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Community and Safe Spaces for English Language Learners in Bilingual/Dual Immersion Settings

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This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education.

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**Community and Safe Spaces for English Language Learners in
Bilingual/Dual Immersion Settings**

By

Miriam Pazos

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2023

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores teachers' understanding of English Language Learners and newcomer students' need for a sense of belonging and safe spaces in a bilingual/dual immersion classroom. The goal was to identify some best practices for teachers to create an inclusive classroom for multilingual students. This research uses the lens of two frameworks, *Acompañamiento* (Sepúlveda III, 2011) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. According to Sepúlveda III (2018), *Acompañamiento* is a response to globalization where there is a need to understand a student's humanity and the need to be part of a community. *Acompañamiento* is about engagement with one another without goals and objectives. This framework provides a foundation for educational projects (Sepúlveda III, 2011). Culturally Responsive teaching is an approach where teachers seek to understand how students' backgrounds can be used to enhance their learning (Chung, Shih, & Cheng, 2020).

This study seeks to address the gap in the literature surrounding creating these inclusive spaces for English Language Learners and Newcomer students in the bilingual/dual immersion setting. The literature documented centers around creating community and spaces in high schools. This study addresses community building and safe spaces in bilingual/dual immersion classrooms, where research is limited.

Data was collected through 45-60 minute individual interviews with bilingual/dual immersion teachers. All the participants interviewed are from Golden Valley TK-8 School and teach within various grades. The data was analyzed using an open coding process. Findings show effective strategies of creating community and safe spaces for ELL students in Bilingual/Dual immersion settings are the importance of creating a second home in the classroom, adapting the practice of “mirrors and windows” in the classroom and developing relationships with families. The findings have important practice implications for elementary teachers.

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Introduction

“It's not even don't even worry about the academics, at least for the first month, you're establishing your safety.” This was a quote from an interview that was conducted for this study. This teacher participant understood the importance of establishing safety in the classroom. What brought me to this project was a series of questions, such as Why are some English Language students unable to connect with their peers at school? Do they feel a part of their school community? Do they feel safe? These were all questions that arose before the start of this research which led to the purpose to understand how teachers can best support their English Language Learners’ social emotional needs prior to engaging in primarily academic content.

Bilingual and Dual immersion have been a topic of discussion for schools for some time. In 2016, an NPR article talked about the different models that are being used to educate English Learners and dual immersion was one of those models. The author of this article states that “parent interest and community acceptance to dual immersion has provided a lot of support for English Learners. “They're no longer seen as ‘deficient’ but as students who can and do succeed” (Sanchez, 2016). Dual immersion changes the way English Learners are viewed in the classroom and prevents experiences of language and cultural identity loss. From personal experience, I witnessed and experienced this first-hand growing up. I was an English Language Learner who went to an English only school. I was expected to only learn in English, and we were expected to learn about what was in the curriculum.

Another NPR article discusses the desire of Latine parents who want their child in bilingual immersion programs. The author of this article explained that one reason both parents and educators think children should be in an immersion program is that, “The loss of Spanish-language fluency among native-born Latinos is a widespread phenomenon” (Korducki, 2014).

Bilingual immersion is one way to make sure students can learn to read, write, and speak in both English and Spanish. I personally am living proof of this phenomenon. I grew up with immigrant parents that only spoke Spanish. I learned English fairly quickly due to there being mostly English television shows for kids. I attended school where instruction was only given in English. My mom used to talk about my upbringing and how I would only want to speak in English. She would tell me that at home we speak in Spanish and at school was the only time I could speak English. One time on the way to school, I did not speak a word to her the whole drive, which was out of the ordinary for me because I was a talkative child. The minute we entered the parking lot, I started talking to my mom in English. My mom got upset with me and told me not to talk to her in English, only Spanish. I responded back to her saying you said at home we speak Spanish and at school I can speak English and we are here in the parking lot. This was just the beginning of me losing that part of my identity as a Guatemalan-American. I embraced that American side by learning, becoming fluent in English and in the fifth grade, I became a redesignated English speaker. However, I was losing that language side of my Guatemalan identity. I eventually entered a journey to recover that identity that was buried due to the English-only instruction. I decided that I needed to take some Spanish courses in high school and in university to make sure I could recover that part of my identity I lost so I can eventually use it to make valuable connections with English learner families.

In high school, I started to become aware of other English Language Learners' experiences. I noticed how all the newcomer students were in their own group, while all the reclassified ELLs that had similar experiences as myself were in their own group as well. There were rarely any interactions between these two groups when I thought there should be. These groups benefit from interaction as a community and supporting one another and I began to

wonder why they are not interacting. My personal experiences informed my interest in this thesis topic.

As a student in a teacher preparation program, I also learned how important it is to talk about how to best support English learners because they are a large percentage of ELLs in our California school system. In fact, there are a total of 2,360,744 students who speak a language other than English in their homes and this is about 40.1% of California's public-school enrollment. Of those students, 65.9% are in elementary school, with 82.03% of students with a native language of Spanish. This means that California has there a large population of students who are learning English. Teachers need to understand how to create community and safe spaces for these students in their classroom.

Statement of Purpose

Many researchers address the topic with community and safe spaces in various ways. One researcher found that to create a community for English language learners is through programs where they empower the outside community to work together and share responsibilities to better their economic status. (Figueroa, Baquedano-Lopez, & Leyva Cutler, 2014). Other researchers found that creating safe spaces means having students share stories that are through activities where they indirectly express their immigration status or identity (Figueroa, 2017) or processing those experiences through restorative circles (Pentón Herrera & McNair 2021). One researcher came up with a new framework to help address the understanding of English Learners. This framework is called Acompañamiento which is the response to globalization (Sepúlveda III, 2011). He found that there were three desires that migrant students had that should be addressed in the classroom (Sepúlveda III, 2018). Those desires are to be a part of a group, be true to oneself, and to feel at home. Another framework mentioned in the conversation was Culturally

Responsive Pedagogy. Some researchers found that teachers should provide opportunities for students to share their authentic stories and use those stories to help support their learning (Reyes & Zermeño, 2018). For more discussions about the literature reviewed for this project, including community and safe spaces, see Chapter 2: Literature Review.

Though researchers present many ways to support English language learners, there were some gaps in the literature. Basically, there were some groups missing in the discussion. The literature provided great insight into how to support preschool and high school English learner students, but what about the elementary grades and what about students who are enrolled in the bilingual and dual immersion classrooms? This study addresses a combination of the elementary-aged students and students in bilingual and dual immersion classrooms, who are included in the discussion about creating community and safe space for English language learners. The purpose of this study is to document strategies that help create community and safe space for English language learners in the bilingual/dual immersion setting.

