HOW CAN GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS LEARN TO BUILD POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH EL STUDENTS BY INTEGRATING EL BEST PRACTICE STRATEGIES INTO THEIR TEACHING?

by

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Building Positive Relationships Between Language Learners and Educators

Description of Research Question:

This professional development is intended to guide teaching staff on a journey of understanding how to build and develop relationships with the language learners in their classrooms. The expanded view of understanding what positive relationships between students and teachers can do for students, how to create positive relationships, and how to expand them, sets the stage for the project. The focus of this project will be to show the impact of building positive relationships with students in the sheltered classroom. It will show how general education teachers can learn to build positive relationships with EL students by integrating EL best practice strategies into their teaching.

The project is intended to equip educators with strategies and resources to better enable them to build positive relationships with their language learner students. Educators may already have resources and tools for building relationships with their native English speaking students and will be encouraged to draw on those resources. By drawing on past experience and available resources, the task becomes much more attainable for the professional educator, the target of this project. The learning targets for each session will be:

- Respect: I can reflect on the ways that I already foster a respectful environment in my classroom and extend that to include EL best practices with the support of the grade level EL teacher.

- Communicating Expectations: I can communicate classroom expectations to language learners with the support of language learner friendly vocabulary.
• Equitable Classroom Treatment: I can reflect on how equitable treatment can include language learners in my classroom with the support of the grade level EL teacher.

• Redirection: I can implement strategies for redirecting language learner behavior to desirable outcomes with the support of resources found on the building relationships website.

The learning targets are designed to draw on what educators already know and use in their classroom. This will extend their strategy use to include EL best practices and build a supportive coaching network. The next section will describe best practices in adult learning and show how the outcomes of the project use adult learning strategies to promote retention and use of the EL best practices.

Project Details

The project consists of a professional development that is supported by presentation slides and a web resource. The presentation was given in a face to face format to the 8th grade teachers who have contact with the language learners in 8th grade. The supplemental materials in the form of the website were available and were accessed after receiving the professional development.

Professional Development

I began the PD with teachers by utilizing time within the Common Planning Time (CPT) structure of the teams at the middle school. Best practices in building positive relationships with language learners will be delivered to staff during the meeting times. In keeping with staff development best practices, PD was not overly long or consisting mainly of me doing the talking (Condon et al, 2016). CPT meets every day at the middle
school for a period of 48 minutes. There is usually time for staff members to either bring up concerns or share with other staff about considerations they need to know about students. I have used this time in the past for EL considerations. I used this time for both formal and informal styles of delivering content to the teaching staff in the CPT small group. The content delivery lasted about thirty minutes per session. A formal and informal conversational style that capitalizes on my trust relationships with other teachers combined with staff being able to converse, give input, and contribute increases staff buy-in during training times (Ferguson, 2006). Since this development is ongoing over the course of four weeks, I included time to implement coaching sessions outside of CPT time. Coaching, when combined with staff development, yields far greater results than simply giving staff development (Desimone and Pak, 2017). The coaching is taking place outside of CPT when I meet with teachers individually. I am able to address questions and concerns that are relevant to individual teachers. Coaching also keeps the content from the PD fresh and relevant, so teaching staff are able to effectively implement it in the classroom. Staff will also be able to give feedback on how relationship building is working in their classrooms. Teacher feedback will be important to collect and use along with the student interviews, which teachers are encouraged to conduct. Teachers can revisit the interviews with students after attending PD sessions.
**Staff Development Agenda:**

Two 45 minute sessions

Targeted toward educators who will deliver middle school content to language learner students.

The training blends elements of English Language Learner education best practices with adult learning best practices to create a training that is beneficial and relevant.

**First Session**

**Topics:**

**Building Respect**

Definitions of respect and language learners will be discussed. Background knowledge will be activated and developed.

**Learning Target:**

Respect: I can reflect on the ways that I already foster a respectful environment in my classroom and extend that to include EL best practices with the support of the grade level EL teacher.

Share out with elbow partners the assets that language learners bring to your classroom.

**Classroom Expectations**

Discussion of what classroom expectations are already in place. Best practices in building classroom community will acknowledged. Staff will be encouraged to share their professional experiences.

**Learning Target:**

Communicating Expectations: I can communicate classroom expectations to language learners
with the support of language learner friendly vocabulary.

Discuss in whole group what expectations might be challenging for language learners to access.

