Implementing Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Practices in Mainstream Classrooms:

Developing an Inclusive School Community for English Language Learners

by
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Abstract

ELLs are socially isolated and marginalized within their learning environments. Therefore, this capstone explores the overarching research question: How can elementary schools meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs by becoming an inclusive community? The academic literature reveals some of the barriers that ELLs face in elementary schools include deficit teacher beliefs, a lack of inclusion, and a loss of cultural identity. To mitigate these issues, this capstone will support the creation of a positive learning environment that welcomes and affirms ELLs' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, in accordance with the NYSED's (2018) CR-S framework. Along with this capstone, a PD session will be offered to elementary teachers concerning the socioemotional and cultural issues that ELLs are experiencing, while engaging them in a variety of activities, including self-reflections and questionnaires, which utilize the methods and tools implemented by scholars, as provided in this capstone. The expectation is that teachers will promote positive student-teacher, peer, and family relationships to bring about equitable opportunities for ELLs. The research reveals benefits of implementing the CR-S framework, for both teacher development and student learning. It is necessary that future research be conducted and focused heavily on the advantages of implementing culturally relevant and sustaining strategies to create an inclusive school community for ELLs.

Keywords: ELLs, culturally responsive, sustaining, CR-S, marginalized, inclusive

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem

As an elementary teacher working in a large New York State school district with a diverse student population, I soon realized that English Language Learners (ELLs) continue to be marginalized in general education classrooms. Through my educational journey of working with ELLs, I was inspired by my colleagues to gain an education in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) to ensure that ELLs are welcomed as an integral part of their mainstream classrooms. Being that I work with ELLs, whose first language is mainly Spanish, I have closely observed how cultural and linguistic backgrounds play a very large role in their everyday lives. However, since ELLs are the minority in my building, it is evident that their cultural and linguistic backgrounds are still being minimized and excluded within the classrooms. This marginalization not only leads to a disconnect between ELLs and their non-ELL peers, but more importantly, ELLs lose cultural identity, become socially isolated, and experience low self-esteem (Newcomer et al., 2021). After witnessing this, it soon became very difficult for me to overlook the everyday challenges that ELLs repeatedly experience in the very same building I work in.

From my first-hand encounters, I firmly believe that we, as educators, must promote a sense of community that is positive and supportive, so that we can effectively meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs. Therefore, this capstone examines the overarching question: How can elementary schools meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs by becoming an inclusive community? Through my personal experiences, substantial research, and a professional development (PD) session that I will be offering to elementary teachers in my district, my goal is to raise awareness of issues of social isolation and loss of cultural identity that

ELLs are experiencing. In doing so, my hope is that ELLs can feel connected to their classmates, teachers, and school, while receiving an equitable education that they deserve.

Throughout this capstone, I will be using a variety of terms including ELLs, ESOL, CRT, marginalization, and mainstream. ELLs will refer to English Language Learners, ESOL, will refer to English to Speakers of Other Languages, and CRT will refer to Culturally Responsive Teaching, or a teaching approach that "recognizes the heterogeneity of students in a classroom and takes steps to affirm and value this diversity" (Martorana, 2022, p. 50). Additional terms include marginalization, which will refer to ELLs being treated as inferior or insignificant to their non-ELL peers. Mainstream will refer to traditional education classes, where the majority of students in the classroom are native English speakers, with ELLs learning right beside them. Being aware of these terms will allow us to fully understand the topics being presented throughout the capstone and PD.

Significance of the Problem

The lack of an inclusive community should be viewed as a significant problem since it not only affects ELLs, but the lives and education of every student in the building. At the classroom level, it is evident that their curriculum reflects majority, ignoring cultural diversity. In addition, there is a lack of positive student-teacher, family, and peer relationships. Sternberg (2007) points out, "When students are taught in ways that take into account their cultural contexts and that are culturally appropriate for them, they can achieve at higher levels" (p. 148). In addition, many school districts, including my own, follow a pull-out approach for teaching ELLs which also causes more exclusion for them, since these traditional programs "often do not let students learn English through cohesive learning experiences" (Eyolfson, 2016, p. 63).

Importantly, the lack of affirmation and validation of cultural identities in classrooms affects ELLs and their family's involvement within the school. This involvement includes the extracurricular activities that are offered for students and/or families through the school district, such as sports, STEM night, theatrical performances, art shows, clubs, etc. According to Przymus (2016), "For ELL students, participation and membership in communities of practice that promote intercultural communicative interaction are essential for developing and claiming desired identities" (p. 266). Therefore, collaboration between general education and ESOL teachers is necessary to promote an increased sense of community for ELLs and their non-ELL peers.

Purpose

The socioemotional and cultural challenges that ELLs are facing call for the implementation of culturally responsive and sustaining strategies in all classrooms. To help students see themselves in their everyday learning environments and eliminate social isolation of ELLs, I will be offering a professional development opportunity for elementary (K-6) general education and ESOL teachers. This Professional Development (PD) experience will take place over the course of three days in the Fall of the upcoming schoolyear. Day 1 will focus on teachers identifying the problem that ELLs are experiencing; Day 2 will center on teachers creating a vision for a culturally responsive-sustaining classroom; and Day 3 will involve teachers working toward the establishment of an inclusive community for ELLs. To meet these learning goals, the participants are expected to work together collaboratively through a variety of culturally responsive and sustaining teaching activities that are relevant to the overarching question shared here. More specifically, these activities will address the issues ELLs are experiencing within their schools (lack of cultural identity, marginalization, little involvement in

school functions, etc.). Additionally, teachers will be using Principle 1 of the New York State

Education Department's (NYSED, 2018) *Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education*

Framework (CR-S) to fully support the products and tools to mitigate the problem.

Conclusion

The need for inclusive and culturally relevant education should be recognized today as a

priority for all students learning in mainstream classrooms. The marginalization and challenges

that are repeatedly faced by ELLs, brings this shift in thinking to the forefront. ELLs are being

deprived of an equitable education when their cultural and linguistic backgrounds are lost in the

mist of their very own learning experiences. As a result, ELL students are becoming socially

isolated from their non-ELL peers, which in turn leads to greater issues: low self-esteem,

anxiety, stereotyping, and disengagement. To bring about well-deserved changes for the ELL

population that exist in school districts, educators (including both ESOL and general education

teachers) must come together to discuss new and improved culturally relevant strategies to create

an inclusive school environment for ELLs and their non-ELL peers. I believe positive change

can be achieved through the teachings, research, and activities that educators will take part in

through the PD opportunity I will be offering to them this upcoming schoolyear.

Furthermore, Chapter 2 will go into greater depth of the scholarly research and literature

that supports this issue of social isolation and the types of steps and strategies that are needed to

meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs. Chapter 3 will break down the professional

development opportunity for teachers (both general ED and ESOL) to help mitigate the problem

described in Chapter 1. Lastly, Chapter 4 will discuss recommendations for future research and

studies, as well as implications for teachers and students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a substantial amount of scholarly literature that closely connects to the issues presented in Chapter 1: How can elementary schools meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs by becoming an inclusive community? Among this research, it is evident that culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a meaningful approach, consistently presented by various scholars to effectively address the socioemotional and cultural challenges that ELLs are facing within their schools (Culbreath & Rana, 2019; Gay, 2018). Therefore, this chapter will begin by exploring the evolution of CRT, while briefly explaining the four core principles of a Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Framework, identified through the New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2018). The remainder of this literature review will focus on Principle 1 of the CR-S Framework: Creating a Welcoming and Affirming Environment. This discussion will be presented through four relevant sections: The Value of Teacher Beliefs, The Value of Student-Teacher Relationships, The Value of Family Relationships, and The Value of Peer Relationships. Each section will include summarizations of issues identified by various scholars that relate to the overarching question. It will also provide a variety of methods, many of which will also be used during the PD session, that scholars have used in their case studies, as well as general findings which could be useful to educators interested in building an inclusive community for ELLs. The information presented in this chapter will, ultimately, offer insight and suggestions for how educators can apply the CR-S framework to help meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs in elementary schools.

