Promoting an Inclusive Environment for ELLs

by

Bailey Cummings

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Supervised by

Dr. Rosa Mazurett-Boyle

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Abstract

The goal of this capstones project is to support K-12 teachers in promoting an inclusive environment for ELLs. Fostering a welcoming environment for ELLs is a common issue in classrooms due to the fact that teachers do not have the proper training and preparation to teach ELLs. This capstone aims to encourage teachers to be aware of their classroom setting and teach them effective strategies on how to create a classroom that allows ELLs to feel comfortable and encourages them to participate. The literature review states the lack of preparation teachers have in this area and the need for training. This issue of inclusion is significant due to its influence on ELLs such as their motivation, engagement and participation. This capstone includes professional development which guides teachers to reflect on their teaching methods and educates them how to create a welcoming environment for ELLs.

Keywords: English Language Learners (ELLs), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Social Emotional Learning (SEL), inclusive, linguistic

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Although I have only been working in the school system for a couple of years, there is something I have noticed in every classroom. It is evident that in a classroom that contains English Language Learners (ELLs), these students are isolated into their own category. Before becoming a full time teacher, I was a substitute teacher. Many of the plans left for me noted who the ELLs were along with the information that the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher will be working with those specific students. I learned early on that mainstream teachers rely on ESL teachers and, even if unintentionally, categorize their ELLs into their own group. It is almost as if these teachers are thinking, "At least three of my students are taken care of by the ESL teacher, I can just focus on the rest."

Once I got my full time teaching position in second grade, it became part of my mission to make sure ELLs feel included in the classroom. It was my priority to create a welcoming environment where all students feel seen, heard and recognized. Not only do ELLs want to feel included in the whole group, but ESL teachers do, too. Therefore, I also prioritized communicating and planning with the ESL teacher. In my experience, schools have tended to use the pull out system for ESL education. The pull out system occurs when the ESL teacher takes the ELLs out of the classroom for a period of time and teaches the content. A typical period of time students are pulled out of the classroom is 30 minutes a day. Again, this is isolating these students. One on one time or small group instruction can be beneficial to an extent, but it also excludes those pulled students from being partners with non ELLs, or just simply being part of class discussions. I allow the ESL teacher to push into my classroom bringing the ELLs from the other second grade classes.This way, ELLs get to feel that they are part of the lessons and

discussions and seem to be more prone to participate when the ESL teacher is in the room. I believe they see her as a reassurance, a person who will help them out if needed.

Problem Statement

I became interested in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL) when I started student teaching. In the classroom in which I was a student teacher, there were six classified ELLs. Prior to student teaching, I was not even aware of ELLs. At the time where I grew up, it was very uncommon to have students in our class who did not speak English. According to data from the New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2023), there are around 231,000 ENL programs in New York. I was unprepared to work with these students, and I believe many teachers feel the same way. More and more classes are being constructed with multiple ELLs in the class and many general education teachers may not have the proper training to help them. That is why I decided to get my masters in TESOL. I want to make sure everyone in the classroom feels included and embraced. In order to mitigate this problem, this capstone project will focus on answering the question: How can teachers promote an inclusive environment for ELLs? This question will be answered through literature review and professional development (PD) sessions.

The problem I want to address is the lack of inclusion for ELLs in the general education classroom. Teachers can work on creating a welcoming environment for ELLs where they feel comfortable to speak and participate. Lazar et. al (2012) assert that a large factor that influences student performance is a teacher's commitment. Noting also that teachers need to put in the effort to create a supportive environment in order to see success in a student's performance. The problem affects ELLs/Bilinguals in both a social/emotional element and a linguistic perspective. A welcoming environment needs to be established in order for ELLs to feel included. From a

linguistic perspective, ELLs want to be reassured that they will not be made fun of when speaking. A classroom where students feel comfortable to speak and participate allows for collaborative learning. Gibbons (2015) states, “Children working together can do more collaboratively than they can do individually” (p. 50). If ELLs do not feel welcome, they will be hesitant to work collaboratively with their classmates who are non-ELLs.

Significance of the Problem

Creating a welcoming environment is important because if the social - emotional needs of a student are not met, it will, most likely, negatively affect their academics. When students come to school, they are spending most of their time in the classroom. If they do not feel included in the classroom, they are less likely to participate and learning may not occur. In his book, Minor (2018), emphasizes the need to create a space where students share power in order to help achieve a safe space. If a teacher is isolating certain students, in this case ELLs, there is no power being shared with them. The classroom is not a safe space where they want to spend their time. It is easy to use ice breakers the first few days of school to help get to know the students, and for them to get to know each other. However, if this is not continuing throughout the year, it is easy to seclude students when getting caught up in teaching the content. Minor mentions the importance of making curriculum work for the students. This means a Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL was introduced in the 1990s by Rose and Meyer (2012), who were part of the Harvard School of Graduate Education. UDL incorporates content that has to be accessible to everyone. Unfortunately, as mentioned before, teachers are quick to rely on the ESL teacher to do the scaffolding and differentiating for ELLs. They do not take the time to create a whole group lesson that is accessible to ELLs. Fairbairn and Jones-Vo (2019) state, “general education teachers need to ensure that ELLs can demonstrate content mastery while still developing

English" (p. 6). Teachers need to hold ELLs to the standards of the whole class, but many are not. The problem of ELLs not being included does not only affect them in the classroom, but also at a school level. Milner, (2018) discusses that if students feel they do not have a strong relationship with their teacher, they have a hard time learning from those teachers. Students can sense if their teacher is not making an effort individually. This leads to the effects on the district. The ELL population is growing dramatically in New York. According to NYSED (2023), ELL enrollment has gone from around 87,000 to 245,500. This large enrollment can cause schools to struggle to give each ELL required time and aid with an ESL teacher. It is imperative ELLs feel welcome and comfortable in order for them to succeed academically. Their success or failure can affect the ranks and reputation of schools, districts and states.