Overview of the Research Design

This qualitative research study asked bilingual and dual immersion teachers at Golden Valley TK-8 school to be part of individual interviews to discuss their experiences and share the strategies they use to create community and safe spaces with English Language Learners. I had the opportunity to student teach at the school where I observe and also taught in one of the Spanish Immersion classrooms where I observe the strong community created by these teachers. Since I was last there, teachers started to slowly implement dual immersion classrooms to meet the desires of the community. This study looks through a constructivist worldview, where teachers will share what they believe is working in the classroom and I as the researcher will seek to understand their viewpoints because the meanings are varied and multiple (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). This research seeks to answer the following question: How can teachers create a community and safe spaces in the bilingual classroom for English Language learners?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study showed that teachers found that creating the classroom as a second home, implementing the concept of “windows and mirrors” and developing connections with families can foster community and safe spaces for English learners in the bilingual/dual immersion setting. This study has implications for practice and policy that includes teachers creating culturally accessible content and the continuation of dual immersion programs. For deeper discussion of implications on practice and policy, see Chapter 5: Discussion. It is important to continue to find ways to provide each student with the support they need to feel comfortable and included in their classroom environment. This study provides some effective practices for creating community and safe spaces for diverse English learner students, not only in bilingual/dual elementary classrooms but in other classroom settings as well. It is necessary to recognize the importance of supporting English learners academically but also socially and emotionally. These students need to be seen by their teachers and they need to feel they belong and are safe; this study provides insight into how teachers can support those needs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

When building a safe community for English Language Learners (ELLs), the literature focuses on how these students can fit into the classroom community rather than how educators can welcome and include these students as we improve the building of community. While this research project focuses on how teachers can create that space of belonging and community in their classrooms, various researchers' findings brought value to this study. There is a need to understand English Language Learners' need to be a part of and safe in the community and figuring out the best practices to do so in the classroom. It is important to reach all students where they are no matter what their background. As educators, the focus when it comes to English Language Learners is to help with their language skills, but what about their social skills? The following review of the literature will go into what researchers have said about the social needs of these students and how educators can create those spaces in the classroom.

Roadmap

The following review of literature includes research conducted within the last eleven years. Some of the questions that were used to guide the research are: how do educators build community with ELLs? How do we create safe spaces for newcomers? What frameworks relate to community building and safe spaces? With these questions in mind, a couple of themes emerged from the literature review that supports this research.

In the first section of this review, I discuss community building for English Language Learners. I then go into how to create safe spaces for newcomer students. Next, I will discuss a theoretical framework called *Acompañamiento*. The final theme from the literature which will be discussed is aspects of Culturally Responsive Teaching (or pedagogy) as related to building community for ELLs and newcomers.

Community Building for English Language Learners

Some researchers defined the important part of community building for ELLs as about students feeling valued, which leads to students feeling motivated to do well academically (Redding et al., 2011). Another study finds community building is about making the school feel like an important part of students' lives (Roxas, 2020). I define community building for ELLs, taking some parts from both studies. Community building is about creating a space where students feel seen, valued, and have an important place in their classroom where they can be themselves. This is an equity issue as some ELLs may not feel part of their school community even when their academic needs are being met as their social skills may not be adequately addressed. Several studies have explored community building for English Language Learners (ELL) (Figueroa, Baquedano-Lopez, & Leyva Cutler, 2014; Dover & Rodríguez-Valls, 2018).

One study was conducted at “La Escuelita” which has a Spanish immersion bilingual preschool, a bilingual afterschool program, and a Spanish-language family literacy program. The research focused on the afterschool program where the students participated in an annual event called La Cosecha which is a school-based, community-wide initiative that merges garden-based learning, heritage-language maintenance, and economic empowerment (Baquedano-Lopez, Figueroa, & Leyva Cutler, 2014, p. 60). The goal of La Cosecha is to provide low-cost produce to the community near La Escuelita. The authors found that this helps empower the community through shared responsibilities. How students feel about their outside community may contribute to how they feel inside their school and classroom community. Understanding how they fit is key to helping ELL students feel welcome.

A study on a teacher training program seems to structure this conversation about community building for ELLs as one about how ELLs fit into the existing community, not how

educators integrate ELLs into the class community by adjusting and improving the community with these students in mind. The Summer Language Academy, which is an innovative district-university-community partnership, uses a framework that is broken into four topics: Who am I?, Exploring Family Values and Culture, Understanding Community, and Understanding Myself within my Community (Dover & Rodríguez-Valls, 2018). This framework seems to focus on how ELLs can fit into an existing community rather than be included in meaningful ways as the community is adjusted and improved.

Safe Spaces for English Language Learners

When talking about safe spaces in the classroom, it is important that educators understand that ELLs (especially those classified as newcomers) are trying to navigate a new environment. They are faced with many uncertainties. They may not feel safe or comfortable at first entering the brand-new class community but also may carry other stressors on top of the new environment. One researcher stated that “learning a language together fosters social integration by helping students engage in conversations with their peers; however, teachers should make a note to create safe spaces in which all children feel emotionally safe to take risks using a new language” (Rizzuto & Steiner, 2022, p. 192). It is inequitable when ELLs do not feel safe in their place of learning; school is a place where they should feel to take academic risks. Several studies explore considerations for creating safe learning environments that support English Language Learners (Cairo, Sumney, Blackman, and Joyner, 2012; Figueroa, 2017; Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2021).

Figueroa (2017) conducted a study on the openness of students to talk about their immigration status and asked why some students hide their status. The study investigates the history of silence on immigrant status, looking at the Plyer vs Doe decision, which stated that

students can have an education no matter their parents' or their own immigration status. This federal education policy also meant schools in the United States adopted what is called a "Don't Ask" policy, where school employees are not allowed to ask families about immigration status; this led to a "Don't Tell" practice, due to fear of students and families losing rights if immigration status was shared with officials within and beyond the school. This study showed that school curriculum can influence students' decisions to open up or stay silent about their immigration status. The authors also noted that if teachers allow students to indirectly express their identity, then they are more willing to be open about their experiences rather than through activities that require them to explicitly state out their identity (Figueroa, 2017). With that being said, students will close off or stay silent about their immigration status if they do not feel safe and secure; this scenario can also affect whether they feel part of their classroom community.

Cairo, Sumney, Blackman, and Joyner (2012) described a program they developed in Kentucky called F.A.C.E. time, which stands for Families and Communities Educating. It is a support program for refugee and Latino immigrant children and their families. The program's goals are to provide language and academic adaptation support, cultural and social emotional support, family support, and community support (Cairo, Sumney, Blackman, & Joyner, 2012). The researchers involved in the study took into account that many immigrant families have a variety of stressors in their lives when adjusting to life in a new country. They recognized that these students have other needs besides language and academic needs. This 2012 article touches on how education policies only go as far as addressing the academic and not necessarily social - emotional needs of students. F.A.C.E ultimately becomes an example of how a community can come together to create something positive. There may be some aspect of what F.A.C.E has done

in the larger community that can be used in the classroom to create that safe environment for ELLs.

Pentón Herrera and McNair (2021) talk about reimagining the way ELLs look at the classroom by transforming it from a place to learn English to a place of meditation, reflection, and healing for students and ourselves. Pentón Herrera and McNair (2021) stated that “restorative circles have the power to bring our ELs together as they navigate the many processes involved in arriving in a new country, including culture shock, language negotiation, and personal and mental healing” (p. 8). This study offers a new perspective in that the classroom is no longer just a place to learn but also another place in which students can take refuge. This reframing of the classroom may help educators think about what stressors newcomers may be carrying and to keep their unique situations and stressors in mind when trying to create a safe environment in the classroom.

