

**Increasing Acceptance of ELLs in Schools**

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### **Abstract**

This capstone project aims to support teachers and other school staff who work with English Language Learners (ELLs). ELL students are a growing population across the entire United States and many of these students are impacted by the lack of acceptance in their classrooms and schools, which in turn can cause students to feel isolated. To increase ELL acceptance, multiple options have been considered. Solutions to the problem include implementing “Getting to Know You” questionnaires at the beginning of the school year, monthly in-service professional development for all staff, updated welcoming signage in all common areas of the school, and a Family Welcome Night for ELL students and their families. Several conclusions are relevant to minimizing the lack of acceptance for ELL students including more knowledgeable and available teachers, and more student-teacher-family involvement. Recommendations include incorporating additional events for ELLs and their families to attend in the future. Furthermore, programs that have recently been established, such as the Family Welcome Night and the in-service professional development, should be reviewed and modified with any necessary changes in order to help improve the success of ELL students.

*Keywords:* English Language Learners (ELL), acceptance, social-emotional, wellbeing, professional development

## Chapter 1: Introduction

As a pre-kindergarten teacher for the past 10 years in a predominantly English-speaking community and school district, it is not very often I have a student who is an English language learner (ELL). During the 2018-2019 school year, I had a student whose family migrated from India, and the student mainly spoke Hindi. His parents spoke Hindi as well, with very little English vocabulary. The start of that school year was a struggle for me as a teacher because I did not have any training or knowledge about English language learners. Therefore, I felt like I was not going to be able to succeed in teaching this student. Thankfully as the school year went on, the student started to understand some English words (colors, shapes, letters and numbers). With the help of some suggestions from the ENL teacher in the building, the student and I were both able to successfully complete the school year. When speaking with an ENL teacher recently, we discussed how many educators, including myself during the 2018-2019 school year, are not fully prepared or well equipped to deal with different races and cultures within their classrooms. Studies have shown that educators struggle with stressors and structural barriers to provide meaningful lessons and student engagement (Bennaouna et al., 2021).

Thus, I have developed an interest in the importance of ELLs needing to feel welcome in their classrooms and in the school community. ELLs are constantly growing in population within U. S. schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) the number of ELLs that attended public school in 2019 in the United States was 10.4% (5.1 million students). ELLs face many challenges when learning a new language, one of them being that they are expected to learn the same material as their peers (Raubaugh & Purmensky, 2021). With the educational system focusing more on content, 25% of ELLs in grades K-12 were not making

progress towards English language proficiency in 2016 (Raubaugh & Purmensky, 2021). The students need to be able to have a safe place with both culturally relevant and scaffolded support.

Many factors contribute to ELLs' struggle, including their teachers' underpreparedness to teach ELLs and students' lack of social-emotional skills. Teachers often do not have enough knowledge or resources to properly teach and test ELLs (Newcomer et al., 2020; Stairs-Davenport (2021). Educators may also believe that ELLs cannot complete specific learning tasks because they do not yet speak enough English (Newcomer et al., 2020), and improper testing leads to misplacing students (Ruiz, 2019). If an ELL student is misplaced in an exclusive classroom, they will not have as many opportunities to interact with their English-speaking peers (Wille et al., 2019). This can cause the student to feel as though they are not accepted or equal in the school community. In addition, many ELL students are shy and have to deal with rejection from their peers. That is, these students have lower social skills and assertiveness compared to their English-speaking peers (Meng, 2018).

Thus, the intent of this project is to successfully make ELL students feel accepted into their school community, as that is where they spend majority of their days. ELL students should be able to feel accepted and welcome in their school community. In Chapter 2, I will review research on the wellbeing and acceptance of ELLs in the classroom, as well as some problems students face and solutions. In Chapter 3, I will use the reviewed research to develop professional development ideas/techniques in order to help solve these problems. These techniques will help to increase educator knowledge and understanding, decrease the misplacement of ELLs and increase support for them socially and emotionally. The professional development will also seek to encourage family involvement. Chapter 4 will conclude with implications for teaching and learning.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This Chapter includes a review of literature that relates to the wellbeing of English language learners (ELL) in the classroom. As I stated in Chapter 1, when we consider ELLs in the classroom, it is imperative to observe the underpreparedness of teachers, the amount of focus on state testing, the misplacement of ELLs in their classrooms, their social-emotional wellbeing and family involvement. Indeed, ELL students have encountered many challenges in U.S. schools such as learning a new language, forming peer relationships, and low self-esteem, all of which contribute to academic difficulties. Academic challenges were also linked with issues such as legal status and living in areas of poverty (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Moreover, research has shown that an English language learner's school experience can be affected by how their teachers perceive them, based on their lack of training (Polat et al., 2019). These issues combine contribute to making ELL students feel unaccepted in their school community.

In this Chapter, I will discuss teachers' underpreparedness to teach ELLs, the amount of focus on state testing, the need for correct ELL placement, the social-emotional wellbeing of ELLs, and the need for increased parental/community involvement. These themes contribute to ELL students feeling unwelcome in their classrooms/schools. Before discussing each of these themes, it is imperative to explore theories and perspectives that can help understand the lack of acceptance with ELLs and the importance of their need to feel welcome in the classroom. Much research has been drawn on the ideas of culturally responsive teaching and CASEL framework.

### **Understanding CRT and CASEL**

When discussing the acceptance of ELL students in their classroom/school environment, it is important to discuss the theory of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-

Billings, 1995) because it helps educators to bridge the gaps that ELL students may encounter. Many scholars over the past decades have developed teaching methods and practices in which they incorporate cultural identities of their students into their classroom instruction (Will & Najarro, 2022). All of these approaches have one goal, to allow students to become lifelong learner and critical thinkers. CRT is a pedagogy that aims to recognize the importance of student culture and aims to include that culture in all aspects of learning (Burnham, 2021). Gay (2010) stated that when students can gain academic knowledge through their lived experiences, skills and prior knowledge they will develop more of an interest in learning and it will be more meaningful.