Purpose

The lack of inclusion for ELLs can be mitigated through building a strong classroom community stemming from the teachers. The first day of school, students are looking towards the teacher for guidance. If the teacher starts promoting inclusion and respect from the start, it can cause the students to do the same. This behavior is something that needs to continue the whole school year. Professional development (PD) will be held for mainstream teachers in order to pursue a welcoming environment the whole school year.

In this PD, teachers will collaborate with each other to discuss strategies that incorporate this type of environment. Teachers will start by filling out pre-reflection questions. Teachers will then be informed of researched strategies that help promote a welcoming environment for ELLs. The teachers will reflect about what goes on in their classroom and brainstorm about what can be changed. They will create a visual which will then lead to discussions involving comparisons, feedback and additional ideas. A short PD in the middle of the year will be held to refresh the

teachers' minds on strategies and have a discussion about how inclusion is going in their classroom. The goal of the PD is to help strengthen the relationships in the classroom and to create an environment where ELLs feel represented and respected, thereby nurturing the desire to participate.

Conclusion

The problem I will address in this capstone is how educators can create a welcoming environment in the classroom to promote inclusion for ELLs. Oftentimes, teachers find it easier to rely on the ESL teacher to "deal" with the ELLs. This creates an unwelcoming environment where ELLs are hesitant to speak and participate. This trickles down to affecting the ELLs' academics. As a result, schools label them as low level ELLs. PD is going to be given to K-12 teachers to help mitigate this problem. Teachers will learn effective strategies to aid in creating a warm, welcoming environment. The inclusion of ELLs within the class community can have positive, social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

In chapter 2, the focus will be on literature review. In this chapter, I will present research done that studied the problem along with information to help mitigate this problem. Chapter 3 will discuss the PD that was created to resolve this problem. Finally, chapter 4 will synthesize all that is mentioned in this paper. It will include the significant details to take away from the research and PD. The students' benefits will be discussed along with the teachers' benefits. It will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is creating content that is accessible to all students. It is a curriculum that can be used and understood by everyone, therefore lessons are meant to be flexible and accommodate all learners. Teachers focus on creating lessons that have multiple means of engagement, representation and action/expression. Engagement aids a student's motivation, representation helps the students comprehend the information, and expression allows students to express what they know (CAST, 2024).

Eichhorn et al. (2019) researched effective strategies to keep ELLs engaged through UDL. The first strategy is to provide self regulation options. Barely knowing a language affects the students' SEL. Providing them with strategies to relieve stress can help. This can be done through modeling, short breaks, creating checklists, reminders or visual aids. The students can not achieve anything if they are not engaged in the lessons. Teachers should also provide feedback and incorporate peer collaboration in order to help sustain effort. ELLs and teachers can come up with achievable goals for the student in order for the student to see he/she can be successful. The authors explain that in order to best achieve UDL, the teacher must know the student. Not only should the teacher get to know the student personally such as information about their family, hobbies, likes/dislikes, but the teacher also needs to pay attention to the student's habits and routines to figure out which strategies work best.

Rao and Torres (2017) discuss similar strategies to incorporate UDL in the classroom for ELLs. These strategies are through the use of technology such as multimedia strategies. There are so many websites now that have online books that come in different languages, read the text aloud, have footnotes included, etc. It is a great scaffold to use with ELLs to make sure they are

comprehending what is being taught. This helps achieve the goal of representation with UDL. In order to achieve action/expression, ELLs can be given options other than to write an answer. They can express their knowledge through pictures, key vocabulary, recordings, visual presentation, etc. As Eichon et al (2019) also touch upon, engagement can be achieved by creating options and keeping the material authentic. This means that when given the opportunity, let the students choose how they want to share their knowledge. If they have to write about nonfiction, let them pick a topic in which they possess a lot of knowledge.

UDL focuses on representation, engagement and expression. This being said, nothing can take place without achieving engagement (Eichhorn et al., 2019). If the student is not engaged, they are not retaining the information, therefore there is no representation or expression. Teachers must take the time to get to know their students and figure out which way they learn best, and then create the lessons/ scaffolds from there.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

In order to help create and maintain a welcoming environment for ELLs, teachers need to find joy in the ELLs' backgrounds. Teachers should make the students feel comfortable enough to express their cultural backgrounds. Gay (2022) explains that culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is "using the characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). This means that in order for ELLs' academic achievement to improve, teachers need to integrate their students' culture into the lessons. Teachers need to learn about and honor students' backgrounds. Teachers need to connect with students and their families and help maintain the students' cultures rather than dismiss them. CRT is using the students' home life, experiences, prior knowledge and understanding in order to better teach the material. Lazar et al. (2012) explains that if students are going to be

willing to learn English, there needs to be a respectful relationship between the students and teacher. This respectful relationship can be influenced by an inclusive environment.

Hu et al. (2021) created a study that involved 10 white preservice teachers (PST); undergraduate students, 6 seniors, 4 juniors, who have had no prior experience working with ELLs in a school setting. These students were in an ESL Methods II course and were required to attend a 50 minute class three times a week, obtain 10 observation hours in a classroom with at least one ELL student, take a community walk around the school's neighborhood, participate in one community event, interview an ESL teacher, and then write a reflection .

The point of this study was to see if a multidimensional course model lead to CRT. The study had many positive results. Some of the preservice teachers (PST) really enjoyed the community walk and event. They claimed that both helped them learn more about the students' community. They were able to see a little bit of these students' lives outside of school. The PST saw the students' houses, how they lived, what buildings were in the community, how the students interacted with peers and community members, the different family behaviors at events, the different cultures in a social setting, etc. It opened their eyes to factors that would not be seen in the classroom. This gave them a better understanding of the students' behavior in the classroom. Through the interview, the PSTs learned the importance of connecting culture and background to lessons. Another result that was interesting was that some preservice teachers saw grouping ELLs and native English speakers as an effective strategy while others saw it as ineffective.

