English Language Instructors' Perceptions of Equity and Its Practical Implementation

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Abstract

This study examines the perspectives of English language instructors regarding equitable instruction in relation to adult community college English language learners. Equity in education is an important goal to improve student outcomes and redress historical injustices. However, research on equity in English language learning in the United States has primarily been conducted in American kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) settings, and when addressed in higher education, is usually related to institutional outcomes as a whole.

This study considered equity related to the diversity of the needs and goals of adult English language learners. It sought to understand how English language teachers working in programs that serve students of various needs and goals define equity and how they implement equitable instruction. Participants were recruited from Washington State Community Colleges, specifically from programs which serve international and domestic/resident students, who may have very different needs and goals, in the same program. The study provides more insight into how instructors define equity and serve students of diverse needs and goals. The design was qualitative and interpretivist and employed semi-structured interviews and a focus group to collect data. Braun and Clarke's (2022a) reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse the results.

Six main themes were developed through the data analysis. The study concluded that equitable instruction is made possible through the intentional efforts of instructors to facilitate access to content, learning, and cultural capital (theme 1), knowing students through centring the individual (theme 2), and prioritizing community and belonging (theme 3). The other themes highlight the factors that influence participant understanding of equity and their pursuit of providing equitable instruction. They are the instructor's attitude of service (theme 4), the impact of political and institutional factors (theme 5), and equity as a work in progress (theme 6). These findings can help instructors develop equity-mindedness and better serve all students to realize their needs and goals.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

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This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my grandmother Olga, who graciously ‘volunteered’ to be my first student.

Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Abbreviations and Definitions

The following terms used in this dissertation reference United States education and legislation.

1. BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and CALP: Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency were concepts conceived by Cummins (1979) to distinguish between the hierarchy of language acquisition.
2. CCRS: The CCRS are College and Career Readiness Standards which are used to measure outcomes of federal adult education programs in the United States. They are related to the Common Core K-12 (kindergarten through 12th grade) standards. In 2014, CCRS were tied to grant funding for adult education programs in the U.S. as part of federal funding for WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, see below) (Shin & Ging, 2019).
3. DEI: Commonly understood in the United States (U.S.) as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
4. WIOA: WIOA is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act which took effect in July 2015. The intent of this act is to develop the American workforce and prepare students for productive careers. WIOA is the source of funding for adult basic education programs in Washington state. AEFLA, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, is incorporated as Title II of WIOA and determines the grants for English language learning programs (Shin & Ging, 2019).
5. EAP: EAP refers to English for Academic Purposes, which Hagedorn and Li (2017) define as 'A program emphasizing formal or professional writing, presenting, and reading of academic literature' (p.232). International students often study in such programs to prepare for academic study in English at American universities.
6. IEP: Intensive English Programs are programs which are 'typically defined by the F-1 immigration status regulation for language training' (Szasz, 2009, p.194). F-1 visas require students to be enrolled in full time English study. This is a minimum of 15 hours of instruction. According to Blanco, Tanner, Hartshorn and Eggington (2020), many students who are enrolled in 'IEPs are international students seeking to improve their English before moving on to further their educational or professional goals' (p.2).

7. ESL: English as a Second Language programs may refer to adult basic education programs, or other programs where learners are learning English in an English-speaking environment. Hagedorn and Li (2017) point out that this acronym ‘assumes the student only speaks one other language, which may not be the case’ (p.232).
8. ELL/EL: ELL and EL refer to English Language Learners. While previously used primarily in the K-12 system, these acronyms are now primarily used to refer generally to all English language learners (Hagedorn & Li, 2017).
9. K-12 – This refers to kindergarten through the final year of high school in the U.S. educational system.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Research Context

Introduction to the Study

This study explores United States (U.S.) community college English language instructor perspectives on the meaning of equity and their implementation of equitable instruction in the classroom. It is not uncommon for classes of English language learners at institutes of higher education to be quite diverse. Students may have different ages, native languages, and regions of origin. In addition, Bergey, Movit, Baird and Faria (2018) illustrate how English language learners may have different motivations for learning English, goals for their careers, prior educational experience, and proficiency levels. Blumenthal (2002) describes the demographics of students in community college English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in 2002 and explains that at the time most of the students were immigrant and refugees, with 'a small minority' international students (p.46). She acknowledges the challenges of measuring the success of students when they have such different needs and goals and posed the question of whether 'programs that include both international students and immigrants and refugees benefit or hinder the progress of either group' (p.48).

After that study, though, the number of international students increased, warranting the demand for academic based programs, often Intensive English Programs (IEPs), for mainly international students who wanted to continue their studies. This increase is reflected in West's (2020) report that the enrolment of international students in IEPs in the U.S. exceeded 105,000 in early February 2015. However, between 2016 and 2021, several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, led to a significant decrease in international students and a re-evaluation of English language teaching programs in the U.S. Nott (2021) reports that IEPs were forced to make major changes. Schools were compelled to identify new ways to deal with the lack of funding due to lower enrolment, including in some instances, closing their programs altogether. To continue to serve international students, some institutions chose to merge separate programs, resulting in more international and domestic/resident immigrant and refugee students sharing the same classroom. This research investigates the perspectives of instructors who teach in a program that instructs students of very different needs and goals: immigrants and refugees, who may desire basic

skills necessary for navigating life in a new country and international students, who may be pursuing degree completion at American universities.

Equity is mentioned in many educational contexts, but too often there is no consensus on what is meant by the term. In their report for the International Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education,* Field, Kuczera, and Pont (2007) define equity as involving fairness, i.e., ensuring that situations in a person's life do not affect their opportunities for educational achievement, inclusion, and 'ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all' (p.11). However, Mameli, Grazia and Molinari (2020) suggest that equity is used to represent 'the degree of equal treatment from teachers' (p.352). Grubb, Badway, and Bell (2003) argue that an equity agenda in community colleges in the U.S. should increase access to marginalized students, such as individuals with low incomes, immigrants, individuals with obstacles to employment, criminal records, and disabilities. These students could then benefit from the skills provided by higher education. Grubb et al. (2003) assert, however, for such an equity agenda to succeed, 'other social and economic reforms', which address conflicting obligations to work and family must be implemented (p.236). Verstegen (2015) describes the three principles of equity that influence policy in U.S. elementary and high school public schools. They are horizontal equity, vertical equity, and wealth neutrality (pp.3-4). Essentially, these principles mean that students should receive equal treatment, except for 'legitimate and justifiable reasons,' and that the financial assets of a family should not affect the quality of a child's education (p.3).

Given that the meaning of equity in existing scholarship differs depending on context and situation, this research seeks to determine how instructors in a program of English language learners with diverse needs and goals, a) define equity, and b) implement equitable practices.

Context and Background of the Study

Community colleges in the U.S. have long served English language learners of diverse statuses and needs. According to Bergey et al. (2018), higher education in the U.S. serves the following types of non-native English speakers: international students, immigrants or refugees who have recently arrived, and Generation 1.5. Generation 1.5 students were born outside of the United States

yet educated in the American school system. They are usually fluent speakers but may need more support with academic skills. Szelényi and Chang (2002) examined the community college's role in educating these students. They concluded that immigrant and international students are served in a variety of ways: specifically, receiving counselling, attaining degrees, or strengthening language weaknesses. They emphasize that American higher education institutions need to be aware that the increase in students originally from other countries 'represents a distinct population with specific needs' (Szelényi & Chang, 2002, p.63). Importantly, when considering English language learners at a community college, Szelényi and Chang (2002) point out that services and policies are often determined based on the idea that immigrants are a 'homogeneous' group, despite the 'large array of backgrounds and needs these students bring with them to the educational environment' (p.70). Bergey et al. (2018) suggest that these students may have very different experiences with education, future goals, purposes for learning English and skill levels. Furthermore, colleges and universities may struggle to appropriately address student needs due to the collective grouping of these students as English language learners, or ELLs.

Viewing all English language students as indistinguishable means that students' own individual needs and goals may not be supported. Szelényi and Chang (2002) articulate the challenges for institutions to find 'appropriate ways for responding to the diversity of backgrounds and needs these students represent' (p.57). They state that although students are internally diverse, institutions respond to them as if their needs and circumstances are the same, thereby failing to support the diverse characteristics of the students.

David and Kanno (2021) also highlight this diversity in their study of ESL programs at U.S. community colleges. They explain,

> CC [community colleges] EL [English learners] populations are highly heterogeneous. CCs serve students whose English proficiency can vary from beginner to advanced; in age, from recent high school graduates to older adults; in educational background, from advanced degrees to little or no formal schooling; in goals, from 4-year college graduation to simply increased English proficiency for work advancement. (p.2)

Acknowledging that students have diverse needs and goals, community colleges have long operated discrete programs to serve specific populations. Domestic, or resident, English language learners commonly enrolled in Basic

Skills ESL programs. These programs are funded by WIOA, whose purpose is to develop the American workforce (WA State Employment Security Department, n.d.). The Center for Applied Linguistics (2010) affirms that adult ESL students in these classes often 'seek to improve their lives as individuals, community and family members, and workers' (p.1). ESL classes usually integrate skills, instructing and assessing reading, writing, speaking, and listening in one class.

In contrast, international students hold an F-1 visa, which allows them to stay in the U.S. solely for the purpose of academic study. Szasz (2009) points out, 'Many students in an IEP are international students seeking admission into a degree-bearing, academic program' (p.194). Because of this, international students were historically served mainly by programs that provided English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which Bergey et al. (2018) specify, provide content that has 'an emphasis on culture, and prepares them for coursework in their academic discipline' (p.4). These programs were often IEPs (Ladika, 2018). IEPs are characterised by serving students who hold F-1 and J-1 visas, a minimum of 18 hours of instruction, and a curriculum of only English courses (Tannacito, 2018). J-1 visas are for temporary visits and are for 'individuals approved to participate in exchange visitor programs', while F-1 visas are issued to students at academic institutions (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). According to Brickman and Nuzzo (1999), other differences between international students and domestic/resident students may include age, motivation, attitude, educational traditions, and learning styles.

The motivation for this study is very personal and stems from my experience teaching both populations at a community college in Washington state. When circumstances which will be described forced my institution to merge programs serving international and domestic/resident English language learners, I served on the program integrated task force committee to develop a program that would appropriately serve all students. We needed to create a new curriculum, including course outcomes and objectives, that would address the needs and goals of all students.

BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP: (Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency)

Despite some obvious similarities in so much as all of these students are learning English, immigrant English language learners and international students may have different language needs. One main difference may be their need for

academic or social communicative language. The concepts of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) originated from Cummins (1979, 1980).

Although this framework was developed in the context of bilingual children and not adults, a discussion of BICS and CALP here is relevant for several reasons. First, these concepts distinguish between the complexity of language and its acquisition necessary for basic skills versus academic skills, but students' need for both proficiencies may depend on their goals. Furthermore, while adult students may have developed CALP in their first language, some students may need CALP for their future success. For example, some international students are as young as sixteen years old. Their abilities in CALP in their first language may not be very strong, but they need this proficiency to achieve their academic goals. Therefore, an understanding of the role of BICS and CALP in studies involving children can help instructors of adult ESL better serve the needs and goals of their students.

Cummins' (1979) initial research regarding bilingualism in children questioned what level of a second language children needed to perform cognitively complex tasks and the implications for teaching and learning. This formed the groundwork for his later research distinguishing between BICS and CALP (Cummins, 1980). Cummins (1980) argues that the interpersonal skills of BICS must be acquired first before the higher ordered thinking of CALP, and how the acquisition of CALP is 'a major determinant of educational progress' (p.178).

Cummins's (1980) research was looking at bilingual children. He found that the older the students were, the faster they acquired CALP. This suggests that the presence of CALP in the first language positively affects its acquisition in the second. He admits that there are other factors, such as motivation or the nature of tasks that can influence CALP in a second language as well. He sums up by emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the difference between basic interpersonal skills and cognitive/academic language proficiency. Cummins (1992) clarifies that the difference between these two forms is that BICS is more surface level, and CALP is a deeper level of academic language. Overall, BICS is less cognitively demanding, and more embedded in situational context, while CALP is more context reduced and cognitively demanding. He explains the differences as:

> In general, context-embedded communication is more typical of the everyday world outside of the classroom, whereas many of the linguistic demands of the classroom (e.g., manipulating text) reflect communicative activities which are closer to the context-reduced end of the continuum. (Cummins, 1992, p.18)

In 1983, Cummins and Swain responded to criticism that the conceptualization of BICS and CALP is a deficit theory. A deficit theory or approach refers to the thinking that students, especially marginalized students, are somehow responsible if they do not succeed academically, rather than considering the structural factors that may be responsible. Cummins' (1980) theory was accused of perpetuating the attribution of blame for disparate education outcomes on the student. Cummins and Swain (1983) assert though, that these young students who have not had the opportunity to develop CALP in their first language need more support to develop this cognitive ability. Moreover, they argue that in fact, the awareness of these differences actually is a tool to combat the perpetuation of education gaps in minority students.

Due to its complexity, necessity of grammatical knowledge, and the abstract nature of CALP, BICS usually emerges first (Adamson,1993). Moreover, BICS is based on context, and acquired relatively easily in comparison to CALP (Leung, 2007). Jiang and Kuehn (2001) explain that students must be at a certain level of BICS before they will be able to expand their skills into CALP. A student who has had experience with academic skills in L1 will learn CALP more quickly, and their study of the effect of at least 10 years of L1 instruction prior to immigrating, showed that the development of L2 CALP can be enhanced by formal education in L1 CALP. Thus, their results showed the significance of having had formal education on the speed of acquiring these skills.

Cummins (2016) notes that the differences between these two types of language are now commonly accepted, and they are incorporated into policy and curriculum. The importance of CALP for academic success has been stated in several studies (Borjigin, 2017; Van Ngo, 2007). Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) found that strategies can be effective in the acquisition of CALP in their study of English language learners in an IEP. Cummins (2016) also points out that this takes time, and that academic language must be reinforced throughout all courses of study. Naicker and Balfour (2009) add that designing communicative activities that lower the affective filter, referencing Krashen's (1982) concept of

the importance of a comfortable learning environment, can help students to develop their abilities in cognitive/academic language.

In the context of this study, while some adult English language learners may have an advantage in the potential to develop a CALP proficiency, they may not need those skills to meet their goals. BICS may be more useful in their daily lives. For students whose primary goal is negotiating their daily lives, focusing on communication in which comprehension is aided by 'paralinguistic and situational cues' and in which learners can 'actively negotiate meaning (e.g. by providing feedback that the message has not been understood)' may be more valuable than academic thought (Cummins & Swain, 1983, p.36). However, other, generally younger students who have academic goals, and may not have had the same experience with developing CALP, will need to develop the ability to depend on abstract 'linguistic cues to meaning, and thus successful interpretation of the message' that 'depends heavily on knowledge of the language itself' (Cummins & Swain, 1983, p.36).

The Decline of Intensive English Programs

The number of international students in the U.S., and hence, the programs that served them, decreased significantly in the years preceding and during the COVID pandemic. The growth and decline of this population of students has often reflected global events. Choudaha (2017) defines three waves of international student population fluctuations between 1999 and 2020. He describes how international students were first motivated by research opportunities, deterred by the September 11th attacks on the U.S., and driven again by finance and innovation. Borjigin (2017) describes how the growth of the population of international students led to the proliferation of IEPs during the 1970s and 80s to facilitate the transition of these students into American universities and professional programs. According to Cox (2017), in 2016, international students consisted of approximately five percent of 20 million students studying at U.S. colleges and universities.

The decline in the number of international students began prior to the COVID pandemic. Ladika (2018) observes that because of changes in the global economy and political spheres, in addition to increased global competition in English language instruction, far fewer international students were enrolling in American universities. However, the COVID pandemic compounded this loss of

students, and by autumn 2020, international student enrolment in the U.S. had decreased by 21%. Intensive English programs saw the worst of this decline (Bukenova, Burrola, Contrata, Di Maria, & Hartmann, 2021). According to Nott (2021), COVID-19 resulted in a 50% decline in international students in U.S. intensive English language programs.

To deal with this loss of international students, many institutions eliminated academic IEPs outright and moved international students to existing basic skills classes or re-conceptualized their programs to serve both populations. As a result of the closing and merging of programs that had aimed to better address these diverse needs and goals of the student populations, the adult ESL classroom has become increasingly more diverse. Moreover, it is critical to understand whether the needs and goals of all students are being met by a modified curriculum, or if new obstacles exist.

Purpose of the Project and Importance of the Study

This study examines instructor perspectives on how instructors understand, perceive, and define equity and how they aim to implement it in their classrooms. The research sheds light on what they do to provide equitable instruction in their classes. The findings of the research may be able to enhance practical implementation of equitable instruction and promote equitable outcomes in a classroom of diverse student needs and goals.

Despite the ubiquity of the issue of equity in education today, its definition is often elusive. Unterhalter (2009) explains that there is no common definition of equity even though this term is used frequently in governmental and educational policy and planning statements. In the U.S, the equity discussion is often associated with the terms diversity and inclusion, which also may be defined differently depending on who is defining them. For example, Özturgut (2017) admits that there is a mistaken assumption that people agree about what Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) means. He contends that DEI efforts in higher education should take a more global perspective to DEI, rather than solely focusing on how many underrepresented students are enrolled.

Equity can also be framed as a failed policy response. Lucas and Beresford (2010) question why existing sociodemographic educational inequality has not been more affected by policy. They also argue that ‘the very measurement of educational inequality itself is also not a given’ (p.25). They

consider the most important aspects of equity to be the factors that influence the distribution of power and the socioeconomic effects of inequity. There is significantly more research available regarding equity policy in the context of K-12 education. Garcia, Kleifgen, and Falchi (2008) point out that guidelines suggested by U.S. policy exist for mainstreaming K-12 English language learners; however, for adult programs, there is often less guidance. Furthermore, when policies governing adult programs exist, they apply to students in programs that are federally funded and not international students.

In this study, I will investigate the perspectives of Washington state community college instructors who teach in programs that serve students with diverse needs and goals. The overarching research question asks: In a program of students with diverse needs and goals, how do English language instructors understand and define equity, and how do they aim to implement equitable instruction practically in the classroom? A lack of a common understanding of what equitable instruction means may impact efforts to implement it. Therefore, this project may help to show what factors contribute to practitioners' definition of equity and the efforts they make to put equitable instruction into practice. The examination of teachers' notions of equity and equitable instruction and how they apply it to the populations of students in their classrooms is crucial to creating learning environments in which the students' goals, needs, and opportunities are sufficiently addressed. Findings from this study may be of practical importance to the field of education and English language instruction in advancing equity in the classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Approach to the Review of Literature

The review of literature was conducted through the University of Glasgow and University of Washington libraries. Catalogue and database searches, including ERIC, ProQuest, EBSCO, and JSTOR, as well as Google, generated evidence and additional resources through which to pursue research. NAFSA: Association of International Educators (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers) publications provided useful information about the recent statistics and trends of international students and international English language learners in the United States, particularly those studying in IEPs. Many sources were also identified through the reference lists in relevant articles. A variety of source material informed the development of this dissertation, including books, other dissertations, articles (both peer-reviewed and not) and blogs. Keywords included equity and ESL, equity and adult ESL, community colleges, ELP, IEP, equity and higher education, and ELLs.

Initial research on equity and adult English language learners often led in quite diverse directions. Searching databases for scholarship involving equity often generated references related to inclusive learning environments, culturally responsive teaching (Chen & Yang, 2017; Borjigin, 2017; Auge, 2016; Johnson & Chang, 2012) and differentiated learning. Research on student-centred learning and equity was well established (Lowe, Leal-Carrillo, Guiney, & Diaz, 2021; Ford Walker, 2021; Hernández, Darling-Hammond, Adams, & Bradley, 2019; Sturgis, 2018).

Many studies related to equity and ESL involved the context of K-12. Some focused on inclusive and differentiated learning with ELLs in primary or secondary school. Coady, Harper and de Jong (2016) emphasize the importance of preparing primary school instructors for inclusive instruction that ‘address the ongoing challenge of ensuring that ELLs’ learning needs and specialized instruction are salient and visible’ (p.363). Wang, Many and Krumenaker’s (2008) study of a mainstream instructor of ESL students in the context of secondary social studies also emphasizes the importance of inclusive education. They comment on the necessity of meeting increased diversity of students’ needs by using differentiated instruction, which focuses on where students are in their learning and what their needs are.

Other research related more to policies governing ELL programs. Verstegen (2015) examines equity in the context of closing funding and opportunity gaps in K-12 education. Garcia et al.'s (2016) research shows that among K-12 ELL students, existing policies do not often reflect the most equitable practices. They point out the unfairness of new regulations that emphasize English only in the classroom in spite of the documented importance of bilingual support for emerging English language speakers. This does appear to be a disservice, as Cummins (1980) has demonstrated the benefits of sustained advanced practice in the first language in order to develop cognitive/academic language in both the first and second language. Moreover, Tung (2013) demands a paradigm shift that recognizes the benefits and opportunities that result from English and native language concurrent acquisition. Although adult learners are not at the same developmental stages as students in K-12, the implications are that they could leverage their first languages to enhance learning in the classroom as well.

While this study specifically addresses the understanding and use of equitable practices within the context of adult ESL classrooms with diverse needs and goals, some search results were more applicable to aspects of the population of English language learners in the context of higher education and DEI efforts. Therefore, the scope of the literature review was quite broad, highlighting a need for more research regarding the topic of the study.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Equity Pedagogy

The framework of equity pedagogy used here is derived from the work of James A. Banks (1993a & b, 2007) and collaborations with Cherry A. McGee Banks (Banks & McGee Banks, 1995, 2007; McGee Banks & Banks, 2007) on multicultural education to promote educational equity and success. Multicultural education includes content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, and an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 1993b). McGee Banks and Banks (1995) define equity pedagogy as instruction which helps create an environment through which students, diverse in race, ethnicity and culture, can develop the skills, knowledge, and mindset to 'function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society' (p.152). Banks (2007) asserts that through this

framework, students gain the knowledge and relevant skills to successfully participate in a global world.

Banks (2007) expands upon the definition of equity pedagogy to show the role of the teacher in its implementation:

> Equity pedagogy is student focused. It incorporates issues, concepts, principles, and problems that are real and meaningful to students. Teachers who embrace equity pedagogy assume that all students can learn. They work to develop student potential and to create a classroom environment that is encouraging and filled with opportunities for success. (p.98)

To provide meaningful instruction, teachers need to provide relevant and motivating content for the student. Moreover, the teacher's attitude and belief in the students' success is also clearly important.