CRT is not just only for ELL students, it is an important teaching strategy for everyone and when done correctly it can be very successful (Burnham, 2021). When used in the classroom correctly, CRT can bring about many benefits. Some of these benefits include strengthening students' sense of identity, promoting equality and inclusivity in the classroom, engaging students in the course material and supporting critical thinking (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Some ways in which educators can apply CRT to teaching ELLs is through questionnaires and building on the students' background knowledge and experiences.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is a framework that highlights five SEL competencies through many contexts (Borowski, 2019). Social and Emotional Learning helps all students be able to understand themselves, connect with others, achieve goals, and support communities (CASEL, 2022). All students should be able to feel safe and have a sense of belonging. CASEL framework emerged in 1994 from a meeting that included researchers, educators and child advocates that were involved in a variety of educational-based efforts to promote positive development in children (Borowski, 2019). Over

the years, the CASEL framework has evolved to become more organized and encourages schools to work with families and communities.

The first competency is self-awareness, which is the ability to recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. The second competency is self-management, which is the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts and behaviors in different situations (Borowski, 2019). Borowski (2019) describes the third competency, social-awareness, as the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It also includes understanding social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school and community resources and support. The fourth competency is relationship skills. Borowski (2019) describes this as the ability to maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. Lastly is responsible decision-making, which is the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions (Borowski, 2019). These competencies can be taught and applied in various ways throughout all grade levels and across diverse cultural contexts (CASEL, 2022). When coordinating CASEL framework into learning environments, it can enhance students' social, emotional and academic learning.

The following sections represent the themes discovered during the literature review: teachers' underpreparedness to teach ELLs, too much focus on testing over content, ELL student placement/ segregation in schools, lack of social-emotional wellbeing of ELLs, and lack of parental/community involvement. While each of these topics will be discussed individually, it is imperative to recognize that they are all connected in the acceptance of ELLs and will be the reasons for a newly developed plan moving forward.

### **Teachers' Underpreparedness to Teach ELLs**

Research has shown concerns with the underpreparedness of educators when it comes to teaching ELL students (e.g., Brown & Endo, 2017; Raubaugh & Purmensky, 2021; Stairs-Davenport, 2021). According to Stairs-Davenport (2021), historically teachers in the United States are given little to no preparation for teaching ELLs. As of 2014, more than half of the states in the United States did not require any ELL training for general classroom teachers (Stairs-Davenport, 2021). Nationwide, 25% of ELLs from grades K-12 are not making progress towards English language proficiency (Raubaugh & Purmensky, 2021). Stairs-Davenport (2021) used two questions to help guide her study. The data came from mainstream teachers in a K-5 school in the state of Maine and was evaluated through a survey. A few months after the original survey was given, all of the K-12 teachers in that district were invited to answer a new open-ended survey (Stairs-Davenport, 2021). Many teachers in the district are underprepared to teach ELLs (Stairs-Davenport, 2021). The participants all expressed their concerns with differentiating curriculum, assessments and instruction. What was the most surprising was their concern for where to start when it comes to working with ELLs. Many of the participants did not know how to even begin to educate their ELL students, yet all the participants were interested in learning teaching methods to best help ELL students learn and succeed. Correspondingly, Wright-Maley and Green (2015) conducted a study to better understand the underpreparedness of teachers when teaching ELLs. Their study was also conducted in the Northeastern part of the United States, at a large urban university in Connecticut and was made up of 87 pre-service teachers who did not specialize in ELL instruction. Participants specialized in other content areas such as social studies, physical education and science. The participants were 79% female, 21% male and 93% were native English speakers. Wright-Maley and Green called their immersion study the *shock-and-show* experience. The experiment was done in two phases-a version with limited scaffolding

(shock), and a longer, more scaffolded version (show). Results of the study showed that many participants stated that “it’s really difficult to be an ELL”, and “this was a great opportunity to pretend or see what it’s like to be in an ELL’s shoes”. Overall, results from the study showed that teachers are underprepared to teach ELLs and there is an important need for teachers to be able to scaffold lessons and differentiate their instruction to better fit the needs of the ELL students.

An important factor of teachers’ underpreparedness is their lack of knowledge to create proper lesson plans. Many mainstream teachers do not know how to prepare lesson plans to appropriately teach and engage ELL students. Although lesson planning and lesson delivery are both important, differentiated instruction begins with lesson planning. For this study, Brown and Endo (2017) content-analyzed 149 lesson plans provided by 149 pre-service teachers from an anonymous university in the Midwest of the United States. The results of the study showed that the overall quality of the lesson plan’s differentiated instructions was uneven and that detailed accommodations for ELLs in the plans were rare. Only 8 lessons that were evaluated (5.3%) included provisions for ELLs. This indicates that there is still a challenge for educators when it comes to accommodating ELLs in specific content areas. The results showed that pre-service participants from the study were likely to reduce the amount of work required of ELLs and struggled to differentiate instruction, even at a minimal level.

Similarly, Sakow et al. (2016) concluded that pre-service teachers do not meet the expectations for differentiated instruction in lessons required for ELL students. In this study, four college juniors were observed during a field experience that lasted four weeks. Data was collected through videos, lesson plans and written reflections. Although it was stated that each pre-service candidate had prior curriculum training, results from the study showed that they had limited knowledge and experience with teaching ELLs. Therefore, while attempts at lesson

modifications were made for ELLs, not all were successful in implementing them properly. For this reason, being unable to construct a proper lesson plan for ELLs, where instruction can be scaffolded and differentiated can cause a teacher to be underprepared for teaching ELLs.