This being said, after completing this multi dimensional course, the preservice teachers stated that they felt more confident to work with ELLs after having this type of experience in a course. They are now more aware that these students bring a variety of knowledge, skills and

experiences to the classroom. They saw that working with ELLs in a mainstream classroom is a positive situation. These preservice teachers realized that just because there is a language barrier that does not mean ELLs are not capable of learning and succeeding in the content being taught. Not only does this multidimensional course help them create an inclusive environment, but it also gives them the confidence to work with ELLs in their general education classroom.

Preparation and Development of Mainstream Teachers

The overarching question for this capstone project is: How can teachers promote an inclusive environment for ELLs? In order to answer this question through literature review, it is important to discuss how teachers feel about teaching ELLs. It is essential that all teachers feel confident and prepared to teach ELLs. There is so much that goes into creating an environment that is welcoming and promotes inclusion. Lazar et al. (2012) mention that teachers can give their students better opportunities by strengthening their own understanding of their students' cultures. This reiterates the idea that teachers need to take the time to get to know their students and then integrate those understandings into the lessons. However, some teachers simply do not know where to start in order to do this.

Knowledge and confidence play a large role in being a teacher. Teachers teach what they know and the more one knows, the more enthusiastic one is about the topic. However, studies have found that teachers lack knowledge in how to teach ELLs (Nieto, 2013). This is an area in which teachers lack confidence and feel unprepared to teach these students.With the increase of ELLs, teachers need to be professionally trained in this area.

Villegas (2018) explains the lack of confidence and preparedness mainstream teachers feel in teaching ELLs. Villegas mentions that in the late 1900s, ELLs were being placed in bilingual and ESL programs with teachers who were trained in teaching ELLs. Now ELLs are

being placed in mainstream classrooms with untrained teachers. Villegas goes on to explain that mainstream teachers are placing the “teaching” on the ESL teacher and making little to no effort in scaffolding instruction for the ELLs. This leads to setting low expectations for this group of students. Teachers being unprepared in this area is causing a negative domino effect. No training is not beneficial to the teacher, the students, or the ESL teacher.

Rubinstein - Aliva and Hye Lee (2014) researched how secondary teachers feel about ELLs in their class and whether or not they feel prepared to teach them. These authors claimed elementary teachers tend to get more training in linguistic development while secondary teachers just get training in their content area. The article focuses on the questions; What are secondary teachers’ attitudes or perceptions toward ELLs? To what extent are secondary teachers prepared to teach content effectively to ELLs? The authors explain that ELLs in secondary grades are not only trying to learn English, but they are also learning harder academic content. An ELL can be placed in a 11th grade class because of their age, but they may only have content knowledge up to fifth grade. These secondary teachers are not prepared to handle these situations which may lead to an environment that does not feel welcoming to ELLs.

There were mixed results to this research in answering the question about what teachers' attitudes were towards ELLs. Many teachers had a positive outlook and saw these students' backgrounds as an opportunity to teach the rest of the class about their different cultures. These teachers stated they created a welcoming environment for the ELLs and used the students’ strengths and cultures during lessons. However, other teachers did not see having ELLs in their mainstream class as a positive situation. Teachers from schools with lower funds felt that they did not have enough support, neither in materials and resources in general, nor support from the ESL teacher. This led to teachers labeling ELLs as poorly academic.

There were also interesting results in answering the second question: To what extent are secondary teachers prepared to teach content effectively to ELLs? About half of the secondary teachers studied claimed that they do not even want training in teaching ELLs. These participants believe there is no time to be focused on such training and their own common sense will assist them through the process of teaching the ELLs. Others understand the potential and knowledge ELLs can hold and want to receive training in order to better work with them. Even with these results, the majority of teachers stated that they do not feel prepared or confident to teach ELLs. They stated that they lack sufficient training. Although there were secondary teachers in the study who felt negatively about ELLs in the class, if training was required, teaching strategies and routines would be changed for the better of these students. Like anything else practiced again and again, over time it can start to become second nature in creating a comfortable environment for ELLs in order for their linguistics and academic skills to improve.

> de Jong et al., (2013) study ESL teachers expertise on three factors;
>
> (a) understanding ELLs from a bilingual and bicultural perspective, (b) understanding how language and culture shape school experiences and inform pedagogy for bilingual learners, and (c) ability to mediate a range of contextual factors in the schools and classrooms where they teach (p. 90).

These authors claim that ELL training for mainstream teachers should address these three dimensions in order for mainstream teachers to best succeed in creating a classroom community environment in which ELLs feel linguistically and socially welcomed. In order to achieve the first dimension, teachers must link instruction to the ELLs background and prior knowledge. This means understanding the students' experiences, norms, prior schooling, home life and much more in order to help find the child’s knowledge. All these outside factors will influence the

students participation, motivation and engagement in the classroom. The second dimension is achieved by understanding how a student's native language and second language are similar and different. Teachers need to be able to recognize the ELLs English proficiency and modify questions rather than dumbing them down. The questions must still maintain a cognitive demand. In order to help the students with English proficiency, the teacher must provide opportunities for the students to collaborate and speak with each other. Again, culture and prior knowledge should be brought into these opportunities because it can help lead the discussion. As for the third dimension, teachers need to reflect on their classroom, district, state and national policies and figure out which work best for ELLs and which policies need to be altered in order to benefit ELLs. For example, ELL students were reconvening reading interventions that worked best for English speaking students. However, ELLs should be receiving interventions that work best for ELLs and their English proficiency level. Teachers of ELLs need to be able to stand up and address these issues and obstacles. In order to achieve these three dimensions, teachers need to have training on teaching ELLs. Mainstream teachers need to build their knowledge and skills in this area so that ELLs are not failed by the education system.

Social and Emotional of ELLs

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the means through which people obtain and use their knowledge, skills and attitudes to control emotions, accomplish goals, maintain awareness for others, take responsibility and expand their own identity (CASEL, 2024). SEL teaches students to be more socially aware and accepting in order to help form and foster relationships with people of all backgrounds (Castro-Olivio, 2020). SEL is great to teach students to be adaptive and create relationships.