Developing participatory citizens, i.e., educating students on how to be involved in society and their communities, is another important aim of this pedagogy. This may be especially relevant to students who are new to the culture and governance of the U.S. Banks (2007) defines this as citizen pedagogy, with the goal of creating 'effective and reflective citizens' (p.11). Banks and McGee Banks (2007) state that

> Helping students to become reflective and active citizens of a public, democratic society is the essence of our conception of equity pedagogy. (p.93)

These concepts connect diversity to the ideals of a just society. Bell (2016) asserts that that the aim of social justice, is the 'full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs' (p.1). She celebrates the affirmation and respect of diversity, which derives from differences in 'historical experiences, language, cultural practices, and traditions' (p.2).

Researchers define diversity in other ways as well. Cook and Sorcinelli (2005) suggest a broader way of defining diversity and multiculturalism. They recommend including any characteristic that may influence teaching and learning, such as 'gender, race/ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability, geographical region, religion, and other characteristics' (p.79). Diversity could also be defined as underrepresented language group students in a classroom (Vigue, 2019). Özturgut (2017) argues that there is a need to frame DEI efforts in a global, inclusive context in order to create an effective shared vision of diversity.

Additional Equity Frameworks

In addition to the theoretical framework of Banks and McGee Banks' equity pedagogy (1995), the study will be informed by McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux's (2020) work on equity-mindedness. McNair et al. (2020) argue that institutions of higher learning have to lead the way to assess equity efforts honestly and work to remove the structural and hidden biases that perpetuate inequity. In their approach, equity must prioritize addressing the legacy of structural racial inequality and injustice in order to close gaps in achievement for historically underrepresented students. They maintain an evidence-based approach, in which outcomes for historically marginalized students are disaggregated to identify gaps, is necessary to implement equity-minded practices. Naming these students is the first step to identifying the causes of different outcomes which will inform action not only for the institution, but also for individual practitioners.

The foundation of equity-mindedness is predicated on research by Bensimon (2007), Bensimon, Harris, and Rueda (2007), Felix, Bensimon, Hanson, Gray, and Klingsmith (2015), Bensimon, Dowd, and Witham (2016), and Malcom-Piqueux and Bensimon (2017). Furthermore, Bensimon and Malcom (2012), encourage the implementation of an institutional 'Equity Scorecard' to promote tools to serve students equitably. This research has resulted in guidelines established by the Bensimon-founded Center for Urban Education. The Center for Urban Education (2020) provides tools to implement equitable instruction through the steps of four phases that include identifying a starting point, defining the problem, developing solutions, and sustaining the work.

The findings will also be considered through the Equity Literacy Framework developed by Gorski (Equity Literacy Institute, 2025). The Equity Literacy Framework (Equity Literacy Institute, 2025) says that equity is more than giving students what they need to succeed individually; it requires a recognition of past injustice and action for change. Gorski's (2020) equity literacy similarly aims to dismantle inequitable structures through an individual and institutional pledge to identify how these structures operate and the willingness to eliminate and intentionally cultivate equity. This framework also stresses examining the qualitative experience of disparity in addition to the gaps in measurable outcomes. Gorski (2020) identifies five capabilities necessary for equitable practice: (1) recognizing bias, oppression and inequity, (2) responding

and intervening immediately, (3) addressing causes of bias, oppression and inequity to redress these factors in the longer term, (4) cultivating 'anti-oppressive ideologies and institutional cultures', and (5) sustaining this culture in classrooms and institutions (p.2).

The role of the individual practitioner is a crucial part of the implementation of equitable practices. McNair et al. (2020) encourage instructors to reflect on their understanding of equity and its relationship with what instructors value, believe, and do. Equity minded practitioners must practice a mindset which accounts for racialized achievement gaps as a result of the system and not individual deficits. Becoming an equity-minded practitioner demands reflection and going 'beyond rhetorical praise for diversity, inclusiveness, and equity' to challenge the perpetuated structure intentionally (McNair et al., 2020, p.49). Likewise, Gorski's framework espouses focusing on 'fixing the conditions that marginalize people' rather than putting the responsibility on the individual (Gorski, 2017). He advocates for confronting inequity directly and creating solutions that centre on acknowledging power and privilege.

Equity in Education

Much of the existing literature used a definition of equity that corresponded to the educational outcomes of students who have historically been disadvantaged. For example, Bensimon et al. (2007) describe the challenges of higher education's difficulties in 'overcoming their limited capacity to produce equitable educational outcomes for African American and Latina/o students' (p.2). They attribute part of this to a lack of practitioner knowledge and emphasize the importance of 'developing funds of knowledge' intended to understand and eliminate inequitable outcomes (p.2). The concept of funds of knowledge also refers to the practical knowledge and existing assets that students bring into the classroom. According to Garcia et al. (2008), this idea

> is based on the notion that everyday practices, including linguistic practices, are sites of knowledge construction and that these resources can be brought into the classroom. (p.44)

Through their relationships with students, instructors can use students' funds of knowledge to scaffold student learning, 'thus validating student knowledge and life values' (Hogg, 2011, p.667). Furthermore, Travis (2022) argues that equal outcomes arise when individual attributes and experiences are accounted for.

The institution and the practitioner both have a role in establishing a culture of equity. Bensimon et al. (2007) explain that the efforts to develop equitable outcomes comes from the 'double-loop learning problem' of equity-mindedness (p.8). This involves both the practitioner and the institution self-evaluating and making changes in order to implement systemic efforts to increase equity. Both the institution and practitioners must prioritize equity-mindedness (Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon et al., 2016). The importance of viewing the students as individual is a key component. Bensimon et al. (2016) claim as a principle that practice and policies that can be considered equitable, 'are designed to accommodate differences in the contexts of students' learning – not to treat all students the same' (p.4).

Celeste (2016) clarifies that equity is the result of striving towards an education system that is fair. He acknowledges that many people are of different minds when it comes to a consensus on the definition of equity. He states that equity is an outcome 'that corrects an imbalance' (p.10). This means minimizing imbalances created by circumstances, such as inequity caused by society, but also economics, culture, health, and systemic problems. In addition to this is quality professional development for teachers. He asserts that in order to have high quality teaching, instructors must have valuable, relevant training.

Standards are another important aspect of the discussion of equity in education. Ward (2020) expresses that equitable education results when every student has access to universal minimum standards. She argues that equity is not only about distributing resources, but 'justice and fairness' (p.316). Ward bases her argument on a variety of philosophical theories of justice developed by Rawls (1971, 1993), Rawls and Kelly (2001), Sandel (2009), and Sen (1998, 1999). She emphasizes the necessity of standards that are minimally applicable to everyone and render the system fair, as a first step to equity. The second aspect is inclusivity, with the goal of involving students as full participators and knowledge producers. Inclusivity is necessary and defined here as making active efforts 'to consider differing goals individuals have based on their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences' (Ward, 2020, p.316).

College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) and Common Core

Many public institutions in the United States implement standards to provide a foundation for equitable education. In the context of American

schools, Gottlieb (2016) refers to the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), which influence the educational outcomes of both children and adults in the U.S. public education system. She states that these standards could potentially have positive impacts if stakeholders, such as policy makers, and educational professionals 'view equity as a means to and an essential outcome of their implementation' (p.41). However, given that the CCRS are part of WIOA, whose chief goal is to improve the ability of the American workforce, these standards may not necessarily be relevant to all adult English language learners, especially those who are not pursuing employment (Washington State Employment Security Department, n.d.). For domestic and refugee students, however, attempting to meet these standards is a mandate of state funding (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, n.d.). This criticism is not limited to adult learners. Despite the wide implementation of the CCRS as the Common Core curriculum, with its emphasis on academic language, in the K-12 setting, Tung (2013) and Coady et al. (2016) point out the lack of consideration and support for younger ELLs. Lachance, Honigsfeld and Harrell (2018) describe the additional equity-related importance for these students to develop academic language skills when the stakes for their future opportunities are so high.

The Role of the Practitioner in Equitable Instruction

Bensimon et al. (2007) describe equity-mindedness as a process which involves the participation of individuals and the institution to self-assess and evaluate outcomes and performance, and 'to assume responsibility for the elimination of unequal results' (p.8). Therefore, the influence of the instructor should not be neglected in the implementation of equitable instruction. Several studies mention the importance of the practitioner's role in equity (Bensimon, 2007; Marrujo-Duck, 2017). Bensimon (2007) argues that paying attention to the practitioners is essential, 'for those of us who are primarily concerned with the agenda of access and equity in higher education' (p.445). She expounds upon the lack of consideration of the practitioner's efforts in policy as a factor in the transfer of low-income community college students to prestigious four-year institutions, highlighting how:

> It was the distinctive contrast between the students' and the policy analysts' construction of success that made me think about the invisibility of practitioners in the discourse on student success. (Bensimon, 2007, p.443)

Moreover, she bemoans the lack of research and interest in 'understanding how the practitioner—her knowledge, beliefs, experiences, education, sense of self-efficacy, etc.—affects how students experience their education' (p. 444).

According to Bensimon (2007), when equity-minded instructors view unequal outcomes, they consider the systemic factors that affect these outcomes and reflect on their own practice. It is incumbent on the collaboration of practitioners and researchers to 'develop funds of knowledge of equity-minded practices' (Bensimon, 2007, p.447). Although this conceptualization of equity-mindedness (Bensimon, 2007, Bensimon et al., 2007) focuses on unequal outcomes for African American and Latina/o students, their discussion of the development of equity-mindedness is relevant here. Apart from the institutional obligations to prioritize and assess progress towards equitable outcomes, Bensimon et al. (2007) state that equity-minded practitioners, 'reflect on the role they and their colleagues play and the responsibility they share for helping students succeed' (p.10). Furthermore, they discuss the negative impacts of the discourse of deficit, and how it affects academic achievement. They state that, 'In the discourse of deficit, inequality is represented as a condition produced by outside circumstances, making it practically unpreventable' (Bensimon et al., 2007, p.15). They describe the Equity for All project (EFA), which promoted the necessity of being conscious of patterns of unequal educational outcomes, examining one's own potential beliefs and assumptions that may contribute to a deficit mentality, and the willingness to 'assume responsibility for the elimination of inequality' (Bensimon et al., 2007, p.15).

Bensimon et al. (2016) suggest the following five principles to enact equity by design. They include clarity in language, goals, and assessment, prioritizing equity-mindedness, accommodating differences in students' learning and an iterative process of evaluating personal and institutional efforts. Wan (2008) proposes that effective teaching requires responding to aspects of diversity such as, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, and needs, among others, and recognizing 'individuality among students' (p.8).

As institutions have become more diverse, institutions and instructors have had to respond to create an environment in which education is accessible to all. Castañeda (2004) articulates the challenges that higher education has in meeting the needs of diverse students. In her view, instructors have a moral imperative to meet these different educational needs. The characteristics of

such an environment include the contribution of all students to the best of their abilities, the effective instruction of the skills necessary to succeed in pluralistic world, and ‘a community that models the vision and values of multiculturalism’ (p.24). While not specifically related to English language instruction, Castañeda (2004) describes the increased diversity of higher education in the relation to institutions of higher learning, stating that

> College and university classrooms, as microcosms of the larger society, reflect this growing shift, which encompasses not only racial and ethnic diversity but also gender, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, language, and other social demographic groupings. (p.1)

Her study examines reflections of college instructors who participated in a training program for teaching and learning in diverse classrooms, specifically regarding their experiences and pedagogical practices. She argues that an ideal multicultural learning environment enables all learners to participate fully, acquire the competencies to successfully live in a diverse society, and demonstrate a commitment to the ideals of a multicultural society.

Marrujo-Duck (2017) illustrates the context of equity in the community college through faculty engagement in student learning outcomes assessment. She describes the efforts to improve strategies to meet the needs of students. She also emphasizes the importance of faculty engagement in improving these outcomes:

> For outcomes assessment to be effective, faculty members need to engage in assessment practices with the intent of improving their teaching practice, courses, and programs. (p.7)

Gorski (2019) explains how a deficit ideology impacts the efforts for equity in the context of avoiding racial equity detours. A deficit ideology frames a disparity in student outcomes as the fault of the student. It also fails to recognize the strengths that students bring that might not be measured in the classroom. Gorski argues that a deficit ideology ‘shifts the onus of responsibility away from schools and onto the very youth who are cheated out of equitable opportunity,’ thereby, hiding the very institutional structures that are impacting inequities, such as policy or curriculum (p.59). Culturally sensitive and responsive pedagogies are an important part of this discussion. Valuing the assets and perspectives that each student brings to the classroom is one of the ways that faculty can help each individual student succeed. Flynn, James, Mathien, Mitchell, and Whalen (2017) describe this pedagogy as responsive to ‘students’

needs as they arise' (p.74). These approaches 'make students feel visible, valued and essential in the classroom learning environment' (p.74).

Much of the literature reviewed also mentioned instructor perceptions and reflections on their own equity efforts. Cavales Doolan (2019) investigated developmental English composition instructors' conceptualizations of equity and equity-oriented teaching practices in community colleges in California. According to Cavales Doolan (2019), due to low transfer and persistence rates for students in developmental courses, the state of California implemented an equity framework that places students into classes at the college-level. These efforts are intended to increase equity for historically underserved students by allowing them access to higher level coursework and hopefully better outcomes.

Cavales Doolan's (2019) study specifically examines the perspectives and practices of instructors where multiple conceptions of equity might be at play. In this context, instructors are navigating the implementation of legislation to improve access to higher education for marginalized students. Cavales Doolan (2019) personally defines equity as supporting the learning of all of her students, more specifically, 'working for the good of those students who hadn't made it' (p.3). This also included working for the students who encountered obstacles which prevented them from continuing. Among Cavales Doolan's (2019) findings was the prioritization of student empowerment as equity. This was enacted through culturally relevant pedagogy, conferencing face-to-face with students, strong relationships in classes, and building classes in conjunction with the students. Moreover, she found that reflective practice was of great importance in implementing equitable pedagogy, especially in light of institutional change.

Equity and Inclusion

In the United States, the discussion of equity in education often involves inclusion. Bell (2016) frames inclusion through the lens of social justice. She states that the aim of social justice is for all people, regardless of their social identity, to participate fully and equitably in a 'society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs' (p.1). Inclusion here involves sharing in the power of making institutional and individual decisions and dismantling the power structures that perpetuate oppression and injustice. Barnett (2020) also frames inclusion in American institutes of higher education. His findings shed light on the work that still needs to be done and demonstrate how an inclusive environment involves not only considering the diverse needs of learners, but also

the expectation on the part of faculty to demonstrate leadership to model and guide students with the tools to create the conditions for respectful, inclusive learning. ACUE and Sova (2021) argue that taking responsibility for students as individuals will foster an equity mindset that promotes the success of all.

Souto-Manning, Rabadi-Raol, Robinson and Perez (2019) explain how inclusion is an integral part of equity. By addressing the needs of every student, not only those with identifiable disabilities, access and outcomes will improve for all students. According to Field et al. (2007), equity consists of fairness and inclusion. Fairness here means that factors such as ethnicity, gender, or economic status will not prevent the achievement of one's educational potential. They define inclusion as 'ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all' (p.11). While equity and inclusion have often referred to protected characteristics such as disability, Grier-Reed and Willams-Wengerd (2018) argue that 'a truly inclusive pedagogy should explicitly include age, gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity as well' (p.1).

Kumar and Refaei (2021) highlight the priority of creating an inclusive learning environment in their discussion of equity pedagogy in higher education. In addition to the importance of teaching students to respect others' diversity, they argue that:

> Equity means providing the tools and knowledge students need in a manner that is accessible to each student. Equity-mindedness is the way of thinking that questions existing structures and practices to find ways to be more inclusive. (pp.1-2)

They emphasize the role of the practitioner in instituting equity-mindedness and show that that even in large classes, there are many things that instructors can do to increase equitable instruction. First, they recommend developing strong, positive relationships with students. Then, instructors must create a supportive, welcoming environment for students and set a tone for the class to follow. The structure and organization of the class is also important. The instructor should be sensitive to student needs and use multiple means to reach students. They also emphasize learning student names, presenting information in multiple formats, and using principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Lastly, they suggest incorporating diverse perspectives into the activities and content of the class.

Equity and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Many studies demonstrate a strong link between UDL and equity. Cavales Doolan (2019) extensively describes how UDL supports student outcomes and promotes equity. She describes the origin of UDL as intended to facilitate physical access to people with disabilities, and how the idea has been applied to facilitating access in education through multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression. The Center for Teaching Innovation (n.d.) describes these principles as allowing for the presentation, engagement in learning, and demonstration of learning in a variety of ways. Daughtery (2016) also states that it is one of the equity practices that the California Community Colleges have promoted for equitable instruction, as it involves identifying barriers and addressing them through centring the student.

UDL has shown to be beneficial in many contexts. Refaei and Kumar (2021) highlight principles for inclusive practices in the context of large college classes, while Meo (2008) describes its use in a high school social studies class to support students' understanding of course content. Grier-Reed and Williams-Wengerd (2018) assert that not using UDL leads to a deficit mentality, as this ignores 'the principle that it is the institution or classroom environment that is limited (or disabled), not the student' (p.1). Rose, Harbour, Johnston, Daley, and Abarbanell (2006) agree that the environment should be considered as limited, rather than the student; making appropriate design decisions and curriculum modifications leads to access and benefits for all students.

Equity and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching appears to be one way that instructors attempt to create an equitable learning environment. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy empowers underrepresented students collectively and is comprised of three discreet components: academic success, cultural competence, and 'a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order' (p.160). In 2014, Ladson-Billings elaborated that culture is always evolving; therefore, the relevance is also always changing. She stated that the key to culturally relevant pedagogy is the 'ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture' (p.77). Furthermore, the sustainability of this pedagogy requires an acknowledgement of cultural and societal changes that

may reflect a new complexity or a revitalizing and reclaiming of marginalized and oppressed cultures. This also requires the members of the dominant culture to 'develop the kinds of skills that will allow them to critique the very basis of their privilege and advantage' (p.83).

In the 3rd edition of her book on culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2018) clarifies the importance of cultural responsiveness in education and beyond. She explains that culturally responsive teaching is imperative as it serves the human rights of all students, including those of underrepresented backgrounds. She exhorts the importance of knowing students and states that that teachers need to understand the complex interaction of identity and socialization and that

> Teachers need to understand very thoroughly both the relationships and the distinctions between these to avoid compromising the very thing they are most concerned about- that is, students' individuality. (Gay, 2018, p.30)

Gay (2018) continues that culturally responsive teaching means creating learning opportunities that make instruction more applicable and effective for students. It uses the strengths of the students to show the value and the 'importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning' (p.37). Furthermore, the culture and the story of the students should be considered in the classroom. Gay (2018) states that by understanding the 'cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles' of students, teachers create more relevant learning opportunities (p.36).

Culturally responsive teaching is inherently inclusive. Doran (2021) explains that this pedagogical knowledge is essential for those who teach in community colleges in order to effectively respond to the needs of diverse students. She states that the because of the complex identities and experiences, both positive and negative, it is

> incumbent upon community college faculty to enact pedagogies in their classrooms that attend to their students as whole people who carry with them many forms of knowledge, experiences, and assets while also understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all best way to teach. (p.81)

Her study intended to spur dialogue of how instructors are meeting the needs of students in light of the often lack of pedagogical training and research on culturally relevant pedagogy involving community college instructors. She also emphasizes that faculty need to reflect on their own identities and positionality in relation to their students.

Regarding the adult ESL classroom, Chen and Yang (2017) demonstrated positive effects of implementing culturally responsive instruction. They found that using culturally responsive pedagogy increased motivation and participation in the three Asian students they observed. Strategies included using discussion to share individual cultures and personal experiences, using materials that reflected student cultures, and applying cultural comparisons to broaden students' thinking. Their study suggested that instructor knowledge of student culture is the starting point, but instructors need to encourage students to expand their thinking in order to 'cross cultural barriers and recognize the differences among cultures' (Chen & Yang, 2017, p.84). In her study on using a culturally responsive approach to find equity in the classroom, Suarez Valarino (2021) explores another benefit of culturally responsive pedagogy as a tool to combat implicit bias and create a more equitable learning environment.

Cultural Capital

Culturally responsive teaching also influences the possession of cultural capital, which is another issue that may affect equity in a classroom of diverse needs and goals. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital, or the possession of beneficial cultural knowledge, can be conveyed through educational achievement, and it is often correlated with social and economic capital. Kanno and Varghese (2010) argue that first generation immigrant and refugee ESL students may be prevented from accessing higher levels of education due to a lack of capital, including linguistic, economic, and cultural. They assert that Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction is at play here because it privileges the middle-class culture as more valuable than 'the cultures of the working class and the poor' and may lead to students choosing to discontinue their education (p.313). While this possession of capital is certainly impossible to predict or measure, some students may be more likely to have increased access to forms of capital and their associated benefits.

However, in a diverse ESL class, students come with a diversity of access to capital. Becker (2011) explains that students who may be more privileged in their own countries may have higher cultural capital in the U.S., while those with low cultural capital may encounter more obstacles in transitioning to credit-based coursework. Becker (2011) addresses some of the issues that adult English learners might encounter attempting to move from non-credit to credit classes. She found that despite the diverse backgrounds and characteristics that

these students possess, participation in non-credit ESL class helped all the students increase their cultural capital and confidence. This finding was supported by Suh's (2017) research on ESL students transitioning into credit classes, which suggests the benefits of the symbolic capital of identity as a student. Becker (2011) acknowledges that learners are often viewed homogeneously and suggests that looking into identifying and addressing difficulties, including those of the funds of knowledge that diverse ESL students may have, might impact academic success and college completion and success for non-native English speakers.

Valadez (1993) references Bourdieu's (1977) concept of cultural capital, when he considers its impact on students whom he defines as nontraditional, including immigrants and students older than 25 years of age. He argues that the community college has the responsibility to address the potential gap in the skills and knowledge required for college success as a matter of equity. He acknowledges the challenge of designing a curriculum to meet all students needs when students may have very different backgrounds and abilities. While international students and domestic students may face similar challenges in navigating higher education, depending on the educational background and goals of students, acculturation to higher education may raise issues of equity.

Social capital may also become an issue within the classroom if the teacher uses the majority language in the classroom, or if a student's language is not represented among his/her classmates. Vigue (2019) explores the use of native language in the classroom and its relationship with social equity in Community-Based ESL classrooms. She questions whether English-only policies benefit the students by creating an environment where theoretically everyone is in the same position or serve as a source of exclusion and social isolation for underrepresented language groups. She recommends that the teacher only use English in the classroom to avoid perpetuating a hierarchy of majority language within the ESL classroom, thereby reinforcing the social capital of the majority language group.