A teacher's lack of preparedness to teach ELLs can also stem from little knowledge of policies in regard to ELLs (Kirksey, 2021). In their study of 12 Florida school district ESOL policies, Raubaugh and Purmensky (2021) found a lack of teacher awareness on policies. Raubaugh and Purmensky also observed two elementary schools in the same district and interviewed 2 teachers, one from each school. Both teachers stated that there is no appropriate PD offered by their district to actually align with their ESOL policies, causing them to have little knowledge of the district policies. The results of the interviews indicated that there is a lack of teacher awareness on policies. Similarly, Kirksey (2021) surveyed pre-service teachers from seven California University teacher preparation programs (TPP). More than half of the 473 pre-service teachers reported that policies impacted their stress and abilities to do their jobs effectively and stated their lack of knowledge on these enforcements caused them to feel underprepared to meet the needs of their students. The lack of consistency from state to state, district to district, and even school to school as a whole makes it difficult to grasp what is actually happening in schools in regard to the education of ELLs.

All in all, the findings are enlightening. The lack of teachers' preparedness to teach ELLs leads to educators not having the proper knowledge needed to help ELL students succeed. These concerns start with not knowing where to begin with teaching ELLs, creating/teaching proper differentiated lessons and the lack of knowledge on district/state ESOL policies.

### **Too Much Focus on Standardized Testing**

There is a lot of pressure on teachers to get students ready for standardized tests in a timely manner (DelliCarpini et al., 2010). A teacher's plans and implementations are strongly influenced by the functional systems at both the school and district level (Pray et al., 2017). With that, teachers are forced to spend more of their time focusing on preparing students for testing as opposed to actually teaching content and focusing on the wellbeing of their students. Teachers feel "obligated" or "required" to model curriculum based on tests or that they need to drill students in specific test-taking strategies. Therefore, teachers are unable to spend time focusing on getting to know their students.

With much focus on standardized tests, it is causing educators to feel as though they cannot teach anything but test topics and strategies. Pray et al. (2017) conducted a study in which they used qualitative methods to shed light on elementary teachers' perspectives on the functional systems in schools. The study contained multiple perspectives through different means of data collection such as interviews, surveys, and observations. A total of 50 teachers participated in the research, all of which teach at the elementary level. Mandated assessment practices were an issue with the participants. Teachers felt that mandated assessments could often affect classroom instruction, not to mention the time-consuming paperwork associated with it. Participants stated that when it comes to teaching ELLs there is just "not enough time in the day". The participants also voiced concerns about reaching their breaking points due to mandated testing, in turn causing them to not focus on the students themselves (Pray et al., 2017). Many teachers voiced opinions that the amount of time spent preparing for tests and actually testing students is "awful" and "unreasonable"(Pray et al., 2017). Likewise, in an interview study conducted by Menken (2010) teachers indicated that they feel strong pressure to "teach to the test". Menken (2010) interviewed 128 participants in New York City schools. Participants

included 61 students, 19 administrators, 44 ESL and bilingual teachers and 4 guidance counselors. One teacher voiced her concern about how she is always planning ahead to make sure her lessons relate to a particular part of the Regents exam or any other specific state test. Other teachers said that they spend more time giving practice regents exams and old tests and not as much time as they would like on actually teaching and helping their students.

With so much pressure being put on testing, there becomes a tendency for teachers to correct student work rather than use more interactive and creative methods of teaching (DelliCarpini et al., 2010). If teachers are to focus so much mandatory testing, ELL students will not receive the proper education they need and possibly being placed in an incorrect classroom setting.

### **ELL Student Placement/Segregation in Schools**

Many times, ELL students are placed in the incorrect classroom setting, causing them to not feel welcome or set up for success in their education (Gandara & Orfield, 2010). An ethnographic study of the implementation of the four-hour block program was conducted in 18 elementary and secondary classrooms throughout five districts in Arizona (Gandara & Orfield, 2010). The results concluded that students in the program were usually segregated in school for the entire day due to scheduling issues making it difficult to re-integrate students. It was noted ELLs in the four-hour model classrooms were spending their entire day with fellow ELL peers. They did not have contact with native English speaking students during academic or fine arts instruction. Therefore, ELL students did not have any opportunities to socialize with their non-ELL peers, which in turn caused ELLs to feel isolated. Similarly, a study researched by Gandara and Orfield (2010) surveyed 880 teachers in eight Arizona districts. The districts all consisted of a significant percentage of English learners that were implementing the four-hour program. The

results found that 87% of the teachers had concerns with ELL students being segregated from their non-ELL peers and that 85% expressed the concern that separating ELL students from their English-speaking peers can be harmful to their learning and social skills. Likewise, in 2019, an experiment was conducted by doing a semester-long E-Pal exchange program. The study sought to examine possible changes in certain aspects of teachers' beliefs about areas such as inclusion in mainstream classrooms (Polat et al., 2019). The participants included 74 pre-service teachers in their sophomore year in a midsize university. The university was in the Eastern United States. The participants participated in an online letter exchange with EL students in a public school. The grades ranged from fifth grade to eighth grade. The pre-service teachers wrote a total of five letters each and received five letters in return. Polat et al. found that pre-service teachers strongly supported the inclusion of ELL students in mainstream classrooms. Many participants also felt very strongly that ELL students should not be excluded from content-area classrooms due to a low English proficiency (Polat et al., 2019).

The pre-service teachers who participated in the E-Pal project as well as studies researched by Gandara and Orfield (2010) want a change in the segregation of ELL students. The interactions made by the students and the pre-service teachers of the E-Pal study gave participants the chance to learn about who ELL students are and what they are actually capable of. The teacher participants were enlightened by the ELL students they spoke with and want to do more to be able to support their future ELL students. Furthermore, the findings from these comparable studies concluded that in order to help ELL students feel accepted and succeed, it is important for them to be able to interact with their non-ELL peers as often as possible in a mainstream, inclusive setting.