Bertrando (2022) explains that SEL improves a student's social behavior and academics while decreasing stress. Bertrando studies the benefits of virtual stimulation as a way for teachers to incorporate linguistic learning, cultural learning and SEL in their classroom especially for ELLs. Virtual stimulation are models of reality. It is a sense of reality where the participants are actively participating rather than just observing. The participants (teacher) work with virtual students and are given different scenarios. The participants are given a menu on how to modify their instruction in order to better benefit the student. The simulations can be customized for the specific training, in this case SEL by enhancing real life experiences.

With virtual stimulation, teachers can customize their virtual classrooms and customize their goal. For example a goal can be to enhance strategies to increase language proficiency for ELLs. The virtual simulation forces teachers to reflect on their specific classroom and what they think needs to improve or change. The stimulation then allows them to practice real life situations they may encounter. The ELL population is continuing to grow in the United States and virtual stimulation is another way in which teachers can be trained and practice teaching ELLs. Although virtual stimulation is not yet as heard of in the education field, it is used in many other fields and has had success.

Secondary Level SEL

Castro-Olivio (2020) conducted research on culturally and linguistically diverse students. This research focused on analyzing data of SEL programs and interventions for ELLs. It focused on five competencies; relationship skills, self-awareness, responsible decision making, social awareness and self management. The author mentions that students who have succeeded in these 5 competencies are more likely to be successful adults. Research has shown SEL has had a

positive impact across ethnicities, age groups, race, etc. However, research also shows that services provided for ELLs focus on language development and rarely focus on SEL.

In this particular study, a total of 102 ELLs from multiple different schools at the secondary level participated. These participants were split into 8 classes; 4 classes received the SEL intervention, and 4 classes did not receive the intervention until three weeks after the results of the study were released. The teachers incorporating SEL were given a four hour training course on how to incorporate SEL in the classroom. At the end of the intervention, the students were given a survey to fill out and the questions were based on the five competencies of SEL. The participants rated themselves on a scale of 0-4, 0 being the least agreeable, 4 being most agreeable. The questions were behavior/feelings related. An example question was *I am happy* and then the students rated themselves 0-4. The students who had the SEL intervention reported notably higher in relationship skills and self awareness than those who did not receive this intervention. However, there was no significant difference in the other three components of SEL.

It is evident SEL impacts a students ability to create supporting and accepting relationships with others. It also helps students reflect on themselves and become more self aware which can affect relationships in a positive way. Although this study did not have significant results for the other three components of SEL, it is a start. As mentioned, the teachers in this study had only received four hours of training on SEL. If more training is implemented and all teachers participate, it can help create a comfortable environment where ELLs feel welcomed, linguistically and socially.

Elementary Level SEL

Cho et al. (2019) studied ELLs social-emotional competencies and what methods elementary school teachers used in their classroom to create an SEL environment. The authors

explain that when ELLs come to an American public school, ELLs are not familiar with the social norms and expectations. However, teachers just expect them to assimilate as quickly as possible. Since a majority of ELLs do not assimilate quickly, teachers expect a low academic performance from ELLs and hold them to a lower standard. The authors explained the teachers either have a multicultural or an assimilationist point of view. Multicultural view is accepting the students culture and advocating for the use of their culture during class. The assimilationists viewpoint pushed for the student to follow the American culture norms and leave behind their culture at school.

The participants in this study included six teachers; three 1st grade teachers, two kindergarten teachers and one ESL teacher. All these teachers had significant experience with ELLs and their classes were made up of 50% ELLs. The authors conducted interviews with each teacher that were about 50-70 minutes long. Some teachers interviewed in pairs, some individually, but they were all asked the same open ended questions. An example question is: What kinds of social-emotional behaviors of ELLs from refugee families have you seen most frequently in your classroom? The study resulted in a majority of the teachers reporting that these ELLs displayed various, negative social-emotional behaviors. The teachers view ELLs as lacking awareness of social norms and expectations. They also struggled to communicate and form relationships. They stated ELLs were disruptive, gave misinformation, lacked self awareness, disrupted the class, and more.

In order to deter these behaviors, the study also provided results of what teachers do to handle these situations and promote SEL. The biggest result was creating a positive classroom environment which means acknowledging the students cultural background and using it as a strength. The next was explicit teaching. This is explaining and fixing the child's behavior right

away. The third was collaboration and support which is communication with parents, peers and staff to help best support the child. The last intervention was individualizing instruction with scaffolding instruction for that specific student or creating an activity for the specific student.

Although these are some positive ways to help promote SEL, the study also resulted in teachers admitting they do not take the time to work with parents or appropriately use the ELLs background as a strength. Instead, teachers will give the ELL a completely different activity to do because they do not think the ELL is capable of doing what is being taught.

Both studies done on secondary level and primary level of SEL for ELLs concluded that more training needs to be done for teachers in order to help promote SEL especially for ELLs. ELLs are expected by most to just assimilate to the cultural norms. The studies suggest teachers do not take the time to truly get to know the students' cultures, strengths, prior knowledge, etc., in order to aid instruction, but rather have low academic standards for ELLs.

Strategies to Build a Classroom Community

It is essential to build up a classroom community where all students feel welcome and comfortable in the environment. Kleinrock (2021) touches up community building activities to do in the beginning of the year such as identity maps and *I am From* poems. Community building activities are great in the beginning of the year, but in order to establish a welcoming environment, strategies need to be used throughout the whole year.