Acompañamiento

Acompañamiento is a framework I was interested in when I first started this research project. This framework illustrates the importance of students needing to be part of a community and navigating how to support each student in finding that place where they feel safe and that their needs are met. Sepúlveda III (2018) created the framework Acompañamiento, which is based on border epistemology and is a response to globalization. One key concept of the framework is understanding the need to understand a student's humanity and the need to be part of a community. Sepúlveda III (2018) found that there are three desires of the migrant students: the need to belong, to be a part of a group; the need to be true to oneself; and the desire to feel at home. The author found it important that Latine students, those born in the U.S., and migrant students should develop dialogue with one another to understand Latine and U.S. culture. They

also found that “healing and freedom” are powerful tools that are integral to the teaching and learning process (Sepúlveda III, 2018, p. 67). This study documented a need to look into how to start a dialogue with students in order to understand one another's culture. All newcomers eventually, after integrating into U.S. society, become ELLs, but not all ELLs were newcomers. Some of these students were born in the U.S. so they know about how society works in the United States. Each dialogue with ELLs can vary with each grade level. One purpose of this project is to understand how to help ELL and newcomer students feel part of their school community by supporting one another and understanding each other's struggles. It is important to realize this is an equity issue when educators just generalize ELLs as one group when each ELL's experiences vary, and educators need to understand each perspective and understand what each student needs when it comes to feeling a part of their school community.

Núñez-Janes and Ovalle (2016) viewed Sepúlveda III's (2011) research in relation to activism. Núñez-Janes and Ovalle (2016) theorized the significance of lived experiences, improvisational ideas, and actions as important elements of *Acompañamiento* among undocumented youth. They looked at the experiences of three young activists and tried to look at their experiences through the lens of *Acompañamiento*. They found the significance in seeing what is important to these young people and how best to support them.

This study (Núñez-Janes & Ovalle, 2016) showed how *Acompañamiento* can relate to activism. For this research project, I center strategies that can be used to create community and safe spaces but recognize that activism can also be something teachers can do to create community in their classroom. Núñez-Janes and Ovalle (2016) show how immigration can be a possible topic of discussion teachers can have with students, especially with English Language Learners, because it is something that these students tend to know and/or think about.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching (or pedagogy) has many characteristics similar to other frameworks such as Ethics of Care and Translanguaging. Ethics of Care is a framework that centers learning about students' backgrounds and Translanguaging is about providing for students a way to embrace their native language in order to reach the curriculum. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has benefits for all students, not just ELLs. "Teaching emergent bilingual learners (or ELLs) with a culturally responsive dialogic model appears to have traction in general for all students in a gateway content area" (Pedro R. Portes et al., 2018, p. 7). One researcher found that social-emotional competencies are critical to the authentication of CRT and learning in schools (Donahue-Keegan, Villegas-Reimers, & Cressey, 2019). Another study states that CRT "... can facilitate teachers' understanding of how students' cultural backgrounds and experiences can be used to enhance student learning" (Chuang, Shih & Cheng, 2020, p. 2443). In this research project, CRT is defined as educators using pedagogy in response to get to know their students' cultural, emotional, and educational background in order to provide support and meet them where they are. No matter what their English language proficiency is, all students deserve to receive the support they need in an equitable way. That can mean adjusting the curriculum to accommodate the culture of the students or providing space to use home language. There have been studies that used aspects of Culturally Responsive Teaching in order to create community and safe spaces for ELL students (Dávila & Linares, 2020; Poza, 2019; Reyes and Zermeño, 2018).

Dávila and Linares (2020) were conducting a study on Ethics of Care and how teachers, specifically English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, perceive care in their relationships with multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual students with diverse immigration backgrounds

during a time of anti-immigration sentiments. The study was broken into two parts, how teachers conceptualize care in their relationships with newcomer ELLs and how their perceptions of care frame their sociopolitical concerns that extend beyond the classroom (Dávila & Linares, 2020). Teachers in the studies conceptualized care as getting to know their students' background in order to advocate for their educational needs. They also found the importance of promoting students' primary language to help improve engagement, show comprehension of content, and establish a welcoming classroom environment (Dávila & Linares, 2020, p. 363). For the second part, the teachers wanted to create a space in their classroom that feels safe and welcome despite the sociopolitical climate. According to Dávila and Linares (2020), they saw that caring through empathy and trust created a positive classroom climate, reduction of absences, and overall greater academic engagement among students.

These authors emphasize allowing students to use their primary language as this is an important aspect of meeting students where they are and providing them the support they need (even if it means allowing them to use their native language). Through allowing students to use their native language, teachers create an inclusive community in the classroom where newcomers and ELLs feel comfortable in the classroom because the language is not a dominant barrier. The study's findings (Dávila & Linares, 2020) provide some insight into how students react to teachers using ethics of care to create a safe environment for students during a time of anti-immigrant sentiments. This study was conducted with high school students; however, it has some aspects that are transferable for elementary school students.

Another study looked at bilingual youth and how students leverage their multilingual and multimodal communicative competencies to forge alliances, tell stories, and reject stereotypes (Poza, 2019). The study investigates how students identify with both Spanish and English and

how they used that to their advantage. The author considers how students interact using Translanguaging and using it for storytelling. The study views translanguaging as an effective resource for students to use in communication, developing friendships, and narrating stories, both fiction and nonfiction. In fact, the author discusses how students create an identity with Translanguaging and emphasized that Translanguaging is something students can make use of to further their learning. Making connections between students helps create an environment where students can be comfortable to translanguage in order to feel part of a community. This also can be seen as a middle ground to all newcomers to feel comfortable and safe to express themselves in their classroom community.

Reyes and Zermeño's (2018) point in their research was to bring across the importance of cultural pedagogy in schools in order to support English Language Learners and newcomers. They talked about five principles that a teacher may follow that are crucial for building and sustaining empowering cultural conditions (Reyes & Zermeño, 2018). The principles were: asking questions before making assumptions; paying attention, listening, and learning; co-cultivating culture with students; cultivating and nurturing the conditions for play, being reactive, and working collaboratively; designing opportunities for students to share their authentic stories. In multicultural/multilingual classrooms, the culture is highly dynamic, and it is necessary to be open to collaboratively make effort towards inclusivity (Reyes & Zermeño, 2018). Reyes and Zermeño (2018) make it clear that, as educators, we have to constantly reflect on our practices and remember to keep students at the center when creating classroom conditions.

These findings are helpful to consider because when teachers think about creating an environment for students, it is not always considered that students come from different cultural backgrounds, and we must accommodate for those differences. We may think about creating a

welcoming environment where all students feel welcome, but how can educators do this when each student's experience is different from one another? Even students who come from the same country may have different experiences that shape who they are. Reyes and Zermeño (2018) painted an outline where educators can start to create a space where students can feel comfortable in their classroom community and open up about their identities and experiences. Through following these principles, students can learn from one another and hopefully foster relationships between newcomers and English language learners.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed for this project has made many contributions to meeting the social needs of English Language Learners. It provided various strategies that can be used in the classroom for students to feel comfortable in their learning environment. Most researchers seem to agree that in order to address English Language Learners there is a need to know these students and where they are coming from. What most authors find most important to know may vary; they all seem to come to the consensus that to work with ELLs, you need to know them and respond to who they are. This is an important part of creating equitable, inclusive, and safe spaces in classrooms. This research project addresses a gap in the literature where elementary ELL and Newcomer students' sense of belonging in the classroom will be added into the discussion. While scholars address how to create a sense of belonging in high school and higher education, I want to address how to do that with elementary students. The purpose of the research is to find strategies to create community and safe spaces in a bilingual/dual immersion classroom for English Language Learners.