The Evolution of Culturally Responsive Teaching

As noted by Culbreath and Rana (2019), the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy is nowhere near new, as it has been thoroughly studied by scholars for many years. In fact, the

theoretical model of CRT in education was developed in 1994, where pedagogical theorist and

teacher educator, Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, explored historical and culturally relevant

pedagogy (CRP) in her innovative book, The Dreamkeepers (Will & Najarro, 2022; Ladson-

Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1994) classically defined culturally relevant teaching as

a "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using

cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes"

(p. 13). Importantly, this scholar has set the stage for modern-day theorists, such as Gay (2018),

whose work can be traced back to her original vision for culturally relevant pedagogy. According

to Gay, CRT can be defined as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of

reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make encounters more

relevant and effective for them" (p. 36). Similarly, Hollie (2012) explains that CRT involves the

validation and affirmation of indigenous culture to ensure student success in mainstream

classrooms. Teachers who practice culturally responsive teaching, thus, respond to students'

socioemotional needs, while considering their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, it

is important that educators consider the benefits of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy

in elementary schools, to be able to effectively create an inclusive community for all ELLs to

thrive in.

      Although current research reveals that traditional CRT is still relevant in present-day

classrooms (McCarthur & Davis, 2017), this approach to teaching continues to evolve over time.

Through decades of research, scholars have reexamined the effectiveness of its tenets through a

new shift in thinking, known as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP). This alternative approach

to cultural inclusiveness, offered by Paris (2012), not only builds on the pedagogical frameworks

that preceded it, but goes one step forward to highlight the importance of *sustaining* the cultural

ways of ELLs. In other words, instead of solely drawing on students' cultural and linguistic

backgrounds in the learning environment, which is a common goal aimed through CRT, CSP

requires educators to support learners "in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of

their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (p.

95). Additionally, Paris continued to argue that "it is quite possible to be relevant to something or

responsive to it without ensuring its continuing presence in a student's repertoires of practice" (p.

95). Hence, Paris helps educators to look beyond responsiveness or relevancy to students'

cultural backgrounds, and more toward strategies that seek to sustain, or preserve the multiple

identities that students bring with them to school. Therefore, educators must implement practices

that are both relevant *and* sustaining to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, especially

for ELLs, who are continuously marginalized in general education classrooms. This can be made

possible through a modern-day framework, as discussed in the following section.

Principles of Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Pedagogy

To grasp a full understanding of what constitutes culturally responsive-sustaining

teaching, educators must look at the theoretical principles, which have been clearly identified

through the NYSED (2018) *Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework* (CR-S).

These principles include a Welcoming and Affirming Environment, High Expectations and

Rigorous Instruction, Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment, and Ongoing Professional Learning.

Since all four principles are essential for bringing about change for ELLs, an understanding of

each principle that supports the overarching question is presented in this capstone.

Principle 1: Creating a Welcoming and Affirming Learning Environment

The first principle of CR-S, which immensely connects to the socioemotional and cultural

challenges that ELLs face within their schools, is a Welcoming and Affirming Environment.

This means that educators should be creating a safe place for *all* students that will affirm and value their cultural identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, language, etc.). In other words, it should be a welcoming space where students can easily find themselves represented and reflected. Further, this principle seeks to explore the positive relationships that should exist between classroom teachers, students, and their families, "by learning about their interests and inviting them to share their opinions and concerns" (NYSED, 2018, p. 14). Unfortunately, research reveals this is not always the case in mainstream classrooms, specifically for ELLs who often have a difficult time feeling included in their very own learning environments (Newcomer et al., 2021). This issue will be further explored through a more thorough analysis of Principle 1 in this chapter.

Principle 2: Fostering High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction

The next principle of CR-S is High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction. According to the NYSED (2018), all students, including ELLs, should be learning in an environment that is academically rigorous, regardless of their identity markers. This means that students are challenged intellectually, while sustaining their cultures through student-centered lessons. This principle additionally enables students to build on their prior learning experiences and cultural backgrounds to engage in classroom conversations, such as those that address biases in the school community. Educators must consider Principle 2 as a benefit for creating an inclusive community for ELLs, especially since they are not always given the same high expectations and rigorous instruction as their non-ELL peers. As Rizzuto (2017) points out, "One basic component of culturally responsive teaching is treating all students as capable" (p. 185).

Principle 3: The Formation of Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment

The third principle of CR-S is the formation of Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment. The NYSED (2018) explains how this principle allows students to develop a voice for

identifying and challenging biases in the curriculum and assessment that teachers are implementing. It also enables teachers and students to generate ideas and advocate for alternative forms of curriculum and assessment that more closely connect to students' identities. Scholars, such as Muhammad (2020), emphasize the importance of educators installing criticality in their students. This allows ELLs to use their identities and skills to investigate multiple perspectives while engaging in critical texts, as well as using "their minds and pens as a form of literacy activism… to demand systems, curriculum, and instruction that is connected to their lives and sociopolitical nature of the community" (p. 44). This principle relates back to the problem identified in Chapter 1, as ELLs are struggling to see themselves in the curriculum offered by their schools.

Principle 4: Ongoing Professional Learning

The fourth, and final principle of CR-S, identified by NYSED (2018), is Ongoing Professional Learning. This means that educators (both general-ED and ESOL teachers) must take part in continuous professional development (PD) sessions to set goals for implementing CR-S practices, identify new and pre-existing bias within the school, and learn more ways to build an inclusive community for all students to learn in. In fact, research suggests that "supporting small group, intensive, ongoing professional development in which participants talk about topics germane to their school's culture can have positive effects on teaching" (Hulan, 2015, p. 72). With this being said, to successfully address the social isolation and marginalization that ELLs are experiencing within their school, it is essential that more than one PD session takes place, following this capstone, to see effective change.

Creating a Welcoming and Affirming Environment for ELLs

The Influence of Teacher Beliefs

To successfully create a warm, welcoming learning environment for ELLs, educators

must first consider how their personal beliefs and attitudes towards ELLs can significantly shape

ELLs' learning experiences. Mellom et al. (2018) argue how the rapid growth of ELLs in the

United States has "resulted in a cultural clash that is reflected in the often prejudiced attitudes of

predominantly white monolingual teachers towards such students" (p. 98). They go on to share

how teacher beliefs can greatly impact ELLs' socioemotional well-being, as it affects teacher

actions and student behavior. For instance, they explain how mainstream teachers who hold

deficit beliefs about ELLs can negatively impact how ELLs act or feel in the classroom. This is

problematic, especially for ELLs who are struggling to feel welcomed by their teachers and peers

in their very own learning environments.

For this reason, Mellom et al. conducted a multi-year study that sought to examine the

effects of teacher training through culturally responsive pedagogy (CRT) on teacher behavior

toward their ELL students. Through questionnaires and bi-weekly log data, these scholars were

specifically determined to detect teachers' prevailing attitudes towards ELLs and how they

changed over time through CRT. When analyzing their findings, Mellom et al. honed in on the

teacher responses from two specific open-ended questions that they were asked through the bi-

weekly logs: "What do you know about the home language(s) and cultural background(s) of the

ELL students in your classroom? [and] Please describe ELL students' use of their home language

at school" (p. 101). Here, these scholars were able to conclude how many teachers had negative

mentalities regarding students' home languages, such as connecting it to crime or poverty,

benign neglect of the ELLs' home languages, or passive acceptance of ELLs native tongue

language in the classroom. The researchers go on to share how although there are educators who have cultural assumptions and prejudices towards ELLs, the weekly logs presented compelling evidence that culturally responsive pedagogies "seem to mitigate such negative attitudes over time" (p. 106). This suggests that both questionnaires and logs, as mentioned in the Mellom et al. study, will be key to the professional development session discussed in the following chapter.