Hatch-Knight and Pappamihiel (2016) discuss how a second grade teacher used digital storytelling to help her ELLs experience a field trip while also building their language and social skills. The students were split into 4 groups when going on a field trip to a museum. Each group was given a camera to take pictures and were assigned different exhibits to learn about and photograph. Since the children were in charge of the picture taking, they thought more deeply

about what would make a good picture for that exhibit that they would be able to use to teach their class. They have to communicate and collaborate about what picture should be taken, what angle it should be at, what is most essential or important in this specific exhibit, etc. Once back in the classroom, the groups got together and sorted through over 100s of pictures to narrow it down to 15-20 pictures. This involved a lot of communication and listening skills. The students had to compromise, collaborate and hear each other out when deciding what pictures to use for their digital storytelling. The students then had to come up with a sentence that went along with each picture. The whole process of digital storytelling involved critical thinking skills, leadership skills, linguistic skills, teamwork, and more. All students, including ELLs, were actively engaged during this hands-on process which helped build their skills and relationships. The pictures especially aided the ELLs when telling the story. Digital storytelling is a strategy to help involve all the students and build a classroom community.

Williamson (2012) goes into detail about many teaching strategies that can be used in a mainstream classroom with ELLs to help build a classroom community. One strategy is to create teams. Students can be matched up every week or couple of weeks and they can help each other out. Peer work can help language development and a student may explain something better than the teacher. ELLs need to work on their language skills and if the teacher is doing all the talking and then the students go and work independently, the 4 main language areas are not being targeted. The goal is to practice writing, reading, speaking and listening. Therefore, discussions and conversations need to be happening in the classroom. Another strategy, especially for older grades, is to allow the students to choose how to show their expertise in a topic. Instead of forcing the students to write a paper, they can create a poster, powerpoint, song, video. This will help encourage and motivate the student. Another useful and simple strategy is the use of graphic

organizers. Graphic organizers not only help with organization, but they also provide a visual and puts emphasis on the key information on which the students should focus. The author explains it is best to always provide a visual aid for ELLs. This can be through pictures, posters, videos, word walls, and more. There should also be constant repetition in the classroom to help reiterate what is being taught. Teachers need to always remember that in order to help an ELL become more proficient in English, reading, writing, speaking and listening needs to be incorporated in every lesson.

Newcomer et al. (2021) studied two elementary school teachers and the techniques and strategies these teachers incorporated to create an environment where ELLs feel included and welcomed. One teacher had 13 ELLs while the other had 15 ELLs. While the teachers had some similar strategies, they also had a few different strategies. However, both teachers have not received training on the topic of creating a welcoming environment. Data was collected through interviews and ten 45 minute observations over a period of six months.

In order to help the ELLs social-emotional well being, both teachers found it beneficial to allow the ELLs to share with the class information about their personal experiences. Over time, the students felt comfortable enough to open up about their cultural background and share stories that related to the lessons. Another common strategy is involving the family as much as possible and learning to understand the cultural norms of the families' backgrounds. Both teachers adjusted to the families cultural norms rather than trying to get them to assimilate and both teachers mentioned having to be flexible. For example, if a meeting was set up for a certain time, the parents of the ELLs would tend to show up at a random time, so the meeting would happen at that time. Both also embraced the ELLs culture by allowing them to make posters about it and hang them up for Cultural Night. In addition, both teachers mentioned the difficulty of

addressing the various English competencies and academic skills of their ELLs, so they used many kinds of scaffolding in order to address the issues. They would pre teach lessons, build the ELLs background knowledge, create hands-on activities, go on field trips, use manipulatives, use direct experiences and more. The teachers had students make visual maps or graphic organizers to help to organize the key information. The students added any personal experiences to these visuals to help form connections between themselves and the lessons. Both teachers saw the importance of providing scaffolding, forming connections, exploring personal experiences, and aiding student to student and student to teacher relationships.

Owens and Wells (2021) studied nine teachers from three elementary schools in Virginia. The point of this study was to see how ESL teachers and content area teachers collaborate to create the best learning environment for ELLs. The authors discussed how various studies conclude that when cultural background is integrated into academics, the students' academic performance improves. Data was taken through interviews with the teachers and by studying the teachers' weekly lesson plans. The authors found that all teachers incorporated cooperative learning throughout the lessons. This was done with strategic grouping by pairing students together where the ELLs would feel comfortable to speak to their partner. Cooperative learning was also used through turns and talks. Teachers in the study also used various instructional techniques. As mentioned in the study by Newcomer et al. (2021), there was the use of visuals, graphic organizers, manipulatives and the use of prior knowledge to help instruction. The participants all reiterated the importance of working with the ESL teacher. They stated that the collaboration between the mainstream teacher and ESL teacher helps create a welcoming environment because it strengthens the classroom teachers skills in cultural understanding. The

teachers agreed that creating a welcoming environment for ELLs makes the ELLs more prone to participate and want to learn.

Bogiagas et al. (2020) studied the effects of task based instruction (TBI) on ELL students. The purpose of this study was to see how motivated ELL students were with the incorporation of TBI in a seventh grade mainstream classroom. The participants in this study were five ELLs and ten English native speakers (ENS). The researchers took the teachers everyday lessons and tweaked them to incorporate TBI. For example, instead of independently doing a worksheet on vocabulary, the students were now working with a partner using flashcards to match the picture to the vocabulary word and then creating sentences to go along with them. Data was collected through observation, student work documents, focus groups and exit tickets. The researchers focused on four dimensions of motivation; attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction. For ELLs, it resulted in TBI having the most positive outcomes with attention and relevance. However, for ENS, it resulted in TBI having the most positive effects on relevance, confidence, and satisfaction. The ELLs expressed that TBI held their attention and was relevant because it helped build their English proficiency. ELLs were also satisfied with TBI. This being said, ELLs stated they still struggled with confidence during TBI. The ELLs discussed how they are afraid to talk in front of the class. They only feel comfortable when the teacher helps them with their work and they know they are correct. Overall, ELLs responded positively to TBI, however the lack of confidence the ELLs still feel is something to keep in mind when working with them.

There are many strategies to help build a welcoming environment where ELLs feel comfortable to speak and participate. Technology is so relevant nowadays and a great tool to use to foster a welcoming environment. There are also many scaffolding techniques that aid ELLs such as the use of graphic organizers, visuals, manipulatives, etc. It can be beneficial to partner

students together in order to ensure discussion and understanding. Lessons can be pre taught and reiterated to make sure the ELL is gaining the proper knowledge. TBI can be used to help build ELLs engagement and motivation during class.