Chapter 3: Methodology

There have been multiple studies about effective strategies to create community and safe spaces in the classroom for English Language Learners. They ranged from the Baquedano-Lopez and Leyva Cutler (2014) study about after-school involvement in the outside community, Figueroa (2017) study of students' openness of disclosing immigration status, and to the Sepulveda (2011) theoretical framework of Acompañamiento. Most studies focused on high school students' sense of community. Therefore, more data is needed to see how we can effectively create safe and inclusive environments for English Language Learners at the elementary level.

Research Questions

This study focused on educators' responses to a series of questions, presented through a 45-60 minute interview about the educators' perspective on what should be done. To this end, the interview questions were formed based on the following central questions: How can teachers create a community and safe spaces in the bilingual classroom for English Language learners?

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

In my research on strategies to create community and safe spaces in a bilingual/dual immersion classroom, I took a constructivist worldview because I seek to understand the teachers' view on what is working in the classroom to include English Language Learners (ELLs) in their classroom community. The data was collected through qualitative individual interviews with bilingual/dual immersion teachers about their experiences working with English Language Learners. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experience... meanings are varied and multiple" (p. 8). I wanted to understand what these teachers are seeing in the classroom and the work they have done to make their

classroom welcoming for these students. I wanted to get a variety of perspectives to develop an overall understanding about what strategies can help students feel safe and a part of their community.

To understand what strategies are successful in creating a safe and inclusive environment for English Language Learners, I need to understand the environment they are in and what teachers are doing to support their social emotional needs. The way to accomplish this is talking with the teacher and asking them to share their experiences and compare them with others' experiences and my own. This aligns with Creswell and Creswell (2018), who state that "...[constructivist] researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participant through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researchers' own experiences and background" (p. 8).

I chose to use qualitative methods in order to understand strategies that can be used in the classroom to help support English Language Learners' need to be included and feel safe in their school community. This allowed me to focus the research purely on the lived experiences of bilingual/dual immersion teachers working with English Language Learners. Creswell and Creswell (2018) provide various approaches to qualitative research and the one most relevant to this research project is phenomenological research which, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) put it, "describes the lived experience of the individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (p. 13). The phenomenon that my research investigated was working with English Language Learners and creating a sense of belonging for these students. I wanted to investigate the patterns among bilingual/dual immersion teachers' thoughts about creating such an environment for their students which culminated in a list of

effective strategies that other educators can use in their classrooms. I decided that the route I needed to take is to conduct individual interviews with bilingual/dual immersion teachers to discuss their experiences providing safe spaces and a sense of belonging for their English Language Learners.

Research Design

This is a qualitative interview study. Data was collected through individual interviews with bilingual/dual immersion teachers. All the educators interviewed are from the same school site and teach within various grades. The 45-60 minute interviews were conducted either virtually through Zoom or in-person based on teachers' preferences.

Research Site and Entry to the Field

The school site where this research was conducted is at a K-8 school in Northern California, which will be referred to as Golden Valley TK-8 School. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the school and teachers. This school serves a total of 618 students between the grades of Transitional Kindergarten through 8th grade. There about 88.6% Hispanic/Latine students, 0.6% African/African American students, 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native students, 3.2% Asian students, 6.1% White students, and 0.9% other races. The ratio of teachers to students is one teacher to about 21 students. This school was purposely selected because of the high number of English Language Learners in attendance, the site hosted the researcher's previous student teaching experience, and the school site includes bilingual instruction and has recently started a dual immersion program. After conversations with the principal, they approved the proposed study. This study did not disrupt the school day.

Participants and Sampling Procedures

The participants involved in this research project were two bilingual/dual immersion teachers at the same school site that each teach a different grade level. They all work with English language Learners of varying English proficiency. Some of the teachers also have newcomer students in their classrooms. See Table 1 below for additional information about these teachers and their classrooms.

Table 1 Participating Teachers

Teachers	Ethnicity	Grade Level	Bilingual or Dual Immersion	Second Language being taught
Yara	Latine	1st	Dual	Spanish
Ana	Latine	5th	Bilingual	Spanish

Prior to being interviewed, each teacher reviewed what the research was about with the researcher and looked at the types of questions that would be asked. Each teacher participant also gave consent to participate in the study, reviewing and signing the informed consent form.

Methods

In order to understand the strategies current teachers are using to create community and safe spaces in their classrooms for English Language Learners, 45-60 minute individual interviews were conducted with each of the bilingual/dual immersion teachers. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions about strategies they use in their classrooms to create a sense of belonging and safe spaces (see Appendix B for the interview questions). Interview questions included the following: “What are the strategies you are using in your classroom to help your English language learners feel a part of their school community?” and “What are ways you create safe spaces in your classroom for the newcomers that are navigating a new environment?” The goal of these questions was to gain insight into what these teachers are doing in their

classroom to provide the social and emotional support for their ELL students. Other questions included, “How effective do you think these strategies are in creating the feeling of belonging in your students?” and “How effective do you think these strategies are in creating safe spaces for your newcomers? How well do you think they adjust?” These questions address teachers’ perspectives about which strategies are working (or not) in their classrooms to provide social emotional support for ELL and newcomer students. Other interview questions included “What are your thoughts about adjusting curriculum in a way students can make connections with their own cultures?” and “What should teachers know about creating a safe and welcoming classroom community with English Language Learners and newcomers in mind? What advice do you have?” The goals of these questions were to gain insight into teachers' willingness to change their way of teaching to accommodate these students' needs and what they find is most important to know in order to provide safe spaces and create community in the classroom.

The interviews were conducted before or after school hours at a time, date, and location/method chosen by the interviewee. The individual interviews were recorded on the my laptop that is password protected. Each interview was transcribed. Notes were taken during the interview but did not include any names or identifying information (e.g., addresses, phone numbers, personal references).

Data Analysis

Data was collected through qualitative open-ended interviews with bilingual/dual immersion teachers at Golden Valley TK-8 School. I used my phone or laptop as a recording device to record each individual interview. Throughout the interview, I wrote key phrases having to do with community building and creating safe spaces for English Language Learners. I also made note of the effectiveness of each of the strategies noted. Similarly, immediately after each

interview, I wrote analytic memos for each individual interview. Then I categorized the participants' experiences as they aligned with the *Acompañamiento* or Culturally Responsive pedagogies. The plan was that there should be a pattern for pedagogical practices most teachers are aligning with, if any. I also noted the successes and failures of strategies, and indicated what strategies seem to be the most effective in creating community and safe spaces. It was important in this research to make note of the kinds of strategies teachers have experience using and the tone they use in reflecting back on their teaching practices.

I used all three of Maxwell's (2013) strategies for qualitative data analysis: writing analytic memos post interview, categorizing strategies, including coding and thematic analysis, and connecting strategies, or narrative analysis. By creating memos, I was able to compare and contrast the differences and similarities in multiple interviews based on experiences teaching ELL students.

Memo writing was included in my methods post interview. I was able to view the mood, facial expression, and listen to the tone of my interviewee. Often, I found that just listening to a recording of the interview did not have the same tone. Memo writing also helped to note where the interview took place and what the circumstances were like during the interview in case that had anything to do with how the interviewee answered.