### **Lack of Social-Emotional Wellbeing of ELL**

ELL students are at a disadvantage socially and emotionally when compared to their non-ELL peers (Newcomer et al., 2017). ELLs may experience psychological distress due to issues such as family separation during migration, navigating U. S. immigration laws, or just adjusting to a new cultural norm (Shi & Watkinson, 2019). Many ELL students feel less connected to their schools when compared to their non-ELL peers (Shi & Watkinson, 2019). In Shi and Watkinson's (2019) survey, they used a mixed-method design to address three research questions on ELL students' sense of school belonging and how school personnel perceive these students. With this information, they would hope to close the achievement and opportunity gaps between ELL and non-ELL students. The participants of the research included three school counselors, one teacher who served as an ELL family liaison, and 28 students who were receiving English as a second language (ESL) at school. Most of the students had come to the United States while they were in elementary school or earlier. Interviews were conducted with all participants. The Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSMS) was used to examine the students' sense of school belonging. The results from the PSSMS used for this research showed that students highly agreed with the fact that "It is hard for people like me to be accepted at my school" and "Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong in my school". The adults that participated stated that many of them felt as though they have not received the proper tools and training to be able to support their ELL students and that, because of this, their students felt uncomfortable asking the teachers for help (Shi & Watkinson, 2019).

Participants also noted that there are communication barriers due to language differences. Likewise, Newcomer et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative case study focused on the social-emotional wellbeing of ELL students. The study was done in a medium-sized school district in Washington State. Newcomer et al. (2017) used a combination of interviews, observations and

artifacts over the course of a six-month period. There were only two teacher participants focused on during this study, as they were the ones that worked closely with the ELL students. Results showed that the teachers often find it difficult to meet the range of needs of their students and that there needs to be healthier ways in which ELL students are able to develop connections with their teachers, peers and the school.

There are many ways in which teachers can help support their ELL students' social-emotional wellbeing and provide them with a sense of belonging. Newcomer et al. (2017) stated that sharing stories within the classroom might be powerful. When students are able to share stories, they will become more engaged which will lead to developing better writing skills and a feeling a greater sense of community. Another way in which teachers can support the wellbeing of their students is to foster caring relationships. By developing empathy, it makes it easier for students to relate and it can help build a stronger teacher-student relationship. Lastly is the importance of community. It is important for educators and school staff to build a strong classroom community, as well as a community beyond the classroom. It is necessary to ensure that students feel connected to peers, their school, and the local community in order to develop a positive social-emotional environment for ELL students. One way this can be accomplished is by partnering with ELL families to help support culturally understanding (Newcomer et al., 2017).

### **Lack of Parental/Community Involvement**

There is a strong need for increased parent/family involvement in the lives of ELL students in order to help students succeed and feel accepted (e.g., Parsons & Shim, 2019; Wall & Musetti, 2018; Wille et al., 2019). Parsons and Shim (2019) conducted a study to determine how they can more effectively engage and involve families in the lives of their ELL students. They used guided questions and quantitative data to achieve the results of their study. The study

consisted of 14 questions answered by 71 participants from numerous Wyoming Public School Districts.

The results of the survey were quite fascinating. On the topic of family involvement, only 4.29% of the participants surveyed stated that they felt their ELL families were involved a lot in school/district events (Parsons & Shim, 2019). Considering if language barriers interfered with ELL families developing deeper relationships with their schools, 42.25% agreed that the barriers were an issue, 9.86% strongly agreed. The principal of one of the school districts voiced that there was a need to find ways to better communicate with families of ELL students by doing more than just telling them what is going on in the school, there needs to be a way to receive some feedback from the families (Parsons & Shims, 2019).

Similarly, Wille et al. (2019) conducted a study where participants consisted of three school districts/communities in the Western and Midwestern United States. Approximately a third of each district consisted of English Language Learners. The participants were 11 females that worked in a variety of settings such as elementary, middle and high schools as well as district office. An interview was then conducted where participants answered questions such as “What have been some of the most successful ways to communicate with or get in touch with families?” When it came to communication, many of the participants agreed they wanted to see a stronger desire with educators to establish better communication with the students and their families (Wille et al., 2019). Participants also expressed their desire for more formal professional development that would help them be able to find ways to learn more about the cultures of their students’ families (Wille et al., 2019). Participants all wanted to find ways to build a stronger family-school relationship. They all agreed that this was important and was needed in order to help support their ELL students. In order to better include families, participants came up with

ideas such as conducting home visits, creating parent programs, and helping families address their needs (Wille et al., 2019).

Wall and Musetti (2018) used their study to describe the ways one elementary school tried to address the needs of its English language learners and their families. They did this through a multipronged approach that included targeting academic instruction, a family-community outreach program, teacher professional development and the adoption of school wide values and expectations (Wall & Musetti, 2018). The focal school used for the study was a Title 1 public elementary school in Southern California where approximately 57% of the students speak English as a second language. Data analysis was used to read and sort data from questionnaires and interviews from focus group sessions.

Results of the interviews were fascinating. Parents voiced that they face many challenges and lack confidence when needing to confront educators and other school staff. Whether it is due to cultural differences, or simply not knowing English well, parents have a hard time speaking up and advocating for their children. This could also be due to the fact that although some parents want to advocate for their children, they remain distant out of respect for the teacher or they feel as though their voices will be silenced due to lack of power. When fourth and fifth grade ELL students were interviewed, they stated that they believed it was their own responsibility to help themselves and to do well, that they shouldn't have to rely on their teachers or families. However, these students also indicated that they wished their teachers would "listen to me" or "know how I'm feeling" (Wall & Musetti, 2018). This proves that ELL students, although feeling their teachers and family are not responsible for their academic outcomes, desires stronger, more meaningful relationships. There is a lack of trust and feeling of support between ELL students, their families, and educators.

In these comparable studies, all agree that ELL students need more support and a deeper level of communication with their teachers and families. Students should not need to feel as though they alone are responsible for their learning and that they should be able to help themselves, without relying on help from their teachers and families. School districts need to discover ways to open the lines of communication with their ELL students' families in order to build more trust and support for their students. It is necessary for educational settings to partner with families and communities to promote positive environments that support students' development.