Conclusion

It is evident there is so much that goes into creating a welcoming environment in which ELLs will not hesitate to participate. Educators need to consider the use of UDL and CRT, their own knowledge on ELLs, their knowledge of SEL, and what strategies are the best fit for their own classroom. In order to best succeed in creating this welcoming environment teachers need to have appropriate training. As noted in the research, many teachers have a negative preconceived viewpoint on ELLs. Teachers claim these students lack social norms and awareness. Although this may be true, teachers need to take steps to help mediate this problem instead of ignoring it. In other words, educators must foster genuine relationships that need to be formed with ELLs. In addition, it is imperative to find out their prior knowledge, experiences and culture. Time also needs to be taken to work with ELLs individually or strategic grouping can be incorporated to help build confidence. Teachers should use hands-on activities to motivate ELLs which can lead to ELLs taking pride in their work. There are many strategies that can be used to create an inclusive environment where ELLs feel welcomed. Teachers need to develop skills and be prepared in this area. In order to do so, teachers need to be given proper training to achieve this type of classroom. In chapter three, I will present professional development (PD) created to promote inclusion for ELLs in school.

Chapter 3: Professional Development

This chapter will be focusing on the content and components of professional development (PD) that will take place over the course of two days. The participants in this PD will be K-12 general education teachers and will focus on all ages of students, approximately ages 5-18 years old. The PD will take place at the district office in the conference room. I will present the first day of PD the last week of August during the superintendent conferences days teachers are required to go to a week before school starts. This PD will be two hours long. The purpose is for the teachers to begin the school year with strategies to implement a welcoming environment for ELLs right from the start. I would then present one more PD mid-year in order to refresh the teachers' minds and to allow teachers to provide feedback on what strategies work and do not work. Collectively, I can guide them to help solve each other's problems that they may be encountering. All the material for this PD can be found in the appendix at the end of this capstone. It will be found in alphabetical order. Day 1 is Appendix A-D and day 2 is Appendix E-G.

In summary, on day 1 the participants will first be expected to write a short reflection on how they currently try to incorporate inclusion in their classroom. Using a powerpoint format I will then present research and strategies on what can be done to promote inclusion in the classroom. This will lead to a group discussion and allow teachers to exchange ideas on how they can provide a welcoming environment for ELLs. After going through the powerpoint, the participants will be expected to work in collaborative learning groups to create an anchor chart of what they think are effective strategies on inclusion to implement into their classroom. Before leaving, they will fill out another reflection answering some short answer questions about what

they learned and if some of their previous strategies of working with ELLs have now been changed or altered.

Day 2 will be an hour long. This PD is based more on reflection and discussion. Teachers will discuss what is going well in their classroom and maybe what they discovered did not work. They can give suggestions and take notes of the working strategies. I will present strategies again in order to refresh their memories and give them ideas. They will fill out a feedback survey before leaving.

Day 1 (see agenda in Appendix A)

Pre-Reflection

Participants will fill out a quick reflection (see Appendix B) of how they believe they incorporate inclusion for ELLS and what is done in their classroom to create a welcoming environment. This is a very basic questionnaire in order to get them thinking about their own classroom and to begin self reflecting.

UDL and CRT

After self reflection, I will present the powerpoint. The participants will be given a note taking template (see Appendix C) to follow along with the powerpoint. They will be encouraged to jot down some notes. The powerpoint will start by explaining UDL and CRT. UDL is creating material that is accessible to all. Eichon et al (2019) and Rao and Torres (2017) explain that engagement can be achieved through creating options and keeping the material authentic. This means to allow for student choice whenever possible. In order to achieve UDL teachers have to get to know their students personally. This aids in using the best strategies in your classroom. Getting to know the students at a personal level leads into CRT. CRT is using the knowledge of the students to help create lessons. Teachers need to incorporate the students' cultural

backgrounds, prior knowledge and experiences, into the lessons (Gay, 2022). A genuine, respectful relationship needs to be established between the teacher and student in order to influence an ELL to learn English (Lazar, 2012). An ELL is more likely to feel included through the use of UDL and CRT.

SEL

If an inclusive environment for ELLs is the goal, SEL needs to be happening in the classroom. SEL not only comes from the teachers, but also from the students. SEL teaches students to build and foster relationships by teaching them to be more socially aware and foster relationships with people of all backgrounds (Castro-Olivio, 2020). SEL aids to create an environment where all are welcome and comfortable. I will go through strategies to teach SEL. These will be general strategies, but there will also be some specific to elementary and secondary grade levels. Again, this is being presented in order to help achieve a classroom that incorporates inclusion. After I finish presenting SEL, there will be a short video on SEL provided in the slideshow. The teachers are to watch that on their own and write notes on their template.

Preparation and Strategies for Teachers

Once there is a solid understanding of UDL, CRT and SEL, I will then go into details about the lack of preparation teachers have in this area. Many studies have shown that teachers lack knowledge on how to teach ELLs (Nieto, 2013; Rubinstein - Aliva and Hye Lee, 2014; Villegas, 2018). Many mainstream teachers place the “teaching” of ELLs on the ESL teacher. Having no training in working with ELLs is negatively affecting the mainstream teacher, the ELL, and the ESL teacher. This is important for the participants to understand because many might assume their common knowledge of running a classroom is adequate enough to teach ELLs. These studies show that teachers need specific training and preparation in this area.

I will then present strategies to help mediate the problem of lack of inclusion. The classroom needs to be a place where ELLs feel comfortable and free to speak and participate. I will present research based practices that have worked in classrooms. Some of these strategies include the first week of school activities, the use of technology, different scaffolding techniques, the involvement of student cultures, and collaboration between the main teacher and the ESL teacher. There are a variety of resources so the participants can start thinking about what might work best for their classroom.