Before I began to interview, I created a list of words or phrases I expected to hear during each interview. These expected codes included community, safety, culture, content, support, funds of knowledge, ELL, newcomer, success, and connection. These codes worked as a mini hypothesis based on my own experiences and questions I had on the topic. When participants used similar words, I asked follow-up questions with the hopes of a more in-depth response, and I was then able to categorize their interview accordingly. During the individual interviews,

however, I put my own list out of sight, and I concentrated on the interviewee and the language they used. When they said a phrase or word that seemed important, I wrote it down. After the interview was done, I took those words and compared them to my list and categorized them accordingly. I continued to repeat that process again when I listened to the recording and transcribed the interviews (each interview was recorded and then transcribed for coding). This process was repeated with each individual interview.

Coding was used before, during, and after each interview. Peer coding was also used during the open coding process. I asked a peer to review the words I have written down based on the interviews and my peer created their own list based on the strategies used in creating community and safe spaces. After that, I used my initial codes to create a concept map where my codes became themes to figure out how to form the central findings of my research. Concept mapping involved the grouping of the coded words from the audio and transcribed interviews in two main categories: community building and safe spaces.

After concept mapping, I used connecting strategies to put together the similarities and differences between each interviewees' stories. Because each experience working with ELLs is subjective, I used a data analysis matrix that combined similar experiences (Acompañamiento strategies with Acompañamiento strategies and Culturally Responsive strategies with culturally responsive strategies.) This process made finding similar keywords and phrases easier throughout the process of interviewing and analyzing notes and quotes from my interviews.

Finally, I used focused coding by looking for similar or same words used among the participants. These words were either the most frequently used words or the most significant words or phrases used by participants to describe their experiences working with ELLs. By finding the patterns, I determined the words these bilingual/dual immersion teachers were using

when describing their most effective strategies, or in other words, I was able to find out what was most important to teacher participants in creating community and safe spaces for their ELL students.

Validity

I have had a deep attachment since starting my education career with wanting to find ways to support ELL students. As a reclassified ELL myself, I want to provide these students with the attention they need to thrive at school. In high school, I noticed the lack of community among the ELL students. The newcomers would be their own group and the reclassified ELLs would be another separate group. There is an understanding that newcomers were provided with extra language support; however, where was the unity among these groups? This personal desire for unity can conflict with the purpose of this study; when interviewing teachers about what they are doing in the classroom to create community, I may have bias as to whether I believe this is enough. Therefore, I implemented several strategies to address bias and ensure validity.

For one, I made sure the data was accurately collected and analyzed. In order to accomplish this, I used respondent validation or member checks. According to Maxwell (2013), “This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what the participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your biases and misunderstandings of what you observed” (p. 126). This allows the participants to take part in the research and have a say in how accurately I described their experiences and perspectives. This meant as a researcher, I did not just rely on rereading the transcription of the interviews, I presented some of my findings to the participants as a way to be able to comment back on the findings and listen to their thoughts on the accuracy of the experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Another check for validity used was peer debriefing, this is a process to have a research colleague review and ask questions about the qualitative study to make sure it resonates with other researchers besides the sole researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Throughout this study, I communicated with a peer in complete confidentiality about my research. This allowed for another layer of security that helps redirect my focus to what is said by the participants and not focus on my own personal biases. The peer debrief allowed for a way to hear other interpretations of the data beside my own.

Chapter 4: Findings

The study sought to answer one research question: How can teachers create community and safe spaces in the classroom for English Language Learners in the dual immersion setting? This question became difficult to answer because at the time of the research, bilingual/dual immersion teachers were going through many changes and challenges, for example participating in extensive professional development about teaching in their bilingual/dual immersion classrooms. Considering these time commitments, scheduling interviews became difficult. Two teachers were able to provide some time to respond and they provided some insights that help to begin to answer the research question.

These teachers both teach at Golden Valley K-8 School's bilingual/dual immersion program. Yara was the first teacher interviewed and she currently teaches 1st grade dual immersion. She has been teaching for multiple years at the school and taught both lower and upper elementary grades. Ana is a second-year teacher teaching fifth-grade Bilingual immersion. She is a product of the school district where she currently teaches. They both teach in Spanish and are latine teachers.

The findings showed that teachers can successfully create community and safe spaces in their classrooms for English Language Learners by creating a second home in the classroom, using the practice of “windows and mirrors” and developing connections with students' families.

Classroom as a Second Home

Throughout the interview process, I heard both teachers emphasize the same thing. They both talked about how the classroom is the students' second home. They both felt that school is a place where students are most of the time and it is important that it feels like a home for them, that they are welcomed and feel they belong. This would allow students to have this sense of a

safe community where they will have their back and support them. Ana, the fifth-grade bilingual teacher stated the following:

I'd definitely like to say, like our classroom is a family depending on like, no matter whether we were born here or just came, or your family is Mexican or Salvadorian or Peruvian. We're all still a family, and we should hold each other accountable as such, so definitely think that I personally believe that my classroom culture has been very connected.

She comprehended that the classroom was a place where students can sense they are part of a family and there is a connection between each of the students. There are various ways that the teachers have stated that work well with creating these second homes for English Language students in the bilingual/dual immersion classrooms. These included creating classroom norms, starting community circles, and having a buddy system.

Classroom Norms

The teachers made sure from the beginning of the year to set up classroom norms. This allows them to set up the expectations of respecting one another no matter what. When a newcomer came into the classroom, those expectations of respect were already in place. Ana felt there was a need to set up the expectation that this class is a family, and it needs to be treated as such. She said:

Yeah, I don't really think it just relates to like our school community... cause sometimes they'll leave like no huge mess. And that's normally, that's like a kid student thing. But I tell them like, hey, you are here. This amount of the hours in the day, like I'm here. This amount of hours in the day. We have to treat this like our home. We have to treat everyone here who is helping us attend to our homes, our custodians, the principal. Everybody here has something to do within our household. Our home. How can we help? What can we do? And so, there are really good and understanding that.

Ana talked about how much time students spent at school and the importance of taking care of the classroom community like it is their home. They need to treat everyone in their school community with respect like they would treat their family and home. She further explained how

her students were able to understand that their classroom is another home where they can feel safe and secure.

And sometimes I see them just really connecting to the fact that, yeah, this is home, like I can, you know, just hang out here. And I know I feel safe. I'm in a safe environment. It's like I'm in my room. I'm in a safe environment. I am doing my work, I'm in a safe environment. I'm doing my work doing what I need to do. And I'm learning the only difference is probably that there learning curriculum, different types of curriculums, and each point of the day, but they know that they feel a sense of like home. This is also their home.

She believes it important to have her students understand that this is their second home, and you need to respect it as such. She set up the class with this expectation in the beginning that we need to take care of this home and the people in it. These norms in her classroom help to reinforce this respect for their classroom environment. It allows them to connect with their class and create a safe environment where all are welcome and are part of this family that these students have created because this is your home where you are loved and safe.

Community Circle

Community circle is a way for teachers to provide space for all students to be able to share something with their classmates. These teachers use this daily community-building practice to help students get to know each other, create a sense of community, and establish a safe environment. Yara tried to use these when she had a new student in her class. If there is a newcomer, she provides that space for them to share in their home language. She stated, "I'm making a community circle, and everybody goes around and says something about themselves and play some name games and really make those few days enjoyable for that student, so that they feel part of the family..." She tries to make sure that those first few days are about making sure the students are comfortable and safe in this brand-new space they are entering. She said, "It's not even don't even worry about the academics, at least for the first month, you're establishing your safety." She recognized that newcomers are going into this new environment

and may not feel comfortable, and she tries to make sure she does what she can to make sure she meets their needs. As she shared further, "Community circle, we have a new student in our class, what are some things that this student will really benefit from knowing in order to be successful in our home here?"