Hu et al. (2021) also firmly believes that teachers must be aware of their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds to build an inclusive community for ELLs. Specifically, they assert that CRT requires teacher education programs to adequately prepare pre-service teachers (PSTs) competency when faced with the challenge of classrooms with culturally diverse students. Current state, federal and PST programs "have not sufficiently prioritized training teachers for this growing student population, therefore teachers are left unprepared for the classroom with students who are culturally and linguistically diverse" (p. 283). The purpose of the research study was to investigate the effects of a multi-dimensional field experience model on developing PSTs' CRT competence and identifying essential components for developing PSTs' CRT competence in teacher education programs.

The English as a second language (ESL) methods course model being evaluated by the study included PSTs meeting with instructors three times a week for class sessions to learn state policies, principles, strategies, and techniques, and assessing ELLs within the framework of CRT. PSTs also observed ten hours in a K-12 classroom with at least one ELL in attendance and conducted interviews of mentor teachers. The PSTs were additionally made to engage and interact with the ELLs in several ways outside the classroom, including community focused activities and events. The course included critical reflections by PSTs about themselves and their attitudes and competency of teaching ELL and requiring PSTs to write about their own

knowledge and assumptions pertaining to ELLs before and after the completion of activities.

Critical reflections will also play an important role in the PD session, contemplated by this

capstone.

After reviewing data based on course projects, interviews, and reflections by the ten (10)

PSTs (who had no prior ELL classroom experience), the findings were that the model was

effective in developing PSTs' potential abilities in CRT. Of note, the model was effective in

providing information about ELLs to PSTs' and had a positive impact on the PSTs' view of

ELLs. Classroom settings assisted PSTs in gaining knowledge in classroom management as they

learned about ELLs' language and cultural backgrounds, peer interactions, and academic needs.

Community walks gave PSTs insight on the ELLs living environment and possible challenges

they faced with their family. Through community events, PSTs observed how ELLs interact with

their peers, their teachers, and their parents. These experiences with ELLs and their families

made them aware of the connections between ELLs' behaviors at school and their life at home,

which helped the PSTs view the student's behavior through a cultural lens. Hu et al. concluded

that this model course provided good methods and opportunities that could positively impact

PSTs' CRT competency. This implies that for teachers to effectively design classrooms that are

affirming of ELLs' backgrounds, they must take the time to form relationships with ELLs and

their families.

The Value of Student-Teacher Relationships

According to Newcomer et al. (2021), students from refugee backgrounds face "social

and emotional difficulties" as they adjust to life in the United States (p. 424). They argue that

students are struggling to form relationships and feel included in their learning environment, due

to their past experiences as refugees. More specifically, they exemplify how students from

refugee backgrounds face different complexities when "acculturating to a new environment while remaining rooted to their home languages and cultures" (p. 417). For instance, Newcomer et al. explain how educators may have deficit views about their students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ from their very own. As a result, these scholars were interested in gathering information about how to resolve the socioemotional and cultural needs that ELLs face in elementary schools through teacher-student relationships.

To bring about a more inclusive learning environment for ELLs, Newcomer et al. conducted a qualitative study in Washington State, to help prepare educators for working with ELLs. Through pre- and post-interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts, these scholars were able to report on the experiences and perspectives that two particular elementary teachers had while working with refugee students. Importantly, these methods of study were all analyzed through a culturally responsive, pedagogical perspective, that enabled Newcomer et al. to describe the similar and different ways the educators supported their ELLs' socioemotional well-being. Their findings reveal how crucial it is for ELLs to feel a part of an inclusive school community.

Through their analysis, Newcomer et al. suggest that teachers should allow students, especially refugee background children, to share stories about their personal lives as a "powerful way to make instruction more culturally sustaining" (p. 420). This includes stories about ELLs' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, personal experiences, and family members, which all play a role in shaping their multiple identities. For instance, one of the teachers in the study reported that some of the ELL students shared "tales of petting a friend's dog during a lesson on homonyms, or anecdotes about a relative living on the coast when discussing lifestyles of coastline" (p. 424). The same teacher was also observed sharing stories to her students about her

own personal life, which helped ELLs to open up even more during classroom lessons. Ultimately, Newcomer et al. consider how building strong teacher-student relationships, such as through the facilitation of discussions, provide ELLs the socioemotional support that they may need to succeed in the learning environment.

Likewise, additional scholars suggest that teachers can build relationships with their students by considering the physical classroom environment that ELLs are learning in, and how it can directly affect their socioemotional and cultural needs at school. In fact, Koss and Daniel (2018) defend research that exposes the harsh truths about many contemporary classroom libraries, such as how there is a "lack of representation of diversity in picture books [which] send the subliminal message that non mainstream groups do not merit representation in books because they play supporting roles in U.S. society" (p. 433). As a result of this, they stress the importance of incorporating ELL's cultural backgrounds into the classroom to create a warm, welcoming learning environment that values their lives and experiences. The researchers specifically urge educators to build a culturally diverse library, or one that contains children's picture books that authentically depict all students and their cultures in the classroom. This includes literature where characters are presented in non-stereotypical ways, who engage in relatable plots that enable ELLs to make connections to what they are reading, and who's cultural traditions and beliefs play a crucial role in the story. Culturally relevant stories in the classroom help teachers to facilitate conversations that allow ELLs to comfortably share their ideas and thoughts. Additionally, by providing such materials, this gives ELLs ample opportunities to compare their own identities to those of the characters in the stories. That is why during the PD session, educators will have access to culturally diverse, relevant, and authentic materials.

The Value of Family Relationships

Newcomer et al. (2020) further argue that building an inclusive community beyond the classroom is essential for supporting ELLs' socioemotional needs. They share how partnering with families in support of cross-cultural understandings is necessary for doing so. For instance, these scholars provide examples of how educators can support ELLs and their families, such as through attending school events and other extracurricular activities. In their study, Newcomer et al. specifically describe how students created posters for Culture Night, which contained visuals and information about their families' cultural backgrounds. To do so, students learned how to research information on Google and how to take part in parent interviews. These posters were then displayed throughout the school, to bring about a sense of community for ELLs. Through their findings, Newcomer et al. explained how navigating cultural differences when engaging with families is necessary for fostering socioemotional well-being for refugee background students. These findings also suggest that educators must be flexible and adjust to the cultural norms or conceptions of time that these families may demonstrate (e.g., learning not to take offense if a parent from a different cultural background than your own, does not shake your hand). Based on this research, similar methods and materials in the PD session will be utilized, including teacher-led interviews and research, to assist educators in designing posters that portray their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Similarly, Cohan et al. (2019) stressed the importance of getting to know more about ELLs' families, as well. These scholars recognized that "for a family and school to have a successful partnership, there must be strong levels of commitment and meaningful communication between them" (p. 36). Cohen et al. go on to share that to build partnerships with families of ELLs, it is necessary to provide multimodal and multilingual resources for parents,

especially if they are unfamiliar with the routines or language of schooling. For instance, the authors shared how communicating does not only have to be in-person, but also through technology, such as using a text-messaging system or websites that offer multilingual translations. This can help parents of ELLs become more involved in their children's learning, including extracurricular activities offered through the school. Cohan et al. turn our attention to the critical goal for teachers, administrators, and program coordinators, which is to "build and sustain relationships with families so that their *children* benefit" (p. 39).