Anchor Chart

Once the powerpoint presentation is over and the teachers have finished taking notes, each table will be given poster paper to create an anchor chart along with markers. The teachers will then collaborate with the other participants at the table to create a chart with effective strategies to use to help create a welcoming environment for ELLs. The purpose is to bounce ideas off each other and discuss what they think would work best. Creating a visual will help others see the strategies and even allow for them to take pictures to take back to their classroom. Teachers have all different experiences in their classroom, but may also have some of the same. Discussions can help teachers in similar situations or can be recalled at a later date to assist in a future scenario. Gibbons (2015) mentions that people can do more together when working collaboratively rather than working individually. Discussions are necessary in order to learn (Gibbons, 2015).

Post Reflection

As an exit ticket, the teacher will fill out a post reflection (see Appendix D). These questions are to get them thinking about everything they just learned in the PD. They will be reflecting on the new, learned information and then relating it back to their classroom.

Day 2 (see Agenda in Appendix E)

Survey

After finding their seats, the participants will complete a survey. This self reflection survey (see Appendix F) will have questions and the participant will rate him/herself on a scale of 0-4; Zero being the least agreeable and 4 being the most agreeable. This type of rating was used in a study done by Castro-Olivio (2020). In this study teachers rated themselves based on their teachings of SEL. The participants at the PD will have similar questions. Once again, the point of this survey is to get the participants to self reflect on their use of UDL, CRT, and SEL. The survey will be completed on a google form, so after submitted, it will automatically categorize the results.

Discussion and Powerpoint Presentation

I will then go into detail about strategies to continue using in the classroom. Before stating strategies, I will ask participants to share strategies that have been useful in the classroom. As mentioned previously, Gibbons (2015) states that talk is necessary in order to help grasp a concept and learn. After the discussion, I will go through a few slides restating effective strategies to use in the classroom. This is also an opportunity for participants to share some challenges they may be facing. Their peers may be able to help out and give them ideas on how to solve the challenge. I will be there to help guide these discussions and step in when needed, but the focus is for the teachers to help each other out and share their experiences.

Exit Ticket

Before leaving, the participants will fill out a quick survey (see Appendix G) about how effective the PD was. This is beneficial not only to the presenter, but also to the participants. Minor (2019) says how it is imperative as a teacher to show students they are heard and changes

are made in the classroom because of the students' feedback. Students like to know that they share power with the teacher. This creates more respect in the classroom. The same goes for adults. Adults want to know that their opinion matters and will be taken into consideration. The participants may build greater respect towards administration knowing that administration is paying attention to the feedback that is provided.

Conclusion

The purpose of the PD is for K-12 teachers to recognize the diversity ELLs bring to their classroom and to use it as an advantage. Teachers should walk away from this PD feeling more confident and prepared in how to create a welcoming environment for ELLs where ELLs have linguistic freedom. This means a space is created where ELLs are not hesitant to participate because they are afraid to speak or to be made fun of by others. Teachers should have some confidence now in how to foster inclusion in the classroom. The strategies taught in this PD should not only give a sense of inclusion to students, but also help students foster and build their own respectful relationships with students from different backgrounds.

In chapter 4, I will summarize the key takeaways from this capstone paper that mediate the problem to the overarching question: How can teachers promote an inclusive environment for ELLs? It is the final chapter that will also discuss the implications for student learning and the implications for teaching. It will conclude with recommendations for future research and my final thoughts.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Introduction

Although I have only been working in elementary schools for a couple of years, I have noticed a lack of inclusion for ELLs. Before I was a full time teacher, I was a building substitute teacher. Every day I was in a different classroom and it was clear ELLs were more hesitant to participate in the majority of classes I taught. This led me to the question: how can teachers promote an inclusive environment for ELLs? Throughout this capstone, I have researched ways to create a welcoming environment for ELLs where they feel comfortable enough in the classroom to speak, answer questions, form friendships, and more. ELLs deserve to be in an environment where they are not afraid to speak up. ELLs need to be reassured that they have a voice in the classroom, that their presence and contributions to the classroom environment have value, therefore, they should not hesitate to speak up.

Conclusions

This capstone project has found significant ways for teachers to create a welcoming environment for ELLs in their classroom. A major takeaway is the use of UDL and CRT in the classroom. Eichhorn et al. (2019) and Rao and Torres (2017) discuss the importance of creating a learning environment that is accessible to all. Lessons should have multiple means of engagement on top of representation and expression. Students want to see themselves in the lessons and then have multiple means of displaying their knowledge of the material. The need for representation leads to CRT. Gay (2022) explains that if students are represented in the lessons, their motivation and academic achievement will improve. In order to achieve UDL and CRT, SEL needs to be happening. The social emotional well being of all students is imperative to academic accomplishment. Bertrando (2022) states that SEL de-stressed students while also

improving their academics and a students' social behavior. A big factor with ELLs is the language barrier. If SEL is taking place, ELLs will not be as hesitant to socialize and participate.

However, in order for teachers to succeed in accomplishing UDL, CRT and SEL, teachers have to be prepared and trained in this area. Nieto (2013) claims that studies show teachers lack knowledge in how to teach ELLs. Rubinstein - Aliva and Hye Lee (2014) conducted a study with elementary and secondary teachers and the majority of teachers stated they do not feel confident or prepared to teach ELLs. Due to the lack of preparation, teacher's academic expectations for ELLs tend to be lowered. This lack of training dedicated to helping teachers teach ELLs influenced me to research strategies on how to create an inclusive environment for ELLs. These strategies involved the use of technology, scaffolding, student choice, cooperative learning, hands-on activities and plenty of other activities.

Implications for Student Learning

There are many benefits for students through the use of these concepts and ideas presented throughout this capstone. One of the main benefits is helping to change the stereotype of low academic expectations for ELLs. As stated in this paper, teachers tend to have low expectations and hold ELLs to a lower standard (Rubinstein - Aliva and Hye Lee, 2014; Villegas, 2018). The PD will train and prepare teachers in this area of education which will result in teachers holding ELLs to higher standards and focusing on scaffolding instruction towards their needs. This effort put in by the teachers will lead to an increase in motivation, participation, engagement, relationship building, and socialization. Lazar et al. (2012) explains that once teachers understand students' cultures, students are given better opportunities in the classroom.

