahan, 2022; O'Keeffe, 2020). Eichhorn et al., (2019) agrees and encourages teachers to use students' current abilities as assets and resources in the classroom, rather than focusing on their inabilities. Along the same lines, Eichhorn et al., support the use of Universal Design for Learning, where curriculum and instruction are formed

based on student abilities and differences, reducing hindrances to learning so that all students are able to access what is taught.

In addition, researchers recommend the use of collaborative teamwork amongst students as they attend to and participate in content related activities (Brisk, 2018; Eichhorn et al., 2019; Gross & Crawford, 2020; O’Keeffe, 2020). Similarly, the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) also suggests engaging students in learning and working together toward common educational goals.

### **Studies Regarding Strategy Implementation**

Manyak et al. (2021) presented their findings of student success after the implementation of a vocabulary instructional program, which lasted for three years focused on students in fourth and fifth grades. The students were enrolled in schools with diverse populations and were located within medium cities found in various US regions. The vocabulary instructional program consisted of areas such as individual words, rich and varied language experience, instructing students on word-learning strategies, and word consciousness. Students were taught strategies such as highlighting key academic vocabulary within reading contexts then engaging in discussions based on those words. Students were also taught specific words such as high frequency words and content words, as well as morphology and the use of context clues. According to Manyak et al., after three years using the program, average standardized test scores showed an increase across grades and locations, with students making “1.3 and 1.5 years of growth, respectively, in vocabulary knowledge in a single academic year” (p. 324). Test scores in previous years with other vocabulary supports showed no significant effect in the area of vocabulary. This example illustrates how students can grow when they have academic supports in place such as ongoing, focused, multifaceted vocabulary instruction.

The research study performed by Wiggins et al. (2020) showed similar success after implementing scaffolding on a science worksheet. This study focused on international students enrolled in a science class at an English-only university, many whose first language was not English. The authors decided to reduce the complexity of text on a worksheet with the goal of increasing student understanding and achievement. The revised worksheet used in the experiment contained less linguistic complexity, included rephrasing, and contained the same models, diagrams and data from the original worksheet. The content on the worksheet was not simplified, only reduced, and the students were engaged in learning the same information that was included on the original worksheet. On the posttest, the international students who scored higher were those who completed the worksheet with lowered linguistic complexity, “increasing the probability of scoring an additional point” (p. 66). The authors admit that they are unaware of English language proficiency of the international students who participated in the study. However, I believe these same techniques can easily be applied to assignments for ELLs who are in grade school in order to support them when learning during content classes. The reduction of complex text allows students to focus on important vocabulary and the visual models while avoiding an overwhelming amount of unnecessary language.

Carney et al. (2019) conducted a case study lasting four years from 2012-2016 which resulted in increased math and English Language Arts standardized test scores of Latino students and also decreased achievement gaps between Latino and white students in an elementary school located near the Mexico-United States border. The math-focused implementations included several initiatives which included a math extended day program, several types of professional development focused on recently adopted math curriculum, and professional learning communities focused on planning for individual student needs. The test results showed an

increase in math scores for Latino students which began a decrease in the score difference between Latino and White students. Another implementation in the school was aimed at enhancing family involvement and support. Teachers were encouraged to conduct home visits and listened to family input which allowed them to understand the family perspectives and parents' expectations of their children. Based on parent input, the school began to offer family nights, ESL classes for adults, conversational Spanish classes for staff, a library program, and a reading club for Spanish-speaking families. They also hired a bilingual liaison who was available to help bridge an existing gap between the English-speaking teachers and the Spanish-speaking and Mixtec-speaking parents. With these new programs in place, the school began to see higher physical involvement of families and more of a family atmosphere during family nights. Over the length of the case study, the behavior referrals in the 2014-2015 school year were less than half of those reported during the 2013-2014 school year. The authors state that this difference could be linked to better communication, improved relationships, and more physical interaction between parents and teachers at the school. The various types of strategies implemented at this school were based upon several needs including improved school-family relationships as well as reducing the academic achievement gaps. Both types of training that the teachers were involved in resulted in new initiatives that benefited the students in several ways and led to personal and professional growth on behalf of the teachers. These results reinforce the idea that teachers need information beyond academic records that can be obtained by making connections with families in order to learn how best to support their students. The strategies and programs implemented were based upon more than academic support. The school also became more inclusive and responsive to the cultural needs of the families.

## Conclusion

The focus of this capstone is: How can teachers improve English Language Learners' content learning in the general classroom? With the population of ELL students continually rising, they are often faced with negative consequences in the classroom when teachers are left feeling unprepared because of a lack of support and training to address the linguistic and academic needs of the students. The content knowledge of ELL students often lags behind that of their monolingual peers when they do not receive supports in the classroom to help them access content learning at each level of language proficiency. A lack of academic growth is not only harmful to the student in the long run, but it can also create stress among their general content teachers. The research of the literature suggests that teachers be provided with more training on how to address and support the needs of ELLs. It is important for teachers to become familiar with appropriate academic strategies as well as to also learn and understand each student's cultural and linguistic background. Making connections with families and students, implementing culturally responsive techniques, and using prior linguistic knowledge as a resource are avenues that can support the whole student and each child's self-image allowing them to feel connected to school while increasing confidence in themselves. The academic literature presented here demonstrates that students have shown growth after academic and cultural supports were consistently implemented (Carney et al., 2019; Manyak et al., 2021; Wiggins et al., 2020). Likewise, when teachers have time to enter into mentorships and supportive co-planning environments, they can receive the support that they need in order to have a positive effect on content knowledge, language growth, and students' self-esteem. In Chapter three of this capstone, I will be describing a professional development (PD) designed to increase the knowledge of general content teachers and administrators in regard to gathering



personal information about students' languages, cultures, and backgrounds in order to better provide better supports in the classroom. The NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) will be used to focus on why integration of student information is crucial. The PD will provide teachers with tips for gather and organizing student information. After teachers have compiled critical information about their students, attendees will be presented with academic and cultural strategies that can be used to support students in the classroom. Lastly, we will come together to discuss and compare teacher experiences after strategy implementation.