To create a more inviting and validating learning environment for ELLs in elementary schools, educators must consider the findings offered by scholars, such as Newcomer et al. (2020) and Cohan et al. (2019), which all closely relate to the first principle of the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining framework (CR-S). As the research suggests, teachers must create a warm, welcoming learning environment for their students, or a space that offers ample opportunities for ELLs to see themselves in their everyday learning environments. This could help ELLs feel more valued in the classroom and bridge the way for them to form stronger relationships with their teachers. Additionally, Newcomer et al. and Cohan et al. both acknowledge how family involvement is also essential for combatting the socioemotional and cultural challenges that ELLs face, not only in the classroom, but in the school itself.

The Value of Peer Relationships

Hamilton (2013) also supports the problem presented in Chapter 1, that ELLs feel socially isolated in schools for a variety of reasons. Through a 3-year qualitative study, Hamilton set out to identify whether migrant students attending a primary school in the UK had access to inclusive educational and social opportunities. The study revealed that out of the 40 children interviewed, 28 students were nervous to begin at a brand new school, and of these children, "14

had been anxious about establishing new friendships" (p. 182). In fact, the teacher conversations that took place during the study, exposed the socioemotional issues that arose for ELLs in their classroom, such as forming relationships with their non-ELL peers. The teachers commented on how the "lack of a shared language and culture sometimes resulted in verbal and physical conflict, particularly among boys on the playground," leading many ELLs to feel socially isolated by their classmates (pp. 182-183). Similarly, through a small-scale interview study conducted by Cho et al. (2019) in an attempt to examine educator's perspectives on refugee ELLs' socioemotional competencies, a teacher concluded that ELLs are "consistently unable to get along with others, blaming others and tattling, name-calling or saying hurtful things like, 'I don't want to be your friend" (p. 48). Hamilton's study also addressed the reasons that migrant students feel unhappy at their new school. Specifically, the data illustrated how 35 out of the 40 students all missed different things from their country, "with over half of all responses [relating] to the loss of meaningful relationships" (pp. 79-80).

By analyzing the results of the study, Hamilton concluded that "the social network established at school seems to be a pivotal factor in determining how migrant children adjust and progress" (p. 182). This is especially true since a majority of the interviewees shared how they valued friendships at school. Using this information, Hamilton linked principles to CRT as a key suggestion for establishing an inclusive community for ELLs. This scholar specifically argued that to create a warm, affirming environment that supports the socioemotional needs of students learning a new language, educators must be knowledgeable of the diverse needs, abilities, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds that each individual student holds. Hamilton further urged teachers to foster positive, caring, and respectful teacher and peer relationships," so that migrant children can feel supported and accepted in their new learning environments (p. 188).

Comparably, Helfrich and Bosh (2011) explain how, often, teachers are unaware of the value that peers have in the inclusion of ELLs. They stress how "teachers should not underestimate the role of peers in the inclusion and education of ELLs" (p. 265). Instead, they encourage teachers to incorporate collaborative strategies in the classroom that enable students to see other points of view, including partner-share, group activities, and peer tutoring. From first-hand experiences of working with ELLs in a first-grade classroom, Helfrich and Bosh share insight on how peer learning, such as through a morning meeting circle, allowed students to learn more about each other in an informal manner. Specifically, during this routine, all students, including ELLs, were given opportunities to share about their cultural backgrounds, even if they spoke a different first language than their peers. For instance, the researchers recalled one encounter of a young boy from China, who did not speak any English like most of his classmates did. During the morning meeting, these scholars observed how the child passed around a stuffed animal to his peers that he brought from home. Although his classmates did not understand what he was saying in his native tongue language, and he did not understand what they were saying either, Helfrich and Bosh concluded that the boy was "learning about his peers and about different cultures through this group experience, and the other students were learning about him and what he found to be important" (pp. 265-266). These findings emphasize how strong peer relationships can effectively foster welcoming and inclusive learning environments for ELLs.

Conclusion

Through extensive research, it is evident that elementary schools should adopt a Culturally Responsive-Sustaining framework (CR-S) to help ELLs overcome the socioemotional and cultural challenges that they face in their learning environments. Educators must begin by evaluating themselves- their beliefs and preconceptions towards ELLs, and how they can

ultimately create a learning environment that is welcoming and accepting of students' cultural

and linguistic backgrounds. It is important that educators closely examine these case studies,

conducted by various scholars, as they give us more insight as to how educators can effectively

create an inclusive community for ELLs that reduces the social isolation and marginalization that

many ELLs face each day. The research specifically recommends educators to build student-

teacher-family relationships, support positive peer relationships between ELLs and their non-

ELL classmates, and incorporate ELLs' cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the classroom

environment. This can all be made possible through on-going training for educators, offered by

their schools, where teachers accumulate knowledge about ELLs and their socioemotional and

cultural needs that they come to school with. In Chapter 3, I will outline a professional

development session that seeks to share the benefits of CR-S as an approach for creating an

inclusive school community for ELLs.

Chapter 3: Description of the Professional Development

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the professional development session (PD) that will be offered to elementary teachers to help mitigate the problem identified in Chapter 1: How can elementary schools meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs by becoming an inclusive community? The audience of the PD will specifically include both general education and ESOL teachers, ranging from grades K-6. The PD session will take place in the Fall, over the course of three days in a large school setting, where educators will have the opportunity to engage in a variety of group and individual activities, all relating to the overarching question shared above. More importantly, these activities will closely connect to Principle 1 of NYSED's CR-S framework, Welcoming and Affirming Environment, which was thoroughly explained in Chapter 2. Each day, the participants will receive an informative agenda that will describe the different activities that they will take part in. All PD materials is labeled as a Figure and can be found in the Appendix of this capstone. Participants will also be asked to bring certain materials to the session that are needed for them to be able to successfully take part in the training. The PD session will last approximately one and a half hours each day after school and will include similar methods conducted by scholars, as discussed in Chapter 2, seeking to bring about a more inclusive and welcoming learning environment for ELLs.

Day 1: Identification of the Problem

Introductions and Hook (10 minutes)

To begin the PD session, participants will be involved in a quick introductory activity to spark interest in their learning and trigger a discussion of ideas. The leader will start off by introducing themselves, while sharing some information about their educational background. From there, the leader will project an icebreaker activity on the board: Two Truths and a Lie.

Teachers will be paired up with someone who they do not typically work with. Partners will be given index cards and will have five minutes to write down two truths and one lie about themselves. Each person will then have to guess what their partner's lie is. This opening activity will enable participants to disrupt the assumptions that they make towards one another. The leader will also facilitate a brief, whole-group discussion about how this activity relates to the preconceived notions that teachers may have towards their ELL students, which will lead into the learning goals and focus activities for the day's session. This discussion is especially important since teacher beliefs and attitudes can have a negative impact on ELLs' socioemotional well-being (Mellom et al., 2018). Following the icebreaker activity, the leader will go ahead and project Day 1's learning targets on the board: 1. Each teacher will be able to share and reflect upon their own beliefs and knowledge of their ELLs to help lay the foundation for an inclusive school community. 2. Each teacher will be able to identify and describe three strategies for fostering student-teacher, peer, and family relationships. These learning goals will be displayed, along with Day 1's agenda (see Figure 1) so that participants have a clear understanding of what is expected of them during the first session.

Academic Justification (15 Minutes)

Before explaining the main activities for Day 1's PD session, the session leader will briefly introduce the socioemotional and cultural issues that ELLs are experiencing in elementary schools, such as marginalization and social isolation, as identified in Chapter 1 of this capstone. The leader will be sure to provide evidence of these issues by specifying details from academic journals, as shown in Chapter 2, that supports the overall purpose and goals of the PD session. The participants will then be provided with Gay's (2018) definition of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Paris's (2012) approach to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), and

NYSED's (2018) Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework (CR-S). This information will be

included for teachers to help them understand and mitigate the challenges ELLs are facing in

their classrooms. At this point in the PD session, the participants will take a look at a diagram of

the CR-S Framework (see http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/crs/culturally-

responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf) which will also be displayed on the board.