Differentiation, Inclusion, and Equity

Differentiation is another way that some instructors create an equitable and inclusive learning environment. Weir (2009) explains that differentiation means that the instructor focuses on the features that make individuals unique.

She emphasizes the importance of considering the individual ‘at the planning stage, during teaching, and throughout the course’; this involves considering the differences of learners in ‘needs, barriers, and abilities’ (p.213). According to Weir (2009), differentiation results in agency and autonomy, and cites Perry (2003) for applicable approaches. These approaches include outcomes, speed, resources, theme-based activities, and opportunities for deeper extension. She stresses, however, the value of collaboration and group work, and highlights that differentiation does not mean that students are only involved in their own tasks.

Bondie, Dahnke and Zusho (2019) examine studies in diverse K-12 contexts in which they identify barriers that challenge the successful implementation of differentiated instruction. Citing a lack of a common understanding and a focus on materials and activities instead of instruction, they propose a new framework to help inform teachers on how to use differentiation. They emphasize the importance of outcomes, and state, ‘Implicit in our definition is the assumption that all students deserve instruction that is clear, accessible, rigorous, and relevant’ (p.358).

In the context of English language learners, Chien (2012) touts the benefits of differentiated instruction to address the needs of diverse learners in a study of elementary English teachers in Taiwan. She states that such instruction is not only related to methods of teaching but also allows instructors to respond to what students need, prefer, or are interested in by adjusting the speed, complexity, or way of teaching. She explains that ‘the content, process, and product are intertwined,’ and that the instruction becomes more accessible to all students (p.281).

Iyer (2015) also makes a case for differentiation in the ESL classroom. He explains how instructors need to investigate their learners to ‘check the learning purposes and needs of the learners’ in order to create an effective learning environment (p.177). This is a continual, interactive process. He says that developing this environment allows learners to access the learning in their own way. Instructors must recognize the various internal factors, such as age and motivation, and external factors, e.g., the curriculum, strategies, and culture that affect learners. Learning is a result of the collaboration between the teacher and students. The teacher must ‘recognize his learners’ diverse needs and interests’ and ‘provide comprehensible input to all the levels of the learners’ (p.183).

The concept of comprehensible input derives from Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis in his theory of second language acquisition. He states that people acquire language through understanding meaningful information. As individuals receive contextual 'input' that is slightly above their comprehension, which he calls i +1, they begin to process and acquire more language.

Equity and English Language Learners

The mere presence of English language learners at an institution is often considered as evidence of institution wide efforts towards equity and inclusion, when in fact they may be marginalized in many ways. For example, evening ESL students may not have access to the same services as the students who are on campus during typical office hours. Sun (2010), in her examination of employment conditions of ESL teachers, cites a participant who claimed that 'When the college needs diversity, our students and faculty are the ones who are often counted as symbols of diversity' (p.143). This participant continues that these same students and faculty are treated like 'second -class citizen' [sic] (p.143). Gorski and Swalwell (2015) write of the alienation of students 'whose voices historically have been omitted from school curriculums' (p.36). In their opinion, the challenge of effective multicultural education is to centre equity rather than culture. Furthermore, equity requires an understanding of interpersonal and institutional dynamics. In this equity literacy framework, Gorski and Swalwell (2015) state that equity work should be integrative, applicable to students of all ages, and applicable to students from all backgrounds.

Part of this is that equity is an essential political act, and all subject areas should be viewed through an equity lens. Gorski (2016) exhorts equity advocates to 'make sure we are distinguishing adequately between *cultural* initiatives and *equity* initiatives' (p.222). He is critical of efforts to promote equity without examining the underlying structures that cause inequity. He argues that the consideration of culture and its lack of a clear definition of culture is problematic, stating that:

> This stubborn persistence of culture as the central frame of reference for conversations about equity ensures inattention to the conditions that underlie the inequities we want to destroy, such as racism, economic injustice, heterosexism, and sexism. (Gorski, 2016, p.223)

In this quote, Gorski (2016) points out that there is so much diversity within such groups that it is flawed to think that any kind of cultural assumption will be valid. Furthermore, he maintains that the structural barriers experienced by the students must be understood, and the distribution of access and opportunity that causes disparity must be addressed for progress in equitable instruction. Gorski and Swalwell (2023) emphasize that awareness isn't enough. They state that there must be action that is oriented towards justice in order to truly work towards equity in education.

The issue of equity in the ESL classroom has been addressed in many studies. Tadic (2020) examined diversity in the ESL classroom through an analysis of teachers' practice and discourse analysis, seeking to understand how teachers and students' 'diverse funds of knowledge, experiences, and values interact in the adult L2 classroom' (p.5). Her findings reveal negative effects of teachers positioning themselves as the authority in the classroom instead of responding to student experience, and she identifies teacher remarks that undermine diversity in the classroom. She concludes with suggestions for further teacher training and recommends that teachers learn to take more advantage of teachable moments to help students develop their intercultural and language awareness. She also suggests that teachers should learn to facilitate potentially difficult discussions and that new teachers should learn, and teach, that diversity is part of learning a language in a diverse society. Teachers can help their students become more socioculturally aware and interculturally competent.

Understanding who the learners are is a crucial part of implementing equitable instruction. Instructors must consider the unique features of their students and other factors that may differentiate learners. For example, Weir (2009) mentions age, gender, nationality, language, academic history, goals, motivation, personality, mood, disability, and learning styles, among others. Johnson and Chang (2012) state that due to the cultural diversity in classrooms, 'educators must take into consideration all the features that encompass diversity' (p.19). Chen and Yang (2017) explain that educators face additional challenges due to the 'socioeconomic and cultural diversity of today's adult population and non-traditional classrooms', currently intensified by factors such as globalization (p.79).

While most educators agree that the needs of the students are of utmost importance, Nguyen and Dang (2020) argue that second language teacher education must do a better job of addressing these learner aspects. They describe a lack of research on the aspects of diversity of age and needs despite the necessity. They state:

> Learners as well as their needs and motivation should be addressed in relation to the macro-level, socioeconomic, and educational contexts as well as micro-level matters. (p.409)

Although they are speaking of teacher training in Vietnam, the emphasis on local and global employability and communication is the same. They declare that in achieving this goal, 'English language education needs to attend to various learners and their needs' (p.409).

There may be additional issues of difference and inequity when students of different needs and goals are in the same classroom. The ages of students may be very different, and older students' needs may be neglected. In his master's research, Janis (2012) investigates 'how older ESL immigrants from multiple cultural backgrounds adapt to the academic environment of the community college' (p.3). He addresses how important it is to consider the various backgrounds, needs, and goals that students may have. He claims there is a lack of focus on the 'unique experiences of older adult immigrants in community colleges' (p.4). Another issue of equity is the use of technology. This can be a source of inequity as some students may lack access or the skills necessary to use technology. McClanahan (2014) suggests that technology can promote educational equity through increasing access and developing autonomous learning, also providing an opportunity for empowerment and giving a voice to marginalized adult learners.

In their study of teacher preparation for equitable access for English language learners in K-12, Chisholm and Beckett (2003), point out that, 'to provide an equitable education, schools need teachers who build upon their students' strengths, who acknowledge and respect differences and who have the knowledge and skills to develop the English language proficiency of ELLs' (p.249). They describe some features of diversity in K-12 which can be applied to the adult English learning classroom, such as varying levels of computer and technology literacy, incompatibility with the American style of learning, and multiple intelligences. Gottlieb (2016)'s handbook on using assessment as a tool

for equity with English language learners is relevant in some ways, though her work focuses on K-12 learners and not adults. While she addresses the use of Common Core and standards in educational assessment, those applied to adult learners are quite different.

The curriculum of programs of diverse needs and goals may be affected by policies which do not align with student aims. Fernandez, Peyton and Schetzel (2017), in their study of whether writing instruction in adult ESL programs is meeting student needs, demonstrate the influence of the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS), which as previously mentioned, govern domestic/resident ESL programs in the U.S. With the CCRS's emphasis of academic complexities, written communication skills have become increasingly important. Thus, even though WIOA and the CCRS may emphasize writing more than the life skills of past policies governing adult education in the U.S., students may have very different writing experience and skills. Fernandez et al. (2017) point out that the domestic ESL learners are different from 'typical' international students' who have more experience in formal academic classroom settings (p.9). They conclude that there is no 'one-size-fits-all solution' (p.9). However, they do mention that students benefit from support, including tutoring and writing centres. They acknowledge that some students might not be getting the writing instruction that they need, as the amount of instruction may vary depending on whether adult English learners are 'in adult ESL, EAP, or mainstream writing courses' (p.8). They also distinguish between the formal learning experience of international students and the potential varying levels of educational attainment that domestic ESL students may have, arguing that,

> The field of adult ESL education needs to seriously consider how and when professional development on academic and professional writing can occur and how programs can implement more opportunities for adult learners to acquire the skills that they need to do well in academic programs. (p.16)

Daugherty (2016) examines strategies that California community colleges have implemented to identify diverse populations, promote educational access, and increase equity and student success within their ESL populations. Using a data driven equity-minded approach, they developed a plan for student success through the identification of barriers. The institutions first assess their students' cultural identities. Then they modify the campus environment to promote equitable outcomes. This involves program outcomes, and institutional pathways review. Lastly, the institutions encourage instructors to implement UDL

strategies, which attempt to remove barriers and increase access to learning amongst diverse students.

Several studies looked at adult ELLs' equitable access to higher education by examining their transition to credit classes. Schmitt (2018) found that many adults do not continue their education in credit postsecondary classes. Ouellette-Schramm (2016) suggests this might be due to the challenge of developing academic language skills. Furthermore, she points out that persistence rate of adult ESL learners who continue to credit classes is low. Schmitt (2018) also describes the importance of determining students' educational needs in addition to proficiency to provide enough instructional support. She speaks to the lack of research on adult ESL learners' access to equal educational opportunity and addresses the difficulty in a standard legal or ethical definition of equity as it relates to domestic adult ESL learners. Goldrick-Rab (2010) investigated the barriers and challenges that many ESL students face in transitioning to college-credit coursework. She argues for institutional responsibility to mitigate these factors and improve successful outcomes.

Several studies related to equity and English language learning involve various contexts that are not higher education. For example, in the context of K-12 language learners, Auge (2016) explores a U.S. school district's response to EL students facing academic challenges. He describes the disproportionate representation of ELs in special education and considers the questions of equity that are related to this potentially mistaken designation. He asserts that intentional research-based teaching strategies and assessment are of utmost importance, which include culturally and linguistically responsive support.

In the private sector, Travis (2022) conducted a study examining equity among English language learners in Fortune 500 companies related to technology, with the goal of identifying interventions for non-native speakers in the workplace. She explains that equality, rather than equity, is valued at most companies; many companies treat everyone the same regardless of their circumstances. However, this is not sufficient to support employees and address the effects of language diversity in the workplace. According to Travis, linguistic diversity is not considered as a criterion by current measures to promote equity in the workplace due to the difficulty in its identification. She observes that private companies' equity efforts are impacted by their speed in understanding the demographics of their employees. Organizations are 'confounded by

employees' diversity, attitudes, and behaviors' (Travis, p.141). This further complicates defining and implementing equitable support.

Using Gorski's (2016, 2019) equity literacy framework, Shufflebarger (2022) proposes critically examining problematic and oppressive curriculum and centring student voices as steps towards equity. Shufflebarger (2022) argues that the curriculum of survival English, which teaches students how to navigate common situations they might find themselves in, is included in these problematic materials. She says that it presents superficial communication that is one-sided and reinforces a dynamic that doesn't give the power of full expression to students. Furthermore, this curriculum may reinforce a deficit ideology 'though us and them binaries,' in which students feel separate and different from other Americans (p.2). Shufflebarger (2022) argues for the concentration on student voices and reiterates that 'in the context of adult ESL education, access to quality instruction is not distributed fairly to beginning-level learners when they are denied a voice or opportunities for higher order thinking activities' (p. 12). She asserts that through the equity literacy framework, the instructor must reflect on practices, have expectations of rigour for the students, develop relevant curriculum, and create opportunities for students to express themselves in ways that reflect more complex thinking.

In her paper on adult ESL literacy programs, Wrigley (1993) demonstrates the complexity of teaching philosophies that influence how ESL literacy is defined. While ESL programs that are oriented by Common Core (as federally funded programs are) emphasize skills in English reading and writing 'that should be acquired by all', Wrigley points out that literacy assessment in English does not define students' competency in other areas that involve navigating life in English (p.453). This orientation of literacy denies the funds of knowledge that students bring and promotes a deficit model. She states the difficulty in finding a philosophy that that will meet all needs, 'given funding realities, teacher preferences, and learner goals' (p.463). However, she emphasizes having a comprehensible mission and flexible philosophy to enhance relevancy to more teachers and learners.

In their literature review of English learners and ESL programs in community colleges, Raufman, Brathwaite, and Kalamkarian (2019) explore influences on the experiences and outcomes of the English language learning population. According to their findings, 'there is limited research on the

experiences and outcomes of ELs at community colleges and other higher education institutions' (p.1). They attribute this to the lack of policies in higher education to monitor progress beyond ESL. While their focus is on the progress of EL students throughout the community college, they clearly show that there is a gap in the examination of equity in programs that serve English language learners. They do mention the disparity in academic preparation amongst learners but are more concerned with the status of EL students meeting postsecondary outcomes. They identify specific themes that impact community college EL success, including the placement and assessment of students, the structure and delivery of instruction in ESL programs, and the framing of the identity of English language learners. They argue that more research needs to be done to fully understand how ELs are defined, how they move through higher education, and what impacts their progression or lack thereof.

Bell (2013) examined the intersection of campus internationalization policy and equity, and questioned whether and how inequity was caused, despite the expressed goals of increasing global awareness and fostering an inclusive community. She argues that inequality may be reproduced due to prohibitive access to students with a lack of social or economic capital. Her findings included the frequent equation of diversity with equity, thereby deprioritizing institutional efforts towards equity and social justice overall, and the 'consistent marginalization of international students' in comparison to domestic students (p. 132).

Yigitbilek's (2022) study promoted autobiography as a tool for more equitable instruction in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. She recommends this method as an inclusive practice in the adult ESL classroom, and although she doesn't isolate needs and goals specifically as a criterion for diversity, she exhorts instructors to make efforts to understand what is unique about each individual student. She states that this includes not only their educational history but also

> their life stories as well as individual and cultural wealth: what their family histories are like, how they reached the point they are now at, what challenges they faced along the way, what their aspirations are moving forward, how their culture is impacting how they are learning or being as individuals, and what they have to offer to their new learning community. (p.4)

She claims the genre of life writing can help bridge personal and academic life. Moreover, this instruction can support students more meaningfully through valuing their experiences and assets.

Summary

Despite the numerous studies that address equity in education, higher education, and English language learning, relevant studies do not take on the subject of equitable practice with students of diverse needs and goals in the adult ESL classroom. While most equity frameworks acknowledge needs and goals as one aspect of diversity, the priority is improving outcomes for historically marginalized students, a term which might apply to all English language learners. Therefore, while these frameworks might be more relevant in the context of improving outcomes for ELLs in relation to other students, there are many applicable aspects to equitable instruction in a class of students with diverse needs and goals. In addition, topics such as inclusion, differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive pedagogy often relate as methods to create more equitable instruction within a diverse classroom.

Studies related to ESL often reflected the position of English language learners or minority students in the larger context of equity at the institutional level, or in the K-12 system. There is a clear lack of consensus of what constitutes equity in education, and few studies examine the dynamics of instructor practices regarding serving the different needs and goals of students within the context of community college ESL programs. Therefore, this study fills a gap in enhancing the understanding of equity and the practice of equitable instruction among students of diverse needs and goals.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Type of Research

In this study, I employed a qualitative approach to understand instructors' perspectives on equity and its implementation in practice. According to Braun and Clarke (2022a), qualitative inquiry, in comparison to quantitative, focuses on understanding meaning, rather than truth. They point out that quantitative research often assesses hypotheses or seeks an explanation, while qualitative research 'aims to generate contextualised and situated knowledge' (Braun and Clarke, 2022a, p. 6). Several researchers (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Lochmiller and Lester, 2017; Lichtman, 2010) also emphasize that research questions which attempt to understand and examine human experience demand a qualitative design.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) explain how qualitative research involves considering the meanings that people bring to phenomena and attempts to understand it through interpreting or making sense of these meanings, while Creswell and Poth (2017) report that qualitative design can be used 'because a problem or issue needs to be explored' (p.45). As this study aims to capture understanding the experience and perceptions of instructors, as well as to address the practical issue of how English language instructors support students' diverse needs and goals, it is well suited for a qualitative study.

Exploratory Interpretivist Approach

The study takes an exploratory interpretivist approach to understand the participants' perceptions and experiences. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) explain that the interpretivist paradigm involves the researcher trying to understand the perspective of the 'subject being observed' (p.33). They state that the researcher needs to understand the individual and their interpretation. Other studies which investigated perspectives, equity, and ESL also employed this approach (Erickson, 2019; Farrell, 2012) and used semi-structured interviews and focus groups to interpret the perspectives of others (Ouellette-Schramm, 2016; Vigue, 2019; Lachance et al., 2019).

The use of semi-structured interviews and focus groups is consistent with an exploratory interpretivist approach and allowed me deep access to the insights of my participants. Through semi-structured dialogue, both of these methods provided an opportunity for greater exploration and control through

follow-up questions, and the medium of interviewing allowed for a dynamic and immediate way of understanding instructor perspectives (Brinkmann, 2018; Fontana and Frey, 2000; Lichtman, 2010). Moreover, semi-structured interviews supported more specific and personal responses, and I was able to ask focused follow-up questions (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).

Despite my original intention to hold a post-analysis follow-up focus group, focus group data was collected from a single initial group. As Kamberelis and Dimitriades (2011) point out, the dynamics among the participants resulted in decentring the researcher and allowed for broader perspectives. Since the focus group interview was not in isolation, the participants were able to interact and contribute to a collective construction of meaning. Morgan (1997) describes an advantage of focus groups as allowing the observation of interaction regarding a topic; however, one drawback is the limited amount of time allocated to each individual participant to share their thoughts and opinions. Gibbs (1997) states the value in using focus groups at various points in the research, and the final focus group might have been a useful way to reflect on the findings.

Ontology and Epistemology

The ontology and epistemology of the study are important considerations that influence design and analysis. Creswell and Poth (2017) explain the ontological and epistemological lenses of qualitative research. They state that the ontology of qualitative research holds that reality has multiple realities, from the researchers to the participants and readers. Pretorius (2022) elucidates that reality is formed as a result of people's individual experiences, and thus multiple realities exist. This is demonstrated by people's different experiences of the same event. Furthermore, the epistemological aspect of interpretive qualitative research involves the closeness of the researchers and the participants. According to Pretorius (2022), epistemologically, the interest of interpretivists is in how the realities of individuals are experienced. As a result, questions of people's feelings, experiences and perceptions are suitable for interpretive inquiry. Moreover, interpretive researchers highlight the participants' voices. The generated knowledge is based on the subjective, individual perspectives of the participants. Cresswell and Poth (2017) claim that knowledge is created through the 'subjective experiences of people' (p.21).

The role of the researcher is crucial as part of a subjectivist epistemology. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) explain that the researcher 'makes meaning of their data through their own thinking and cognitive processing of data informed by their interactions with participants' (p.33). Therefore, the role of the researcher is to 'report these different realities' (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.20). The researcher expresses these perspectives of the participants through themes.

The complexities of interpretive qualitative research influence choices in design and interpretation. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) state that in interpretivist research, 'ability to interpret their experiences becomes an important methodological consideration' (p.37). Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe the construction of qualitative interpretations. They explain that the process of 'making sense of one's findings is both artistic and political' and 'there is no single interpretive truth' (p.35).

When attempting to understand the experiences of participants, the interpretivist paradigm is appropriate, as it permits the 'interpretation of the participants' perceptions of their own realities' (Kivunja and Kuyini,2017, p.36). Braun and Clarke (2022a) refer to the interpretive paradigm as experiential qualitative research. This research focuses on the 'exploration of participants' meanings and understandings' (p. 289). Byrne (2022) describes an experiential orientation as one that emphasizes examining how the participant experiences a phenomenon. He also clarifies that the participants' meaning should be prioritized in the researcher's interaction with the data. He explains that:

> Adopting an experiential orientation requires an appreciation that the thoughts, feelings and experiences of participants are a reflection of personal states held internally by the participant. (p.1395)

This study uses Braun and Clarke's (2022a) reflexive thematic analysis (TA) as the method for analysis. Braun and Clarke (2022a) describe TA as 'a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset' (p.4). A critical component of reflexive TA is the thorough and systemic coding of data and theme development process.

Participants

The initial data collection involved twelve English language instructors. These participants were purposely sought out for their perspectives of teaching in a program that serves English language learners who have diverse needs and goals. Participants were all Washington state community college instructors of

students in programs that serve combined international and domestic or resident English language learners. They came from two institutions. Data collection consisted of nine semi-structured interviews and one focus group with three participants. The participants were recruited through a call for participants forwarded by deans to their faculty. Faculty were instructed to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. Nine women and three men participated in the study. The participants were assigned a number in the order that they responded to the call for participants. Demographic information, apart from contact information, was not collected, as it was not relevant to the topic. Some of the participants were known to the researcher prior to the data collection, but I took steps not to let that interfere in my collection and analysis of the data. Since this was an interpretivist study, the subjectivity of the researcher can help enhance the findings. Toma (2000) suggests that in qualitative studies, the interactions and involvement of the researcher and the participants 'strengthen end products' (p.178).

In all discussions, I was mindful of valuing the words of all my participants. I was cognizant of the words of Seidman (2006), who said that despite the difficulty of doing equitable research in a world that is inequitable, 'equity must be the goal of every in-depth interviewing researcher' (p.111). He says that equity in interviewing comes from a basis of respecting the dignity of the participants and defines it as both ethical and methodological. He insists that researchers must be 'deeply aware that other people's stories are of worth in and of themselves as well as for the usefulness of what they offer to interviewers' research' (p.94).