### **Chapter 3: Professional Development**

In this professional development, the goal is to inform teachers about ways to support English language learners' content learning in the general classroom. The professional development consists of three, one-day sessions. We will use the New York State Education Department's Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework, or NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) as a guide and reference throughout the PD sessions. The first PD session is focused on the importance of gathering and organizing linguistic, academic, and cultural information about their ELL students in order to create a more inclusive classroom. The second PD session is focused on using student information that has been collected to determine strategies that will support students' academic and cultural backgrounds in the content area classes. We will continue to refer to the New York State Education Department's Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework, or NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) for guidance as we collectively brainstorm strategies to support each student's cultural identity. The third PD session will guide teachers to reflect and discuss experiences after strategy implementation. All of the materials that are included in this PD are located in the Appendices.

## Session One

During the first session of the professional development, we will focus on the New York State Education Department's Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework, or NYSED CR-S Framework (2018). The NYSED CR-S Framework is focused on the creation of student-centered educational settings that support and incorporate cultures and languages, using them as resources and assets as a part of content learning. Using the NYSED CR-S Framework as resource will provide guidance to teachers as they aim to create learning environments that maintain and support students' home languages and cultures. It is beneficial for teachers to learn how to best support their students' cultural identities which can, in turn, positively affect academic engagement and performance. This relates directly to teachers who have ELLs currently taking part in their content classes. When teachers implement strategies that support their students' cultural identities, students feel a greater sense of inclusion and higher self-esteem, especially when language and culture are used as resources to learning content. Similarly, when teachers implement strategies that support their student's academic learning, students are more likely to access the content at any level of language proficiency. Students often have more success when academic strategies are a part of content classrooms.

Equally helpful, when teachers have information and resources related to supporting students in the classroom, they will feel more comfortable planning strategies for ELLs in content areas, often resulting in teachers having more confidence in themselves as educators of ELLs. The NYSED CR-S Framework is a helpful guide, providing ideas and changes that can be implemented into the classroom.

Session one agenda:

1. Video and discussion

2. Teacher Survey
3. View NYSED CR-S Framework- Teacher responsibilities
4. Discuss Student information organizer tool and Parent Questionnaire
5. Looking forward

To begin this session, we will view video clips showing students from Wales attending high school in South Korea (Appendix A, Figure 1). The purpose will be to observe the behavior, perspectives and opinions of students from both countries, as well as differences between the styles of education. We will discuss how the experiences in the video may relate to ELL students in our school. Each teacher will find one set of questions under their chair to discuss with their group before sharing their responses and ideas with all of the participants (Appendix A, Figure 2). Next, the teachers will complete a survey based upon questions administered to in-service teachers by Grant et al. (2021) related to teachers' perceptions of their knowledge of cultural and academic strategies as well as their confidence in themselves as teachers of ELLs (Appendix A, Figure 3). According to Grant et al. (2021) it is common for general classroom teachers to have a lower confidence level when working with ELLs in their content classrooms. When teachers receive training, they are given tools that may help them feel more successful teaching ELL students. Teachers will complete the same survey at the end PD session three in order to determine how teachers perceive their skills after training.

After participating in today's survey, we will view portions of the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) and discuss how the framework relates to the general content classroom and why we need to gather and incorporate cultural information about ELL and immigrant families (see Appendix A, Figure 4). For example, Goldin et al. (2018), suggest gathering student background and cultural knowledge to later integrate it as a resource for content knowledge.

Each team will view one page of the NYSED CR-S Framework to determine keywords that stand out among the guidelines relating to supporting ELLs students. Keywords will be recorded on a group chart. As stated earlier in chapter two, the NYSED CR-S Framework suggests that teachers engage in trainings that are focused on diversity and including student background information into the classroom as well taking time to address their own biases, which can affect classroom expectations.

Learning about the uniqueness of each student is imperative to making content classrooms more inclusive and responsive to cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as challenging biases. In chapter two, several authors stressed the importance of forming relationships between schools and families that will further help teachers integrate students' cultural knowledge into the classroom, positively affecting the learners (Brisk, 2018; Goldin et al., 2018; Jennerjohn, 2020; Lucas et al., 2018).

To assist with information gathering, teachers will be given a set of sample parent interview questions that can be used to inquire with families through written communication or at the parent-teacher conferences at the end of the first grading period (see Appendix A, Figure 6). The sample parent interview questions contain examples that have been adapted from a SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire found on the NYSED website (2022). Teachers will be asked to view the questionnaire and find items that they think relate to and coincide with the NYSED CR-S Framework teacher responsibilities, for example questions about cultural values, previous experiences, languages spoken, and literacy skills. We will discuss the importance of the relation between the two documents. The parent interview questions will be shared with teachers in multiple languages for those who choose to send home the written version for parents to fill out on their own.

Next, we will view an ELL student information organizer that can be used to collect and record information about each student's language competencies, academics, and culture (see Appendix A, Figure 5). We will discuss portions of the information organizer that the teachers think is most important to know and why. After PD session one, the teachers will be expected to gather information from parents in order to learn more about their students, make those personal connections, and begin a relationship with their families.

Over the next several months, the goal for the content teachers is to learn as much background and cultural information as they can about two or three of their ELL students beyond basic information, such as test score data. As stated in chapter two, Carney et al. (2019) suggest that, if needed, educators receive guidance as they consider student backgrounds and family cultures as they create and solidify relationships with students at school.

In the second PD session, the collected student background information which may be recorded on the organizer will be the main focus which will be used to compare students. The information will also be used to determine and choose strategies that honor and incorporate students' languages and cultures into the classroom as resources to support learning.

## **Session Two**

During the second PD session we will share and compare the student information we collected from parents. Teachers will engage in discussion about the varied strengths and needs of students as well as the diversity in languages, proficiencies, academics, and cultural identities between their students. First, as we focus on academic and English language proficiency levels, we will brainstorm and choose strategies that will be helpful for students in content areas. We will then use the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) to determine additions to classrooms which can help make connections between home and school. Also, we will discuss changes that can be

made to ensure that the general content classroom becomes more inclusive to students' cultural identities and language needs. We will then add those ideas to a strategy spreadsheet.