Following a brief discussion of the four major principles of CR-S, the leader of the PD session

will specifically turn the participants' attention to Principle 1, in which they will receive a copy

of the CR-S guidelines for creating a welcoming and affirming learning environment (NYSED,

2018, pp. 20 & 26). It is important that the teachers familiarize themselves with the ways in

which their students, specifically ELLs, can feel a part of an inclusive community, and keep

these guidelines as a reference throughout all three days of the PD session.

Main Activity #1 (20 minutes)

The first main activity of the PD session will involve individual participants filling out a

brief questionnaire (see Figure 2). The questionnaire will contain 10 questions that are closely

connected to Principle 1 of the CR-S framework. The purpose of this tool is for teachers to be

able to recognize and reflect upon their own knowledge and beliefs of their ELLs, as well as the

types of strategies that they are currently implementing, if any, to create a welcoming, inclusive

learning environment for their ELLs. This activity also allows participants to think deeply about

the types of changes that they may need to make going forward to help mitigate the social

isolation and marginalization that their ELLs may be experiencing within their classrooms.

Importantly, this activity forces participants to become familiar with Principle 1 of the CR-S

framework, which they will need to know to successfully take part in the PD session. After

fifteen minutes of completing the questionnaire, the participants will be given five minutes to

share their thoughts and discoveries to their elbow partner. Two guiding questions will be posted

on the board to help facilitate a conversation among teachers: 1. What did you learn about

yourself, your ELL students, and/or classroom environment through this activity? 2. Did

anything surprise or interest you when completing the questionnaire? The session leader will

walk around during this time and listen in on participant's conversations. Implementing a

questionnaire is a valuable method (Mellom et al., 2018), not only to enable teachers to identify

their own knowledge and beliefs towards their ELLs, but also for recognizing how they can meet

the socioemotional and cultural needs of their ELLs, who often struggle to fit in with their non-

ELL peers (Newcomer et al., 2021).

Main Activity #2 (35 minutes)

The second activity for Day 1 will involve teachers working in groups with their

tablemates. The participants will be given a hypothetical scenario about a new ELL student who

will be entering their classroom. The scenario will describe the imaginary student's identity,

including their age, grade level, gender, place of birth, and language, as well as their behaviors

and emotions. In total, there will be two separate scenarios offered to teachers, Scenario 1 and

Scenario 2, which will be projected up on the board. The room of participants will be divided in

half to determine which scenario their table will focus on. The groups will also be given a

handout (see Figure 3) which will contain three critical thinking questions that they will

eventually have to answer together. With their tablemates, the participants will be given five

minutes to read and discuss their group's scenario aloud. After doing so, they will be directed to

look back at their CR-S Framework, specifically the guidelines for Principle 1, which could be

found on the NYSED website or on their handouts from earlier. Together, each group of

participants will use the CR-S framework as a guide to identify three different strategies that

would promote an inclusive, welcoming learning environment for their imaginary ELL student. They will record their answers on their handout sheet and will be directed after 20 minutes to share some of their responses aloud in a whole-group discussion.

This activity will be implemented during the PD session for a couple of important reasons. Importantly, it allows K-6 teachers to become more familiar with how they can design a welcoming and affirming environment for their ELLs. This is because the participants will have to closely view the CR-S framework and think about the ways in which they can use Principle 1 to help mitigate the problem discussed in the beginning of the PD session. Specifically, the tablemates will have to respond to questions that focus on how they can foster student-teacher, peer, and family relationships in their very own classrooms. As NYSED (2018) points out, "this approach to education counters dominant narratives about difference as deficits or as characteristics of students and families that should be remediated or assimilated" (p. 13).

Another reason why this activity was chosen for the PD session is so that the teachers can continue to self-reflect about their own beliefs towards ELLs and the types of teaching strategies that they choose to implement. This is crucial, especially since Harrison and Lakin (2018) argue that "without considering beliefs about ELs, both explicit and implicit, efforts to train and empower teachers to work with ELs will have little sustainability" (p. 14). That is why creating a realistic scenario about an ELL student, who is nervous or afraid to attend a new mainstream classroom, will enable participants to think about their own ELLs' socioemotional and cultural needs and how their own teacher attitudes and learning environment can promote inclusive and equitable opportunities for their ELLs.

Closing (10 minutes)

To wrap up Day 1's session, the participants will be asked to submit a reflection question on a Google Form: What is one important takeaway or realization you made today? A weblink will be provided for teachers on the board so that they can easily access the form. During this time, the session leader will also summarize what was learned during Day 1's session and will discuss the focus of the following day's session, which will be for the participants to create a vision for a culturally responsive-sustaining classroom. Teachers will additionally be asked to bring their Chromebook to Day 2's session, along with the handouts from Day 1's session. Any last minute questions will also be discussed so that teachers are fully prepared and ready for the next day's session.

Day 2: Creating a Vision for a Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Classroom

Introductions and Hook (5 Minutes)

Day 2 of the PD session will begin with another strength-based opener to trigger participants' emotions and experiences. The leader will project a relevant question up on the board for teachers to individually respond to. Participants will be asked: What is your favorite childhood story? Why? Participants will have five minutes to share their opinions with their elbow partner and will then return to a whole-group discussion for the remaining time. The leader of the PD session will then introduce Day 2's learning targets: 1. Each teacher will be able to identify culturally responsive books for their classroom library to design an inclusive community for ELLs. 2. Each teacher will be able to use their self-reflections of ELLs to create and present a vision for a culturally responsive-sustaining classroom through a group project. In the previous day, participants were given opportunities to identify the socioemotional and cultural issues that exist within their classroom through both critical-thinking and reflection

activities. They also familiarized themselves with Principle 1's guidelines from the CR-S

framework. Day 2's activities (see Figure 4) will build upon Day 1's activities, in which teachers

will continue to reflect upon their own experiences of teaching ELLs, while beginning to form a

clear vision for creating a culturally responsive-sustaining classroom environment.

Main Activity #1 (25 minutes)

For the first main activity of Day 2's PD session, teachers will watch a ten-minute

YouTube video relating to the socioemotional and cultural needs that ELLs have in a specific

school district. The video will also discuss ways in which the teachers make efforts to create a

welcoming and affirming environment for their ELL students. Following the video, the

participants will receive a handout (see Figure 5) and will answer three response questions about

what they watched. The questions will allow teachers to think back to some of the strategies they

learned in the previous day's session for creating an inclusive community for ELLs through CR-

S. The participants will have ten minutes to complete their worksheet, and then the session leader

will facilitate a whole-group discussion to share out responses. This discussion, which will

include the recognition of a culturally diverse classroom library, will lead the participants into

the next activity.

Main Activity #2 (25 minutes)

For the next main activity, teachers will have the opportunity to reflect upon their own

classroom libraries in relation to their ELL students. Specifically, they will think about the types

of books that they have and if their ELLs can fully connect to the characters, settings, and/or

events in the books that they provide to them. The leader of the session will project a scenario

question up on the board for all the participants to read: If your school gave your class a wish list

to purchase any five books to support your ELLs' socioemotional and cultural needs, which

books would you choose? At this point in the session, the leader will bring out bins filled with a variety of books and place them on the tables for teachers to look through. They will also have access to research books on their Chromebooks, which they brought with them to the session. The participants will type their five book choices into a Google Document that will be emailed to them and organized by grade. This will allow teachers to gain ideas from each other and use this document to find new, inclusive books for their classroom libraries following the PD session. To assist teachers in the searching process, they will receive a checklist (see Figure 6) to help them choose the appropriate culturally responsive books for their ELLs to read. It is important that teachers take part in this activity so that they can ensure that their books authentically represent their ELLs and their cultures in the classroom (Koss & Daniel, 2018).