The research questions were designed to facilitate discussion of how instructors define equity and what they do in their classrooms through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. While developing the research and interview questions, I sought out feedback from my advisor and trusted, knowledgeable colleagues. The same questions were asked of all participants, with the individual interviews allowing for more thoughtful introspection and the focus groups generating perspectives from the collaborative dynamic of the group. The following questions were asked:

Research Question
In a classroom of student with diverse needs and goals, how do English language instructors understand and perceive equitable instruction, and how do they aim to implement it practically in the classroom.
Interview Questions
1. How do you define equity in English language instruction and assessment? 2. How did you come to this understanding of equity? 3. To what extent do institutional policies and culture influence your understanding of equity? 4. What are the elements of an equitable English language learning environment? 5. What do you believe equity means in a classroom that includes domestic and international English language learners? 6. How do you identify the different needs and goals of students in your classrooms? 7. What challenges or issues may arise in a classroom where the needs and goals of the students may be very different? 8. How well do your program and course outcomes reflect the different needs and goals of students? 9. How can instructors facilitate the success of learners whose needs and goals might not be being met due to changes in the curriculum? 10. How do you respond equitably to these differences? Do you use different pedagogical techniques with students of different needs or goals? 11. How effective do you perceive your efforts to be in implementing an equitable learning environment? 12. Can you describe a practice or assignment that supports equitable outcomes for students of diverse needs and goals in your classrooms? 13. What can instructors do to support the success of all learners in the classroom?

Table 3-1: Research and Interview Questions

Context

In the years preceding and during the Covid pandemic, many intensive English language programs closed in the United States. These programs largely served international students, whose number had declined quite significantly. Some institutions dealt with this by merging previously distinct programs. For example, the institution where I work re-envisioned their whole program with the populations of international students, domestic/resident, and refugee students in mind. As a result, classrooms that were already diverse in student age, native language, educational background, and life experience became more diverse with respect to student needs and goals. The purpose of the study was to investigate how instructors in programs of English language learners with diverse needs and goals perceive equity and how they aim to implement it in their classrooms.

Data Collection Procedures

Instrumentation

The study employed semi-structured interviews and a focus group to collect the data. The interviews and focus group were held on the Zoom video platform. Coming out of the COVID pandemic, it seemed safest and more convenient to hold the discussion online. Krouwel, Jolly and Greenfield (2019) say saving time and money are some benefits of online interviewing. Oliffe, Kelly, Gonzalez Montaner, and Yu Ko (2021) also found that as research moved to video sites during the pandemic, the benefits outweighed the negative aspects, such as the inability to control where the participants physically are, Wi-Fi challenges, pacing, and crosstalk. They concluded that remote research will likely have a long-term impact on qualitative research. Hannah and Mwale (2017) outline the benefits of using video platforms, specifically Skype, in qualitative research. Possibly, two of the most important benefits that they mention are easy and flexible scheduling and the ability to record data with ease. Through the use of Zoom, I was able to speak with instructors who might not have been physically in the state of Washington at the time. Also, Zoom features the option to record the conversation with video and audio, as well as the ability to create a transcript of the discussion. I was able to use Zoom to easily create an initial transcript of the interviews. Lastly, all participants, both individual interviewees and the focus group members, received the same

questions in advance of our meeting. The full list of questions is available in table 1 and in the appendix.

Recruitment of Participants

The participants were selected purposefully due to their experience teaching in a program that serves students of diverse needs and goals in the same classroom, namely domestic immigrant and refugee students and international students. The criterion for inclusion in this study was employment in a program that serves these two populations together. The first step in recruitment was to find these programs located in Washington state.

As the programs serving international students and domestic/resident English language learners at my institution had merged, the Dean of Transitional Studies was able to share the initial research that she had compiled on programs that served both populations. She provided me with the contact information of institutional deans at local Washington state community colleges that served both populations together. I contacted four deans. Three agreed to forward my email to their instructors, who were directed to respond to me directly if they were interested in participating. I received a total of twelve responses and included all respondents as participants in individual interviews or a focus group. If this process had not yielded sufficient participants, I would have conducted outreach to the other institutions on the list.

The interviews and focus group were held on Zoom in the summer of 2023. I chose to conduct both semi-structured interviews and focus groups because I had experienced the value of both methods of data collection during a coursework trial study. Although most participants were given a choice, I asked some to participate in a focus group because I wanted to have at least one. While interviews had the advantage of allowing participants to speak in great detail about their experiences, the focus group allowed for a more collaborative result which is only possible in groups.

Ethical Considerations

Participant recruitment was initiated upon receiving approval from the University of Glasgow Research Ethics Committee. In accordance with university guidelines for human subjects, participants were informed of the study and confidentiality measures and completed and returned consent forms through the University of Glasgow transfer system. This system allowed for the secure drop

off and pick up of confidential documents. Digital documents were stored on University of Glasgow's Microsoft One Drive cloud, and only essential personal information was collected. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and their responses would be anonymised and thematically analysed. They were also informed that their personal data would be destroyed upon the completion of the project. To comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a data protection impact assessment was conducted in order to minimise the processing risks in the treatment of personal data. In compliance with the University of Glasgow's GDPR, research data is stored for a ten-year period.

The Analytic Process

I used Braun and Clarke's (2022a) reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) to analyse the data for this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2022a), the basic features of this method involve 'developing, analysing, and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systemic processes of data coding to develop themes' (p.4). Braun and Clarke (2022a) articulated their reflexive thematic analysis in 2006 and have been refining and clarifying it in several iterations since (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2013, 2019, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b, 2023). Braun and Clarke (2020b) explain that thematic analysis may represent a range of methods.

Kidder and Fine's (1987) concept of small q/Big Q is also an important concept in Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022a, 2023) framework of reflexive TA. Kidder and Fine (1987) define it as research that involves observation, the lack of a rigid structure, and the development of hypotheses and theory. Braun and Clarke (2022a) state that this refers to an approach that is thoroughly qualitative. Braun and Clarke (2019) explain that the aim of their 2006 approach was to 'articulate an approach to TA that reflected an orientation to qualitative research that was *fully* qualitative' by this, they mean, that the research embodied the qualitative spirit both philosophically and procedurally (p.591). Another way that they have explained this is that the research is qualitative in both 'techniques and values' (Braun & Clarke, 2021b, p.39).

In 2006, Braun and Clarke explained the theoretical flexibility that reflexive TA provides. They state that with the theoretical flexibility, 'Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences,

meanings, and the reality of participants' (p.81). In 2023, Braun and Clarke clarified the process of reflexive TA, with one goal of guiding researchers in producing and reporting methodologically coherent TA' (p.1). They emphasize the encouragement of the '*knowing* practice of TA' (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p.1). Furthermore, such a researcher acknowledges their personal and theoretical viewpoints, makes decisions intentionally, and is a reflexive practitioner of TA.

Byrne (2022) demonstrates the applicability of reflexive TA in the educational context in his study of Irish educators. He used semi-structured interviews and an interpretivist and constructionist framework. This method fit his aim to 'reflect educators' own accounts of their attitudes, opinions and experiences as faithfully as was possible, while also accounting for the reflexive influence of my own interpretations as the researcher' (p.1394).

Positionality in Reflexive Thematic Analysis

In Braun and Clarke's (2022a) framework, the subjective nature of the researcher is taken as essential to the process. Throughout the development of Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013, 2022a) reflexive TA, they have strongly emphasized the importance of the subjectivity of the researcher as a crucial tool in analysis. They clarify that the role of the researcher in the following quote:

> Reflexive TA is premised on the researcher always shaping their research; it will always be infused with their subjectivity, and they are never a neutral conduit, simply conveying a directly-accessed truth of participants' experience. (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p.4)

Due to the importance of the intrinsic, subjective nature of the researcher, situating the positionality of the researcher is necessary, as the researcher's perspective is an important contributor in the analysis of the dataset. Braun and Clarke described researcher subjectivity as 'the primary tool for reflexive TA, as knowledge generation is inherently subjective and situated' (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p.8).

Braun and Clarke (2022a, 2023) stress the importance of Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie's (1999) concept of 'owning your perspective' (Elliott et al. 1999, p.211). Elliott et al. (1999) define this as the researcher's understanding, articulation, and disclosure of what is important and interesting to them, as well as recognizing any presumptions they come with and how they may affect the process and analysis. In Trainor and Bundon's (2021) practical explanation of reflexive TA, they reiterate that it is insufficient to merely mention positionality

due to the active engagement of the researcher in producing knowledge. Braun and Clarke (2022a) emphasize that this helps distinguish their method from other forms of thematic analysis. The researcher must acknowledge their perspective both theoretically and methodologically.

Positionality

Braun and Clarke (2023) explain the importance of the researcher's clarifying their own positioning and experience, the process of reflexivity, and its influence on the analysis. As Drake and Heath (2008) describe, a professional doctorate program often involves insider research, as the purpose is to improve practice by contributing to a body of knowledge. My positionality as a post graduate research student in a Doctor of Education program is one of an insider or cultural member of the group of instructors I spoke to. Like my participants, I am an instructor in a Washington state community college that serves students of diverse needs within the same program. Therefore, my research is truly relevant to my profession and to my interest in creating an equitable learning environment for my students. However, I am a white, cis-gendered, middle-aged woman born in the United States, while some of my participants may identify quite differently from me.

Fleming (2018) explains that there may be many benefits to insider research, such as a deeper familiarity with the context of the study, but that research practitioners have to take steps to avoid their own bias and subjectivity due to this familiarity. Mercer (2007) adds that pre-conceptions that both the researcher and the participant have about each other must be contended with. In interviews, as Fleming (2018) suggests, I tried to 'remain in a neutral position' (p.313). Moreover, I tried to be consistent with how I conducted the interviews, whether the participant was known to me or not. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) point out that posing follow up questions requires the researcher to actively listen and be sensitive to the individual's answers. In all interviews, I remained cognizant of my responsibility to my participants. I made every effort to listen actively and only interrupt to elicit more information about particular responses.

As a researcher and a practitioner, the topic has personal meaning to me, as I try to be the most effective and compassionate instructor that I can be. The knowledge generated by this dissertation will hopefully serve a useful role in helping instructors work more thoughtfully towards equity in their classes.

Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013, 2022a) Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Much has been written about reflexive thematic analysis and how it differs from other forms of TA (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2019, 2021a and b, 2022a, 2023; Byrne,2022). Braun and Clarke (2023) delineate how their reflexive TA differs from other forms of TA,

> They differ in the enactment of coding and theme development, underlying research values, and the conceptualization of key concepts such as the theme. Procedural differences should not be dismissed as trivial, as they reflect underlying research values. (p.1)

Byrne (2022) refers to Braun and Clarke's (2019) article *Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis* to clarify that the main differences involve coding reliability, codebook approaches, and the absence of a reflective approach in research.

Coding and Reliability

Coding is a crucial step in the interpretation and analysis of qualitative research. Creswell and Poth (2017) describe the coding process as involving:

> aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code. (p.190)

They note that depending on the data collected, the researcher may have data from observing, interviewing, and other documents.

Braun and Clarke (2022a) explain that in reflexive TA codes play an important role as the basis of the analysis. They state that codes 'capture specific and particular meanings within the dataset, of relevance to your research question' (p.52). In comparison to other intentions of coding, in reflexive TA, coding is more than narrowing down the details of the data. Coding is the first assessment of what is of value in the data, which will ultimately result in themes. In their view, coding should be a process that is systemic. The researcher should engage in a thorough and rigorous process of

> exploring the diversity and patterning of meaning form the dataset, developing codes, and applying code labels to specific segments of each data item. (p.53)

Coding reliability is another way that Braun and Clarke's (2021b) TA differs from other forms. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define reliability as the 'extent to which research findings can be replicated' (p.249). Therefore, coding reliability is a method influenced by positivism, that presupposes that the same coding can

be reproduced by more than researcher, and that this is what would make it truer. The emphasis in these forms of TA is on the accuracy and the reliability of coding, according to Braun and Clarke (2022a). This may involve the use of 'a fixed codebook and multiple independent coders' (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p.285). In these forms of research, agreement between more than one coder may show the reliability of the research, the concept being, 'that a high level of agreement equals reliable coding'; the subjectivity of researchers is considered to be a threat to the reliability of coding due to individual 'bias' (Braun & Clarke, 2021b, p.39). However, Braun and Clarke (2021b) assert that although agreement between coders and attempts to code consistently and objectively can be present in thematic analysis, they are not a part of reflexive TA.

Byrne (2022) extrapolates upon Braun and Clarke's (2019) assessment of coding and inter-rater reliability, calling attention to the point that analysis happens at the meeting of the dataset, the implications of theory, and what the researcher brings. Therefore, expecting a consensus among codes is unnecessary. He delineates Braun and Clarke's (2019) viewpoint that coding is subjective and not inherently replicable, maintaining that:

> It is fully appreciated—even expected—that no two researchers will intersect this tripartite of criteria in the same way. As such, there should be no expectation that codes or themes interpreted by one researcher may be reproduced by another (although, this is of course possible). (p.1393)

Smith and McGannon (2018) buttress this argument by pointing out that there are many other factors, such as interpersonal and power dynamics that may affect the discussion and agreement of codes, thereby rejecting this as a measure of quality.

Quality

In addition to a more structured and fixed approach to coding that potentially involves a team of coders to check inter-rater reliability, other markers of quality more frequently associated with positivist research are absent from reflexive TA (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Some of these features include generating themes early into the analysis and the aspect of bias. In response to these concerns, Braun and Clarke (2021a) argue that:

> Demonstrating coding reliability and the avoidance of 'bias' is illogical, incoherent and ultimately meaningless in a qualitative paradigm and in reflexive TA, because meaning and knowledge are understood as situated and contextual, and researcher subjectivity is conceptualised as a

> resource for knowledge production, which inevitably sculpts the knowledge produced, rather than a must-be-contained threat to credibility. (pp. 334-335)

Moreover, according to Braun and Clarke (2023), reflexive TA welcomes the subjectivity of the researcher and views it as a resource, not a source of bias. Reflexive TA regards TA as

> inherently subjective, emphasize researcher reflexivity, and reject the notion that coding can ever be accurate – as it is an inherently interpretive practice, and meaning is not fixed within data. (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p.2)

Smith and McGannon (2018) also highlight the problems associated with member checking and inter-rater reliability, which in many forms of thematic analysis are measures of rigour. Rigour, as they point out, may have a variety of meanings depending on the situation. They argue that in qualitative research, it means 'a marker of excellence sought through method' and that the proper application of methods will result in rigour (p.103).

Braun and Clarke (2022a) assert that 'a systematic coding process is important for two reasons – insight and rigour' (p.54). They explain that rigour in reflexive TA is the result of deep, reflexive, and systematic engagement and interaction with the data. As a result of this engagement, theme development can be both 'robust and detailed' (p.54). Ensuring rigour to the process also prevents the researcher from several pitfalls associated with inappropriately using reflexive TA, including avoiding a weak and cursory analysis of the data and merely reinforcing prior assumptions in their theme development.

Byrne (2022) contributes to this understanding by explaining how in RTA 'codes are understood to represent the researcher's interpretations of patterns of meaning across the dataset', thereby emphasising yet again the importance of the individual, subjective researcher (p.1393). Tracy (2010) describes rigour in qualitative research as 'marked by a rich complexity of abundance' in addition to a careful collection and analysis process (p.841).

Validity, Trustworthiness, and Rigour

In some methods, member checking is used to contribute to the validity and trustworthiness of a study. This involves having the participants check the accuracy of what was said and how it was interpreted by the researcher. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe the practice of member checking for validity

as a process that involves bringing the researcher's analysis to the participants to see if they recognize their perspectives and experiences.

However, Smith and McGannon (2018) argue that member checking is ineffective as a measure of trustworthiness and validity. They claim that as the nature of interpretative research is clearly subjective, there is no 'objective knowledge' that member checking can provide (p.104). Therefore, it cannot provide a useful measure of validity in qualitative research. Braun and Clarke (2022a) point out that while there may be some value in 'participant validation' of the data, due to the subjective pattern seeking theme development in reflexive TA, participants might not clearly recognize their experiences and have mixed, perhaps negative emotions. Therefore, member checking in this case may cause harm. While sharing the transcripts with my participants would likely not have caused harm, this consideration informed my decision not to request a review of the transcripts by my participants

According to Braun and Clarke (2022a), in reflexive TA, quality derives from a thoughtful, immersive, deep engagement with the data and the process of analysis. It also involves sufficient reflection and clear design. This is similar to Nowell, Norris, White and Moules' (2017) contention that the measure of trustworthiness in qualitative research begins with 'a rigorous and methodical manner' (p.1). In addition, they state that trustworthiness is a consequence of precision, and consistency in data analysis. They argue that research is deemed trustworthy when it demonstrates 'recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible' (Nowell et al., 2017, p.1).

Subjectivity

As mentioned earlier, Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013, 2022a) view of subjectivity is also unique. Braun and Clarke (2019) assert the researcher's role in coding and theme development is unavoidably subjective; subjectivity is considered a part of reflexive thematic analysis, and not a 'potential threat to knowledge production' (p.591). They state:

> For us, qualitative research is about meaning and meaning-making, and viewing these as always context-bound, positioned and situated, and qualitative data analysis is about telling 'stories', about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the 'truth' that is either 'out there' and findable from, or buried deep within, the data. (p.591)

Also, due to the identification of patterns across the data set in reflexive TA, the justification of the results relies on an adequately large data set to identify patterns.

Topic Summaries and Theme Development

The practice of topic summaries, which presents themes as all the comments the participants said about a topic, is also not appropriate in reflexive TA. Braun and Clarke (2023) emphasize the intentional design of the procedures to result in stories created through interpretation, which draws on the skills of the researcher to engage deeply with the dataset, be a creative and reflective thinker, and follow a rigorous and systematic coding process in order to achieve rich, deep stories. Braun and Clarke (2019) assert that themes should not be confused with topic or 'domain summaries', or a theme that represents a mutual topic, but doesn't share meaning (p.593). Themes are stories that are told about 'particular patterns of shared meaning across the dataset' (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p.592). While topic summaries might be more focused on a subject the participants spoke of and reflect the content of their responses, a theme has more depth, capturing 'a wide range of data that are united by, and evidence, a *shared* idea' (Braun and Clarke, 2022a, p.77). In other words, a hallmark of themes in reflexive TA is the organization of shared meaning around one primary concept.

According to Braun and Clarke (2022a), themes are conceptualized as 'patterns of meaning that are underpinned and united by a central idea' (p.229). Themes are defined as 'shared or similar ideas or meanings, across different contexts' (p.77). Braun and Clarke (2022a) emphasize the crucial role of the researcher in theme development. They warn against the idea that themes emerge from the data and discourage the view that the researcher is a passive participant in theme generation. This, 'denies the *active* role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.80).

The data item is the 'individual piece of data that forms part of the wider dataset' (Braun and Clarke, 2022a, p.286). As themes are patterns, the researcher must show enough evidence throughout the dataset to support or justify the existence of that theme. The role of the researcher is crucial in this

process. Braun and Clarke (2021b) reinforce the relationship between the researcher and theme development, stating that,

> Themes cannot exist separately from the researcher—they are generated by the researcher through data engagement mediated by all that they bring to this process (e.g. their research values, skills, experience and training). (p.39)

Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2022a) argue that themes are not discovered; they are 'generated, created or constructed…they are not identified, found, or discovered, and they definitely don't just "emerge" from data' (p.3).

Trainor and Bundon (2021) highlight that one important update to Braun and Clarke's (2022a) thematic analysis was the addition of the reflexive, thereby bringing the importance of being reflexive to the forefront of the process. They stress that the reflexive TA process requires transparency and clarity in stating reflections, theory, and assumptions that influence the analysis. Moreover, they define three types of reflexivity necessary for this method. Specifically, 1) introspection reflexivity, which uses the understanding of oneself, 2) intersubjective reflection, in which the researcher reflects 'in relation to the participant', and 3) mutual collaboration, in which the researcher acknowledges the participants as co-creators of knowledge (Trainor and Bundon, 2021, p.707).

The Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2022a) explain the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis. The first phase is data familiarisation. This process involves becoming familiar with the data. In my case, the data familiarisation process began with checking and editing the accuracy of the Zoom transcripts. After that I read through the transcripts multiple times and made notes and highlighted areas that stood out as they related to my research question. Trainor and Bundon (2021) describe this process as an initial attempt to make sense of the interview, one which involves active engagement and the consideration of potential patterns and meanings (p.711).

In the second phase, the researcher works in a systematic and detailed way through the data set. Braun and Clarke (2022a) note that this phase is applying code labels, or descriptions, to any meaningful information. They state that the focus is intended to encapsulate 'single meanings or concepts' (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p.35). The initial coding process is particular and meticulous. However, data can also be coded multiple times and at diverse levels. Gathering

code labels and linking them to evidence from the data segments are the next steps.

Phases three and four involve creating initial themes, then developing and reviewing them. Themes describe ‘broader, shared meanings’ then codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p.25). While phase five is the ‘fine-tune’ process of re-evaluating themes and naming them (p.36). The last phase is the writing up. However, Braun and Clarke (2022a & b) emphasize the importance of writing throughout the process, usually beginning at phase three. Trainor and Bundon (2021) similarly describe the journaling process that is a feature of reflexivity and a way of documenting the interactions between the researcher’s role in the process and creation of data.

Although I began reflexive journaling later in the process, it became a way for me to reflect on many aspects of the study. In addition to identifying codes and themes, I was able to use journaling to consider and narrow down theoretical paradigms and relevant conceptual frameworks. Journaling provided more personal insight into the research and coding process. Braun and Clarke (2019) describe the iterative and ‘recursive’ process of coding involves the constant reflection of the researcher and show the importance of reflexivity. The researcher has to constantly ‘reflect on their assumptions and how these might shape and delimit their coding’ (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.39).

Braun and Clarke (2022a) also describe the variations of reflexive TA. They delineate four areas of difference in regarding the orientation to data, focus of meaning, the qualitative framework, and theoretical frameworks. Orientation to data ranges from inductive, in which the analysis originates from the data to deductive, which is more influenced by prior theory. The analysis can be more semantic or latent regarding focus of meaning. Semantic analysis explores at a more surface level, whereas latent analysis looks more at the deeper meaning beyond what is said. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2022a) distinguish between experiential and critical qualitative frameworks, the former’s intention to explore perspectives and the latter to focus on meaning around the topic. Lastly, the different theoretical frameworks are realist and essentialist versus relativist constructionist. The realist/essentialist framework ‘aims to capture truth and reality, as expressed within the dataset,’ and the relativist/constructionist is more concerned with unpacking the ‘realities that are expressed within the dataset’ (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p.10).