**Opening:**

**Introduce topic of building relationships and expectations**

**Slides 1-2 (5 min)** Introduce learning target. Make distinction between building relationships with native English speakers and language learners

**Slides 3-5 (5 min)** Present how respect specifically affects language learners

**Slide 6 (10 min)** Turn and talk. What assets do language learners in your class have? Whole group share out. What assets do language learners bring to the classroom? How can those assets set students up for success?

**Slides 7-9 (10 min)** Introduce learning target. Present topic of classroom expectations. How language learners navigate culture.

**Slide 10 (15 min)** Pose the question: what are some actions students produce that you suspect may be due to cultural misunderstandings? Share with your elbow partner and discuss some ways to scaffold classroom expectations.

**Slide 11 (Remaining time)** Recap and wrap up session. Field questions.

**Exit Ticket: Write on a notecard one take away from the session**

**Second Session**

**Topics:**

**Equity**

The all important topic of equity will be addressed. Staff knowledge of equity will be assessed
through discussion. Principles of promoted equity will be encouraged in all staff. Benefits of equity will be shared.

**Learning Target:**

Equitable Classroom Treatment: I can reflect on how equitable treatment can include language learners in my classroom with the support of the grade level EL teacher.

Reflect and record a classroom practice that could be altered to promote equity.

**Student Potential/Redirection**

Rephrasing ‘behavior’ gives staff alternative ways to address student concerns without casting them in a negative light. Every action is a chance to grow. Build on ‘teachable moments.’

**Learning Target:**

Redirection: I can implement strategies for redirecting language learner behavior to desirable outcomes with the support of resources found on the building relationships website.

Reflect on language learner challenges with following classroom expectations. Share and discuss how classroom procedures could be changed to promote student success.

**Opening:**

**Introduce topic of equity and student potential**

**Slides 12 (5 min)** Learning target. Introduce and define equity.

**Slide 13 (4 min)** Discuss diagram. Explain how it relates to equity.

**Slide 14 (3 min)** Example of a situation that is not equitable. Example of how to introduce strategies that promote equity.

**Slide 15 (8 min)** Reflect and jot down a practice that could be enhanced in your own classroom to promote equity.
Slide 16 **(2 min)** How does this build equity?

Slide 17 **(3 min)** Culmination of all other topics. Tie in. Explain how student potential mitigates nonstandard student behavior

Slide 18 **(2 min)** Teachable moments and tie in to student strengths and potential

Slide 19 **(10 min)** Reflect and share. Think of a student who is a language learner. What do they struggle with? What strengths do they possess that could feed into their potential success?

Slides 20-21 **(8 min)** Recap and process. Open the floor for questions and comments.

Exit Ticket: Write a strength that a language learner in your classes possesses. Describe how that strength can be used to activate student success.
Respect (it's more complicated than a two way street)

The basis of utilizing respect in the classroom includes:

- Convey students’ curiosity and uncertainty
- Not using sarcasm
- Being direct
- Giving students opportunities to make meaningful input in class

However, when the language learning factor is introduced, the lists you may have heard about acquire a new set of considerations.

Language Learner Considerations

One consideration that arises when talking about teaching language learners is the use of deficit language. This manifests itself when there is talk about what learners ‘cannot do’ or ‘did not know.’ This may also be seen in such phrases as ‘they’re so low’ or ‘they can’t even.’

Some problems with deficit language are:

- Generalizes people
- Limits people
- Is in danger of feeding into stereotypes

A Striking Alternative

The logical opposite of deficit language is the use of asset language. We focus on what our students can do and what they do know. With these thoughts in mind, we can build on student strengths to help them achieve.

Some examples are:

- Diverse experiences
- Nontraditional skill sets
- Collaborative expertise
- Individual/collective societal
- Practical knowledge
**How Does This Foster Respect?**

By showing students that you are not focusing on their deficits, but rather looking at their potential, you are building the foundations of a mutually respectful relationship between the teacher and the student.

**Share Out**

Share out some assets that language learner students in your classes have. Reflect on these assets and how they may be used to benefit the student’s journey toward success. Share out what you reflected on.

As you digest this information, please be aware that you are welcome to bring any questions of comments to your grade level EL staff.

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**Communicating Expectations (Help me help you)**

Another good educational practice that has a twist when it comes to our language learner students is that of expectations. It is always good to be clear with expectations. If students know how you want them to act, they can attempt to reach that goal. Deviations from this expectations cannot be explained through ignorance. However, what does this mean for the language learner student?