Main Activity #3 (30 minutes)

For the final activity of Day 2, teachers will take part in a vision board activity. This will involve teachers thinking about their own goals for establishing an inclusive community for ELLs. Participants will be placed in groups of four by the same grade level. ESOL teachers will also be added to a grade level grouping to promote collaboration and communication with mainstream classroom teachers. The leader will explain how teachers will need to think about their individual goals for meeting the socioemotional and cultural needs of their ELLs. Together, in their groups, participants will need to brainstorm four important goals that they want to achieve moving forward, so that ELLs feel that they are a part of a welcoming, affirming learning environment. Participants will be encouraged to look back at Principle 1 of the CR-S framework when brainstorming ideas. Each teacher will then receive a brainstorm sheet (see Figure 7) and a cardboard puzzle piece where they will write down one of the four goals that their group members came up with. Using the crayons provided, they will also need to decorate

their puzzle piece with positive designs. After twenty minutes, each group will need to tape their

puzzle pieces together to create a larger vision board that displays all four goals that were set.

For the remaining ten minutes, the leader will go around the room and have each group share one

goal from their vision board with all of the participants. At the very end of the activity, the leader

will have one person bring up their group's puzzle to the board to form an even bigger puzzle

that will display everyone's puzzle pieces put together. This implies that teachers need to work,

not just individually, but also collaboratively as a school toward establishing an inclusive

community for all ELLs.

Closing (5 minutes)

To conclude Day 2's session, the participants will be asked to use their Chromebooks to

log onto a website called Note.ly. A link will be emailed to them to also make this process

smooth and easy for them. On the website, the teachers will be asked to use their brainstorming

sheet and puzzle vision board, to record one personal goal that they have for themselves moving

forward to help meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of their ELLs. The website resembles

a cork board, containing digital sticky notes. Each teacher will click on a sticky note and type in

their goal. This will allow participants to have an electronic copy of all of the groups' goals put

together. During this time, the leader will also discuss the focus of the following day's session,

which involves teachers putting their goals into action. They will be asked to bring in their

Chromebooks and handouts from the previous two days, so that they can refer back to their goals

and the NYSED CR-S Framework.

Day 3: Establishing an Inclusive Community for ELLs

Introduction and Hook (5 minutes)

To spark interest and emotion in participants for Day 3's PD session, teachers will take part in an activity called Mend a Heart. They will first be asked to draw a heart on a piece of a paper, using the supplies provided. They will then have to cut out their drawing of a paper heart and crumple it up into a ball. From there, the participants will be asked to restore it to its original position. Through this activity, teachers will realize, of course, that they won't be able to do so. The leader will explain that this is a perfect representation of the fact that broken hearts are difficult to fix. The leader will then share a relevant quote with the teachers on the board. This will facilitate a brief discussion about ELLs and their socioemotional well-being. Shortly after this introductory activity, the leader will project the agenda on the board (see Figure 8), along with Day 3's learning goals: 1. Each teacher will be able to design and share a variety of make and take artifacts that represent their cultural identities. 2. Each teacher will be able to provide positive messages toward the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of other participants to promote an inclusive community.

Main Activity #1 (20 minutes)

The first main activity for Day 3 is called Identity Hand. Teachers will begin by tracing and cutting out an outline of their hand. Then, they will be asked to draw pictures and words that describe their identity, or what makes them special. The leader will encourage participants to put their names in the center of their paper hand outline, and include information about their culture, hobbies, and interests on the fingers. They will have fifteen minutes to complete this task. For the remaining five minutes, teachers will turn to their elbow partner and present their artifact. This activity is meant to give teachers ideas as to how they can implement inclusive activities in

their classrooms that will help to mitigate the social isolation and marginalization that ELLs may

experience. Additionally, the Identity Hand activity gets teachers thinking about their own

cultural identities, which they will expand upon in the following activity.

Main Activity #2 (40 minutes)

The next main activity for Day 3 will involve teachers creating a Culture Night poster.

Teachers will use their background knowledge, some of which they gathered through the

previous activity, to create a poster for a hypothetical Culture Night. Teachers will be able to use

their Chromebooks to look up any additional information about their culture that they may not

know or want to know more about. They will have twenty minutes to research and gather their

ideas for their poster. A brainstorming sheet will also be provided to participants to help guide

their research and thinking (see Figure 9). For the remaining twenty minutes, teachers will use

the information that they gathered to design a poster for Culture Night. Teachers will specifically

be asked to draw pictures and write words, phrases, or facts that authentically represent their

cultures (e.g., Their country's name, flag, foods, holidays). This activity will be carried out

during the PD session so that the teachers can similarly implement it in their own classrooms to

acknowledge and validate ELL's cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In Newcomer et al. 's

(2020) qualitative case study, ELLs took part in the research and design process to develop a

poster that closely represented their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, just like the teachers

will do during the PD session. This Culture Night poster activity was deemed to be a positive

artifact created by ELL students during the study since it brought together both ELLs and their

families through an inclusive community.

Main Activity #3 (20 minutes)

Once the teachers have finished their Culture Night posters, the leader will conduct a museum walk to take the Culture Night activity one step further. For Activity #3, participants will hang up their posters around the room and will be handed eight sticky notes. On the sticky notes, teachers will have to write down notes of appreciation, or positive messages about someone else's poster and place it next to their poster, so that the original creator can read them once the activity is completed. The teachers will be asked to write down a positive note for one teacher per grade level (K-6), as well as for an ESOL teacher. This is to ensure that everyone has received a note of appreciation that they can read and value. The point of the museum walk is to allow teachers to feel a sense of pride in their cultures, while feeling that their cultural backgrounds are welcomed and acknowledged. Therefore, teachers can think about their experiences with this activity and how implementing such an activity in their own classrooms would help to meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of their ELLs since it would "promote positive relationships among individuals from diverse backgrounds" (NYSED, 2018, p. 26).

Closing (5 minutes)

At the end of Day 3's PD session, the teachers will be handed an exit ticket (see Figure 10) to complete and hand in on their way out. The exit ticket will contain two self-reflection questions that connect to the overall focus of the PD session. These questions will allow the leader to determine which concepts the teachers grasped, and which further instruction and training will need to take place moving forward. During this time, the leader will make sure to discuss the next steps with the participants for future PD sessions and emphasize the importance of implementing the culturally responsive and sustaining strategies continuously to bring about equitable change for ELLs.

Conclusion

The three-day PD session gives teachers ample opportunities to learn about how they can effectively support their ELLs through the creation of an inclusive community. By analyzing Principle 1 of the CR-S Framework, teachers are able to make a variety of connections to their own classrooms and reflect on their personal attitudes, beliefs, and teaching strategies involving ELLs. Moving forward, the hope is that teachers will continue to self-reflect and continuously implement inclusive strategies that they learned through the PD session so that they can meet their ELLs' socioemotional and cultural needs. This is especially important since ELLs' educational experiences can impact their current and future interactions, achievements, and overall lives going forward. That is why it is crucial that both mainstream and ESOL teachers learn how to implement these strategies together so that ELLs receive equitable opportunities to learn. Ultimately, the PD session aims for elementary teachers to gain a clear understanding as to how they can create a welcoming learning environment that affirms and validates ELLs' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the next chapter, implications for teachers and students, as well as recommendations for future research and studies, will be discussed.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Introduction

This capstone extensively explored the issues of social isolation and marginalization that ELLs are experiencing within their elementary schools. It specifically set out to find researched-based methods, tools, and artifacts, proposed by various scholars, that would help teachers to effectively meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs. Notably, the academic literature that is thoroughly examined and reviewed within this capstone sufficiently supports the problem identified in Chapter 1: How can elementary schools meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs by becoming an inclusive community? Through analyzing the research and findings of a variety of case studies, this information will provide educators with a clearer understanding as to how they can help mitigate the challenges that ELL students are facing at school through culturally responsive and sustaining practices. The PD session, offered to elementary teachers, will additionally help to ensure that ELLs are receiving equitable opportunities to learn English as a new language through the creation of a learning environment that is both positive and affirming. This chapter will seek to explain conclusions, implications, recommendations, and final thoughts all regarding the issues ELLs are suffering from, as mentioned above.