My process in applying Braun and Clarke's (2022a) steps was not linear. Phases one and two involved multiple, in-depth interaction with the transcripts. Codes were indicated though handwritten and sticky notes and while initially semantic or located at the surface level of what participants said, later developed into more latent, or implicit coding. Then, initial themes were developed and refined through numerous readings of the codes. The table below shows code labels used to create themes.

Examples of Code Labels: The table below shows code labels which were used to generate themes. They are presented here in alphabetical order.

Absence of Fear	Empathy	Pairing
Acceptance	Empowerment	Participation
Accessibility	Encouragement	Patience
Accommodations	Engagement	Persistence
Adapting	Experience	Personal circumstances
Adjusting	Expectations	Personal Connection
Advocacy	Faculty status	Positionality
Affective Filter	Fair access	Power
Age	Fair instruction	Practice
Agency	Feedback	Presence
Altruism	Flexibility	Program constraints
Ask	Fostering a welcoming environment	Progress
Asset - Based	Freedom of choice	Rapport
Assumptions	Gaps	Reality of student lives
Attitude	Goal setting	Recognizing effort
Avoid stereotyping	Guidance	Reflection
Awareness	Helping students in different ways	Relationships
Background knowledge	Humanity	Relevance
Barriers	Humility	Repetition
Basic Skills	Inclusion	Resources
Belief	Individuality	Respect
Belonging	Individualized instruction	Responsibilities
Building community	Insecurity	Rigour
Campus climate	Institutional commitment	Safety
Challenges	Institutional policies	Saturation
Check ins	Interaction	Scaffolding
Choice	Interactive Design	Self-doubt
Collaboration	Interests	Sensitivity
Combined levels	Kindness	Situations
Comfort level	Knowing the individual	Skill Based Assignments
Communication	Learning	Standards
Community	Learning from colleagues	Student buy-in
Concern	Level playing field	Student centred
Confidence	Listening	Student strengths
Conflict resolution	Low stakes	Support
Connections to personal needs/ the individual	Meeting students halfway	Technology gaps
Consistency	Modification of assignments	Time
Conversations	Modification of curriculum	Transparency
Culture	Motivation	Trial and error
Cultural capital	Multiple modalities	Trust
Curiosity	Observation	UDL
Differentiated instruction	Open-mindedness	Understanding
Discussions	Opportunities	Unintended Consequences
Disparities	Options	Values
Diversity	Outcomes	Variety
Emotions		Work in progress

Table 3-2: Code Labels

Reasons for Choosing Reflexive TA

From the variations of reflexive TA described above, I used the these to perform my analysis of the dataset. Since the analysis was largely driven by the content of the participants' voices, the orientation to data was mostly inductive.

However, the application of a deductive orientation was used to frame the themes in terms of McGee Banks and Banks' equity pedagogy (1995), Gorski's Equity Literacy Framework (2025), and McNair et al.'s (2020) framework of equity-mindedness. In addition, the focus of meaning began as largely semantic, but through the repeated readings and coding, also involved latent exploration. The analysis employed the experiential framework and attempted to 'capture and explore' the participants' perspectives and experiences. Finally, as the analysis tried to demonstrate the 'truth and reality, as expressed within the dataset,' it could be defined as more essentialist in theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p.10).

Summary

Braun and Clarke's (2022a) reflexive thematic analysis influenced and underpinned the design and orientation of the study. I chose this because of its flexible application and its potential for complex analysis. Also, it has the benefit of allowing for the comparison of 'similarities and differences across the dataset' and accessible results in an experiential framework (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p.261). Other support for the use of this method includes the focus on themes instead of particular aspects of 'individual cases,' and the investigation of more than the personal experience of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021b p.42). A crucial attribute of this method is the researcher's role in the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2019) exhort a celebration of the subjective nature of the researcher and say that 'The researcher's role in knowledge production is at the heart of our approach!' (p.594).

Through a systematic and iterative coding and theme development process, and the interaction between 12 instructors in ESL programs who sacrificed their time and provided broad and valuable insights, the researcher asked what instructors understand or perceive as equity and how they aim to implement equitable instruction in their classroom in a program with students of diverse needs and goals.

Chapter 4 – Results and Analysis

Overview

This study seeks to understand how instructors in a program of students with very different needs and goals define or understand equity and how they try to implement equitable instruction. The context of this study focuses on programs that serve two populations that may have very different needs and goals. It examines how instructors best serve these students in light of the challenges that may arise in a diverse classroom. The evaluation of instructors' understanding of equity and how they attempt to facilitate a learning environment that considers the diverse needs and goals of students is an important way to help all learners succeed.

Thematic analysis of the transcripts of interviews resulted in the following conceptualizations of equity and equitable practices. The research generated six main themes: implementing equitable instruction through facilitating access, centring the individual, encouraging community and belonging, having an attitude of service, considering the impact of political and institutional factors, and the importance of equity as a work in progress.

The preferred gender of the participants was neither requested nor specified during data collection or analysis. Therefore, participants will all be referred to by the pronoun they.

1. Equity through facilitating access
2. Centring the individual: knowledge of students
3. Community and belonging
4. Instructor's attitude of service
5. Considering the impact of political and institutional factors
6. Equity as a work in progress

Table 4-2: Overview of Themes

Theme 1: Equity Through Facilitating Access

The first theme developed through this study is the concept of equity as providing access to all students. Here, access will be defined and demonstrated in a variety of ways. Instructors spoke of the importance of providing a means of contact for their students through the removal of barriers and obstacles which

may impede learning, agency, or successful achievement of goals. Providing access is one of the ways teachers facilitate an equitable learning experience.

Instructors acknowledge awareness of the diversity of their classes in many ways. Here participant 10 details the realities of the challenges in a diverse classroom, whether it contains solely international or domestic students:

> even if we have a homogeneous group of students...and when I say homogeneous, I mean... all international or whatever, there still are going to be challenges. So, kind of magnify that with, you have two different populations, right? Two different populations, perhaps several different needs, challenges...

Moreover, despite advantages and disadvantages that students may come into the classroom with, all students deserve a learning environment through which they can learn and work towards their goals successfully. The participants take this responsibility seriously. Instructors aim to facilitate access in two main ways: access to content and learning and access to cultural capital, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Participants highlight the importance of access in their definitions of equity. For example, participant 4 defines equity as

> fair access to quality resources, quality instruction… so that each student can learn and thrive, according to their needs and goals… in the class and outside of it.

Further, they pose:

> How can we remove the effects... of class and money and education and past school success? How can we remove those influences so that everyone has that access to quality education and... the chance to thrive? I see those things as being either requirements to success or barriers. They can be barriers to success. How do we remove those barriers to put them on that level playing field that they don't always come with? (Participant 4)

Other participants echoed this definition. Participant 7 said, ‘It’s opening the door and removing the barriers so that anyone can achieve’. Participant 5 framed equity as meaning, ‘all students have an opportunity to achieve their goals in the classroom environment’.

Access to Content and Learning

Instructors use various strategies to ensure that all students can access content and learning. This means that instructors seek to create ways that all students can engage with the content and learning despite the differences in their immediate or end goals. Although instructors have to address the course

outcomes or objectives, they use various methods to satisfy the specific interests and outcomes for all learners. Teachers try to make content relevant to the students in their classes. They allow for freedom of choice through the adjustment of assignments and assessment. A core aspect of providing access to content and learning for all students is the instructor's flexibility and willingness to be flexible in a variety of ways.

Making Content Relevant

Most participants prioritized a student-centred environment, and they considered making content relevant to students' needs and goals as an important part of this. A feature of this is giving students choices and modifying assignments to provide a point of access for students to relate classwork to their own needs. Instructors work to make content meaningful to students by responding to their differences. This involves considering their needs, goals, and interests.

Instructors need to be aware of the differences amongst their students and consider these differences when designing assignments and instruction. According to participant 3, instructors must be:

> inclusive of all different kinds of age groups and cultural backgrounds... you've got to try... to be more inclusive, in discussions and… make adjustments with assignments. Maybe you want to focus on different …skill areas towards different students based on their needs. What they want to achieve, that that sort of thing…

Instructors implement equitable instruction by creating assignments that are likely to broadly connect to their students' experiences. This means that despite a more academic emphasis with some curriculum, instructors create tasks that are relevant to all students, regardless of different needs and goals. Instructors explained ways that they frame tasks and assignments to appeal more broadly to students who may not have academic goals. Several instructors showed how they do this with writing assignments.

Participant 5 explains how they respond to student differences in their classroom.

> [by] finding a way…to be relevant to all the students…if they have different interests, different goals, it's …how can I bring content and skills that appeals and motivates...[to] the different interests and needs of the students…say for around writing. I try to bring in things that aren't academic…to hit on other motivations like writing skills…like, if you're writing to your child's teacher, writing an email…writing a letter or a job

> application…I just try to bring in some other connections to what they're doing in writing, besides the academic style, that's on the curriculum.

Students are given the freedom to make choices, which makes the content more relevant and personal. Instructors allow students to choose topics that are meaningful to them and relevant to their circumstances, needs, and goals. One way that instructors allow for the personalization of topics is by modifying prompts. Here, participant 8 describes how they frame a prompt so that all students have a point of access.

> [an assignment] where … people can write … about some event in their life that was … embarrassing, or scary, or funny and leaving it quite loose … so that the students can express themselves and tell their own story. It could be something to do with their hometown as well. I think personalization … is pretty important, and I suppose an equity aspect of that is…it's not so prescribed.

In addition, instructors make assignments relevant by emphasising the importance and application of the core concepts of the skills. Some instructors create opportunities to show their students how topics or skills relate to them even if it seems like they do not. By relating the skill of writing to the art of thinking and organizing ideas, participant 12 explains how the concepts of a more academic writing class can be framed as relevant to students whose goals are not academic.

> If you're a student who is really not…going on to get a college degree... then, learning…how to write, an academic essay may not be personally relevant to you. So that's the challenge… doing annotation, learning how to summarize things - that's not just good in an academic environment… You might be in a job where your boss will ask you to read a memo, and then…give a quick summary… or…tell … what the meeting was about… And that's where you would need to have…good note taking skills and good summarization skills … So, trying to create things in the classroom where the students can see...I can use this in my own life.

Participant 12 is transparent about the transferable skills that students may develop from a task that on the surface might not be related to all student needs. They explain,

> You may not need to know how to write an essay, but … even if you're doing a project and a job… you still a lot of the same concepts … like brainstorming, outlining, doing drafts… if you're not writing a 5-paragraph academic essay, you're still using a lot of the same skills applied to different situations.

Participant 4 described a similar way to make content relevant with an assignment they modify to make accessible to all needs and goals when teaching about ability with the verb can. They emphasize framing the purpose in

activities so that students can apply the concepts to their own needs and goals and showed how they get students to inductively apply concepts to their own contexts through directed guidance. This not only makes the content relevant to the students but also empowers them.

> I might consider all the different ways that students might need to be able to express ability and really offer a lot of those scenarios. So, in speaking … we might talk about it as if it were a job interview, as if it were a parent- teacher conference, as if you were a student describing your academic skills. And then in writing - we might write it as in an email or a text to a client or a letter to a supervisor, and then maybe also in a paragraph form that maybe hits a little bit more academic … I would have them generate their own list of their abilities…The things that they can do, that's important for them to describe for their work situation, for…whatever their situation is…they can generate a list of verbs…that are important to them, and then they might…write sentences that work for themselves…in general trying to think about the purpose of this…why are we teaching describing ability…What are they going to need to use this for? And how will this improve their lives? And how will this give them agency? How will this give them the ability to express themselves?

Choice and Flexibility in Assignments and Assessments

Findings showed that part of creating access to content is the modification and reframing of tasks and assignments. This involves creating more opportunities for students' freedom of choice. Instructors alter their assignments and assessments to reach students of diverse needs and goals in various ways, thereby allowing students to access the content and create more equitable learning opportunities.

This choice and flexibility are often presented as differentiated learning. Instructors make content relevant and increase access through differentiated instruction. Participants spoke of an awareness of other factors in addition to needs and goals, which might affect the engagement of their students in the content and learning. These factors could include differences in age, circumstances, experience, and level of English. Instructors take these differences into account, and they design activities that provide an entry for all students to relate to the materials and access the learning.

Instructors consider the needs and goals of their students to modify assignments and assessments to allow all students to be invested in their learning. Here, participant 5 describes part of their process:

> I will adjust for…what I know about them, their age, for example… I'll consider my audience, of course, with what kind of content I bring in, or

> examples. Is it relevant to the different populations in the room that they can relate to, that they're not offended by?

Participant 1 echoes this by reflecting on how they make choices that increase the relevance, and therefore access, for their students:

> Looking at assignments, saying, okay, this will work for most of my students, but it's not going to work for international students, so how can I tweak this, so the context is applicable and… relevant to what their goals and what their needs are. So maybe switching something that was originally…pre-employment or employment focused into something related to…college transfer, or a major that they're interested in…so sometimes it involves me…printing… two different versions…pre-employment focused, and…college…major focused.

Personalizing assignments and creating an inclusive learning environment allow students to invest more of themselves in the learning. Participant 4 explains how personalizing assignments helps

> to keep that motivation up and to help students be able to bring as much of themselves to the class, as possible, I can help them get out of it what they need. So, a lot of open-ended activities…and I try to vary activities a lot throughout the class period…that's trying to reach as many students in different ways as possible, trying to teach the same thing in several different ways, to reach different students in different ways.

The involvement of the students in their own learning, production, and assessment is another way to facilitate equitable instruction. Participant 1 spoke of 'letting students …tweak aspects of major assignments' as long as the outcomes of the course were being met. Participant 3 explained allowing their students to choose what books to read in a reading class, from ESL levelled readers to books written for native speakers:

> I actually adjusted the assignments. I allowed them to completely choose… let them forget about ESL. They just choose whatever they want to read, and they're interested in reading, because… especially those domestic students; they're adults. They are good readers in their own language. So, they found books actually in their own interests, the interest in the[ir] fields.

In addition, participant 4 explained how they modify prompts for students of diverse needs and goals:

> I might try to make the prompts sort of more general to align with, maybe more what they need or what they want…and then also really focusing on making those assignments really transparent.
> Ensuring equitable access requires flexibility on the part of the instructor. This flexibility manifests itself in various ways in an equitable learning

environment. Participants related flexibility to adapting instruction to meet the needs of the students. Participant 1 related their definition of equity:

> I guess a definition would have something to do with like being flexible and meeting students where they're at; understanding that each student is going to be a little different.

Instructors emphasized the importance of meeting the course outcomes but allowed for flexibility in what that looked like. Participant 8 explained how in their class, they allow handwritten or typed final written products:

> My expectation is that they have the same format that the other students do… they have… the first name, last name, class, date in the top left. They have the title in the middle. They have an indent, and they do the double space.

Similarly, participant 11 articulated,

> I don't require students to submit their writing assignments on Canvas [learning management system] or even type, for that matter, they can write it in crayon, as far as I'm concerned, as long as they're getting…the concepts and principles that I'm teaching to them.

Moreover, the instructors described how they modified final projects to allow for individual characteristics, thereby allowing all students to demonstrate learning in their own way. Participant 1 shows how an instructor's flexibility is part of that:

> Back to that kind of theme of being flexible…when we do presentations, either at the end of the quarter or the mid quarter presentation, telling students it's okay if they want to do something different…either with the topic or the structure, they just need to talk to me first, so, I can see that it's still… within reason, and it's still working toward the goals that that we have for that assignment.

The instructors prioritized students' learning of essential concepts and allowed students choice in the final format and appearance of assignments. They sought out topics that could apply broadly to students of many different needs and goals, where students could find a point of access. When describing a reading assignment, participant 6 showed how they focus on responding to themes that could apply to all students. Here, they discuss mentorship:

> But I think that [mentorship] does get to everybody- no matter where they are in their skills, no matter where they are in their needs or goals, they can identify things they have learned and how they learned it to some degree, and they can identify important people in their life who have been inspirational.

Participant 9 described how they consider space for student differences. They state how they

> make sure, like, in terms of assessment, whenever it's possible, to give students some choice in the matter, whether that's the choice of a format that they're submitting it in or ...if it's like written or spoken, or choice of the topic that they're writing about, or doing their project about, or whatever that is - ways that I don't see equity in our current English language instruction…And I think also giving room for the assignment to look different for different students.

They also illustrated how this choice provides access to agency through showing students that they can affect the communities they live in and that they have a voice in their democracy. In the following quote, participant 9 describes a writing assignment they used in class:

> I wanted them to pretend they were writing to an elected official about a problem in the community, and ... what solutions they suggest for changing that. And I gave the students two different ways that they could do this. One is they could ...look up … like actual bills that are going to be going to the Senate or the House of Representatives...you could write to a representative about gun control or abortion...make your voice heard in that way, or if you want more trash cans at the park by your house, write to an elected official about that ...You want streetlights? You want sidewalks? You don't want fireworks in your community? Write to your elected official about that... if you have academic goals and you want to do something like more challenging, awesome. if you don't, and you just want, like everyday writing abilities, awesome.

Participant 10 continues with how they allow modifications in final projects based on the individual characteristics of their students.

> The whole class did a presentation, and one student, due to high anxiety, did a paper. That's totally fine... I don't care so long as I have some evidence that you learned something.

Participant 2 also commented on creating assignments that allow access from many different vantage points. They also emphasized the importance of students understanding why they are doing something and how it applies to them.

> I think we do it [create an equitable learning environment] through a diverse number of assignments, where they can express, where they can use their skills...more on a type of summary and response writing where we're really more focusing kind of on the grammar behind and parallel structures, and commas and punctuation, and the ability... using that as the tool... some assignments might be more purposeful, more useful to one group of students, but they need to understand why you're asking them… that is the same for... any group of students.

Instructors demonstrate intentionality and flexibility in creating accessible assignments. Participant 12 explains their process.

> In a lot of assignments ... if a student wanted to say, create a PowerPoint and have some kind of visual background, they could do that. They can have it a little bit more formal... I recognize not all of our students have

> access to the same kind of technology... they could just stand in front of the class and speak from their heart...I try to create in a lot of assignments, options like that where you can engage with the assignment [and] requirements in different ways...I try to create assignments that allow for a lot of creativity and flexibility in that way…they get choices on topics and they...could do it by hand, or ... type it on a computer.

Instructors use choice intentionally in their classes though assignments and assessments that allow students to access the content and learning in a class. They consider the students' interests, needs, and goals to design appropriate, relevant, and engaging content. They demonstrate flexibility involving the students in the design of content and in not adhering to prescribed assignments or formats. In this way, they can increase the equitable instruction in their classes of diverse needs and goals.

Multiple Modes of Instruction

Many participants were influenced by the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in fostering an equitable class. The hallmarks of the UDL framework are multiple means of how information is presented, how students engage in learning, and how students express their learning. This influence was seen previously in how instructors offer students a choice in the format of their assessments, but here I will discuss how participants implement multiple means of instruction and presentation as a way to make their classes more equitable. By providing opportunities for students to engage with the course content in a variety of ways, instructors increase access and thus make the class more equitable.

Instructors demonstrated their awareness and understanding of UDL principles in their intentionality to provide written, spoken, and visual instruction to their students. Here, participant 9 explains more about using UDL:

> Some of my practices are implementing...universal design for learning whenever possible, which can mean a bunch of different things, and I am still exploring what all ...the possibilities are for that...but I think of it as … in the basic forms, as having everything written and spoken, so that students have different ways to access the information, to make sure there's multiple modes of engagement.

In addition, participant 10 described how these ideas can help provide equity for all learners:

> The pedagogical things we can do intrinsically have equity built in right. And to remember that, too. It's not just like personal stuff. It's just also craft stuff that we can do… Like again, making sure that we can offer things in different modalities.

Moreover, participant 1 commented on the steps involved in providing detailed support:

> …trying to…help students in different ways …multiple modalities for content...when I do videos…I do the auto subtitles. But then I go back, and I edit the subtitles. And then I teach the students and show the students how to activate the subtitles...and then being flexible with the student, offering things in multiple modalities.

Using variety proved to be very important to most participants in order to provide access to diverse learners in different ways. Participant 8 explained how important it is for students to work in different ways. They also spoke about materials and classroom activities:

> …the different use of materials: video, audio textbooks and newspapers, magazines, quizzes on Canvas, just variety, variety, variety. And … people working individually, recognizing that some people … like to go a million miles an hour and need to be maybe slowed down a little bit. Other people … may need a little bit of help and encouragement … A huge variety of ways of learning in the classroom and materials used in the classroom: textbook, audio, working in groups, working in pairs, working individually, so that maybe during the course of a class each individual student… will have been in the comfort zone of studying at some point, and maybe that's maybe that's the best we can do when we've got 25, 30 people in a classroom.

Participants strongly attested to the benefits of multiple means of presentation and engagement. Participant 7 also alluded to the point of student's being in the comfort zone briefly and described a similar approach to instruction, highlighting the importance of remembering to focus on the basics.

> I'm constantly having a combination of writing, speaking, moving around the classroom, talking in pairs, talking in groups...and with many different pedagogical techniques, to meet the needs and also reminding myself to slow down sometimes and not having to be so fancy and change everything. I think sometimes I get too caught in trying to meet everyone's different needs that I just need to also slow it down and simplify.

Participant 2 describes the methods they use to ensure every student is getting access to the content. They reiterate the importance of providing students multiple experiences with content in order to increase access to the content.

> You start with a kind of the general lesson, and then you watch how they are responding to what you're giving, and generally...every single piece of knowledge that you are sharing. You are introducing it...in many different ways, right? You're going to show it. They're going to write it. They're going to speak it, they're going to look at it, they're going to walk it, they're going to talk it.

Participant 12 expands upon this:

> I do think that there's something to be said, for… giving a lot of verbal instruction and writing things on the whiteboard, posting things in Canvas, acting things out... I get students to act things with me, and I try to… teach things in different ways… if we're doing vocabulary, we'll look at vocabulary…in the PowerPoint, and then we'll read the vocabulary in a text, and then I'll have them do discussion questions with each other in which they're using the vocabulary, and then we'll do vocabulary games…in a couple of different formats to have to have them use and interact with the vocabulary in different ways.

They also emphasize the value of multiple modes of instruction for improving student outcomes and equitable instruction.

> And to me that's the mark of a good teacher. It may take more time. It may absolutely take more patience. Maybe you have to rearrange things in your schedule...you want to make sure all the students get it...I think that's the challenge to me as a teacher...what can I do to explain things in ways all the students in the room go, oh, I get it! because that's ...a beautiful moment...to begin with, but definitely for equity. I want all the students to get it ... I think, recognizing as an instructor and also helping students recognize that people learn at different times, different paces. People learn in different ways. And that's totally okay. (Participant 12)

Participants across the interviews and the focus group clearly demonstrated ways in which they used a variety of activities, multiple means of presentation, and engagement to involve their students in their own learning. Similarly, they showed ways in which they adapted classroom materials to increase access to content based on the individual needs and goals of students.