Ana's students have been together since kindergarten and they love to talk, so she uses community circles as a way for each student to share what they are thinking about in the topic they are discussing. She expressed:

Community circles every morning we have a morning meeting. We're either write or we'll write about the topic, and then they'll discuss, and then we'll talk about it, and I give every student a chance to talk, and it can take pretty long, because, you know, each student like some love to share a lot and some don't share that much, but the opportunity to just share out and really feel comfortable and knowing that everybody's listening to one another has helped a lot...

This has allowed her students to just let out everything and become comfortable sharing their stories and find a support system within their peers because they just allow themselves to become vulnerable and this vulnerability provides a safety net for newcomers that have joined her class.

Community circles have been a useful tool used by both teachers to create a sense of community and acceptance among their students. The community circles allowed the teachers to get to know their students on a deeper level and understand where their students are coming from. It provides a chance for each student to have a sense of safety and have an opportunity to share with their classmates. It is an enjoyable way for ELLs, especially newcomer students, to find safety and community in the classroom. They can openly discuss tough topics and dig deeper to understand what their peers are going through in their daily lives.

Buddy System

The buddy system can be used as a way for introducing a newcomer into their new classroom community. During the interviews, the teachers had their own way of having a buddy system that works for their own students. Ana felt that her newcomers and English Language Learners worked well when they were paired with a friend to work on class assignments. She also used this system when creating her classroom seating chart. She stated, "I actually seen a lot more benefits. If the student feels comfortable with a friend, they are more attentive to like work together with the rest of the group." She understood there were many benefits with having these groups based on students' friendships with one another; however, the other teacher, Yara, used the buddy systems a different way. She used these systems to introduce newcomers to the school and classroom. She tries to make an initial assessment of their comfort going into the new environment. Yara stated, "So it's just kind of assessing their comfort. Also assuring them that I speak Spanish and that I'm going to give them a buddy introducing them right away to someone I know I had picked ahead of time who's going to be a student that they can rely on." Yara felt it was important to provide the students with a buddy that would actually help a newcomer know where things are and help them in whatever way they can without neglecting their schoolwork. She tries to make sure to find that peer that is the best match for the newcomer student.

Windows and Mirrors

The teachers talked about something called "windows and mirrors." This is where you see representation of people and their experiences in the class curriculum and literature that is different from the students' backgrounds and experiences (i.e., windows) and also see representation of people and their experiences that are similar to the students in the classroom (i.e., mirrors). In other words, do students have opportunities to learn about people like

themselves (like looking in a mirror) as well as opportunities to learn about people different from them (like looking through a window)? The teachers interviewed for this study recognized that using the concept of windows and mirrors is a great way to help students see things in different ways and having representation as well is important. They did this first through the transparency of their own background, representation of their class's culture, and the representation of cultures outside of the classrooms.

Teachers Background Transparency

The teachers found that their backgrounds had an impact on their students, and it should not be something to hide. It was important to share this part of themselves and their experiences with their students and frame it as a strength to start to teach their students about respecting and appreciating others' culture. Yara stated:

I think being a teacher of color also creates that space like wow, that she looks like me. She talks like me, we share common experiences, I think it's a blessing. I can't even say a disguise anymore because it's very obvious. But I think growing up as an EL myself, I didn't see any of my teachers who look like we had one teacher and like, I feel like because we share that connection. We didn't look a lot alike. But she was from Mexico, and she spoke Spanish, it just made me feel at home made me feel safe, I think. So, I have to say like, I think knowing the impact that I have in front of students is a big plus. And then using that to my advantage and using that to create that like common space.

Yara felt her background had an impact on her students and she tried to use that to her advantage to help her students become comfortable in their learning space, knowing they had someone who represented similar experiences they went through.

Ana was a product of the same school district as her students; therefore she had the most similarity to her students in terms of how she grew up. She stated, "I'm very transparent as to how I grew up... I definitely heard a lot of what most of my family went through, so I can relate with them in that sense and that helped them feel comfortable." She felt strongly about the importance of being open to students about where you come from and not just surface level

things but being vulnerable with students in order to connect with them and provide that space to be comfortable in their learning space. She also advised future teachers to...

Be honest with them. Think telling them your story, and not just surface level things like, Oh, I have kids, or I graduated from here. This is how long I've been teaching, you know, like, really dig in and kind of, let yourself feel vulnerable so they can see that too.

Ana is honest with her students, and she even tells them when she is having bad days. This gives her students opportunities to help figure out how to get through those days and that they are allowed to have bad days as well. They can be vulnerable with her and be safe to share those days with her and the class.

Representation of Class Culture

Representation is something a lot of people seek, and it is no different in the classroom. Students want to see themselves reflected in their classrooms. This could include their teachers looking just like them or seeing people like them in the curriculum and the literature. Yara stated, "I think that's like a self-identity piece, we do like a lot of self-portraits, a lot of literature that reflects in, like a mirror into who they are." She felt that students should be able to reflect on their own self and how they identify themselves. Who they are as a person should be reflected in the literature they are reading. She advised that teachers should be mindful of the kind of representation they are providing for their students in the books and content and finding what can be meaningful for the students. And she felt that teachers should always remind students that their home language will always be an asset.

Even though Ana was a second-year teacher, she had much insight about how students' culture should be incorporated into the curriculum they are learning. She mentioned how exciting it was to experience recent professional development on how to integrate students' cultures in their classrooms. She mentioned, "I personally, I've seen so much growth within my newcomer

students, very connected to their culture and connected to the material.” Of course, teachers need to teach the content standards to their students; however, both Yara and Ana felt that students' cultures should be able to be interwoven into the content they are teaching.

Representation of Cultures Outside the Classroom

The teachers agreed also that students should not just learn about themselves but also about other cultures outside of their classrooms. Ana talked about how her fifth graders will soon enter middle school where they will be exposed to other students that may not identify the same way they do. Her students have been in the same cohort since kindergarten. She stated:

They split into the Middle School section. So, they're gonna be, you know, surrounded by different people, by different cultures, by a different community so we definitely like, say, we can enjoy it like this, this is nice like, we're all here together right now, it's not gonna last.

She recognized that these students are going to get that "wake up call" when they are exposed to people that are different from them and she needs to prepare them to be open and respectful to those that are different from them. She wanted to create a space where they can appreciate each other and be ready to face what may come from their transition from elementary to middle school.

Yara feels she needs to reflect on what she is doing to help her students gain different perspectives. She talked about how she looks at the standards and what students need to get out of the material and what she can do for them to gain those different lenses. She reflected, “How can I like have a lens? On what I want to teach? What am I noticing my students are lacking? Or what are some things that my students could really benefit from being exposed to?” She tried to look at what she could do to make sure students can see things in different ways and be mindful of the kind of material she has available to them that not only reflects the students but also outside perspectives and experiences.