Session two agenda:

1. Opener- view results from the PD session one teacher survey
2. View Student information organizer and discuss with small peer group.
3. Venn diagram- whole group, pairs
4. Strategy spreadsheet
5. Looking forward: Choose cultural strategies to implement

The activities in session two address the need for supporting ELLs in content area classes with strategies and environments that respect and incorporate their individual backgrounds and cultures. As mentioned in chapter two, Jennerjohn (2020) believes that students feel more connected to schools and classrooms that value their culture and language as resources. Students may feel more motivated to become involved in learning and educational activities which value their identities. When educators are unable to understand and support student strengths, needs, cultures, and languages, ELL and immigrant students often have long lasting, negative experiences throughout their time in school (Brisk, 2018; Eichhorn et al., 2019; Jennerjohn, 2020; Lucas et al., 2018; Manyak et al., 2021; Sandilos et al., 2020; Villegas, 2018). Examples are lowered self-esteem as well as a lack of connection and belonging to the school community. When teachers form relationships with families, there is often more engagement between home and school resulting higher self-image on behalf of the students as well as feelings of connection to the school (Goldin et al., 2018; Hilliker & Washburn, 2021; Jennerjohn, 2020; McNeill, 2021; Shiffman, 2019; Von Esch et al., 2018).

To open the professional development session two, we will view the results of the teacher perspective survey. As stated in chapter two, the survey conducted by Grant et al. (2021) found that the average response in reference to knowledge about ELLs was a 2.7. The average response in the area of familiarity regarding the best practices for teaching ELLs was a 2.5, illustrating a lack of confidence and understanding of the needs of ELLs. Participants will make observations comparing their survey results to the results mentioned in the study.

Next, we will view the student background information organizers that teachers used to gather and record information about two or three of their ELL students. We will begin by meeting within small, peer groups to share one piece of student information that was surprising and one item that piqued interest. I will compile a list and will draw attention to the varied types of information. Afterward, we will focus on student background information. Together as a group we will use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the information of two students from the entire group (Appendix B, Figure 1). We will then discuss the following items: similarities between students, differences between students, how the information affects students in the classroom, how the classroom environment may be affecting the students, discrepancies between home values and school expectations, etc. As mentioned in chapter two, it is important for educators to realize the diversity of cultural values, background, and educational history that exist within their classroom in order to use those as resources of knowledge (Eichhorn et al., 2019).

Participants will compare two students, recording similarities and differences on their own Venn diagram. In order to use the student information as a resource for planning lessons and activities, we will brainstorm academic and cultural strategies that will incorporate and support the student background information we have collected using the NYSED CR-S Framework

(2018) as a reference (Appendix B, Figure 2). Ideas can be recorded on the Strategy Ideas form found in Appendix B (Figure 3). Participants will share their brainstorming ideas and we will refer to the literature from chapter two for examples that are similar which will also be added to the list. For example, Jennerjohn (2020) suggests incorporating and creating texts that are culturally sustaining. Similarly, McNeill (2021) recommends using students' background experiences as a resource for creating classroom experiences which connect content learning to students' lives. The NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) encourages teachers to invite family members into the classroom to read or speak about subjects that relate to their experiences or culture. A handout containing a compiled list of cultural support strategies will be shared with all participants (Appendix B, Figure 4). Cultural strategy ideas as well as academic strategies that teachers choose to implement for each student will be recorded on a spreadsheet (Appendix B, Figure 5). Teachers will collaborate to decide which strategies will provide the most support for the culture and academic growth of each student, based on their background information. Teachers can fill out the top of the strategy spreadsheet, choosing several cultural support strategies that match the background, assets and needs of each student. Student names will be listed on the left side of the spreadsheet. As a goal moving forward, teachers will choose only 2-3 cultural strategies from the spreadsheet to incorporate into their general content classroom over the next several months. According to the literature, both Lucas et al. (2018) and Ollerhead (2016) found that after teachers had training focused on the needs of ELLs there was an increase in the implementation of learning strategies in the general content classroom. This time of trial implementation will provide an experience for teachers to become familiar with the strategies and to gain confidence as they incorporate cultural support into their routines. In chapter two, it was stated that Grant et al. (2021) found that there was a lack of confidence among general



classroom teachers regarding knowledge about ELL students and understanding their needs which could affect how often they implement support strategies. By participating in this training and gaining a set of tools, it is possible that teachers may feel more comfortable and confident in their skills supporting ELLs in the general content classroom.

After implementation time, we will reconvene in our last PD session to reflect upon the incorporation of strategies in the classroom and discuss how the teachers and their students have been affected. As stated in chapter two, Brisk (2018) suggests that teachers engage in collaborative discussions. Similarly, Ohara et al. (2020) encourages educators to participate in mentoring scenarios where teachers support each other and respond to feedback as a part of the learning process. The teachers will also participate in a follow-up survey focused on teachers' knowledge of cultural and academic strategies as well as their confidence in themselves as teachers of ELLs.

### **Session Three**

After teachers have had months to implement cultural and academic strategies, we will meet for the third session of the PD. The targets for the third PD session will be to share and reflect upon the strategies implemented as well as discuss their perceptions. We will focus on the effects that the strategy implementation had on teachers and students. We will revisit the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) to check our progress toward the creation of learning environments which sustain the cultural identities of ELL and immigrant students in the content classroom. Teachers will also participate in a post-PD teacher survey to determine their level of perceived knowledge about cultural and academic strategies, supporting ELL students, and confidence in themselves.