Low-Stakes Practice

Access to content and learning is also created through low stakes practice. Instructors use this as a way to ensure that their students are ready to meet the outcomes of high-stakes assignments and as a way to promote equitable instruction. Low-stakes practice consists of activities and classwork which are not associated with a large number of graded points. It provides a space for students to learn without the pressure of a major evaluation that may seriously affect their grade. Low-stakes practice serves to provide access to content and learning without the fear or pressure of a grade that could be the difference between success or failure, and it still ensures that students are learning. Participant 1 spoke of this practice in their instruction as a way of building confidence and a way to mitigate the pressure of a high-stakes presentation:

> I need …to provide a lot of ... low stakes or no stakes example[s] or... opportunities… for language production… both in writing and in speaking…different scenarios or different situations, where maybe sometimes it's in a group, sometimes it's...one on one... Maybe it's not even an assignment. Maybe it's me talking with a student after a class or something in writing …giving more examples … even for a higher stakes assignment.

Participant 4 also spoke of the importance of these assessments:

> It's important to do lots of low stake assessments, lots of chances and frequent opportunities for students to show what they've learned and show progress towards objectives that are not high stakes or opportunities to redo things. I think it's important for student success.

Participant 10 explained their use of allowing students to revise a high stakes essay assignment multiple times in order to get the grade that they want.

> A lot of times in our classrooms... scaffold, scaffold, and then our big essay assignment. They get a grade after all the prep... What I tell students is that if they like the grade they're at, they could leave it, as is; however, they have the option to do another revision to get a different grade and they are able to revise that essay however many times they want. So, in my opinion, that's pretty equitable, because again, students can do it, should they choose ... I think the most I've had is 4 [number of revisions] ... that student did... get a passing grade to move on... they have the option to do that... that's one thing that I can think of that can show equity.

These examples show how instructors are using low stakes practice and optional revision to create opportunities where learning is the focus and not the grade. These practices create more equity because they support student learning and bolster student success.

Leveraging Student Strengths

Another way that instructors deal with the challenges of facilitating student access to learning and engagement is by leveraging student strengths. Instructors increase access for all students by creating opportunities for students to benefit from their classmates' support. Participant 3 argues, 'have some teach each other and have them teach you, and they will learn better, and they will learn more carefully'.

This strategy can be useful in a variety of ways in a diverse classroom, as it provides a means of access for students of all levels. For example, participant 5 describes using classmates' technological skills and other strengths in their classes in order to increase access for all students:

> I will instruct everybody on how to make a basic PowerPoint…usually in the group, there's somebody who's got stronger skills and they are with

> them, building the PowerPoint, learning from each other… that's one big reason I like group projects. … the students are learning from each other… Some might have stronger speaking skills, some might have stronger writing skills or grammar skills… they're … learning from each other… They have… a roles and responsibilities worksheet to go through…What are your strength[s]? What are your skills? … How can you help your group? … I really try to make it very overt, like: Don't be shy right now. Your strengths are going to help your group. Tell your group what you're good at and do it.

Participant 6 explains this process:

> I guess one thing is the old classic... pairing up people with stronger and weaker abilities... assignments where the stronger ones can help out some of the weaker ones a little bit better, or they can see more modelling... some of my old standbys are language experience approach activities…for example... picture stories where …they have to explain the picture at the level they're at... each person can develop the level wherever [they are] ... when they're co-constructing the meaning with other learners...everyone's level can be bumped up that way... I think a language experience approach can go towards ... pairing up of people who have different abilities as well.

These participants show that while it is a challenge to effectively meet each student at the level that they are at; by leveraging student strengths, all students can have an access point to the material.

Leveraging student strengths can also affect students' attitudes and familiarity with the academic expectations. Participants described how pairing students helps with access to both knowledge and motivation. Participant 8 explains:

> I always like to ...put them together because I think both can really help each other because… the domestic students, are generally ...more mature and can encourage the international students to ...be ...more mature and self-motivated ...And I think the international students can be pretty helpful, too, because they'll...typically come from backgrounds where... they're much more privileged and have some study skills already in place, and they... know the expectations in academia.

There are additional benefits, such as an awareness of their own agency, that also come from leveraging student strengths, as participant 12 demonstrates:

> …or … this student maybe is struggling a little bit. Let me pair them up with someone who is a little better at x thing, whatever it is, and have them help each other as well. I think I think it's also really important that students recognize that that it's not just the teacher ... as the source of knowledge.

Access to Technology

Technology and tech skills play a big role in student access to content and learning. Tech skills have become increasingly necessary, and federal funding requirements for domestic students require computer literacy outcomes. Moreover, learning requirements changed during and after the COVID pandemic, with a greater emphasis on technology, including the ability of students to successfully navigate remote/hybrid learning with computer learning systems. However, the emphasis on technology may not necessarily reflect all students' needs and goals. Access to content and learning is complicated by both access to physical hardware and computer skills.

Instructors need to consider gaps in technological skills in order to create an equitable learning environment. Students with disparate technical skills can pose a significant challenge to equitable instruction. As mentioned earlier, many instructors mitigate the challenges for students who may not have as strong technical skills by leveraging student strengths or allowing multiple forms of final submission formats. Instructors need to identify and address these disparate skills in order to increase access to content and learning and provide more equitable instruction.

Differences in access to technology skills can result in inequity in both time and learning. The issue of being able to navigate technology easily also may affect students' access to coursework. In a class of international and domestic students, some students may be completely computer fluent, while others need a lot more support and time. Moreover, sometimes students will receive laptops from institutions without knowing how to use them. One challenge is that students need time to learn how to use technology. Participant 8 speaks of the challenges of the disparities in skills and the difficulties in instruction due to lack of time.

> When they're high level and they're very comfortable on the computer, maybe they can do a few hours a week. But actually, when ... computers are so new to them ... they begin to ... just get frustrated...then there's the outliers who... who can't do technology at all because of the age or ... where they've come from... It is a challenge, and … unless you're teaching one to one, it's frustratingly ineffective. I think I'd like it to be more effective.

Instructors identify gaps in technology skills early in their interactions with students. Participant 12 explains how they assess technological skills in their classes:

> Part of that also is to address that in … the student introduction survey… I ask them what kind of technology they have access to? ...Do you have a computer at home? Do you have a microphone? And do you have a good Wi-fi connection? Or is that an issue sometimes? So, addressing what access to technology they have at home... reiterating to students they have access to technology at the school. And then in those moments when we're... using the technology, checking in…and with the students who need a little bit more instruction… giving them the time… that little extra help…

Participant 5 described incorporating computer lab time to ensure that all students have the access to computer skills and software.

> I schedule a computer lab weekly… I just tell the class... this is an English language class...You're all about the same English level. But we also have technology in this class... And I think that's the challenge... They're all about the same English level. But they're all over the page for technology skills... Maybe they don't know ... what technology is even available as a student... how to use the library or what's available to them... that's where I will bring that into my classroom, into the instruction and activities to make it more equitable.

Access to technology has become increasingly important in community college English language classes and is necessary for academic and work success, but often students may have widely different experiences and skills in technology. Though challenging, instructors focus on ensuring that all students have the necessary skills to be successful in their class, thereby creating a more equitable experience for students of all needs and goals.

Access to Materials and Resources

Instructors also think about equitable access to materials and resources. Through their institutions, instructors account for disparities in financial situations by providing the use of computers, dictionaries, and sometimes textbooks. They encourage the use of library resources and website that are available to everyone.

Several participants mentioned the use of Open Education Resources (OER), as a means to remove the cost of materials in order to ensure more equity. OER is one way that programs and instructors are offering an alternative to high-cost materials, which might be inaccessible to all students and result in inequity. Participant 11 spoke of the challenges some students face with financial insecurity and what their institution is doing. They said:

> Economically, we're trying to find funding for textbooks for our students... war refugees from Ukraine. And they're being really challenged with being able to purchase the textbooks, which [are] sold as a packet for just

> under $60. And that's a big stretch... especially when you're thinking about... this is on learning as opposed to food, a necessity sort of thing. So, we're...in this era of OER, that's definitely an area where we could stand to grow.

Participant 5 spoke of deciding which topics in OER to use in order to appeal to all students.

> I found in some material... this OER Vancouver or B.C., Canada-based materials… I like the readings and the topics... food is very relatable for everybody... But then within that there are interesting articles... It's not like basic food, for, like a beginner level. It is talking about nutrition and shopping strategies ... but I do find my students, whoever they are... these are things they all share interest in and [are] relevant to their lives.

Access in materials is not just literal, though. Students need to connect to the materials in a personal way in order to access the content. Several participants spoke of the importance of creating access to various perspectives and representation in materials. Participant 5 describes using a lesson on naming culture in an OER that

> values... a variety of cultural background and knowledge naming cultures around the world, and how names are in various countries... So just of having this…not a totally American or Europe, like centric viewpoint on what we're reading... consistently bringing in... some story or some information ... that brings in other cultures and countries. Just to show … "This is interesting. I'm curious." And that fosters... this curiosity about each other and different places and peoples.

Participant 12 argues for the value of resources and representation in materials.

> If students feel... maybe I don't have a lot of money outside the college, but I can still come to the college and access all … these tools and resources just as much as a rich student... you know, if I have a Black student largely surrounded by... Asian or white students… I want that student to feel included. I want them to see themselves in the curriculum... I want... them to be visually represented because representation absolutely matters. And so even in my materials, I like to show lots of different kinds of people.

Not all participants were in favour of the push for OER. In spite of its cost-saving value, participant 6 suggests that its lack of quality is in fact a drawback that leads to more inequity. They say,

> I really believe in the institution of publishing, and it's one of the areas where I'm probably a bit at odds in the field. I'm not that enthusiastic about the whole OER thing. And actually, I think it's inequitable. I think it goes against equity principles because I think the institution of publishing is based on distilled knowledge that's happened to have, over a hundred years at least, in English language learning. and of course, is not perfect. But it's distilled knowledge of things that have been built on each other over time.

Most participants agreed that facilitating equitable access to resources was one thing they could do to facilitate an equitable environment despite the acknowledgement that 'You're not going to fully meet everyone's needs by one language class and one teacher, but...connecting to the other resources is huge' (participant 7). Furthermore, participant 9 spoke of their use of accessible materials through their institution's library and other resources:

> I utilize a lot of outside resources… I make sure that I let my students know about resources at the college… the library has a whole section ... for ELL students... I let them know ways that they can utilize the resources that we're using in the classroom, so if they want to practice their listening skills... they can create their own pronunciation logs, their own vocabulary logs that they can work on whatever skills that they need to work on. ... In addition to the Conversation Corner, that we have [at] our college, giving them links to a bunch of different websites for reading access, and letting them know about podcasts and the benefits of podcasts.…ways they can use Ted Talk to work on their listening, to work on their reading, to work on their speaking... letting them know all these resources that are available to them, because there's no way that my class is going to be able to give everyone exactly what they need.

Part of access to content and learning is the accessibility of materials. Open Educational Resources are one way that instructors are making access to content more equitable. Furthermore, instructors choose materials which reflect the culture and values of the class. They consider access to representation in their materials, and they provide free resources for further study. In these ways, instructors create equity through access to materials and resources.

Access to Cultural Capital

Through access to cultural capital, instructors provide a means for their students to develop their agency and resist marginalization. Several instructors highlighted how all the students are in the class to learn English, regardless of their needs and goals. Therefore, developing English skills will provide students with the capital to act in their own best interest and ultimately advocate for themselves. Access to cultural capital is provided through access to cultural, institutional, and campus norms and resources. Most importantly, through this capital and the linguistic capital of English, students are able to develop a sense of confidence in their own agency, crucial for meeting their own needs and goals.

Access to Institutional and Cultural Norms

Through English instruction in the United States, students receive access to American institutional cultural norms. This serves as a tool to provide them with the agency to advocate for themselves on campus and in the greater community. Here, participant 5 describes a project through which students become familiar with campus resources and derive far more benefits.

> A goal of the campus resource project is for them to learn access to campus resources. ... it's very important for equity, because ... they should... feel welcome, and [know about] how to access all the basic campus resources that the native English-speaking broader campus community college students know about, like how to use the tutoring centre, what are the different food resources on campus. Do our students know about …the food that's available… Do they know how they can access study rooms at the library? Do they know how to ... use the exercise facilities and go on social events? ... That's equity in my mind.

Participant 7 also prioritizes facilitating access to campus resources for their students. They try to mitigate the inequity within their program that provides more support to international ESL students than domestic English language learners.

> Another thing that came to mind are campus connections. I generally find that international students have ... a lot of support and the bigger [college] orientations when they come in and … they get their student ID cards right away...it's just been very structured in our program, whereas [with] domestic students, often it is a much shorter orientation, and they don't always have the same ... campus connections coming in. So being intentional, like the first couple of weeks of seeing who has their student ID cards and scheduling the whole group to go get them if needed and making sure they all know where the library is ...and not just assuming that they've had the same introduction to the college, even, because that's often not the case.

Facilitating access to support the development of student agency is also a priority. As previously mentioned, agency may result through the process of the confidence of learning and leveraging student strengths, but through access to cultural capital, students are ultimately able to advocate for themselves. Participant 10 describes how supporting students to ask questions empowers students with the agency to ask. They say:

> We just need to make sure that we give them the encouragement... and the empowerment to ask. That to me…is a sign of equity, because many times our students do not know how to ask… and that… always changes the shift in dynamics too… The people who ask, oftentimes are heard. So, if we can teach all our students how to ask and not to be afraid definitely helps… injects them with equity.

Cultural capital is developed through being able to navigate American culture and self-advocate. This happens in the classroom and through access to the campus and larger community. Participant 10 emphasizes that students need to learn how to share their voices in class. They state, 'This is how students learn to have a voice, for without a voice, students won't be heard; not being heard, well – that is a principle of inequity'.

Summary of Theme One:

The first way that instructors provide equitable instruction and perceive equity is through access. Prior research has determined that access is an integral part of equity theory. Banks (1993, 2007) and McGee Banks and Banks (1995) explain how a major goal of equity pedagogy is the attainment of knowledge and skills by racially and culturally diverse students. Castañeda (2004) also demonstrates how multiple methods, practice, and access to diverse perspectives further the success of students. Other previous studies showed equity as access to minimum standards (Ward, 2020; Field et al., 2007), while Bondie et al.'s (2019) research concluded that successful outcomes are achieved in part through access. Facilitating access can also be considered to be an important part of various inclusive and student-centred learning practices. The theme of equity through access is dense but predicated on the concept that instructors provide equitable instruction through facilitating increased access to content and learning and cultural capital.

The findings presented show two main ways that instructors provide access. The first way is through access to content and learning. Instructors increase access to content and learning in a variety of ways for students with diverse needs and goals. First, they make content relevant for their students. Relevant content is created through assignment design and the involvement of students in their own learning. It increases student engagement and success. As it has been shown, practices such as culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (Ladson Billings, 1995; Chen & Yang, 2017; Gay, 2018; Doran, 2021) increase student investment in their learning and result in better learning outcomes.

Instructors also use principles of UDL to facilitate equitable access to content and learning. They provide choice and flexibility in their assignments and tasks, and they use multiple modes of instruction to engage students where

they are. Studies on the use of UDL to increase equitable outcomes by the Center for Teaching Innovation (n.d.), Daughtery (2016), Grier-Reed and Williams-Wengerd (2018), Cavales Doolan (2019), and Kumar and Refaei (2021) have demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing barriers to learning and increasing access. Differentiated instruction, as demonstrated by Bondie et al. (2019), Iyer (2015), and Chien (2012) is another method that the participants use to engage students and provide access to content and learning. Instructors support their students through low-stakes practice, leveraging classmate strengths and providing access to materials, resources, and technology, which McClanahan (2014) showed can be a strong means of empowerment for marginalized students, as ways to facilitate equitable instruction.

Lastly, participants facilitate access to cultural capital, including institutional and cultural norms, as a way to increase student agency, which results in improved student advocacy for achieving their own needs and goals as studies by Valadez (1993), Kanno and Varghese (2010), and Becker (2011) can attest. Bourdieu (1986) frames this capital as a form of power. By providing access to cultural capital, instructors enable students to more successfully manage the dynamics of American society, thereby satisfying their needs and meeting their goals. This access to cultural capital is also a critical element of students' participation in American society, a central piece of Banks' equity pedagogy (1993, 2007). Cultural capital amplifies the voices of students and provides them with the confidence to participate. It gives students a tool to resist marginalization.

The theme of equity through access demonstrates the efforts that instructors make to ensure their students are learning what they need to in order to succeed in achieving their needs and goals. This occurs through facilitating increased access to content, learning and cultural capital. Access here is a theme that touches on many different aspects of teaching and learning, but it is connected by the efforts that instructors make to support all students to achieve their desired outcomes.

The following graphic shows the relationship between access and the main tools that instructors use to create an equitable learning environment.

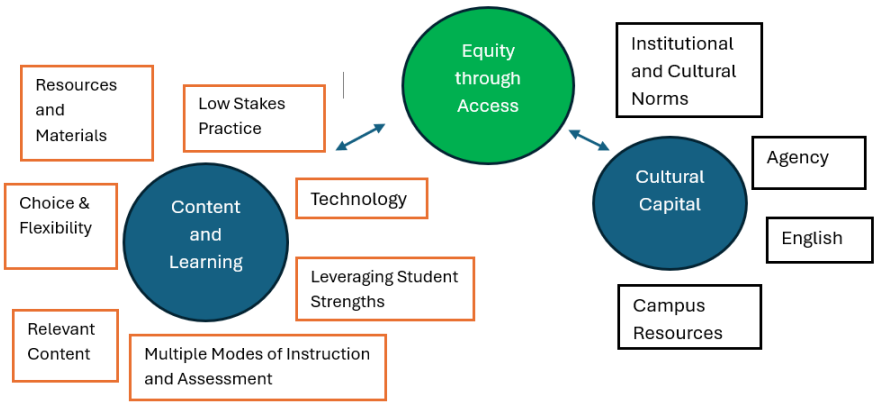


Figure 4-3: Graphic of Theme 1: Equity Through Facilitating Access

Theme two discusses how instructor define and engage in equitable instruction through centring the individual students in their classrooms.

Theme 2: Centring the Individual: Knowledge of Students

Another important way that instructors create an equitable learning environment is through centring individuals. Centring the individual means that instructors seek to find out who their learners are and what their students' needs, goals, motivations, and circumstances are. The second theme developed in this study reflects the significance of promoting equity by creating a learning environment that considers the characteristics that make each student unique. Through this knowledge, participants design instruction that recognizes the individuals in the classroom. Instructors are able to centre the individual needs and goals of their students through prioritizing an understanding of individual students.

Unique Backgrounds and Circumstances

Part of facilitating equitable instruction is taking the time to know who the learners are. Though this knowledge, instructors are better able to provide instruction that is equitable. Participants emphasized how knowing the backgrounds and circumstances that students are dealing with helps them to support their students and give them the tools that they need to be successful. Participant 12 describes how they find out more about their students:

> You've got to get to know your students. You need to know who you're working with… from day one I want to know their names and where they're from, and then … What are your goals? Why did you choose [name of institution]? What do you plan to study after English... Where do you

> want to go from here?... First and foremost, just ask them ... Also, get them to share with each other… I like to have activities and assignments in the class that they have opportunities to share about their own stories. So, whether it be... their background experiences, or …where they're going …

By getting to know their students, instructors are able to create instruction that addresses what students need and what they want to achieve. Here participant 2 explains their understanding of the principles of equity and how a deep knowledge of students aligns with this. They describe equity as providing a fit for the unique characteristics of each individual student. This comes through the relationships that an instructor facilitates in the classroom:

> This is what I do - This is who I'm working with. This is who I'm talking to. If you have 2 puzzle pieces...you have 2 Legos, and you cannot just take a random Lego and try to fit it in. It has to have the dots and the holes in the right places... it's similarly the same way... I try to connect with the students one on one and hear what it is they need to get out of this class… what is it they want out of this class... hear more about them as human beings.

Instructors get to know their students in order to provide instruction that is equitable for each learner. This is different from equal, as participant 5 explains, describing how they lay the foundation for equity through understanding the individuals in the classroom:

> [Equity] means that to me that students all have an opportunity to achieve their goals in the classroom environment, and so that might not be exactly equal…I try to understand the individuals as far as I can in my class and their goals within... the constraints of the class outcomes themselves, also bringing whatever knowledge I have that they don't, like about the learning context … whatever I can do to provide instruction and assessment that's fair; that meets their needs, which might be different from each other.

Participants explained the necessity of finding out students' aims and circumstances. As each student is unique and has their own challenges and privileges, knowledge of the students helps instructors make accommodations that consider these factors and how they may impact their students' lives and their ability to learn. Participant 12 explains:

> I think you need to learn about your students and know not only who they are, but where they're going, maybe also their challenges in life... For example, if a student has a learning disability... accommodations can be made for that. If a student doesn't have access to … technology that they need, what can we provide? How can we make that happen at the college to get them the technology they need?

Instructors focus on getting to know their students' needs and goals by asking at the beginning of courses. This knowledge and understanding helps instructors determine what they need to do support their students. Participant 12 elaborates on how they discover their students' aspirations.

> I think, too, an awareness specifically with those two groups of students' goals and really trying to delve into: what are their goals? Why are they taking the classes? Are they on this academic transfer to college? Are they working on the job skills? Are they just trying to learn language to talk to their daughter or sons' soccer parents, like all the different goals... really supporting those goals as best you can when [they] it can be very different... you're trying to meet with this bigger group of students.

Participant 2 says more about their pedagogy here:

> For me, equity means that you are serving the *individual [emphasis]* needs of every student, and it's your job as an instructor to find the right approach that connects to that individual student ... What is their prior knowledge of experience with education? What are their individual fears and biases attached to that language, and then kind of getting that picture, you are creating an instruction plan and instructional approach to really connect to that individual... that's how I view equity.

Part of knowing what individual students need is an awareness of the differences amongst students. This may involve some reflection on the age, culture, and linguistic background of individual students, which may affect how an instructor designs and implements teaching. Participant 3 speaks to the awareness of differences:

> It's basically the most important part ... to provide teaching and instruction for students based on their needs and different goals... it's very important for instructors to be aware and understand that their students [are]...from different cultural backgrounds and cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and they are from different age groups. And so the instruction and assessment ... should be trying to meet their different needs and goals ... first, it's kind of built into my teaching philosophy... In Asian Confucian … teaching philosophy, there is the idea that you teach students based on their differences… for a good instructor, he or she always needs to be aware of the differences in students… [Students] are coming from very different places and mentalities... Instructors need to be willing to listen and acknowledge students' differences in their preferred learning methods and their differences in their goals, and…basically different ways of learning.