Developing Connections with Families

The teachers talked about the importance of making connections with families, which is reflective of their school community values. The school serves many low-income families; therefore, the school has a family center that provides support to these families in any way they can. Yara shared:

I made sure from the get-go that I connected the family with the family center, we are so lucky to have the services at our school where we're able to direct the family there or at least give them the tools to be able to navigate if it comes to going to the clinic, or where can they get free food or if it's clothing.

Both teachers have found that it is important to make connections with the families in order to get to know family life, get to know the students, and provide families with resources.

Get to Know Families

To get an idea of the whole students it is important to know what their family life is. Ana admits:

You, reach out, I don't reach out to my families as much of like every like everyday kind of thing. But at conferences. I do inform them, and I do let them know like, hey, I'm here for you, for whatever you need, because that's important to their home culture and what they experience at home is just as important as what they experience here.

She recognizes that she does not connect with families as much as she would like but she knows how important it is to connect with those families because whatever happens at home can have an impact on what goes on at school. She talked about how this is their second home and if students are having a bad day because of what happens at home, it translates into the classroom and knowing what goes on at home directly from the families helps to set up the class in a way that makes the students feel comfortable and safe at school.

Get to Know Students

The teachers recognized that they need to get to know the students and understand where they are coming from, like where they are from and how you identify, to really get to know this new family member entering your second family classroom, truly making a connection with the student. Yara takes the time to make those one-on-one times to create those connections with the students.

...taking some time during recess, taking some time putting the kids to do something independently. So, I could make that connection with the student and say, here's why I am I'm really happy you're here. Tell me a little bit about yourself and just kind of gauging with that.

She tries to make sure students know directly that they are wanted in the classroom, and they are a part of this second family. She uses this time to understand the students and their home life and get a sense of what they need emotionally before looking at the academics needs.

Provide Resources

These teachers have found that family is an important part of their students' lives. Fortunately, they are at a school site that are supportive families and helping them in whatever way they can. Yara explained how resourceful the school's family center is.

I was going to help them in any way or form I made sure from the get go that I connected the family with the family center, we are so lucky to have the services at our school where we're able to direct the family there or at least give them the tools to be able to navigate if it comes to going to the clinic, or where can they get free food or if it's clothing...

The family center provides families with all the need to help them in their time of need. Yara felt that it necessary to provide these services and provide families with tools needed to experience grounding. She knows that newcomer families most likely do not understand the school system here but having a place where they can get the information can help create safety and support in this new environment.

and giving the family like the tools or resources that they needed in order to just feel grounded with their experience in our new school system, because things operate that way differently, depending on where that child or what school experience they had in their former country.

The teachers admire that their school has created this environment where families are supported in every way and creating this sense of community, safety, and acceptance. The teachers share this same sentiment that Ana shared, “Yeah, I definitely think that we have such a beautiful school community where they do feel that sense of belonging from the minute they come.”

Conclusion

This study tried to answer the question: How can teachers create community and safe spaces in the classroom for English Language learners in the dual immersion setting? These findings provide insight into successful strategies that teachers can use in their bilingual/dual immersion classrooms to create community and safe spaces for their ELL students. The teachers who participated in this study create community and safe spaces for their ELL students in their bilingual/dual immersion classroom in three ways. They set up their classroom as a second home where students can treat everyone in their classroom with respect and be a part of their classroom family. The teachers educate their students through “windows and mirrors” to provide representation of themselves and exposure of others they may encounter. Teachers develop connections with their students' families to get to know their situations and provide them with the support and resources they need to be successful in the school system. Through these common experiences the teachers report that their students have a sense they belong and are safe in their classroom. These themes aligned with the themes found in the literature review, but also illuminate some additional gaps in the literature. Some of those gaps include what is the families and students' perspective of community and safe spaces and the impact of family centers.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This research tried to figure out the effective ways to create community and safe spaces for ELLs in bilingual/dual immersion settings. The findings fell under the following themes: Classroom as a Second Home, “Windows and Mirrors”, and Developing Connections with Families. This research found that previous research aligned with what bilingual/dual immersion teachers have discussed are effective strategies to support ELLs.

Sepulveda III (2018)’s research on his framework Acompañamiento is related to the common theme both teachers interviewed discussed, which was that they treat their classroom as a second home for their students. Sepulveda III (2018) found that migrant students had three desires with one of them being the desire to feel at home. The bilingual/dual teacher recognized that their students were in school as much as they were at home. They knew that, especially for their newcomers, they are coming into a new environment and there is going to be an adjustment period where they are trying to figure out the new school system. The bilingual/dual immersion teachers and Sepulveda (2018) found that this need for home is something important to address in the classroom. It is necessary to recognize that students need to feel like they have a sense of home at school to feel safe and a part of their classroom community. According to Dávila and Linares (2020) caring through empathy and trust are part of a positive classroom culture which creates an overall greater academic engagement in the classroom. These teachers expressed how they show care and create their classroom space as a space that their students can call home and be comfortable. As Yara expressed in her interview, “Love can go a long way.”

The research provided different ways to develop dialogue between ELLs in understanding their cultural background. Figueroa (2017) states that curriculum can influence the way students express their immigration status. He found that indirect expression was the way the

students were more likely to open rather than through activities where they need to explicitly express their identity. The teachers found ways their students can find comfort in being true about their identity and be able to share it with the class. Acompañamiento's other desire of migrant students is to be true to one's identity (Sepúlveda, 2018). The teachers and the researchers alike recognized the value of students' identity in feeling a part of their community. If they do not feel safe expressing their identity, then how can they have a sense of belonging in school? The teacher utilized community circles and classroom norms to provide safe spaces to express oneself in a safe and accepting environment. Pentón Herrera and McNair (2021) recommend using restorative circles to have power to navigate all the different processes they go through and be able to heal from it.

Implications for the Literature

Throughout the research the theme of second home came up multiple times. It took additional analysis to realize that both previous research and this study had this in common. Home was a keyword that was not expected to be a code to look out for in interviews. Home was mentioned by Sepúlveda (2018) when he talked about the three desires migrant students had. The bilingual/dual immersion teachers, Yara and Ana, both talked about how their classrooms were like a second home for their students. This may imply that there is a need to understand the importance of home for ELLs. It is important for teachers to set up their classrooms as a second home for their students to feel like they belong and are safe in the environment. Teachers should actively set up norms that promote respecting everyone in the classroom as if they were a family and treat everyone and everything like they would if they were at home. Teachers make sure their classroom is a place where everyone, new and old, can be a part of the classroom family and feel welcome, included, and safe and to be able to call the classroom home.

Families was another theme that came up in the interviews. In the literature review, families were not necessarily a topic of discussion. Cairo, Sumney, Blackman, and Joyner (2012) were one of the few research teams that made mention of providing support to ELL families. They talked about an outside program where they provide a variety of services to refugee and Latino immigrant children and their families. Yara and Ana spoke highly about their school family center providing similar services to their ELL family community. They both were prime examples of how providing the resources needed for families to succeed in a new environment can have a positive impact on ELL students. It helps create a community of support and a positive attitude in the classroom when there is a community to support you in your time of need. There is a need to further investigate how much developing connections can have a positive impact on students and their sense of belonging in the classrooms. Families should have a greater part in the discussion when talking about community and safe spaces because they are a part of an ELL's community circle.