There are potential gaps in research that have been noted of the reviewed literature. One of which comes from the study performed by Pray et al. (2017). When reviewing this article, it stated that they found little data corresponding with the systems of politics due to the types of data they collected. Pray et al. (2017) suggested earlier in the article that school politics was one of the four elements of a school system, therefore they should have conducted further research in all four categories. In other studies, the authors focused on specific ELL groups, such as Latinos. Although Spanish is one of the most popular languages in the United States, there are still many other languages spoken of ELL students in school that should be considered.

Raubagh and Purmensky (2021) researched teachers' knowledge of ESOL policies in the state of Florida. Further research could be investigated on the adoption and knowledge of ESOL policies in other states as well. Although the study by Wille et al. (2019) seemed to give clear emphasis on empathy, problem solving and relationship building, as well as developed and highlighted many strategies that were considered to be successful, the perspectives from refugees and their families was not received. Therefore, further research would need to be done in order to consider how the refugees and their families felt about the practices put into place. Finally, when

it came to research on ELL parental involvement, Parsons and Shim (2019), conducted their research by surveying school administration and staff. It would have been beneficial when discussing parental involvement to consider surveying parents and families of ELL students in the same district. By doing so, they could have broadened their results and develop more potential ideas on how to solve the issue at hand.

### **Conclusion**

The literature has informed my understanding of the needs of ELLs in order to make them feel welcome in the classroom and school setting. Many educators need more PD and workshops in order to further support their ELL students. Regrettably, only 14 states in the United States have professional development that targets experiences related to supporting ELLs in their content area classrooms (Polat et al., 2019). The literature also shows many educators want to become more knowledgeable and successful in teaching ELLs. The main issue seems to be that there are not enough resources for them to do so. In Chapter 3 I will discuss my professional development that aims to inform staff of the potential social-emotional issues that may arise if ELL students do not feel a sense of belonging. Educators will learn specific ways in which they can better support their students, as well as their families. Educators and school administration will take part in school-family events that are held such as a Culture Night and Family Fun Night. They will also take part in professional development classes geared towards educating teachers and all school personnel on culturally responsive education. By implementing new strategies and professional development opportunities, educators will have the chance to become better prepared in helping their future ELL students.

### **Chapter 3: Description of the Product and Tools**

In this Chapter I will present a professional development strategy that seeks to increase the acceptance of ELLs in their schools and classrooms. With the amount of ELL students in classrooms continually increasing throughout the United States, ELLs are struggling to feel accepted. As discussed in Chapter 2, several factors influence the acceptance of ELL students including the underpreparedness of teachers to teach ELLs, too much focus on testing, ELL student placement/segregation, lack of social-emotional wellbeing and the lack of parent involvement (e.g., Brown & Endo, 2017; Fredricks & Warriner, 2016; Parson & Shim, 2019; Pray et. Al., 2017; Shi & Watkinson, 2019). This Chapter discusses solutions to the problem of ELL acceptance. I will first present an overview of the professional development plan. Then, I will discuss the components of the PD including: “Getting to Know You” student questionnaires at the beginning of every school year, welcoming school signage, and Family Welcome Night.

The professional development plan (see Appendix I) will be presented at the Superintendent’s Conference Day in late August. At this meeting, all teachers in the district will be in attendance. The ELL professional development will take place from 9am-12pm in the high school auditorium. During the 3-hour session, staff members will have the chance to voice questions and concerns at the end. The PD will be presented in the form of a Google Slideshow, as well as several materials and handouts (see Appendices A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H & I) to help guide the discussion. The name of the professional development program is “What More Can We Do?” as it is designed to improve staff knowledge on what more we can do to help ELL students feel accepted in our classrooms.

#### **“Getting to Know You” Questionnaire**

There are many ways in which teacher's can support their students' social and emotional wellbeing. It is important to allow space for students to share their personal experiences as well as for teachers to find ways to connect with their students. Many students are lacking, rather than focusing on, linguistic, cultural and experiential resources (funds of knowledge) (Newcomer et al., 2017). Social interactions between peers and/or their teachers are very important in the development of students. Some scholars argue that language is the vehicle for social interactions and communication (Meng, 2020). Therefore, language diversity in the classroom should be positive and all students should feel welcome and accepted, no matter what their language or culture is.

During the first week of every school year students, as well as teachers, in grades 4-12 will complete a "Getting to Know You" questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questionnaire will be in English and will be available in Spanish as well. If any students need a copy of the questions in a language other than English or Spanish, one will be provided in their native language. Students that are in grades K-3 will partake in a class discussion during the first week of school in which they share fun facts about themselves with the class, as they may not have a full understanding of some of the questions and may have a harder time reading and writing answers.

The questions will be simple and easy to answer. Teachers will make it known that this is a simple activity to allow for the students and their teacher to know each other better. Students and staff will be given approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. After completion, students will break up into small groups to share their information about each other. As a whole group, the students will then each share one important or interesting fact about themselves with the class. The teacher will also have the opportunity to share one fact about

themselves with the class as well. The questionnaires will then be collected by the teacher which they can then review the information all of the students shared and use that to help guide them in culturally responsive teaching practices.

Conducting a questionnaire getting to know the students during the first week of school allows for all students to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. Everyone will know coming into class that their voice will be heard. By involving the teacher in the whole group conversation it allows for the students to see that the teacher is relatable. Teachers need to work on building relationships with their students to ensure that they feel respected and valued (e.g., Newcomer et al., 2017; Stairs-Davenport, 2021).

### **Monthly In-service Professional Development**

Teacher preparation and development should require some sort of basic knowledge relevant to ELLs for all teachers as a first step in helping ELLs make greater academic gains (Samson & Collins, 2012). The analyses of Stairs-Davenport's (2021) survey revealed five major themes emerged that teachers state they are lacking knowledge in: 1) curriculum and assessment, 2) instruction, 3) community, 4) distinguishing difference from disability, and 5) where to start when teaching ELLs. In a study by Shi and Watkinson (2019), one teacher participant reported that educators want to do better when it comes to teaching ELLs, they just are not provided with the correct support and training. It has been revealed that in-service teacher education programs with practical curriculum have a strong influence on participants' teaching than ones that are theory-oriented pre-service programs (Stairs-Davenport, 2021).