Session three agenda:

1. Brag Board
2. Reflection of strategy implementation
3. Making connections to the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018)
4. Looking forward
5. Exit Ticket: Teacher survey

As teachers enter the room for the third session, they will complete a Brag Board where teachers can brag about the strategies that have implemented by adding sticky notes to the board. Teachers will take turns sharing a strategy from the Brag Board, how it was implemented, and what they have observed as a result of the implementation within themselves or the students. As a whole group, we will engage in a discussion about each strategy where teachers add related experiences to the discourse. The literature by Ohara et al. (2020) emphasizes the benefit of discussion and reflection with peers and an ELL trained educator as a part of the learning and implementation process.

In small groups, teachers will then compare those experiences to the teacher expectations of NYSED CR-S Framework (Appendix C, Figure 1). Each page found in the teacher expectation portion of the NYSED CR-S Framework is posted around the room on large sheets and on individual copies for attendees. The author of each Brag Board item will then move the sticky note to the appropriate page(s) of the posted NYSED CR-S Framework while describing how they coincide. Teachers will also highlight the area(s) on their own individual pages of the NYSED CR-S Framework. This reflection process will allow us to discuss and observe which areas of the NYSED CR-S Framework that we have been successful at addressing in the classroom, how they connect to cultural support strategies, and in which areas we can put more focus as we move forward with strategy incorporation. Before completing the exit ticket, each

group of teachers will have time to share a strategy or strategies heard today that they would like to try implementing into their classroom in the future. Implementing newly learned strategies may not always go as planned or as smoothly one would like. To address any positive outcomes and adverse consequences, teachers will be asked to reflect upon how the teacher and students were affected during the implementation of the cultural and academic strategies into their general content classes by completing a teacher survey as an exit ticket (Appendix C, Figure 2). The teacher survey is similar to the one completed during session one regarding knowledge of cultural and academic strategies as well as confidence in themselves as teachers of ELLs. However, it also contains a space for teachers to reflect upon the effects of strategy implementation on themselves and the effects on students. The survey will serve as an exit ticket and all responses will be compiled before they are shared with all participating staff after the completion of the PD.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this PD is to mitigate the problem that the general content teachers who work with ELLs are in need of training related to supporting ELL students through the use of academic and cultural strategies. The PD is based around informing educators about the teacher responsibilities mentioned within the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) related to culturally responsive and culturally sustaining practices. The PD aims to guide teachers on information collection and organization, before the implementation of and reflection focused on support strategies based on student background, language, and culture. Teachers will remain focused on fulfilling the teacher requirements contained within the NYSED CR-S Framework.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

### Introduction

The research reviewed in this capstone project was focused on finding information that would be helpful to prepare general content teachers in their efforts to support ELL students in the classroom. The overarching research question that has been addressed in this capstone is: How can teachers support English Language Learners' content learning in the general classroom? Many teachers have been put in the position to educate ELLs without knowledge about their linguistic and cultural needs. Often times, educators are unaware of support strategies that benefit students' academic and language growth in the classroom nor those that are culturally responsive and sustaining. According to the literature, when teachers lack knowledge about ELLs linguistic development and are left without helpful tool sets, a disadvantageous domino effect can occur (Brisk, 2018; Eichhorn et al., 2019; Jennerjohn, 2020; Lucas et al., 2018; Manyak et al., 2021; Sandilos et al., 2020; Villegas, 2018). For example, without knowledge and resources, it can be an overwhelming task to teach ELL students in the general content classroom. Teachers may feel unsuccessful and according to Grant et al. (2021) lack confidence in their skills, which can lead to negative feelings and deficit views about the students themselves. The literature also suggests that when deficit views are perpetuated, ELL students are adversely affected facing low expectations and falling behind academically as well as referrals for learning disabilities. ELLs students can also experience a low self-esteem and may not feel accepted as a part of the school community. The New York State Education Department's Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (2018) provides teachers and schools with a guide to create an environment that challenges deficit views and incorporates the languages and cultures of students as assets and resources.

## **Conclusions**

In order to address the lack of training for general content teachers focused on supporting ELLs in the content classroom, a professional development was presented in chapter three. The PD is intended for general content teachers and administrators to participate in training focused on supporting the content learning of ELLs in their classrooms by implementing cultural strategies as well as academic support strategies. Using the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) as a resource and guide, the professional development is intended to guide teachers through a process of obtaining valuable family information about students in order to choose academic support strategies as well as choosing and implementing cultural support strategies. According to the research literature, Brisk (2018) and Ohara et al. (2020) support training teachers through mentorship and collaborative discussion. The PD in chapter three also encourages open conversations pertaining to similarities and differences between a variety of ELL students and choosing strategies that are helpful to support each student in the general content classroom. Teachers are encouraged to openly share their experiences after cultural strategy implementation, discussing the effects on students and teachers. After reviewing the literature, I have learned that the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) is invaluable resource used to guide the PD and improve my understanding of culturally responsive-sustaining educational practices related to supporting ELLs in the general content classroom. When teachers implement cultural strategies into classroom that support student learning, they are creating a culturally responsive environment and developing practices that sustain the identities of learners.

## **Implications for Student Learning**

When students feel understood and appreciated at school, their overall educational journey can be impacted in positive ways, often resulting in higher levels of motivation and

achievement (Carney et al., 2019). It is beneficial for students to observe teachers putting forth effort to include and support them within the academic learning experience. It is also helpful for students to witness the incorporation of their home languages and cultures into the classroom, where prior knowledge and skills are viewed as assets to learning. In fact, the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) encourages schools and teachers to do just that in order to create a more culturally responsive and sustaining educational environment for all students.

It is equally beneficial for students to have access to the same education as their monolingual peers. This can be a challenge for ELLs, especially those enrolled in English-only schools that have no bilingual program or access to home language materials. Teachers can participate in training that prepares them to support the simultaneous language and academic growth in the classroom with the use of academic support strategies. With academic support strategies in place, students have a better chance of participating in the educational experience, accessing the curriculum, and growing academically as they improve their English language skills.