Conclusions

After completing this capstone and PD presentation, I believe that there are many clear and noteworthy takeaways relating to the overarching question. When thinking about the socioemotional and cultural needs of ELLs, it is very evident, through the analysis of academic research, that there are a variety of barriers that prevent ELLs from successfully feeling as though they are a part of an inclusive school community. The first barrier includes the beliefs and attitudes that teachers hold toward their ELL students. Specifically, from my research, I can

conclude that teachers who hold negative beliefs toward their ELLs, "whether manifested as a deficit mentality towards ELLs, benign neglect regarding their language needs, or passive acceptance of home language use in the classroom," can contribute to the social isolation and marginalization of their ELL students (Mellom et al., 2018). In fact, it appears that many teachers, especially those who teach immigrant students, do not always know enough information about their ELLs' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, nor do they know strategies to learn more about them (Hulan, 2015). Therefore, these teachers have a difficult time creating a welcoming learning environment and forming strong student-teacher relationships that help ELLs feel that their cultural and linguistic backgrounds are being authentically represented within the classroom. This lack of inclusiveness and validation of ELLs' cultural identities is problematic, especially for mitigating the problem discussed in this capstone (Hollie, 2012).

Another barrier that inhibits ELL students from feeling included within their classroom environment, as well as outside of the classroom walls, is a lack of positive family and peer relationships. A heavy part of the academic research, specifically reviewed in Chapter 2, focused on the importance of building an inclusive school environment through the fostering of school and family relationships. Many ELLs have a difficult time forming strong friendships with their non-ELL peers, which has also resulted in a lack of ELLs attending extracurricular activities outside of the classroom. As previously discussed in this chapter, negative beliefs towards ELLs can easily prevent these relationships from forming between ELLs and their peers. That is why implementing culturally responsive and sustaining practices within the learning environment is crucial for providing ELLs with equitable opportunities to learn and succeed. These conclusions, supported by academic research, reveal important implications for both student learning and teaching of ELLs, which will be discussed in the following two sections (Hamilton, 2013;

Helfrich and Bosh, 2011).

Implications for Student Learning

The research conducted throughout this capstone reveals that ELLs learn best and feel included when their teachers implement Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices (NYSED, 2018). Specifically, this approach to instruction implies that ELLs will benefit from learning in a classroom environment that reflects the first principle of the NYSED's (2018) CR-S framework: Welcoming and Affirming Environment. This is because ELLs will feel that they can comfortably learn and participate in a classroom environment that authentically recognizes and celebrates their identities, rather than one that shames, ignores, or misrepresents them (Hamilton, 2013). To accomplish a welcoming environment for ELLs, this capstone and PD session will provide helpful suggestions for teachers to consider when planning lessons, decorating their classrooms, and interacting with their students. For example, teachers who take part in the PD session will have the opportunity to reflect upon their knowledge of their ELLs' cultures and engage in the searching process for finding books that truly represent ELLs and their backgrounds. This method will, in turn, allow students to become more interested in the learning process and feel excited to take part in classroom discussions (Helfrich and Bosh, 2011; Koss & Daniel, 2018).

This capstone and PD presentation will also be advantageous for ELLs since it promotes the fostering of positive student-teacher, family, and peer relationships. The academic research that supports the benefits of fostering these relationships, argues that many ELLs, especially immigrants, have a difficult time adjusting to the culture and language of their non-ELL classmates and teachers (Cho et al., 2019; Newcomer et al., 2021). Crucially, understanding this difficult reality for ELLs is significant because it reveals how ELLs need numerous opportunities

to feel more connected to their peers, teachers, and family members. As Brabeck and Sibley (2017) point out, "Strong partnerships among schools, families, and communities are vital to the success of immigrant students" (p. 12). Fortunately, the formation of these positive relationships can be made possible for ELLs through the methods, tools, and artifacts discussed in this capstone and PD. Overall, the implications of these findings suggest that students will prosper when they feel that their cultural and linguistic backgrounds are valued and appreciated within their classrooms, which will help to create an inclusive school community for them to thrive in.

Implications for Teaching

This capstone and PD presentation provides elementary teachers with a variety of research-based strategies and helpful tools for meeting the socioemotional and cultural needs of their ELL students. This research, which closely connects to NYSED's (2018) CR-S Framework, indicates how these methods, offered by scholars, must be culturally responsive and sustaining to ELLs' cultural and linguistic backgrounds to help mitigate the challenges ELLs are facing in schools (Gay, 2018; Paris, 2012). This includes teachers engaging in the self-reflection process and completing questionnaires to think about how their personal beliefs and knowledge of their ELLs may influence their decisions for creating a welcoming and affirming learning environment that celebrates student differences (Hu et al., 2021; Mellom et al., 2018). These methods, which will also be included in the PD presentation, implies that educators must take the time to get to know their ELL students, specifically the multiple identities that ELLs bring to school with them, so that they can provide ELLs with equitable opportunities to learn in an inclusive learning environment. This further suggests that both mainstream and ESOL teachers need more training as to how they can learn more about their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Agbo, 2007).

Additionally, teachers can support their ELLs' socioemotional and cultural needs by implementing strategies that help to maximize the relationships between ELLs and their teachers, peers, and families (Brabeck & Sibley, 2017). Through this capstone, educators learn how important it is to engage ELLs' families in their child's learning process, and to build a strong partnership with them to support ELLs' socioemotional and cultural needs (Cohan et al., 2019; Newcomer et al., 2020). Teachers can benefit from attending the PD session since they will learn how to recognize and affirm students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds through projects, such as a Culture Night poster and an Identity Hand activity. Educators will also take part in activities, such as Two Truths and a Lie, to help them make realizations about how crucial it is to implement culturally responsive lessons and activities that disrupt the preconceived notions that non-ELLs may have toward their ELL peers. This indicates that teachers must help ELLs build friendships with their non-ELL peers to create an inclusive classroom community for them. These strategies will be helpful for bridging the social gap between ELLs and their non-ELL peers, while giving teachers suggestions as to how they can get their ELLs and their families more involved within their school community.

Recommendations

After carrying out a thorough literature review, it is clear that future research needs to take place regarding the social isolation and marginalization that ELL students experience in elementary schools. For example, I noticed that there is a great amount of research concerning the promotion of CRT and CSP supporting ELLs' socioemotional and cultural needs, but there does not seem to be enough review on the impact of implementing these two approaches simultaneously. I believe that more specific research is needed on the benefits of applying culturally responsive *and* sustaining teacher practices together, such as through the CR-S

Framework. Specifically, it is crucial that scholars take the time to observe and reflect on the advantages of educators implementing the CR-S framework, such as how it can help to eliminate or mitigate the social isolation and marginalization that ELLs experience within their learning environments. Additional research is needed on this topic because culturally responsive approaches have evolved over time. Strategies offered by scholars in the past for building an inclusive school community for ELLs, may still be relevant today, but newer research and approaches must be studied, such as the CR-S framework, to ensure ELLs have the utmost quality instruction to support their learning. Most of the research I have found either compares CRT to CSP or reviews these approaches separately. I found that the CR-S framework builds on years and years of high-quality research that seeks to mitigate the social isolation and marginalization of ELL students.