To improve the overall knowledge of educators throughout the school year, each monthly faculty meeting will allocate time devoted to ways in which to best help support and work with ELL students. During the first faculty meeting of the school year, teachers will be asked to voice

any concerns they have about ELL students. These concerns can be about anything including different student cultures and languages, differentiated instruction, ELL district, state or nation policies, etc. At least one concern will be addressed during each faculty meeting for the remainder of the school year. A list of topics to be discussed at each meeting (see Appendix B) will be handed out during the October meeting, as well as posted in the main office.

During each meeting, the speaker will create a brief PowerPoint on the topic that will be discussed. Handouts may also be distributed to staff members so that they have a hardcopy of each presentation and can also make their own additional notes as well. The PowerPoint presentation will be emailed to all staff after the meeting as well. At the end of the presentation, the speaker will give ideas of additional resources in which staff can further inform themselves of the topic if they are interested in learning more. All staff members attending the meeting will be encouraged to ask any questions they may have pertaining to the topic at the end of the meeting.

Ongoing professional development is important for teachers and other school staff members. It is especially important for educators and staff who have not received an education or have knowledge of working with ELLs. Incorporating topics related to ELLs into monthly faculty meetings allows for educators to ask questions on topics they may not normally have the chance to discuss and will allow for educators in the field to offer guidance and support to those in need.

### **Welcoming School Signage**

ELL students can sometimes feel less connected to their schools/peers. A lack of school connectedness or belonging is linked to a decrease in academic motivation in students that are underrepresented (Shi & Watkinson, 2019). According to Shi and Watkinson (2019), many

students agreed that sometimes it is hard for them to feel as though they belong in their school. Regrettably, ELL students often have a hard time and struggle to feel accepted into their schools. This is not done purposely by the schools, but there are simple ways to fix this issue. One way is to create and display welcoming school signage throughout the buildings.

In order to allow students to feel accepted in their school setting, they should be able to feel as though they belong in every room of the school, not just segregated areas. The signage in schools will be updated in numerous locations in the building to promote and support multiculturalism (See Appendices C, D, E, F, & G). Instead of having all signage throughout the school in English, signs will also be placed throughout the school in Spanish and other languages spoken in the school as well. Signs will be put into place before the start of the school year. The signs will be hung in the most common areas of the building, such as the cafeteria, main office, guidance office, gym, library and art room. In addition, at least one welcome sign will be displayed in multiple languages throughout every content area classroom.

Additional school signage will help to create a welcoming school environment. ELL students will feel accepted and incorporated into the school community. It will also create a welcoming environment for visitors of the school, such as student families.

### **Family Welcome Night**

Not only do ELL students feel unwelcome in the school setting, but their families often struggle as well. Wall and Musetti (2018) found that many ELL parents lack confidence to confront teachers and to “speak school”. The community liaison found that families often feared English-speaking institutions and that they leave the teaching to the teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to welcome families into the school community and ease any of their fears or

concerns. Inviting parents into the schools can be successful and allow for an increase in family involvement.

A Family Welcome Night has been established and will take place on the second Friday night of the school year. It will start at 7pm and end by 9pm. Invitations (See Appendix H) will be sent home to families during the first week of school. The event will allow opportunities for ELL families to informally meet with school staff. All staff including guidance counselors, ELL teachers, content area teachers and elective teachers will be expected to attend the welcome night.

During the event, staff will have the chance to introduce themselves to the families. Each teacher will be given time to briefly discuss important expectations for their class as well as share some information about themselves. Afterwards, parent and families will have the chance to walk around the cafeteria and talk to the teachers and staff, asking any questions they have. Families and staff will also have the opportunity to bring food from their culture or home countries for others to try. This will create opportunities for families to connect with others. The cafeteria will be decorated with decorations and flags from different cultures and countries from families and staff in the school. At the end of the night, students and their families will be given a packet of important information talked about during the evening. It will include a directory of school staff available for ELL families to call or contact if they have any questions or concerns such as guidance counselors and ELL teachers. The packets will be available in English as well as the families' native language. A staff member will give out all handouts before the families leave at the end of the night.

The Family Welcome night provides a chance for ELL students and their families to feel accepted in the school community. It provides an opportunity for staff, students and their

families to make connections and open lines of communication that may have not been had in the past. Events such as a welcome night allow for other events to take place throughout the school year that will continue to help all families of the schools feel welcome and accepted.

### **Intended Professional Development Outcomes**

There are several intended outcomes for sharing the professional development with the faculty and staff of the district. First, the PD will provide all staff and educators with information of the changes being made within the district to better support and accept ELL students. Secondly, all staff will be provided with information and knowledge on ways in which they can better support their ELL students and their families. Additionally, the professional development will provide continuing knowledge and resources for staff during the entire school year. The broad goal of the professional development is to improve staff preparedness and socio-emotional status. The overall goal for the product is to provide ELL students with a secure, positive classroom/school environment in which they feel safe and welcome. Students and staff alike should be able to develop genuine relationships where everyone feels equal and accepted. The strategies and suggestions provided by the professional development should be implemented within all classrooms. At the end of the school year, discussions will be had about the new strategies and ideas put in place. Modifications can be made yearly based on seen success and staff suggestions/concerns.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

This capstone project has explored reasons for the lack of ELL acceptance in many school districts in various parts of the United States. The lack of student acceptance can often cause ELL students to be shy and feel rejection from their teachers and peers (Meng, 2018). This project also examined ways in which educators and school administration can increase staff knowledge of ELLs, allowing ELL students to feel accepted and like they belong to their school community. In order to understand the lack of acceptance for ELL students, it is imperative to consider the preparedness of teachers, the focus on testing over content, placement of ELLs in classrooms, lack of ELL students' social-emotional wellbeing and the lack of parent involvement. These themes work simultaneously in the development of ELL acceptance. Several research questions developed from these themes such as:

Does a teacher's lack of knowledge in regards to teaching ELLs affect the students?