### **Implications for Teaching**

As mentioned in chapter two, teacher training is a necessity which can positively affect both teachers' and students' educational experiences in many ways. When teachers engage in training that enables them to better understand the linguistic and cultural strengths and needs of students as well as how to support those needs, teachers often have more confidence in themselves as educators. Training and professional support can also positively impact teachers' feelings toward ELLs and ELL families. One way to better understand ELL students and families is by obtaining information from parents about the cultures, languages, values, and skill sets that students possess (Dunn Shiffman, 2019; Goldin et al., 2018; Hilliker & Washburn, 2021;

Jennerjohn, 2020; McNeill, 2021; Von Esch et al., 2018). Possessing personal knowledge about their students allows teachers to incorporate students' knowledge and strengths as resources into the learning experience. The literature suggests that the formation of relationships between families and teachers allows educators to gain valuable information and a better understanding of each family's history and values. This is useful when planning cultural support strategies that reach each student in unique ways in order to form better connections and relationships within the classroom setting space (Eichhorn et al., 2019; Jennerjohn, 2020; McNeill, 2021; O'Keeffe, 2020; Ollerhead, 2016). The NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) is a helpful guide for teachers to use in order to create a more culturally responsive environment for their students.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The research cited in chapter two conducted by Carney et al. (2019), Manyak et al. (2021), and Wiggins et al. (2020) was focused on student achievement after the implementation of academic support strategies in the classroom. All studies reported student growth after the use of academic support strategies in the classroom illustrating the positive effects on students' academic achievement.

The study performed by Manyak et al. (2021) lasted three years and was focused on the effects of a vocabulary instructional program on students' standardized test scores. The results showed positive effects, resulting in student vocabulary growth ranging from 1.3 to 1.5 years. However, this intense type of program implementation is not always feasible for most schools because of many types of restraints such as time, the inability to invest large amounts of money, and the lack of personnel available to provide the intense intervention program. For future research, it would be helpful to study student growth after a more reasonable implementation of

consistently integrated academic support strategies as an integral part of general content area classes.

Wiggins et al. (2020) also conducted a study focused on the implementation of a reduced-text science worksheet given to international students at the university level. The researchers used one academic strategy, reducing the complexity of the language included on one worksheet with visual and labels, resulting in higher student achievement. The authors did acknowledge the lack of data regarding the language proficiency levels of the international students who participated in the study. However, all students who used the adapted worksheet performed better on the assessment. As a part of future research, it will be beneficial to conduct a similar study focused on elementary-aged students over a longer period of time in order to better analyze the effects of the academic strategy on student achievement in content areas such as science. Gross and Crawford (2020) suggest that eliminating unnecessary language can help support students' understanding of academic material. Similarly, reducing text complexity is an academic support strategy that can be applied to materials and activities beyond content area worksheets. Future research is needed to study the effects of reducing the amount of complex language within content area texts and exams as well, which may prove to be beneficial to both ELLs and non-ELLs who struggle with decoding and reading comprehension (Brisk, 2018).

Carney et al. (2019) conducted a study focused on mathematics intervention and mathematics professional development for teachers. The school also put forth a multi-step effort focused on making connections between the school and families in hopes of increasing family involvement and parental support for the benefit of the students as well as to increase teachers' understanding of parental expectations for their children. They began an open line of communication using the help of interpreters in order to make changes based on parental



concerns and they created reading clubs offered in the students' home language. These changes showed families that the school valued their input and their home language skills. The changes also resulted in an increase in student math test scores and a reduced number of behavior referrals. The authors deduce that the behavior improvements could be related to the improved relationships and communication between parents and teachers.

The studies conducted by Carney et al. (2019), Manyak et al. (2021), Wiggins et al. (2020) focused on academic achievement data to determine the effectiveness of the academic intervention strategies and to prove the effectiveness of cultural support strategies. More research is needed to determine the impact of cultural support strategy implementation on students' sense of belonging and self-image, which may be difficult to distinguish from feelings caused by academic achievement. In order to assess progress based on cultural responsiveness it may be best to conduct surveys. Parents and older students can participate in surveys focused on their perceptions of linguistic and cultural responsiveness within their schools and classrooms. Using survey results, teachers and schools can continue to reflect upon their integration of culturally responsive and sustaining practices, using the NYSED CR-S Framework (2018) as a reference and guide to progress their efforts further. Long-term research is needed to determine the academic and emotional impact that cultural strategy implementation has on ELL students and their families.

### **Final thoughts**

For school level administrators and general content teachers, it is imperative to participate in training in order to learn a variety of teaching strategies that support ELL students in content learning environments. Knowledge about a variety of academic support strategies may be more common among educators, but knowledge about the importance of cultural support

strategies may not be as well understood or implemented. The literature in chapter two led to The New York State Education Department's Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (2018). The NYSED CR-S Framework is a useful tool that can be referenced when training and guiding educators as they work to improve the inclusion of languages and cultures in the classroom for the benefit of ELL students and their peers. The PD sessions in chapter three use the contents of the NYSED CR-S Framework as a part of a collaborative mitigation process, addressing the need to train teachers how to support content learning with the use of cultural and academic support strategies. The long-term goal is the creation of classroom environments that are culturally responsive and sustaining in order to support ELLs' content learning within the general classroom. The integration of a culturally responsive learning space that utilizes academic support strategies as well as cultural support strategies is a very important aspect of educating each ELL student who enters the general content classroom (NYSED, 2018). My hope is that when teachers and administrators engage in training and implementation, the school will become a much more welcoming, understanding and supportive place for ELL students and their families.