Although it may seem contradictory, with an awareness of difference, some insight for individuals may also be gleaned from the consideration of the common needs and goals of students in a group. Instructors may use their familiarity with characteristics of groups in order to develop more knowledge of

the individuals in their classes. Here participant 8 describes some group aspects that might inform consideration of the individual:

> ... the consideration again, of the backgrounds people are coming from... They may be refugees - massive difference there. because ... [they] are fleeing from something … and… may have had some frightful experiences. and may have no intention of staying here... that their goal might be ... just to survive for a couple of years until things have calmed down where they come from, and then go back… they were very happy with their lives in the country that they came from, and they don't really want to be presented with textbooks and listening to teachers ...so very different- immigrants, refugees. But also, on the other hand, the international students…they're very often much younger - straight out of high school and have a lot of needs in terms of well... They're not much beyond that childhood years, really. And it's like, it's potentially like teaching 16, 17-year-olds here. They need a lot. They need help and encouragement and persuasion.

Participant 12 also mentions the qualities that some of these groups may share. Simply due to demographics, such as age, students may have more things in common.

> [Domestic students] have different demands on their time. A lot of them are older. They have families, they have children. and then also part of it is recognizing that students have different goals, you know, for a lot of our domestic students, their goals are to get English because it's going to help them in their job. It's going to help them with... communicating with their children, in their children's schools. Where there's a lot of the international students – again not all, but a lot of them, their goal is to go on [to] get a degree here in the United States, and then eventually go back to their home country. So, they're all coming from different angles... trying to reconcile that in a classroom to serve both populations' needs can be challenging.

Instructors pointed how critical it is to know what the goals of their individual students are, despite acknowledging that there may be similar goals for domestic and correspondingly, international students. Participant 2 explains,

> Some students, it is a matter of getting into college... Are they taking this writing class so that they can help the kids with homework? ...Can they write notes with their children? Or are they doing the writing so that they can get into college? And that's a very different need.

Participant 4 argues that the goals of domestic students might be overshadowed in a program that emphasizes academic considerations. They state the need to make sure the needs and goals of domestic students are centred as well:

> Making sure that we are equally including the goals of our domestic students, and the needs of our domestic students, and adding into those

> classes ... the specific things that they need to succeed… for example, if we need to add in more supports or structure for knowledge building or for ... fluency, or... those kinds of things that they would need to be successful. Also, adding in supports for ... school culture, how to be a student, literacy... I think a big thing is addressing that that possible lack of past school success... we have our ELL students that come in... sometimes we have those neurodiverse students who are undiagnosed... there needs to be an awareness of that also ... they may not have had success in the past because of this. There's just so many things.

As the participants have described, instructors must consider the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of each student in order to try to facilitate an equitable learning environment. In addition to the backgrounds and circumstances students are coming from, instructors also must consider the current situations students are experiencing.

Considering Situations and Experiences

Equity is also enabled by considering the experiences and situations of the individual students. Instructors work to provide the class structure to allow for the success of all students. Several instructors reflected on the differences between equity and equality, elucidating that distinguishing between these concepts means being aware of the effects of advantages or disadvantages and providing the support to counteract those inequities.

Centring the individual is to 'get to know …who your students are and ... practical barriers they might be facing' (participant 5), part of which is considering what commitments they have that might impede their learning. Even though students are impacted by their unique individual situations, there may be similarities in commitments between students who are international students or domestic/resident students. For example, domestic students are more likely to have jobs and family obligations. In contrast, international students are required to take a higher courseload than domestic students. Therefore, instructors have to determine equitable solutions to these issues. Participant 5 explains how they investigate and manage the situations that students might be experiencing.

> I do a survey to find out … Do they have any challenges in their life that they anticipate might interfere with their success in school and stuff? ..... What's your commute situation? Do you see any challenges with getting to school on time... I just try to find out some of these things about their context that they're in... recognizing international students have to take like 20 credits. They have a really full load. But they're at school all the time. My domestic students …usually take fewer credits, but they have jobs, or kids to take care of…

The obligations of life outside of the classroom also affect students' engagement and success in the class. Participant 1 explains how they try to facilitate the success of domestic students when they may have outside demands on their responsibilities as a student.

> If a domestic resident student ... has to work overtime or something, and it's like the day of a key assignment, what do I have in my syllabus, or what can I do that still allows that student to succeed? Or if their child is sick and they don't have any backup, and they have to stay home with their child. What can I do? … How can I reschedule this?

Participant 3 illustrates how they engage with students depending on knowing their differences, and how they address student needs in ways that are appropriate for age and circumstances.

> We talk with students from different kind of groups in different ways…... Oh, this is a domestic adult student. You obviously talk and communicate with them differently... And also based on their language level… one thing is about communicating, for example, with adult students. ... We will ask about their ... life goals and their ideas and frustrations with moving to this different country. ... whereas with younger international students, we know their different goals... we would be more... interested and supportive in their academic pursuit... I adjust my assignments and I ... talk to them about the purpose of assessments, probably in different ways.

International students may need different kinds of support because of similar characteristics, such as age and previous academic background. Participant 8 describes accommodating multiple needs in the classroom.

> I think you can be sensitive to what both of those people need, even if they haven't stated in the writing or in the speaking, I think you can know that that younger person is... probably going to need different support ...because that person is young and homesick... They're probably going to have some study skills in place.

Participant 8 also illustrates how they deal with the challenges of having individuals with very different needs in the classroom, when describing a refugee student in their class.

> He's illiterate, and he's joined the class in week 5, so he can't even write about his goals and needs at the beginning…He can't understand me when I'm asking about it...I have to use my knowledge and experience and humanity to sit next to him and smile, and make him feel comfortable and happy, and then...try to show him a pencil, and show him a piece of paper and...that's a very sort of personal personalized one to one, and I can only do it for a few minutes every class.

Disparities in financial situations were another factor that may affect students experience of equity. Participant 12 speaks to this:

> Recognizing that there are going to be inequities because as a generality again, certainly not all of them, but a lot of our international learners come to the situation... with a lot more money … and that some of our domestic students are not quite as well off and that also international students ... most of them by and large, don't work, so their job is to work on school, whereas a lot of our domestic students have jobs.

The predicament of differences in economic status may result in uncomfortable conversations. Participant 11 described how they manage classroom discussions that stray into areas that might bring attention to these disparities.

> In the conversations...it always falls back to what is your life experience? And… if one student starts talking [about] their home on ...their second home on ... I'm happy for them, but ... I try to bring it back to what about you? [other students] And how's your new apartment that you moved in, or ... you finally have a place of your own... [I] just try to downplay the excessive, and... uplift ... the daily successes that other students are ... maybe ashamed to admit to. But it's certainly worth celebrating, I think.

Participant 8 commented on the reality that:

> Everybody is coming into the classroom... from different situations. And some of those situations are good and going to promote learning for them, and others of those situations are not going to be good at all.

However, participant 8 also points out that the way that individuals perceive and engage with learning is personal, and opinions and interpretations will vary:

> And honestly, is that in the same way that any individual reading a book... the meaning of that movie, or that book - is going to be different for everyone, because everybody's coming at it from a different and perspective…it might be massive as well like, you know … the wealthy Japanese student whose parents have sent them … versus the nomadic tribesman from Sudan, and if we're going to serve both of those people well in the same classroom, then we really need to be talking about almost running a separate class for them both, within the same class… in terms of tasks and expectations and speed with which they can do things.

Instructors seek to resolve the issues that are preventing individual students from being successful in their classes. They seek creative and equitable solutions to make accommodations for challenges that students are facing. Participant 12 explained how they approach learning about what situations might be impacting their learners and what can be done.

> I think you need to learn about your students and know not only who they are, but where they're going, maybe also their challenges in life... for example, if a student has a learning disability ... accommodations can be made for that. If a student doesn't have access to the technology that they need, what can we provide? How can we make that happen at the college to get them the technology they need. Assessing your students on

> a regular basis... whether it be that anonymous check in or just asking in class, you know, maybe meeting with the student one on one... Are you learning what you need... is this working for you?

Participant 12 sums up how they deal with the differences in situations and experiences:

> The reality is that we come from different places, and we're not always going to have access to the exact same resources, but we can do what we can to address it.

Considering the situations and experiences of the students is essential to knowing who is in the classroom. The participants express the challenges with addressing diverse needs in the classroom, yet they do their best to provide what each student needs in order to succeed. To truly understand if their instruction is meeting the needs and goals of learners requires getting feedback from students.

Feedback from Students

In order to provide equitable instruction through centring the individual, instructors need to get to know their students. Asking students is one way that instructors get to know their class as individuals. They ask their students both directly and anonymously. They get feedback from the students from the beginning of the course and throughout the term. This can occur through various means, such as conversations or surveys. By continually checking in and evaluating how the students are feeling, instructors are better able to adjust their instruction to meet more student needs and goals.

Participant 12 speaks to the value of getting to know students through asking questions. This value includes knowing who the students are and the importance of understanding how students are experiencing the course in order to make changes that will positively affect the students' experience.

> I do a student introduction survey…I want to find out again what the students' goals are…I ask them about challenges in their own life…that may affect their success in the classroom, and then halfway through the quarter … Are you getting your needs met? Are you learning what you hope to be learning? Are we working at a pace that works for you? ... what can I do as an instructor to help support your success better? ... I think regular check-ins are important…asking students directly.

As participant 12 mentioned, many instructors begin with an introductory survey to initially meet their students and allow them to identify their needs and goals. Participant 3 describes how they get to know their students at the beginning of the course.

> I ask and listen at the very beginning. I try to get to know at least something from them, about them… at the very beginning, like where they come from, why they want to learn the language and what they want to do with better English, those kinds of things…from the very beginning, I try to get some sense of where they are and what they want to do and where they want to go.

Moreover, as participant 3 shows in the following quote, asking for students' feedback helps them to better articulate their own needs and goals.

> Throughout the quarter we have a lot of discussions… in relation to the class material, we always … come back to the basic needs of their learning…We have…a lot of discussions regarding identity, the purpose of immigration ... the purpose of our transnational travel... through all those discussions, I think ... the students will be clearer about their goals as well…it's not just about…me understanding them - it also involves they have more understanding of themselves.

Participant 11 explains their informal evaluation of students in order to meet their needs and goals.

> …just informally finding out ... from the first day of class, who they are ... where they're from, how long they've been in the United States. That gives me a good indicator of... how far along they could be versus where they're at, and so that gives me an idea of…how much improvement I might expect from them versus those students who … have only been in town for a couple of weeks, and yet they're on fire with their learning.

Often, instructors will follow an introductory questionnaire with a midterm survey to gauge if the students are able to engage and thrive in the class. This ensures that instructors are aware of how their students are experiencing the class and if their needs are being met. Participant 1 describes how they use a mid-quarter survey to get feedback. Through this survey, participant 1 demonstrates to the class that they hear student responses and will act on them.

> The four questions I use for the mid quarter feedback form are, what's helping you learn English, what's making learning English difficult … that could be things that are in the classroom or outside the classroom, like a work schedule, or I've only been in this country for like 2 months, and I don't like my host family or things like that...How would you improve the class, or what would you like to change about the class? And then the fourth one is ... How will you be a better student in the latter half of the quarter? ... This is anonymous... I share the results with the students. I …paraphrase and aggregate similar responses into a word file, share that with the class, highlight the most common responses…It's more like the constructive feedback that I want ... where students are offering like possible changes. and so…I look at that, and I try to address that.

Feedback from asking students not only informs the instruction but also helps students to reflect and take responsibility for their own learning. To

encourage this, participant 5 includes more self-reflection in addition to initial and medial responses from students.

> We do the goal setting... We'll do like a mid-quarter check in. I'll have a reflection assignment about their goals. How are you doing ... Are you making progress on your goals? Why or why not? Do you need to adjust your goals? .... And then at the end of the quarter... I'll do... a final reflection. And then there is just… the day to day… adjustments. So, teaching and then seeing ... what students need more time with. Are they able to meet… the outcomes?

This also helps students become more cognizant about what is working for them and what is not. Students are invited to express their own needs and become more confident advocates for themselves. Participant 12 describes an interaction with a student in which the student recognized the instructor's efforts towards equitable instruction.

> [A] student…identified…that... teachers teach in many different ways, he said... you do that... But the fact that the student says that to me, "but you... teach in different ways, so we all learn effectively" ... I think I'm doing a good job because I get positive feedback from students. I can see it in their faces when they... all learn things. Students will tell me directly.

Participant 4 also describes ways of getting to know students through questions, observation and beyond.

> I ask them at the beginning of the course and at the midterm... what are your needs? What are your goals? [getting to know students through] observation…when they're interacting, through their speaking, and their writing, learning about them, especially if we design those open-ended activities that... are more personalized that they can really bring something of themselves into the classroom, allows me to learn more about them, conversations before and after class outside of class, emails...all of those things help me learn more about them. Also, sometimes I might ask their previous teachers or ask the intake people... for any little hint that they find.

Instructors make efforts to meet with their students and get to know them one on one. Participant 9 described using the equity framework of 'The 4 Connections' (Chae, 2017; Ames & Heilstedt, 2019) to ensure equity, part of which is meeting individually with all their students every quarter.

> It's something we have called the four connections where it's: use their name; check in regularly; meet one on one; and practice paradox. And so those 4 things have been shown to increase success of students. [practice paradox] … you set rules, or you set guidelines. But then you allow for flexibility…if you say like, this assignment must be due on Sunday - no late submissions accepted. And then the student's like, 'Hey, I'm in the hospital. Could I submit this like Tuesday instead' …of course you can...

> setting targets, setting boundaries, but then also allowing flexibility for... reasonable requests... and so one of those is ... meet, one on one... we try to do that at least once during the quarter, and that's a really great opportunity to learn about the students' goals. Another way that I have done before...is…a diagnostic writing assessment at the beginning of the quarter…you can get a feel where students' writing is but also learn about their goals through that assignment.

Prompting students to write can allow teachers to get to know more about what their students' needs are and if they are being met, thus allowing for instructional modification. Instructors also develop their knowledge of their students through observing interactions in class and online. Participant 8 tells how they identify their students' needs and goals:

> At the beginning of quarters… I have them write about their needs and goals…and [we talk] about those as well in the first few classes... that's really listening - listening and reading what each individual has to say.

Participant 6 emphasizes the importance of early assessment. They note the importance of noticing and intervening in students whose needs might not be being met early on in the course. It is the instructor's responsibility to identify the students who might need additional support and provide it for them to ensure their success in the course.

> …first up the surveys, of course. But then also ... having... first day or second day discussions over…skills, values things like that - early writing assignments... trying to catch as early as possible [who is not doing work] ... if you give a survey right away, who's doing it... noticing. And if they're not doing it? Well, what's the reason?

Instructors work hard to get buy in and input from their students throughout their time together. They derive feedback through asking directly, designing assignments which inform their knowledge and understanding of students, observation, and getting to know their students. Instructors are invested in getting feedback from their students in order to create an equitable learning environment that serves student needs and goals. Participant 7 sums up the various ways they acquire feedback throughout the term.

> I have the intentional…writing sample just at the end of one of the first classes..... we have the technology survey... But also... the in-class conversations, the quick writes we do in class and the topics, the introductions on Canvas, discussions online…We just keep hitting this topic from a lot of different angles and modalities throughout those first couple of weeks, and I'm slowly trying to gather... as much as I can learn about them as possible, to keep shaping my direction and curriculum for the rest of the quarter based on their needs.

As demonstrated by the participants, instructors use surveys, writing prompts, conversations, and online discussions to get feedback from students and create a more equitable classroom environment.

Individual Attitudes and Motivation

Participants also spoke of the significance of identifying individual attitudes and motivations, which sometimes corresponded to differences between groups. Motivation obviously differs based on individuals; however, many participants observed some differences between immigrant/refugee students and international students in terms of why they are in the class. To provide equitable instruction, teachers need to consider what motivates students and how their engagement may be affected by their attitudes. Here participant 9 speaks of the potential differences in motivation among the students in their class:

> I think the biggest difference that I notice in the classroom is my immigrant and refugee students have all chosen to be in my classroom... whereas the international students, it could be their parents sent them here... or the college is telling them 'Your English isn't ready yet'… And I definitely do have international students who have chosen to be in my classroom, but I think it can be a distraction or disruptive to the students who have chosen to be there when the students who haven't chosen to be there might not have the same behaviours, so I think the equity there is just trying to make sure that the people who have chosen to be there are still getting their needs met, because it can be really easy, as the teacher to .... focus on ...the negative side and trying to... make that student more interested, and ...that is a thing I want to do. I want to make them more interested. But I don't want to forget about all the students who have chosen to be there.

Motivation may be different, as participant 8 reflects here:

> Perhaps the self-motivation [for international students] isn't as good as it might be with somebody who's a domestic student who really needs and wants to learn fast, but has got the challenges of also working jobs and having a family and children here to manage.

However, it is important to point out that international students may have different challenges that influence their motivation, including the stress of passing courses quickly because of the burden of expensive tuition.

Participants detailed more about how differences in motivation may affect learning. For example, some students may be more motivated by passing the class; in contrast, for others, a high grade is their end goal. However, instructors reinforced that awareness of the different motivations of students is crucial. Understanding why students are in the classroom and what their

priorities may be is important, as well as accepting that the goal for some students may be very different than for others. Participant 5 reflects on how motivation can affect students' learning.

> Maybe some students are motivated by grades only; others ... maybe they've had more life experience, and they don't actually even care about their grade very much. I mean, that's not why they're there: they're motivated by their learning. So…if their goal is to get a good grade [and] another student's goal is to learn, that can be a challenge.

Here participant 10 elaborates on the influence of grades on some students' motivation and the implications for teaching and learning.

> A lot of [students] are here for academics... that's not all our students... not all our students have the resources or the time to be focused for 20 credits… that's one issue. I think that perhaps the goal of one student who is here solely for academics is a 4.0. Perhaps... the goal for another student who's here for other reasons is a 2.0, or passing, you know, or 2.5. I think that's super okay...some people [think] oh, 4.0, I'm a loser if I don't [get that grade] and that also applies to students who are international … Perhaps they've been so inculcated like 4.0 or nothing...and to realize that you know, in this academic culture. yes, grades are important. And what did you really get out of it? ... So ... that is a challenge. Because many of our students are so fixated on the number.

Avoiding Stereotypes

Although awareness of group characteristics may help inform instructors' understanding of students and help determine appropriate instruction that meets students' needs and goals, participants were very clear that avoiding stereotypes is critical to providing equitable instruction to individuals. Whether students are international, domestic, or refugee, instructors cannot assume they understand individual student needs and goals without finding out directly from the students. Participant 5 explains:

> I always have to…keep in mind…where they're coming from, what their goals are…you can't just say like, oh, they're international students- these are their goals. These are domestic students - these are their goals... a domestic student's goal may be very similar to the international student's goal, and vice versa... I kind of come in with some assumptions…But then... I have them set goals in the first week and I do a survey to find out.

Centring the individual means that instructors are sensitive to the differences amongst students. Participant 6 explains that this involves supporting the students in many ways, but not perpetuating injustice by not seeing the students that we are instructing:

> We identify people who have those disparate skills, and we provide support for that…if it's technical support, we provide support in that way… And it's so critical in this day and age that we have that technical support… otherwise it's trying to ensure that they all have the same opportunities to succeed... being sensitive to some differences without ... making over generalizations at the same time, or being careful about our preconceptions, because sometimes our preconceptions may lead to disparate outcomes. So, to be careful about not over privileging our quick generalizations... that may not actually fit what our students need... having a good balance between understanding there are some differences but also being attentive to personal situations as well- personal distinctions.

Equity through centring the individual may mean that every student gets the support that they need, even the high performing students, as participant 1 points out:

> Sometimes I have to remind myself not to fall into the trap…of thinking, like, okay, equity is purely like the students who are in greater need. And what do they need more - I mean, I think that's a really big, important part -maybe the main part, but then that doesn't mean that I should gloss over my students who are performing really well.

Summary of Theme Two

Instructors provide equitable instruction by centring their individual students. They do this by getting to know the unique characteristics of their students and designing instruction to appropriately respond to these different needs and goals. This is a vital part of many equity frameworks. Knowing the students is the orientation of instructors who are equity-minded (McNair et al., 2020; Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon et al., 2016). For example, Felix et al. (2015) state that part of learning to be equity-minded means, 'recognizing that to achieve equity it may be necessary to treat individuals unequally as opposed to treating everyone equally' (p.28). Bensimon et al. (2016) stress that awareness of student differences, and how not treating all students the same, is a main principle of equity-mindedness. While their framework defines equity in the context of correcting equity gaps due to structural and institutionalized racism, this aspect can be applied to providing support for what students need. This may not be equal, but it is equity.

Centring the individual is also related to Gorski's (2019) equity literacy framework, which emphasizes considering the individual strengths of students in order to avoid a deficit mindset. Inequitable outcomes are not the fault of the student, but rather the system. Instructors must consider the individual

characteristics of students to understand how to best support the success of the student and rectify historical injustice. This involves considering several aspects of student lives including backgrounds, circumstances, situations, and experiences. An equity-minded approach requires that each individual student is entitled to a successful education, according to ACUE and Sova (2021).

Centring the individual may also include culturally responsive teaching, as shown by Gay (2018), Wan (2008), Chen and Yang (2017) and Suarez Valarino (2021), as well as differentiated instruction, as defined by Weir (2009) and Iyer (2015). This also involves accounting for individual attitudes and motivation. The participants described finding out about students through getting feedback by observing, asking, and interacting. As participant 9 also pointed out, the 4 Connections framework demonstrates the positive effects of regular student check ins and flexibility through practicing paradox. Other aspects of this equity practice that serve to centre the individual are using students' names and scheduling mandatory individual meetings (Chae, 2017; Ames and Heilstedt, 2019).

Importantly, although instructors may be informed by group differences amongst students, they avoid stereotyping in order to equitably serve the unique individuals in their classes. Instructors must develop knowledge of their individual students in order to serve them equitably. This validation of students as individuals with unique strengths and assets contributes to their future success, as demonstrated in prior research (Garcia et al., 2008; Hogg, 2011, and Travis 2022). This theme demonstrates the how instructors respect and respond to the individual in their classes in order to teach them equitably.