Do teachers focus too much on testing, and if so, how does this impact ELL students?

How does social-emotional wellbeing affect ELL students?

Are schools doing enough to involve families in the school community?

In this chapter, I will first summarize the literature. I will then discuss implications for teaching ELLs and will conclude with recommendations for future research.

### Summary

I have reviewed numerous studies based on ELLs and their school experiences. They include case studies based on teachers' underpreparedness to teach ELLs (e.g., Brown & Endo, 2017; Raubaugh & Purmensky, 2021; Stairs-Davenport, 2021; Wright-Maley & Green, 2015), too much focus on testing (e.g., DelliCarpini et al., 2010; Menken, 2010; Pray et al., 2017), ELL student placement/segregation in schools (e.g., Fredricks & Warriner, 2016; Gandara & Orfield,

2010; Polat et al., 2019), social-emotional wellbeing of ELLs (e.g., Newcomer et al., 2017; Shi & Watkinson, 2019) and the lack of parent/community involvement (e.g., Parson & Shim, 2019; Wall & Musetti, 2018; Wille et al., 2019). Drawing on this research, I was able to prepare the best approaches going forward.

In relation to my research questions, several conclusions are pertinent to increasing ELL acceptance in schools. First, many teachers lack knowledge when it comes to teaching ELL students, causing many ELL students nationwide to not be making progress towards English language proficiency (Raubaugh & Purmensky, 2021). Many teachers feel as though they cannot properly differentiate instruction or create proper lesson plans in order to help ELL students succeed (e.g., Brown & Endo, 2017; Wright-Maley & Green, 2015). When teachers are not prepared to teach ELL students, the students may not succeed in their classrooms nor feel accepted. Secondly, there is a lot of pressure on teachers and students to focus on standardized testing (e.g., Menken, 2010; Pray et al.). In turn, if teachers are focusing on testing over content, they do not have the time to connect with their students on a more personal level or get to know the students' needs that will help them succeed.

When teachers are underprepared or focused too much on standardized testing, ELLs often feel less connected to their schools and peers when compared to non-ELL peers (Shi & Watkinson, 2019). This can have an impact on students' social-emotional wellbeing and many students feel as though they do not belong. Educators can work on supporting their ELL students' social-emotional wellbeing by allowing students to share personal experiences as and by partnering with families to support cultural understandings (Newcomer et al, 2017). Many ELL families are not involved in school/district events (Parsons & Shim, 2019) therefore it is

imperative to create welcoming events and become easily accessible for ELL families to be able to communicate and feel comfortable with the staff that is helping their student learn.

In response to these findings, a professional development plan and tools were produced. The products seek to establish ELL acceptance in the school district. To do so, multiple aspects of the school community have been considered in order to support ELL students. The product created has abundant implications and recommendations.

### **Ways to Enhance Student Acceptance**

Several implications and recommendations for student learning and teaching based on research findings have been recognized. Strategies are now established for ELL acceptance within the school district. English language learners will now be able to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance from the moment they enter the classroom in the fall. During the first week of school all students will complete a “Getting to Know You” Questionnaire (see Appendix A). This will encourage all members of the classroom to begin forming meaningful relationships and help build a foundation in which the classroom in which everyone feels accepted. Acceptance can also be accomplished through updated and welcoming signage in common areas of schools (see Appendices C, D, E, F & G). New programs, such as the Family Welcome Night (see Appendix H), have been designed to enable students to feel that they are receiving a proper welcoming into the school. Including ELL students and their families in school events allows for the families to feel welcome and know they are supported, which improves the students’ feeling of acceptance into the school community.

Additionally, all staff will benefit from the ideas of the professional development plan and tools. All staff will have the opportunity to engage in the faculty meetings where time will be allocated each month specifically for topics concerning ELLs (see Appendix B). Topics will help

all educators and staff develops continual knowledge on ELLs and any questions and concerns will be discussed during this time. By developing knowledge, educators will be able to improve communication, develop more meaningful lesson plans, and better learn how to help their ELL students succeed. Family Welcome Night impacts teachers by opening the lines of communication with the families of the ELL students (see Appendix H). Opening communication will set the foundation for building upon student-teacher-parent relationships.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The professional development plan is a great starting point of change for school districts. In the future, more work related to ELL student acceptance can be achieved. First, another family night during the second half of the school year should be put into place. Another event for families will provide a formal check-in that will help provide families more opportunities to communicate with staff and will allow for staff to reassure families that they are still available. As such, the even can be called “Family Culture Night” or “Welcome Back Night”. This second event will help in continuing to build parent-teacher relationships aimed at ELL success. Additionally, the “What More Can We Do?” monthly professional development as well as the Family Welcome Night should be reviewed yearly and modified with any essential changes for improvement. The opinions of the students, parents and teachers should all be considered using questionnaires and interviews to determine what, if any, improvements need to be made in order to better help ELL students feel accepted in school. The participation and honesty of students, families and staff can significantly help future students in allowing them to feel accepted into their schools.

### **Final Thoughts**

ELL students are the fastest growing demographic in public schools within the United States (Raubagh & Purmensky, 2021). In many of these schools, these students lack the feeling of acceptance. The underpreparedness of teachers to teach ELL students, too much focus on standardized tests, misplacement of ELLs in their classrooms, lack of social-emotional wellbeing and family involvement are all factors in making ELL acceptance imminent. Additionally, these factors can cause ELL students' efforts and motivation in school to decrease. Therefore, successful plans to increase ELL acceptance are crucial in order for ELL students to experience a similar school environment as their non-ELL peers.

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**Appendix A:**  
**“Getting to Know You” Questionnaire**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday \_\_\_\_\_

Parents’ Names \_\_\_\_\_

Siblings’ Names (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any pets? Names? \_\_\_\_\_

Nationality \_\_\_\_\_

Languages Spoken \_\_\_\_\_

What holidays do you celebrate?

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What are some of your likes?

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What are some of your dislikes?