### References

- Brisk, M. E. (2018). Transforming education by embracing bilingual learners. *Educational Forum*, 82(2), 235–240. DOI: 10.1080/00131725.2018.1420947
- Carney, J., Chu, M., Green, J., Nutting, W., Donnelly, S., Clancy, A., Buly, M. R., & Carroll, D. (2019). Creating synergies for change. *Teachers College Record*, 121(12), 1–34. DOI: 10.1177/016146811912101204
- Eichhorn, M. S., Lowry, A. E., & Burke, K. (2019). Increasing engagement of English learners through universal design for learning. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 9(1), 1–10. DOI:10.5590/JERAP.2019.09.1.01
- Goldin, S., Khasnabis, D., & Atkins, S. (2018). Mining gems, nurturing relationships, building teacher practice. *School Community Journal*, 28(2), 189–212.
- Grant, L. T., Yoo, M. S., Fetman, L. & Garza, V. (2021). In-service teachers' perceptions of their preparation to work with learners of English. *Educational Research: Theory and Practice*, 32(1), 62-71.
- Gross, E., & Crawford, J. (2021). Instructional Models for Equitable and Effective Multilingual Instruction in California. *CATESOL Journal*, 32(1), 59–67.
- Hilliker, S. M., & Washburn, E. K. (2021). Family literacy night: A student-centered clinically rich experience for teacher candidates in literacy and TESOL. *Journal of Education*, 201(1), 34–41. DOI: 10.1177/0022057420904381
- Jennerjohn, A. (2020). School–family partnerships for culturally sustaining texts. *Reading Teacher*, 73(5), 657–661. DOI: 10.1002/trtr.1891

- Lucas, T., Strom, K., Bratkovich, M., & Wnuk, J. (2018). Inservice preparation for mainstream teachers of English language learners: A review of the empirical literature. *Educational Forum*, 82(2), 156–173. DOI: 10.1080/00131725.2018.1420852
- Madler, A. M., Anderson, S. K., LeMire, S. D., & Smith, K. (2022). Perceptions of teacher preparation for classroom diversity. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, 34(1), 42–68.
- Mahan, K. R. (2022). The comprehending teacher: scaffolding in content and language integrated learning (CLIL). *Language Learning Journal*, 50(1), 74–88.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2019.1705879>
- Manyak, P., Blachowicz, C. L. Z., & Graves, M. F. (2021). The multifaceted, comprehensive vocabulary instructional program: Quantitative findings from a three-year formative experiment. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 60(4), 301-331. DOI: 10.1080/19388071.2020.1822473
- McNeill, E. (2021). Immigration stories to reveal funds of knowledge and brave spaces in literacy curriculum. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 65(4), 287-296.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1205>
- Montero, M. K., & Newmaster, S. (2019). Guiding teachers to flow with the translanguaging corriente: A review of the translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 62(4), 470–472. DOI: 10.1002/jaal.929
- New York State Education Department. (2018). *Culturally responsive-sustaining education framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.nysed.gov/crs/framework>

New York State Education Department. (2022). *SIFE oral interview questionnaire*. Retrieved from <https://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/students-interruptedinconsistent-formal-education-sife>

O'Hara, S., Bookmyer, J., Pritchard, R., & Martin, R. (2020). Mentoring secondary novice teachers to develop the academic language of English language learners. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 10(1), 26–40. DOI: 10.5590/JERAP.2020.10.1.02

O'Keeffe, S. B. (2020). How exemplary educators use their instructional expertise to support CLDE achievement in English-only inclusive classrooms. *TESOL Journal*, 11(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.471>

Ollerhead, S. (2018). Pedagogical language knowledge: preparing Australian pre-service teachers to support English language learners. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(3), 256–266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2016.1246651>

Peterson, P. J., Sandigo, A. M., Stoddard, S. E., Abou-Rjaily, K., & Ulrich, J. (2020). Changing lives on the border: Preparing rural, culturally responsive special educators. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 39(2), 71–81. DOI: 10.1177/8756870519879066

Rodriguez, D., Carrasquillo, A. L., Garcia, E. M., & Howitt, D. (2020). Factors that challenge English learners and increase their dropout rates: Recommendations from the field. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 25(3), 878–894. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1722059>

Sandilos, L. E., Baroody, A. E., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Merritt, E. G. (2020). English learners' achievement in mathematics and science: Examining the role of self-efficacy. *Journal of School Psychology*, 79, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.02.002>

- Shiffman, C. D. (2019). Learning to communicate across language and culture: Demographic change, schools, and parents in adult ESL classes. *School Community Journal, 29*(1), 9–38.
- Stairs-Davenport, A. (2021). “Where do I start?” Inquiry into K-12 mainstream teachers’ knowledge about differentiating instruction for ELLs in one U.S. school district. *Education Inquiry, 14*(2), 163–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2021.1969078>
- Statista (2023) Number of public school students enrolled as English language learners (ELL) in the United States from 2000 to 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/236285/english-language-learner-students-in-us-public-schools/>
- Villegas, A. (2018). Introduction to “Preparation and development of mainstream teachers for today’s linguistically diverse classrooms.” *The Educational Forum, 82*(2), 131–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2018.1420848>
- Von Esch, K. S., & Kavanagh, S. S. (2018). Preparing mainstream classroom teachers of English learner students: Grounding practice-based designs for teacher learning in theories of adaptive expertise development. *Journal of Teacher Education, 69*(3), 239–251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487117717467>

## Appendix A

### *Figure 1*

**YouTube video link: Why Are Asian Youths More Academically Advanced? | School Swap: Korea Style | Real Families**

<https://youtu.be/g7PWrn9EpN8>

### *Figure 2*

**Question sets to discuss after viewing the video:**

- A. What did you notice about the behavior of students from each country? What did you learn about students' perspectives about school/education? Did any of their comments stand out to you?
- B. How do the styles of teaching in Korea compare to what you/the western students are used to? What would be difficult for Korean students entering a western style school? How could Welsh teachers support the Korean students as they adjust to the educational style?
- C. What would be difficult for Welsh/western students entering a Korean style school? How could the Korean teachers support the Welsh students as they adjust to the educational style? What might be different if the Welsh students were immersed in Korean with no use of English?
- D. What did you notice about the parents' role? What might Korean parents think about the western style of education for their children? How does the experience in the video relate to students at our school?

*Figure 3***Teacher survey questions adapted from Grant et al. (2021) sample survey questions:****Beliefs regarding English Language Learners (participants rate level of agreement (0=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree))**

- I believe that being able to read and write in multiple languages would be beneficial to any student.
- Cross-cultural skills are necessary for the 21st century learner.
- Parents of non- or limited-English-proficient children should be advised to speak English with their children as often as possible.
- Families have a strong knowledge base and are a resource to be tapped into through classroom and assessment activities.