**Navigating Culture**

When all students come from the same or similar cultures, expectations translate seamlessly horizontally and vertically. Horizontal expectations touch the different aspects of a student’s life at home, school, and the community. Vertical expectations follow students through their life as they age up into seconding grade levels.

When there is a discrepancy between cultural expectations either horizontally or vertically it will disrupt how students process or make sense of what is expected of them.

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**Cultural Compass**

The same way we scaffold academics, we must also scaffold culture for our students. Language learners are processing input and translating continually. They need expectations to be modeled and explained in language learner friendly language.

Some examples of behavior that may be acceptable in other cultures and not in some are:

- Affection aggressive
- Overly loud attention seeking
- Making or not making eye contact

**Discuss**

What are some actions students produce that you suspect may be due to cultural misunderstandings? Share with your elbow partner and discuss some ways to scaffold classroom expectations.
Recap

Expectations give you a solid tool for building relationships with language learner students. The extra scaffolding and instruction it takes to guide language learners in understanding cultural and classroom expectations strengthens and develops student-teacher relationships.

And remember, you are welcome to bring any questions of comments to your grade level ESL staff.

Equitable Classroom Treatment (now we’re all equal)

People report fairness. The definition of equity is to provide fair treatment or what is necessary for an individual to succeed. Every individual comes with different strengths, backgrounds, privileges.

Therefore, it is up to the educator to create an environment where students understand they will be equipped with the tools they need to achieve their own success.

The Box Diagram (Equity Illustrated)

The diagram is intended to illustrate how the three people in the picture get the resources they need to achieve their goals.

Example

In terms of what we do for language learner students, we are ensuring that they have access to the means that will allow them to become successful. This can include learning through various sentence stems or frames that will promote student success.

For example:

Calling on students equitably in class needs to be more than making sure everyone gets a turn. Language learners may need to be prepared for repeated. The teacher can scaffold by checking a student’s understanding and then listing the student know he or she will be called on.

Reflect

What is one classroom procedure that you do that could be altered or added to to promote equity in your classroom?

Write this down on a note card or electronically.

How Does This Build Relationships?

Because fairness/equity are generally respected, the young people you teach will come to see you as the kind of teacher who has their best interests at heart. By equipping students with tools that will allow them to be successful, you will build student self-esteem and develop the positive relationship between yourself and the student.

As always, you are welcome to bring any questions of comments to your grade level ESL staff.
Redirecting Student Behavior

This section on positive relationship building is a natural culmination of the previous sessions detailing some ways we can build and develop our positive relationships with language learners.

Language learner behavior in the classroom that does not meet expectations can be attributed to cultural differences, misinterpreting the expectations, or backwash from perceived/regulated treatment.

Let’s explore what we can do to mitigate behavior and unlock student potential.

Teachable Moments

Every correction, whether it is academic or behavior related, can be used as a teachable moment. The times when behavior is treated as an instructional moment is where relationships between teachers and students are constructed. The positive relationships built in this way can be used to mitigate or prevent future straying from classroom expectations.

Time spent teaching appropriate behavior is never time wasted.

Reflect and Share

Reflect on a student who is a language learner who also struggles with following classroom expectations. How do you turn incidents of behavior into teachable moments? Share out with a partner.

Build It!

Putting all these elements together increases the depth of positive relationships with all students, but it especially helps language learners. Remember, they may have a strong background in social communication, but navigating the language and culture of schools is still a challenge for students who are learning English. We can all work together to support our language learners and promote their success.

In Closing

Remember, you are welcome to bring any questions of comments to your grade level EL staff. In addition, if there are specific students on the EL caseload that you would like additional support for, please feel free to contact us with your friendly EL grade level teacher.

We’ve got this!

References

Alexandar, M. (2017). Transnational English language learners: fighting on an airborne playing field. High school instruction, accommodations, and ELs. Language Policy, 16(2), 105-120.

ASCD.org
http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/191274/topic/Developing_Positive_Teacher_Student_Relationships


NAESE http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/191274/topic/Developing_Positive_Teacher_Student_Relationships
Website Link:

The Website is intended as a supplemental resource for adult learners to continue self-directed learning after attended the PD.

https://mypstr.weebly.com/
References


ASCD.com