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**Appendix B:**

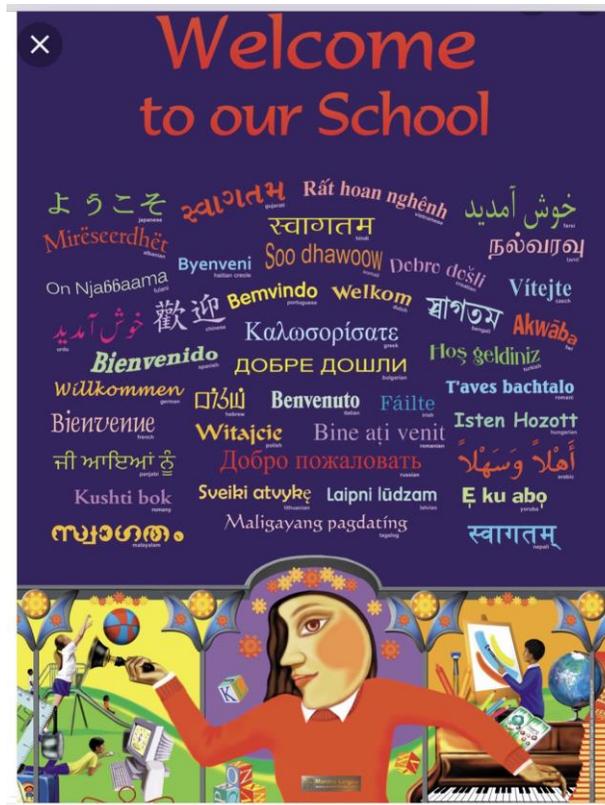
**Monthly In-service Professional Development Topics**

<b>Month</b>	<b>ELL Topic</b>
Example: October	Incorporating culture into the classroom
Example: November	ELL school policies



**Appendix D:**

**“Welcome to our School” Sign**



Amazon

[https://www.amazon.com/Welcome-Classroom-Decorations-Motivational-Preschool/dp/B08C9LXHD4/ref=sr\\_1\\_58\\_sspa?crd=3C5BT4OXQ3OWC&keywords=welcome+to+our+school+poster&qid=1658179238&sprefix=welcome+to+our+school+poster%2Caps%2C70&sr=8-58-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhbGlmaWVyPUEzU0ILUDIwS1FWM1E1JmVuY3J5cHRIZElkPUEwNzYyNTQ0MVhBSFpZM01OSVNXWiZlbnNyeXB0ZWRBZEIkPUEwMDIzMDY1MklIMFhST0cwTjhnOCZ3aWRnZXROYW11PjNwX2J0ZiZhY3Rpb249Y2xpY2tSZWRpcmVjdCZkb05vdExvZ0NsaWNrPXRydWU=](https://www.amazon.com/Welcome-Classroom-Decorations-Motivational-Preschool/dp/B08C9LXHD4/ref=sr_1_58_sspa?crd=3C5BT4OXQ3OWC&keywords=welcome+to+our+school+poster&qid=1658179238&sprefix=welcome+to+our+school+poster%2Caps%2C70&sr=8-58-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhbGlmaWVyPUEzU0ILUDIwS1FWM1E1JmVuY3J5cHRIZElkPUEwNzYyNTQ0MVhBSFpZM01OSVNXWiZlbnNyeXB0ZWRBZEIkPUEwMDIzMDY1MklIMFhST0cwTjhnOCZ3aWRnZXROYW11PjNwX2J0ZiZhY3Rpb249Y2xpY2tSZWRpcmVjdCZkb05vdExvZ0NsaWNrPXRydWU=)

**Appendix E:****“All are Welcome Here” Sign in Spanish**

Etsy

[https://www.etsy.com/ca/listing/1066118959/spanish-classroom-decor-all-are-welcome?click\\_key=d2e29d72fa77fe5f01318c5fee0163b0a9c4c3d6%3A1066118959&click\\_sum=6aaf37e2&ga\\_order=most\\_relevant&ga\\_search\\_type=all&ga\\_view\\_type=gallery&ga\\_search\\_query=all+are+welcome+here+sign+spanish&ref=search\\_in\\_grid-1-3&pro=1&sts=1](https://www.etsy.com/ca/listing/1066118959/spanish-classroom-decor-all-are-welcome?click_key=d2e29d72fa77fe5f01318c5fee0163b0a9c4c3d6%3A1066118959&click_sum=6aaf37e2&ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=all+are+welcome+here+sign+spanish&ref=search_in_grid-1-3&pro=1&sts=1)

**Appendix F:**  
**“Diversity” Sign**



Etsy

[https://www.etsy.com/ca/listing/549661563/diversity-poster-school-counselor-poster?click\\_key=a47c9c353071b99274bbdf9d5aab3799328761c9%3A549661563&click\\_sum=02231cb1&ref=hp\\_recently\\_viewed\\_content-1](https://www.etsy.com/ca/listing/549661563/diversity-poster-school-counselor-poster?click_key=a47c9c353071b99274bbdf9d5aab3799328761c9%3A549661563&click_sum=02231cb1&ref=hp_recently_viewed_content-1)

**Appendix G:**  
**Country Flags**



© OTC

Oriental Trading

<https://www.orientaltrading.com/web/search/searchMain?keyword=world%20flags>

**Appendix H:**  
**Family Welcome Night Invitation (English Version)**

**WELCOME!**

Welcome to another school year!  
Please join us on Friday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022 for a chance to meet your child's  
teachers, counselors and administrators.

The event will be held in the cafeteria at 7pm.

We will provide snacks and refreshments, as well as family favorites from our  
staff.  
All families are welcome and encouraged to bring a favorite dish from their home  
country or culture to share!

During this time you will have the opportunity to meet the school staff, review  
important information and dates of events happening during the school year, ask  
any questions you may have and develop relationships with teachers and families!

We look forward to seeing you there!

If you have any further questions please contact the main office.

**Appendix I:**

**Professional Development Presentation Slides**

<https://brockport.voicethread.com/share/20397417/>