ELL's mindsets and outlooks can change once an inclusive setting is incorporated. Castro-Olivio (2020) conducted a study and found ELLs who received SEL intervention reported

higher in social awareness and relationship skills. School is a very social environment. It is imperative to build these skills especially for ELLs because they may have a language barrier or it might not be part of their cultural norm. Having these skills can help benefit these students to encourage a positive outlook of school.

Overall, the research has shown benefits of building a welcoming classroom community for ELLs. Many aspects increase for ELLs such as socialization, engagement and motivation. There are also aspects that decrease such as stress. These benefits can have a great impact on their academic achievement which can help build their self confidence.

Implications for Teaching

Teachers will also benefit from the concepts and ideas presented. A few studies concluded that there is a lack of preparation and training for teachers in teaching ELLs. With ELLs now being placed in mainstream classrooms, not just ESL specific and bilingual programs, teachers will benefit from training (Villegas, 2018). This training will not only help mainstream teachers, but in addition it will aid ESL teachers. Billegas says teachers place the “teaching” on ESL teachers. However, with training and preparation, teachers and ESL can learn to collaborate and work as a team to teach ELLs. As a result teachers will begin to hold higher expectations for ELLs. Many teachers not trained in this have a negative outlook on ELLs. Some secondary teachers claim to not even bother getting to know the student, but would rather just teach the content and put the scaffolding on the ESL teacher (Rubinstein - Aliva and Hye Lee, 2014). That being said, these are the same teachers not prepared in this area. Reiterating the use of UDL CRT and SEL in this PD can help teachers in getting to know their ELLS and choosing lessons and materials that are more beneficial to ELLs. This capstone and PD will supply teachers with effective strategies to teach ELLs. The students show first hand the benefits of using certain

strategies with ELLs. Teachers will become more aware of their teaching material and what can be done to increase academic achievement in their classroom.

Recommendations

Although a lot of research, methods and strategies were presented throughout this capstone project, there is more research to be done. As ELLs continue to increase in schools, research should be done on ELL families themselves. There should be more research on the families of ELLs and their lives outside of school. Research should be done on the jobs of these families, the resources they have, specifically the parents, what schools are doing to benefit their child, and more. School is only half of the student's day. Research should be done to see what schools can do to help ELLs outside of the classroom in order to benefit and help their success and experience at school. Doing this research can show the interest the school has for their families which feeds into creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for the ELLs during the school day.

Final Thoughts

It is critical for teachers to understand the benefits of being prepared and trained in teaching ELLs. It may seem simple to create a welcoming environment in a classroom, but due to the language barrier, it is a challenge to create one for ELLs, yet research has shown not enough is being done to do so. It is a teacher's duty to educate all students to the best of their ability. In order for this outcome to be achieved, ELLs is a community that needs to be focused on. The first step is to create a classroom community that ELLs have confidence in which to speak and participate. With the increase of ELL population in schools, PD in creating inclusive welcoming classroom environments will benefit ELLs, teachers and the school as a whole.

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Appendix A
Day 1 Agenda

2:00-2:15	**Participants find their seat and fill out pre reflection questions.**
2:15- 2:25	**Participants discuss their answers to the questions with other participants at the table**
2:25- 3:25	**Powerpoint presentation**
3:25- 3:45	**Participants work collaboratively at table to create an anchor chart of effective inclusion strategies**
3:45-4:00	**Participants fill out post - reflection questions**

Appendix B
Pre-Reflection

1) **Do you have any prior training in working with ELLs? If yes, how much?**

2) **What have you done in your classroom to create a welcoming environment for all, especially ELLs?**

3) **Do you feel ELLs often participate in your classroom? Do you wish they would participate more?**

4) **Do you rely on the ESL teacher to teach the ELLs in your classroom?**

Appendix C
Note Taking Template

Notes

UDL

CRT

SEL

Strategies to build an inclusive classroom Community

Other

Appendix D
Post Reflection

Think about the strategies discussed in the powerpoint and with the teachers around you.

1) **What are new strategies you plan to implement in your classroom?**

2) **Is there a strategy you already use that you plan on changing or altering after today's PD?**

3) **Did your perspective change on teaching ELLs?**

Appendix E
Day 2 Agenda

3:00-3:15	**Participants find their seats and fill out reflection survey**
3:15-3:30	**Participants discuss what is going well and challenges**
3:30-3:50	**Presenter goes through powerpoint presentation on effective strategies**
3:50-4:00	**Participants fill out feedback survey**

Appendix F
Reflection Survey

Please rate on a scale of 0-4.

0 = strongly disagree 1 = disagree 2= neutral
3 = agree 4 = Strongly agree

Since the first PD,
UDL is incorporated in more lessons?_____

SEL is taught throughout the day?_____

Students have had more opportunities to discuss or display their culture? _____

There has been an increase in ELL participation? ____

New relationships have been shown throughout all students? _____

There is a stronger relationship between you and the ESL teacher? _____

There is more student collaboration and student center activities? _____

There is an increase in acceptance between students, especially between non- ELLs and ELLs? _____-

There is an increase of inclusion at lunch and recess? _____

ELLs seem happier in class?_____

ELLs are enthusiastic to learn?_____

ELLs communicate more with you? _____

You feel more prepared this year than last year to teach ELLs? _____

There is an increase in ELL academic performance?_____

Appendix G
Exit Ticket

Please circle your answer.

1) **Did you find the two days of PD useful and helpful?**

Yes **Somewhat** **No**

2) **Did you learn at least a couple new effective strategies?**

Yes **No**

3) **Do you use some strategies from the PD in your classroom?**

Yes **No**

4) **Did this second PD in the middle of the year help?**

Yes **No**

5) **If any, please list a few strategies you use from this PD.**
   -
   -
   -

6) **Any recommendations for future PD?**

_____

_____

_____

_____