**Classroom Preparation to teach Diverse Students and English Language Learners Specifically (Participants rate level of agreement (0=not at all like me to 5=completely like me))**

- I have received training that has fully prepared me for working effectively with ELLs in the general content classroom
- I struggle to meet the educational needs of ELLs.
- I am prepared to build relationships with the parents and families of ELLs.
- I am confident in my skills to support ELL students' content learning
- I am confident in my skills to support ELL students' cultural background

**Best Practices for Teaching English Language Learners (participants rate level of knowledge (0=no knowledge to 5=extensive knowledge))**

- Strategies to help ELLs connect their home language to the English language
- Strategies to create opportunities for simultaneous content and language learning for ELLs in the classroom
- Academic strategies to support content learning
- Strategies to draw on the cultural background and experiences of ELLs
- Strategies to draw on the cultural background and experiences of the ELLs' parents, families, and communities



**Figure 4**

Link to PDF of New York State Education Department's Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework (NYSED, 2018) [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework \(nysed.gov\)](https://www.nysed.gov/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework)

**Figure 5**

ELL Student Information Organizer components:

ELL Student Information Organizer

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday \_\_\_\_\_

Home Language(s) Spoken \_\_\_\_\_

Literacy language(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Family's home country \_\_\_\_\_

Student lives with \_\_\_\_\_

Countries lived in \_\_\_\_\_

Countries visited \_\_\_\_\_

Student interests/hobbies \_\_\_\_\_

Student talents \_\_\_\_\_

Learning styles/preferences \_\_\_\_\_

Home cultural values \_\_\_\_\_

Background experiences \_\_\_\_\_

Holidays celebrated \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite foods \_\_\_\_\_

Favorite school subject \_\_\_\_\_

Student strengths \_\_\_\_\_

NYSITELL/NYSESLAT Levels:

Listening \_\_\_\_\_ Speaking \_\_\_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_\_\_ Writing \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 6**

Sample parent interview questions adapted from NYSED's SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire:

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's Title \_\_\_\_\_

School Background

· What is your son/daughter's preferred name? \_\_\_\_\_

· How old is he/she? \_\_\_\_\_

· In what country(ies) did your child live? \_\_\_\_\_

· Did your son/daughter attend school in another country (ies)? \_\_\_\_\_

At what age did your child begin school? \_\_\_\_\_

Which grades did your child attend? How many months did your child attend each grade?

Grade Pre-school for \_\_\_\_\_ months

Grade K for \_\_\_\_\_ months

Grade 1 for \_\_\_\_\_ months

Grade 2 for \_\_\_\_\_ months

Grade 3 for \_\_\_\_\_ months

· Did your child attend any other school(s) in the US before this school? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, where and when? \_\_\_\_\_

· Did your child attend school regularly? \_\_\_\_\_

· If he/she did not attend school, what was the reason? \_\_\_\_\_

· Do you have any school records which will help us to understand your child's educational needs, interests and subjects that were studied? \_\_\_\_\_

· What subjects did he/she take and how did he/she do in those classes?

· What were his/her favorite classes/subjects? \_\_\_\_\_

What does your child enjoy about school? \_\_\_\_\_

What does your child find difficult in school? \_\_\_\_\_

· Which grades did your son/daughter complete? \_\_\_\_\_

· Which languages does your child speak? \_\_\_\_\_

In which language(s) does your child read and/or write? \_\_\_\_\_

Family Background

· Which languages are spoken in your household? \_\_\_\_\_

· Does your child have brothers or sisters? \_\_\_\_\_

How many? \_\_\_\_\_ Are they of school age? \_\_\_\_\_

· Does your child have any friends who speak the same home language? \_\_\_\_\_

· Does your child have any friends who are English speaking? \_\_\_\_\_

What types of activities does your child enjoy with friends?

· What are your child's favorite games, songs from your home country?

What types of activities does your child enjoy?

· Do you have opportunities to read with your child? \_\_\_\_\_  
How often do you read together? \_\_\_\_\_  
In which languages do you read together? \_\_\_\_\_

· What are your child's special interests, talents, or skills?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What seems difficult for your child?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

· Do you have an opportunity to help your son/daughter with homework?  
\_\_\_\_\_

· Other than yourself, who else cares for your child? \_\_\_\_\_

· Do you have any concerns for your child that you want the school to know about?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

· What do you hope the school can provide for your child?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

· What aspirations do you have for your child?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What are holidays that your family celebrates? Please list the dates of each holiday.  
\_\_\_\_\_

What are some cultural traditions that you practice?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What are your child's favorite foods?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How does your child prefer to learn? How would you describe their learning style?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What educational expectations do you have for your child?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please describe a person who is considered intelligent?  
\_\_\_\_\_