At the same time, I also recommend that future research is conducted to uncover other barriers that prevent ELLs from attending extracurricular activities. While researching, I found it very difficult to find enough data on ELL students attending school events and how that data compares to non-ELL students taking part in school functions. I think it is important for teachers to recognize the reasons behind the lack of participation that ELLs have in their school community and ways in which they can eliminate this social isolation that occurs beyond the classroom walls. I also find there is a lot of valuable research on ways in which teachers can mitigate the social isolation and marginalization of their ELL students within the classroom, but there appears to lack research on how teachers can encourage and get their ELLs more involved in clubs, events, and activities that take place within the school. Additionally, I was able to locate a significant amount of research on how to support family engagement within the school community, but not as much statistical data on their actual participation in their children's school

events. I believe this research, which would explore the statistical involvement of ELLs and their families within the school, is necessary to fully bring about an inclusive school community for ELLs.

Final Thoughts

ELLs are marginalized and socially isolated in elementary schools. As a result, ELLs are struggling to form healthy and meaningful relationships with their teachers and non-ELL peers. To bring about equitable change for ELL students, this capstone and PD session calls for teachers to implement culturally responsive and sustaining practices that closely align to the principles of the CR-S framework. Specifically, it is necessary that educators provide a welcoming learning environment for their ELL students to effectively affirm and validate ELL's cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is also critical that ELLs are learning in a positive school climate that values student-teacher, family, and peer relationships to help overcome the barriers that prevent ELLs from feeling included both in and beyond the classrooms of their school. Ultimately, the hope is that elementary teachers will be able to successfully implement culturally responsive and sustaining methods and tools to meet the socioemotional and cultural needs of their ELL students through an inclusive school community.

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Appendix

Figure 1

Agenda-Day 1

<u>Agenda-Day 1</u>

Identification of the Problem

- **Opener (10 minutes):**

    o Icebreaker Partner Activity: Two Truths and a Lie

    o Whole Group Discussion- Making Connections

    o Introduce Learning Goals

- **Academic Justification (15 minutes):**

    o Identifying the Problem

    o History of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

    o Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework (CR-T)

- **Main Activities (55 minutes):**

    o Activity #1 (20 minutes)- School Climate Questionnaire/Turn and Talk

    o Activity #2 (35 minutes)- Scenario Group Activity

- **Closing (10 minutes):**

    o Discuss Next Steps/Materials Needed for Following Session

    o Exit Ticket- Google Form

Figure 2

Questionnaire

<u>School Climate Questionnaire</u>

Directions: Please read each question carefully and circle the answer choice that most closely matches your opinion.

A. Teacher-Student Relationships	Answer Choices			
1. I am very knowledgeable of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of my ELL students.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
2. I assess the physical environment of the classroom and school to ensure that my ELLs' diverse cultures, languages, orientations, and identities are reflected, represented, and valued.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
3. I identify and address implicit bias in the classroom or school to support and advocate for my ELLs.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
4. I implement positive classroom management strategies that avoid assigning blame or guilt to ELLs based on beliefs about their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
B. Peer Relationships	Answer Choices			
5. Most of my ELL students take part in extracurricular activities (e.g., clubs and school events).	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
6. My ELL students have daily opportunities to respectfully communicate and collaborate with their peers (with both ELLs and non-ELLs).	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
7. My ELL students support and accept their classmates, while holding their peers accountable for following mutually- agreed upon rules and routines.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
C. Family Relationships	Answer Choices			
8. I build rapport and develop positive relationships with ELLs and their families, by learning about their interests and inviting them to share their opinions and concerns.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
9. I attend community events to develop strong relationships with ELLs and family members outside of the classroom setting.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
10. I provide ample opportunities for parents to communicate in their native tongue language and method of preference.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

Figure 3

Scenario Activity

<u>Group Response Question:</u>

How will you support your "new" ELL student through fostering…

a.   Student-teacher relationships?

_____

_____

_____

_____

   b. Peer relationships?

_____

_____

_____

_____

   c. Family relationships?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Figure 4

Agenda-Day 2

<u>**Agenda-Day 2:**</u>

Creating a Vision for a Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Classroom

- **Opener (5 minutes):**

  o Opinion Question- What is your Favorite Childhood Book? Why?

  o Turn and Talk

  o Introduce Learning Goals

- **Main Activities (80 minutes):**

  o Activity #1 (25 minutes)- YouTube Video and Response/Whole-Group

  Discussion

  o Activity #2 (25 minutes)- Classroom Library Activity and Checklist

  o Activity #3 (30 minutes)- Vision Board Activity-Groups of 4

- **Closing (5 minutes):**

  o Discuss Next Steps/Materials Needed for Following Session

  o Ticket out the Door- Note.ly

Figure 5

Video Response

<p align="center">Video Response Questions</p>

1. What stuck out to you in the video? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What connections, if any, were you able to make between the ELL students in the video,

and your very own ELLs? (e.g., school experiences, attitudes.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What types of strategies did you notice that the teachers in the video implemented to create a

welcoming and affirming environment for their ELLs?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Figure 6

Checklist

<u>Checklist for Culturally Responsive Books</u>

Directions: Use this checklist to guide and narrow your search for culturally responsive books that you will add to your classroom library.

_____ The books that I chose describe characters that reflect my ELLs' identities and orientations (e.g., appearance, race, hobbies, interests).

_____ The books that I chose portray characters having similar cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds to my ELL students'.

_____ The books that I chose include settings that connect to my ELL students' country of origin, current living situation, and/or places of interest (e.g., a soccer field if they enjoy playing soccer).

_____ The books that I chose contain realistic events that are similar to the personal experiences of my own ELL students' (e.g., travel, family, schooling).

_____ The books that I chose positively depict my ELL students and allow them to feel a strong sense of pride in their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Figure 7

Brainstorming Goals

<u>Goals Brainstorming Sheet</u>

Directions: Use the space provided to write down goals that you brainstorm for creating a welcoming and affirming environment for ELLs. Please refer back to Principle 1 of the NYSED's CR-S framework to assist your thinking.

My Personal Goals	My Group's Goals

Figure 8

Agenda- Day 3

<u>**Agenda-Day 3**</u>

Establishing an Inclusive Community for ELLs

- **Opener (5 minutes):**

  o Mend a Heart Activity

  o Introduce Learning Goals

- **Main Activities (80 minutes):**

  o Activity #1 (20 minutes)- Identity Hand/ Turn and Talk

  o Activity #2 (40 minutes)- Culture Night Poster-Research and Design

  o Activity #3 (20 minutes)- Museum Walk

- **Closing (5 minutes):**

  o Discuss Next Steps/Materials Needed for Following Session

  o Exit Ticket- Self-Reflection Questions

Figure 9

Culture Night Brainstorming Sheet

<u>All About my Culture</u>

Directions: Use this sheet to brainstorm ideas about your cultural identity.

- My family's home country is _____

- Our flag's colors are _____

- The foods we eat are_____

- The clothing we wear are_____

- The languages we speak are_____

- The holidays we celebrate are_____

- The activities we enjoy are_____

- Fun facts about my family's culture includes:

    o   _____

    o   _____

    o   _____

Figure 10

Exit Ticket

<div align="center">Exit Ticket</div>

Directions: Please answer each question thoughtfully to demonstrate your thoughts, ideas, and understandings from the PD session.

1. Moving forward, how will you continue to demonstrate positive strategies that promote an inclusive, welcoming learning environment for your ELLs?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

2. What is one new activity that you learned through the PD session that you would like to implement in your own classroom? Why?

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____