Throughout this study, I came to the conclusion, like Pentón Herrera and McNair (2021), that restorative circles or community circles (as the participants called them) hold power for creating community among ELL students. It seems based on what the participants shared and from previous studies that in community circles there is a way to bring a group together through the sharing of similar experiences. Students are given a safe space to share their stories with no judgment and not only do the teachers understand their students, but their students seem to understand each other's stories and are able to support each other. This may indicate that community circles are something that should be tried and looked more into to see how powerful they are to create community in the classroom.

This study was able to add additional topics to explore when creating community and safe spaces for ELL students in bilingual/dual immersion classrooms. For example, this study included a bilingual/dual immersion classroom into the conversation. Most studies discussed how to create community in general education classrooms. Other studies focus on either preschool or high school but rarely the spaces in between. This research allows elementary teachers a chance to be part of the conversation. They were able to provide insight into what specific strategies they use in the elementary setting based on the frameworks mentioned in the literature review. Finally, this study brought some focus back into how to create community and safe spaces inside the classroom rather than how the outside students fit into an already established classroom community.

My original problem for this project was that there is a need to understand that ELLs have other needs besides academics: the need for a sense of security and belonging. This provides new insight for the academic literature because it provides a glimpse into what bilingual/dual immersion teachers perceive are effective strategies to create community and safe spaces for their ELL population. Their knowledge adds to a conversation in which they were not previously included; in this sense, the teachers building these communities became part of solving this problem. This study gave another perspective into what can be done to understand these students' social emotional needs that also need as much attention as the academics.

Implication to Practice and Policy

Teachers try some new ways to create community and safe spaces keeping their ELL students in mind. There are four things that all teachers should try in their classrooms even if they do not teach a bilingual or dual immersion classroom. Teachers should treat their classroom as a second home or family. This allows students to know they belong and are safe in the

learning space. Teachers should try to follow the advice from Yara that “Love goes a long way” and overall, care enough about each student and make sure they know it. Students should know they are seen by you as their teacher and that you will support them in whatever way you can. Teachers should be compelled to make content culturally accessible to their students. It is important to teach the content and standards, but it needs to reach all students. To do that teachers need to find ways that students can connect with the content through understanding who they are and where they come from. Finally, teachers need to involve families in any way they can. There should be open communication. It can be difficult when there is a language barrier but that should not be a reason for there to be a lack of effort to communicate with families; it is an even greater reason to try and help provide the necessary support they need to feel a part of the classroom community.

At the Golden Valley K-8 school, they have implemented ways to support their large Hispanic/Latine community. One of the ways was at first, they implemented a bilingual immersion program where any Hispanic/Latine student could be taught in both English and Spanish. They found success in this program increasing proficiency for bilingual students by providing confidence to these students to use their native language. They seem to make the emphasis that home language is an asset which Yara has mentioned she tries to emphasize to her students. The school eventually found that non-ELL families were interested in the program. This led to the gradual implementation of dual immersion starting in the lower grades and eventually moving up to the upper grades. These bilingual and dual immersion programs have benefited the school’s close community dynamic and should continue to grow and expand. This allows for not only reinforcing appreciation of home language but the appreciation of other cultures as well.

Another thing that the school is doing well in creating community and safe spaces is the implementation of an in-school family center. The participants talked highly about the family center supporting the ELL population at school. Their family center provides a variety of services (e.g., translations, food, or educational workshops). According to the participants these services have helped create a strong community in the school where families are getting the support they need to succeed in the system. Not all the schools in the district are fortunate enough to have a family center due to not having the population of families in need of these services. However, some forms of these family centers are beneficial to have in all schools to create this community where families are supported, which will later translate into the students feeling a part of the community.

This study provides a new perspective into how to best serve the ELL population. It is easy for ELL students to become isolated in the school system when there is lack of focus on the social emotional needs. It is valuable to acknowledge that schools are required to provide services to aid in the academic needs of ELL students but perhaps not their social emotional needs. This is an injustice to ELLs, because they are going through many hurdles in their education, and they are not all related to language. Once this is acknowledged teachers can use the strategies that will help ELL students sense safety and community in their classrooms.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

This study was conducted with a small sample size; due to time constraints, only two bilingual/dual immersion teachers were available for interviews. This creates a limited amount of data to compare and work with to get a sense of what these teachers were doing to support their ELLs sense of community and safety. The participants were of Latine background similar to their students and there was not any other perspectives to share, regarding different cultural

backgrounds and experiences. However, this does not mean the teachers' experiences were invaluable because these teachers understood where their ELL students were coming from because they once were ELLs themselves. It would have been interesting to hear a different perspective from teachers that did not identify with their ELL students' backgrounds.

Originally, this study could have extended and included students' perspectives into the conversation as well. However, due to the time frame of the research both perspectives could not be presented in this study. It would have been interesting to investigate how the students perceive community and safe spaces in the bilingual/dual immersion settings. It could provide a better understanding of exactly what these students need to feel safe and belong at school. What are those experiences and what are their stories they want to share? This could also provide insight into whether or not the strategies that the teachers claim are effective to create community and safe spaces truly work for ELL students. It would be interesting to hear their voices and express their experiences of safety and sense of belonging.

This study opens up other gaps in the literature that could be addressed in future research. The continuation of this study with more participants to hear other perspectives about the topic could add more to the discussion. This research can go further with adding the thoughts from families and students and their experiences of community and safe space in the classroom. Additional research could also compare schools with a low population of ELL students and consider how the findings differ from schools with a high population of ELL students. Finally, future research could focus on the role of family centers in a school and compare the community at the schools with and without family centers. These gaps can add more to the discussion on how to create community and safe space for ELLs.

Conclusion

This research project started with a search for effective strategies to support ELLs and help them feel a part of their school community and feel safe. I wanted to find ways to prevent the cliques I saw in high school, where these groups of ELLs were separated based on their language skills or the type of ELL they were. Theoretically, speaking these separate groups of students have the potential to become a strong community that can support one another; unfortunately, in my schooling experiences, this was not the case. My ultimate goal is to become that teacher that is able to create an environment in the classroom where students feel welcome and are able to form healthy relationships with one another no matter their differences or how new they are to the country. The vision of this study is that it can help teachers create inclusive environments for students of different backgrounds so they can become friends with anyone. Students that usually do not interact with one another can come together and form a healthy relationship. The hope of this study is that it will help inspire teachers to strive to support ELL academic needs while also supporting their vital needs to be safe and a part of a community.

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Appendix A
IRB Approval Letter

DOMINICAN
UNIVERSITY
of CALIFORNIA

Jan 23, 2023

Miriam Pazos
50 Acacia Ave.
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Miriam,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to approve your proposal entitled *Community and Safe Spaces for English Language Learners in Bilingual/Dual Immersion Settings* (IRBPHP Initial IRB Application #[11074]).

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

Michaela George, Ph.D.

Chair, IRBPHP

Cc: Katie Lewis

Appendix B
Individual Interview Questions

1. What are the strategies you are using in your classroom to help your English language learners feel a part of their school community?
2. How effective do you think these strategies are in creating the feeling of belonging in your students?
3. What are ways you create safe spaces in your classroom for the newcomers that are navigating a new environment?
4. How effective do you think these strategies are in creating safe spaces for your newcomers?
How well do you think they adjust?
5. What are your thoughts about adjusting the curriculum in a way students can make connections with their own cultures?
6. What should teachers know about creating a safe and welcoming classroom community with English Language Learners and newcomers in mind? What advice do you have?