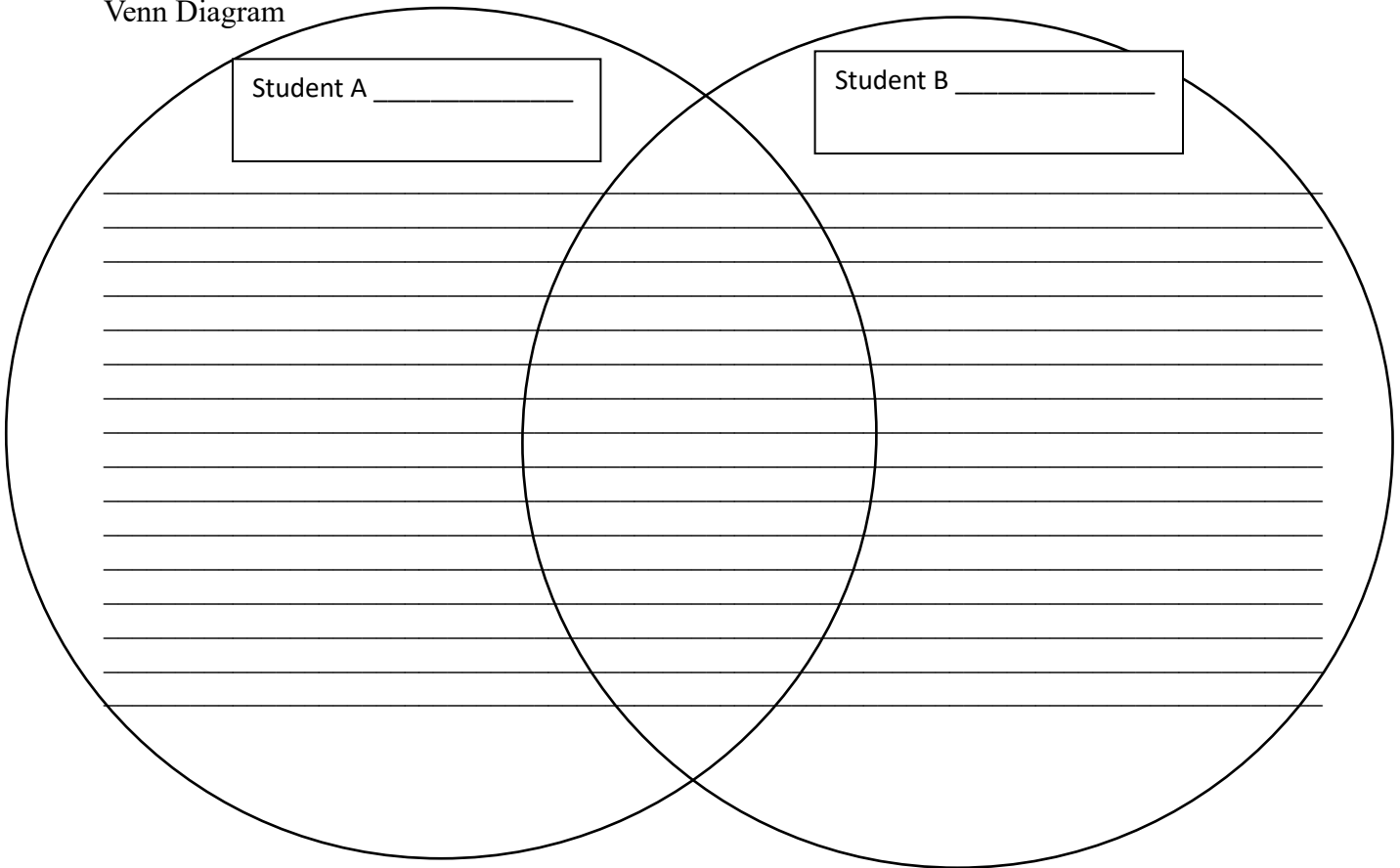
What are some background experiences that impact your child?  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to share more information about your child, please include it here:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**

**Figure 1**

Venn Diagram



**Figure 2**

Link to PDF of New York State Education Department’s Responsive-Sustaining Education

Framework (NYSED, 2018) [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework \(nysed.gov\)](https://www.nysed.gov/culture-responsive-sustaining-education-framework)

*Figure 3*

Note taker for brainstormed strategy ideas:

A rectangular note-taking template with a light blue border. At the top center, the text "Strategy Ideas" is written and underlined. Below this title are 15 horizontal lines spaced evenly down the page, providing a space for writing brainstormed strategy ideas.

**Figure 4**

Examples of cultural strategies:

- Incorporate stories from students' cultures
- Incorporate stories in students' home languages
- Plan activities that represent students' cultures
- Integrate students' cultural knowledge and experiences into the classroom
- Integrate students' interests into the classroom
- Opportunities for teams/group work/collaboration
- Show students you value their home language
- Create an environment that respects students' cultures
- Opportunities to develop individuality
- Incorporate different perspectives into the classroom
- Involve family in academics and classroom activities- reading and speaking
- Provide alternate and varied ways to assess learning
- Check classroom library- add various perspective or subtract as needed
- Embrace diversity
- Celebrate differences
- Allow use of home language in class and translanguaging
- Provide texts for students in their home languages
- Student-centered activities
- Ask families to create texts together outside of class
- Incorporate supplementary materials and texts that connect to students' lives



## Appendix C

### *Figure 1*

Link to PDF of New York State Education Department's Responsive-Sustaining Education

Framework (NYSED, 2018) [Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework \(nysed.gov\)](https://www.nysed.gov/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework)



*Figure 2***Teacher survey questions adapted from Grant et al. (2021) sample survey questions:****Beliefs regarding English Language Learners (participants rate level of agreement (0=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree))**

- I believe that being able to read and write in multiple languages would be beneficial to any student.
- Cross-cultural skills are necessary for the 21st century learner.
- Parents of non- or limited-English-proficient children should be advised to speak English with their children as often as possible.
- Families have a strong knowledge base and are a resource to be tapped into through classroom and assessment activities.

**Classroom Preparation to teach Diverse Students and English Language Learners Specifically (Participants rate level of agreement (0=not at all like me to 5=completely like me))**

- I have received training that has fully prepared me for working effectively with ELLs in the general content classroom
- I struggle to meet the educational needs of ELLs.
- I am prepared to build relationships with the parents and families of ELLs.
- I am confident in my skills to support ELL students' content learning
- I am confident in my skills to support ELL students' cultural background

**Best Practices for Teaching English Language Learners (participants rate level of knowledge (0=no knowledge to 5=extensive knowledge))**

- Strategies to help ELLs connect their home language to the English language
- Strategies to create opportunities for simultaneous content and language learning for ELLs in the classroom
- Academic strategies to support content learning
- Strategies to draw on the cultural background and experiences of ELLs
- Strategies to draw on the cultural background and experiences of the ELLs' parents, families, and communities

**Please reflect upon how this three-session PD, strategy implementation experience has affected you over the past few months:**

---

**Please describe how your ELL students were affected over the past few months during strategy implementation:**

---