

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE AND INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract. Supporting English language learners in the classroom requires a multifaceted approach that addresses their linguistic, cultural, and social needs. This article discusses the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment for ELLs and provides practical strategies for educators to implement. By implementing these strategies, educators can create a learning environment where ELLs feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed academically and socially.

Key words: English language, challenges in the classroom, inclusive classroom.

СОЗДАНИЕ БЛАГОПРИЯТНОЙ И ИНКЛЮЗИВНОЙ СРЕДЫ В КЛАССЕ ДЛЯ ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК

Аннотация. Поддержка изучающих английский язык в классе требует многогранного подхода, учитывающего их языковые, культурные и социальные потребности. В этой статье обсуждается важность создания благоприятной и инклюзивной классной среды для учащихся ELL и предлагаются практические стратегии, которые педагогам следует реализовать. Реализуя эти стратегии, преподаватели могут создать среду обучения, в которой ELL будут чувствовать себя ценными, уважаемыми и иметь возможность добиться успеха в учебе и обществе.

Ключевые слова: английский язык, проблемы на уроке, инклюзивный класс.

Introduction

Creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment for English language learners (ELLs) is crucial for their academic and social success. ELLs often face unique challenges in the classroom, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and feelings of isolation. Therefore, it is essential for educators to foster an environment that promotes acceptance, understanding, and support for ELLs. In this article, we will explore strategies for creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment for ELLs.

Creating a Supportive and Inclusive Classroom Environment for English Language Learners.

Stages of cultural accommodation

Chances are that your English language learners (ELLs) come from a culture with traditions and family values that differ from mainstream American culture. These young children not only have the challenge of learning a new language, but also of adjusting to an unfamiliar cultural setting and school system. Imagine what it would be like to step into a foreign classroom where you didn't understand the language, rules, routines, or expected behavior.

On a daily basis, ELLs are adjusting to new ways of saying and doing things. As their teacher, you are an important bridge to this unknown culture and school system.

In the same way that ELLs go through stages of English language learning, they may also pass through stages of cultural accommodation. These stages, however, may be less defined and more difficult to notice. Being aware of these stages may help you to better understand “unusual” actions and reactions that may just be part of adjusting to a new culture.

Euphoria: ELLs may experience an initial period of excitement about their new surroundings.

Culture shock: ELLs may then experience anger, hostility, frustration, homesickness, or resentment towards the new culture.

Acceptance: ELLs may gradually accept their different surroundings.

Assimilation/adaptation: ELLs may embrace and adapt to their surroundings and their “new” culture.

What is the silent period?

It is also common for students who are learning a new language to be ‘silent’ for a period of time, when they are listening to the language around them without speaking yet (much as a young child listens to language first before learning to talk). This is considered the first stage of language acquisition.

Patience and creating opportunities for small successes in speaking with you and peers can help build students’ confidence. In addition, keep in mind that students’ silence could also be a sign of respect for you as an authority — and not a sign of their inability or refusal to participate. Educators are having to retool their approach to teaching English as a second language, given the growing number of English language learners in the U.S.

“The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners (ELLs) was higher in fall 2016 (9.6 percent, or 4.9 million students) than in fall 2000 (8.1 percent, or 3.8 million students),” notes the National Center for Education Statistics.

Teachers are faced with the challenge of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for an increasingly diverse student population. An inclusive classroom environment is one that encourages active participation and facilitates learning for all students. While promoting sensitivity to cultural differences, one of the biggest hurdles to engaging all students is the language barrier that some students must overcome.

English teacher and education writer Rusul Alrubail writes, “Being an English Language Learner in the classroom can be a very overwhelming experience for students regardless of age. It’s important for educators to build an atmosphere that fosters a safe and empathetic environment for ELL students.” Recalling her days as an ELL student in the fifth grade, Alrubail shares that most of her challenges dealt with the social aspect of integrating into a new school and classroom, and with new classmates.

Benefits to Inclusiveness in the Classroom

Students will take their cues from the teacher when it comes to interacting with ELL students. Teachers must be genuine and non-judgmental when dealing with students. ELL students may quickly withdraw if they are treated differently, and learning outcomes will suffer. A positive learning environment is one in which students learn acceptance of differences in culture, religion, economic status and language so that all students feel respected and supported.

Whether ELL students have a separate specialized class for English or are mainstreamed with a fluent English classroom, the goals of inclusiveness and achieving English fluency are the same.

Tips for Teachers

In an article on strategies for promoting a multicultural environment in the classroom, Bright Hub Education shares some tips for teachers. Teachers can help all students understand one another by creating a word wall in the classroom which shows common vocabulary words in both English and the ELL students' native language(s). Another way to foster inclusion is to have a multicultural library in the classroom. This helps expose children to different cultures without pressure. Celebrating cultural differences by having food fairs, making posters highlighting different cultures, and holding question-and-answer time about culture or homeland are ways to include all students.

Dr. Kelly S. Meier has worked in education for more than 30 years, and has authored many books on educational leadership. She encourages teachers to pay attention to their classroom environment. "When a student walks into your classroom, the environment should convey inclusion. What pictures do you have on your walls? How is the room arranged?" Her recommendation is to intentionally weave diversity into the fabric of the educational experience.

From her experiences as both a student and a teacher, Rusul Alrubail has some recommendations for teachers looking to create an inclusive classroom. One simple suggestion that shows personal respect for all students is to learn how to properly pronounce their names and, when necessary, correct students who mispronounce their classmates' names.

Understanding that in some cultures it is not socially acceptable to ask questions, it is crucial for teachers to make sure that ELL students are given information about daily routines that might seem obvious. Explaining use of the restroom, eating and drinking, what to do when feeling ill, how lineups work, what the start- and end-of-school day procedures are, how recess and lunch breaks work — these are basics that all students need to understand.

Teachers can integrate culture into the curriculum by including artists, inventors, creators and prominent figures from other cultures and countries, and by advocating for diversity and equality in school displays.

Alrubail reminds teachers that it's okay for students to speak their first language. She notes, "If you 'enforce' an English only rule in the classroom it will create a divide and a form of resistance from struggling ELL students. Instead, allow them to speak a language of their choice. Go over to them and find out if they have any questions or need clarification on instructions. Instantly, this builds a conversation and a connection between you and the student."

Specializing in Bilingual Education

Education professionals who want to gain expertise in developing inclusive educational strategies for teaching diverse student populations can do so by pursuing a Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction with a Specialization in Bilingual Education degree. Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) has a fully online program designed for working professionals.

The TAMIU online degree program consists of 33 credit hours and can be completed in as few as 12 months. The flexibility of multiple start dates offered throughout the year combined with the fully online format make this an ideal option for those who don't want to quit working to attend

in-person classes on campus. Creating an inclusive classroom allows all students to feel respected, happy and safe in their learning environment. These feelings help them learn and develop better than they would in an unsupportive environment. Inclusive environments help students learn about diverse backgrounds and perspectives, communicate with their peers and practice empathy.

To create inclusive classrooms, teachers should educate themselves, set clear behavior standards for students, model respect and provide space for students to practice empathy. Various inclusive classroom strategies can help teachers accomplish these goals and support their students.

What Is an Inclusive Classroom?

An inclusive classroom is a learning environment that supports all students, no matter what their individual needs or learning barriers are. Creating an inclusive learning environment means teachers and other school staff provide students with equal achievement opportunities and learning access. A student may find learning and achievement more difficult if they:

1. Speak English as a second language.
2. Come from a low-income family.
3. Are part of a minority community.
4. Identify as a different gender or sexuality.
5. Have a disability or different mental abilities.

Creating an inclusive classroom also means providing a respectful, welcoming environment that makes students feel comfortable. Teachers can implement many strategies to create inclusive, happy, safe and purposeful learning environments.

Who Benefits From Inclusive Education?

Inclusive education can benefit all students. Inclusive classroom strategies directly benefit students with additional needs, but they can also benefit students who don't need special assistance. Inclusive education strategies have no impact or a positive impact on most students without additional needs. All students can benefit from additional support and a welcoming environment.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment for English language learners is essential for their academic and social well-being. Educators play a crucial role in fostering an environment that promotes acceptance, understanding, and support for ELLs. By implementing the strategies discussed in this article, educators can create a learning environment where ELLs feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. It is important for educators to continue to seek professional development and resources to better support ELLs in the classroom. Ultimately, by creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment, educators can help ELLs thrive and reach their full potential.

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