The following graphic demonstrates the factors involved in how instructors create an equitable learning environment by centring the individual and developing knowledge of students.

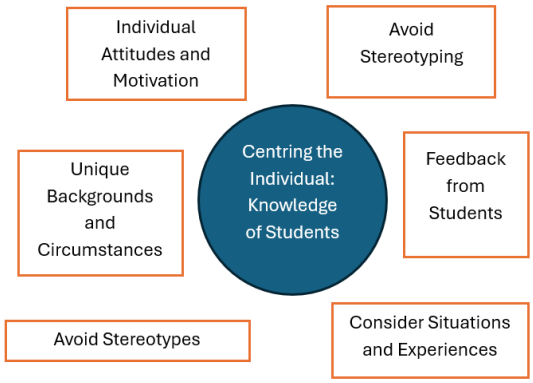


Figure 4-4: Graphic of Theme 2: Centring the Individual

In theme 3, I will describe how the participants develop community and belonging to facilitate equitable instruction.

Theme 3: Community and Belonging

The theme of community and belonging refers to the classroom and campus environment and interactions among teacher, students, and classmates. In this theme, equity is facilitated through relationships. Instructors promote an equitable learning environment by fostering conditions where every student is appreciated and feels comfortable. Through the factors that contribute to this theme, students feel part of the community. They feel like they are included and that they belong. This sense of community and belonging contributes to lowered anxiety and a more supportive environment for learning, thereby increasing inclusion and more equitable instruction.

Community Building

In the classroom, instructors prioritize community building as a way to create a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. They encourage bonds among the members of the classroom community. Participant 5 talks about the importance of a community as a basis for learning.

> Build ... foster, strong community in the classroom. Because you have so many different people coming from very different backgrounds, whatever your situation ...whether you have a mixed international domestic population or not. We have people with all kinds of different educational and economic backgrounds. So, foster a strong community, so there's ... a shared ... foundation with each other. We're learning together and sharing …their knowledge, skills with each other ... like a team mentality kind of thing.

Knowing and using names is one simple practice that teachers use to build community. Participant 1 prioritizes creating a welcoming environment by

setting expectations for their students to use their classmates' names early on. This environment helps encourage students to rely on and help each other.

> Trying to ... learn everybody's name by the end of week 2...and encouraging students, like kind of embedding that in some of the practice that students have with each other to use one another's names... back to that... welcoming open environment... Maybe they'll realize that we're all trying to help each other.

In addition to names, community building may result from encouraging students to make use of the resources in the larger campus community. Participant 7 comments on how they foster a supportive community:

> …developing friendships among students and making that a priority with assignments in class, names, knowing names, having students know each other's names, campus connections, whether it be with...food resources, library resources…

Participant 5 explains their campus resource project and the resulting community building amongst students.

> I'll tell you about the campus resource project…in this project, students are [in] mixed groups. They can choose according to their interest... what resource on campus they want to learn more about...so priority is choosing a resource you're interested in researching to be in a group that has people who speak a different first language than you. My primary goal of this project is for you to develop your communication skills in English, so be with people where you must speak English with them.

Community building may at times place the primary focus on bringing students together in ways that make the content secondary. For example, participant 3 describes their use of authentic English passages to reflect on their learning and build community. During this activity, the primary purpose of the assignment is to build a sense of connection based on their mutual experience.

> I actually give them a warm-up reading every class at the beginning of a class. It's not anything ESL, it's just a poem sometimes, or a piece of song lyrics- very short - for them to read and discuss at the beginning... It's just for them to get a sense of how English goes naturally and how they could just encounter something in this culture... That's something that I would do...for them to…forget about their differences in certain ways, not just their differences from each other - also about their differences from this particular culture- just forget that they are not American. They choose to come here in whatever ways, but ... just to have them experience the English language, and they will feel more ownership... with this language and the new culture they chose to come to.

Instructors convey to their students the importance of shared values and assets. They emphasize that all students have something to contribute to the class. Community and belonging helps set up the classroom to promote the

learning of all students, regardless of needs or goals. Participant 5 generates guidelines for class culture in conjunction with their class. The class uses these values to prevent any disagreements and resolve any potential conflicts.

> I just keep their class culture values up on the wall the entire quarter just as a reminder. And I review it … what are the key values that are shared among all of you, and usually respect is shared among everybody, and friendliness or kindness. So that's…usually what it boils down to... but if a conflict arises, I've become more comfortable... addressing it directly but privately as much as possible.

Reminding students that everyone brings strengths to the class is also part of this. Participant 12 explains their thoughts:

> I think that's important, that as a community, that we all have things to teach. And we all have things to learn. And that really... helps the students bond too and feel better working with each other.

A Welcoming Environment

Instructors believe that the foundation for equitable instruction is a comfortable and welcoming learning environment. This environment shows respect and support for all students. Furthermore, it influences how students feel about being there. Participant 1 explains the effects of establishing this environment:

> I think creating that ... really welcoming, opening environment is a big part of it, and then showing that in doing so... I'm trying to support the students, so they know I'm not just there to teach. I'm there to try and support and help.

Participant 4 comments on their strategies in creating an inclusive class community:

> I try to create a welcoming culture in the classroom, so that students feel that they fit in there, that there is a place for them, that they are in the right place...just simple things like calling them by their name every class period, giving that little bit of space for that social interaction...making time for those important sort of social connections in the classroom, and also making sure that they interact a lot with their classmates. However... always trying to gauge the comfort level of students in the classroom, and [if] sometimes they would rather sit this one out, or would rather work with a familiar person, I try to be aware of that. And accepting of that sometimes.

Participant 2 explains their efforts towards creating an environment in which everyone feels listened to and respected:

> It's where there is a sense of belonging, where every individual in the classroom feels that they matter, their opinion matters, their teacher cares, their classmates are understanding… I feel like that sense of belonging is really key. That's… how you know you're being equitable.

Instructors want students to feel a sense of belonging and community. They want students to know that they are respected and an important part of the class. Here, participant 5 shows how their class fosters the sense of community through creating a class culture.

> I want them to feel comfortable and that they belong. And they have value to bring to the environment…it's a culture... as a foundation... I put values first and I just overtly say... what do you want your class culture to be, what do you want to create? ... I try to honour … the cultures they're coming from. But then, also ... We're going to have a culture in this classroom, whether we choose to create it or just it happens. ... what culture do you want to create in the classroom?

Participant 8 outlines how they encourage interaction and community from the beginning of the class.

> In the first few classes... every time they come into the classroom... I really encourage them to go and sit with someone else, with somebody they don't know, somebody that that doesn't speak their language… And going back to probably the first session... we might just brainstorm some very simple personal questions...But I think in getting that initiated and getting that started, it's always then a pleasure to look around and see... Oh, actually, those 2 over there, have gone even further with this and that. They're having a laugh and a joke. And they they're trying to find out more information about each other, maybe brothers and sisters, or married, or family or work.

The role of the teacher in promoting collaborative learning is a big part of setting the tone for a sense of community and belonging. Participant 12 describes their classroom:

> It starts with the teacher, and I think you have to go in with an open mind and an open heart, and you encourage the same in your students...one of the things for me that's really important is to have… an environment where students feel safe and that students feel supported.

Participant 12 underscores the importance of the teacher's role in setting the tone for an inclusive learning environment where all students are welcomed and respected, and there is an expectation that they are active participants in creating the community. Participant 12 continues:

> recognizing the fact that we're going to learn together... recognizing that we come from different places, ... different backgrounds, and you may not agree with someone, but that's okay… you still need to respect them... if someone may have a different sexuality from you or use a different pronoun from you... you could have a different opinion, but of course, support your opinion... but again, that respect, that kindness. Because that's another thing. I tell the students ... the world is not always kind, but what I hope for in our classroom is that we can have that kindness...and they all agree that the world needs more kindness.

Trust and Safety

Equitable instruction is only possible in an environment in which the students trust the teacher and feel safe. Instructors spoke of the necessity of trust between the teacher and student as a basis for communication. Instructors need to be aware of the cultural norms of their students and know how to encourage students whose native culture might not value the same kind of participation. This can only happen when students feel comfortable and are not afraid of making mistakes. Participant 1 describes their view:

> …helping foster like a really welcoming open environment, because I think so much of like equity … it can't happen if there isn't communication, and you can't have communication if you don't have… an open environment where students feel safe and at least some degree of trust to open up to the instructor or even to other students. I think that's important as well ...not just asking if there are questions but encouraging questions and encouraging questions during class, after class... telling them that sometimes in some cultures, maybe it's not okay to ask questions during class. But it is okay, and it's encouraged.

Moreover, participant 1 highlights the importance of communication as a means of identifying student needs and goals. The environment is crucial:

> I can't really learn what the students' needs or goals are if I don't allow them that opportunity to communicate...then hopefully, with the environment that I try to foster in class being welcoming and supportive, that they feel safe enough and have enough trust where they can come up to me ...and ... talk, and let me know.

A key element of trust is creating an environment in which students feel comfortable speaking, but it is also the responsibility of the instructor to listen. Expressing interest and curiosity is one way to help facilitate this. According to participant 3,

> …ask questions and listen to their answers. That's one thing... remain curious... give them time to express in English where they're from, what they eat… what kind of people they have in their world, and what kind of job they used to have... as long as you show your willingness to listen … they will open their world for you, and it's… fascinating.

When students feel safe and that they belong, they are able to learn more effectively. Students must feel as if they are being listened to. Participant 2 explains how important it is that students trust that they belong and feel encouraged to express their individual, authentic selves. When speaking about the elements of an equitable learning environment, participant 2 said,

> It is ... where there is a sense of belonging, where every individual in the classroom feels that they matter- their opinion matters; their teacher

> cares; their classmates are understanding... That sense of belonging is really key. That's why you know you're being equitable… people are happy to be there ... They're not afraid to speak, and they're not afraid to be their authentic selves- because if they are, you're not being equitable somewhere, somebody is feeling that you are not listening, that you are covering them ... with the same blanket as everybody else.

Equity is also affected by giving students the opportunity to share their feedback. Students only feel comfortable sharing their feedback when they feel safe. Participant 1 points out that the quality of student feedback may be affected by many factors:

> I also understand that there's probably a lot more constructive feedback that these students could give…But maybe if they didn't feel like [the instructor was] …trustworthy enough ... then maybe they're not sharing that, or if they don't feel like their English is at the right level, maybe they don't bother trying.

Trust and safety also extend to considerations of instructional design. Participant 2 builds instruction in ways that students are not put off by the magnitude of their task.

> I embed small pieces of writing throughout the entire lesson, and in a way that they're not threatened because when students hear oh, my gosh! I have to write a 3-page paper. It's scary. And then what they do is that they don't do it.

Furthermore, participant 2 referenced how Krashen's theory of comprehensible input, or i plus one, which means providing content slightly above the students' comprehension, influences their instruction. A crucial part of this theory is lowering the affective filter or creating an atmosphere in which students are not stressed. When speaking of what constitutes equity in a classroom, participant 2 says,

> …the two pieces from all of my learning and all of my study... the two main things are i plus one and that's for everything in the world, and affective filter. And that's also for everything in the world. If we provide the instruction at i plus one level in the classroom instruction where the affective filter is low, we can accomplish it.

Participant 2 elaborates about this process in creating an environment where everyone belongs, and everyone feels comfortable making mistakes:

> But it's really important... that first of all, we reduce....the affective filter so that the reaction we are getting from our students is accurate, that they're responding to this knowledge, how they really would respond …so once that is lowered, and for that ...the icebreakers, and it's less...to find out about the student, but rather to create an atmosphere where mistakes are perfectly okay…so [if] …they don't make mistakes, I don't

> know what I'm supposed to teach them. So, it's really, really key that they are comfortable making mistakes and being themselves.

Participant 12 also emphasizes this:

> First and foremost, I make it clear to students that... we're going to make mistakes, that we're all learning together…I point out to the students that I make mistakes even as a native speaker. And that's okay. And that's totally fine, because it's absolutely part of the language learning environment. and that when we do make mistakes, you know that we shouldn't laugh at each other.

Participant 12 elaborates how important representation is for students to feel like they belong:

> I want them to see themselves in the classroom, and to see themselves in that environment, and that all are welcome to be here, that you might be the only ... trans person in the classroom of non-trans people, but that you are just as welcome as anyone else. You may be the only Black student in a sea of largely white and Asian students, but again, you are just as welcome here as anyone else.

Successfully resolving conflicts in the classroom also requires trust. Participant 5 described a situation in which they had to resolve a disagreement between two students. As the class had established shared class norms, the instructor emphasized the class value of respect. The conflict was resolved through the instructor's careful intervention, which was possible because of the environment of trust facilitated by the instructor.

Instructors consider many ways to create a safe environment that fosters trust in the classroom. This trust allows the students to feel comfortable to learn and express themselves without judgment.

Equitable Instruction through Inclusion

Belonging is established through the relationships between the teacher, the student, and their classmates. Inclusion is a large part of this. Students feel included, respected, and understood when they feel as if they belong. Equitable instruction derives from students feeling comfortable to learn and be supported to achieve their goals. Participant 2 states that that at the most foundational level, equity is created through belonging.

> …because I don't think anybody would truly argue against equity, diversity and belonging: who does not want to feel that they belong? Who would not argue that that is important?

Moreover, the students and teacher being in community is the means of developing equity in the classroom. Participant 2 states that face-to-face interaction is crucial to building relationships

> The power of the teacher is through that interaction and is through that understanding of the student and the only way we will be able to really provide that equity.

Participant 3 describes belonging as ‘everybody feels accepted for themselves - that they're part of the team. They're part of the class culture and they're not afraid’. Participant 12 speaks of creating space for students to get to know each other personally in order to find community:

> … allowing students to have opportunities ... where they can really share about themselves, share their own story, really helps build the community. It allows students to find opportunities to connect with each other...[In their classroom, two very different students] are interested in going into nursing …and from day one we were just talking about that just kind of like a meet and greet activity...and instantly they’ve become friends...and so that immediately has built community for those 2 students who might not have really interacted before... But they've immediately found a bond because of …that common ground.

Participant 3 describes how community helps diverse students learn from each other. While they describe this as happening organically, often the instructor sets the tone for its successful facilitation. Here, participant 3 encourages discussion and reflection in order to foster connection among students:

> It's so interesting …when each of them ... express their response to the text and story, and the younger ... international students. And the older domestic students, they will have very different views about parenting, and how to deal with certain difficult situations within a family, they have ... distinctly different…perspectives... Everybody talks, and then afterwards we will reflect... almost naturally or organically after the discussion…they will realize their differences... they will reflect and think back on what they just said, and then we will all laugh and... people will see… and ...kind of point out: Maybe you could learn from my perspective. And also, like I got something new from your perspective. So that kind of thing, it happens almost organically.

Belonging can help student use their abilities as a team in ways that promote learning for all students. Participant 2 speaks of their experience teaching middle school ESL:

> They integrated the ESL students into mainstream language arts classrooms…how do you make sure that the students are able to do the work and feel a sense of belonging. ... you put a group together, and let's say their assignment is to read something...and you have students in the room in the that group who have different abilities... they're all working

> on the same project. But which part of that project they do depends on... let's say…one of the pieces of it is to draw pictures to represent what happened. And then another person writes a sentence about that picture. It can be different people. Then that work gets presented to the class. The students are … listening. They're seeing many different presentations. And then they get the very same test at home to do independent work with. And they still feel that they have contributed to this work. They were part of the group. They were an important member of the team.

Agency through Trust and Rapport

Insights into how students feel in the class and whether their needs and goals are being met are made possible through the results of interactions that support each student's self-esteem and sense of value in the classroom. Instructors prioritize creating rapport with their students as a way of facilitating community, belonging, and equity. Participant 2 describes how they cultivate rapport through encouraging and supporting students.

> You say... I am so proud of Jake! The way he was able to express his view. I value his power of being able to have the courage. And right away I made that student feel good about himself, no matter where he is from.

Building rapport allows students to develop more agency in advocating for themselves, which is a vital way they can have their needs met. Participant 1 describes the importance of trust in encouraging student communication with the instructor:

> Making sure there is open enough communication, they feel welcome enough, so they can actually voice this; a student might feel that way but then might let it simmer ... if they don't feel that they can trust the instructor.

Participant 10 explains the profound relationship between rapport and agency. They describe how this relationship is of crucial importance in implementing equitable instruction.

> Really building rapport is really… a big part of our job in the classroom... and when we do that, those needs…come out more freely from the students... I try my best to build rapport with the students. This is how they get comfortable and start trying to feel free to ask questions...Giving the students the comfort and the nudge to start airing and sharing their thoughts is a vital step, for me, to help ensure a place of equity in the classroom---this is how students learn to have a voice, for without a voice, students won't be heard; not being heard, well – that is a principle of inequity.

They emphasize just how important the connections of belonging, trust, and rapport are in meaningfully supporting students in developing their own sense of agency.

> With regards to equity for English language learners, I see... giving them encouragement and empowerment to ask questions… is big because oftentimes... asking or showing that they don't know is a sign of either weakness or…it's very othering…But…to make them know that…in our classroom that's not a bad thing. And conversely, I think that really helps implicitly or explicitly with being equitable in the classroom.

Participant 10 explains the importance of instructors asking students for their feedback, as it provides an example to students about how to make their own inquiries.

> ... making sure that [you are] checking in with students ... asking that question to students also is an equity thing…because we just need to make sure that we give them the encouragement …and the empowerment to ask. That to me, too, is a sign of equity, because many times our students do not know how to ask.

However, participant 10 also acknowledges that students need to develop this agency to be accountable for their learning and need to advocate for themselves.

> The students need to have onus and need to be able to articulate what they need. I can help them articulate ... if you need it, I'd be happy to accommodate. But if you don't, if you don't tell me … I can't help you. I believe ... they have to have some accountability on their end, too.

Community building also helps build agency amongst students. Participant 5 explains their campus resource project and the resulting effects on their students.

> I'm really committed to those group projects because I mean, a main focus for me is equity … I'll tell you about the campus resource project…in this project, students are mixed groups. They can choose according to their interest ...I think that…the equity too of honouring the students' agency and choice, and what they're going to spend their time on...in this project...they are meeting members of the campus community through interviews...it really helps them feel welcome, and like a connection to the campus community in the process, they work with each other, and they bring their strengths...learn from each other...And they're building skills. ... Also, it builds community... I think that's part of the equity, too, of…everyone feeling like they belong ... That sense of belonging... they can feel like a complete, whole individual and learn - like their affective filter's down, they can learn more. They have friendships.

Summary of Theme Three

The theme of community and belonging shows how instructors intentionally cultivate a supportive learning environment by creating a safe place for students to learn and to express themselves. Instructors promote equity through building community and fostering a welcoming environment.

They prioritize trust and a safe space where students can feel comfortable making mistakes. Through an inclusive learning environment, students learn in community and develop agency. Despite the presence of inclusivity in the themes of centring the individual and access, its place in community and belonging is central.

Community is crucial in equity pedagogy, as the ultimate aim is to develop the skills necessary to participate in and 'help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society' (McGee Banks and Banks,1995, p.152). This aspect of belonging translates to the efforts of the participants to create an environment in which their students have a safe place to learn. Although the context is of LGBTQ+ students' experience, Morantes-Africano (2024) argues that belonging is social justice. He explains how the human need of belonging affects learning.

This theme stood out as prioritizing the relationships in the classroom. Several participants described the benefits of creating an inclusive, safe environment. Some benefits included taking more risks in learning and becoming more integrated into the class and the campus community. However, it seems that most instructors emphasized the importance of a comfortable and trustworthy learning environment to ensure equitable learning. Many instructors mentioned using student names as an equitable practice. This finding is supported by the 4 Connections equity framework in which interacting with students using their names is one of the four principles (Chae, 2017; Ames and Heilstedt, 2019). The participants also spoke of the importance of rapport in lowering Krashen's (1982) affective filter, which results in better learning, as students are more comfortable. Schlossberg's (1989) research also showed how important it is for students to feel like they matter, a necessary aspect of achievement and persistence in higher education.

Bensimon (2007) highlights the importance (and lack of research) of the interaction between instructors and students and how this affects student experience. The previous research of Kumar and Refaei (2021) and Souto-Manning et al. (2019) also demonstrate the importance of relationships and a supportive environment. Barnett's (2020) research confirms how instructors are critical in fostering this environment. Instructors consciously encourage rapport and create a space for students to learn from each other, in addition to the instructor. Through these interactions and the greater campus community,

students continue to build a sense of agency, an important factor in self-advocacy. In these ways, community and belonging contribute to an equitable learning environment and equity amongst students of very diverse needs and goals.

Theme three builds upon the principles of theme two of centring the individual in so much as the individual is a critical component of community. These instructors demonstrate that belonging is also necessary for learning, and it is a priority of these instructors to ensure that each individual feels comfortable and safe to make mistakes and learn. Therefore, through community and belonging, instructors facilitate an environment that promotes equitable instruction.

The figure below shows the factors that contribute to a successful equitable learning environment. They are both causes and effects.

Figure 4-5: Theme 3: Causes and Effects of Community and Belonging

The next theme will explore the role of the instructor's attitude towards their development of an equity mindset.

Theme 4: Instructor's Attitude of Service

Theme four reflects the finding of an instructor's attitude of service. This theme represents the ways that participants described the emotional considerations of serving their students and working to challenge historical injustices. The instructors' own attitudes, the human connection, and a desire to serve their students are of crucial importance. Participants spoke of an obligation to the students that aligns with serving and eliminating barriers to their students' success. In this theme, I will present the emotional and

attitudinal factors that influence instructors' conceptualization of equity and motivate instructors to implement equitable instruction.

Deeper and more personal qualities emerged through this theme. Often, this was influenced by an instructor's own experience, identity, or concerns for social justice. As this theme was developed, the altruistic motivations of participants became clear. Teachers are motivated to provide equitable instruction because they are compassionate, caring, humans who want all of their students to succeed. They are committed to the growth and the empowerment of all students, which participant 4 encapsulates passionately:

> I'm always looking for this idea of agency... How is this going to give them the power they need in their lives to express themselves, to get what they want and what they need. Because language is you know, it's power...I go deep when I when I think about ...What is the purpose of what we're doing?

Instructors first and foremost want to help people. Participant 1 framed the importance of helping students as forefront in their teaching context:

> We're really student focused and sure … we have procedures, we have policies. But we're really focused on the student...in trying to help them.

Even though it may be argued that equitable outcomes are the central goal and outcome of equitable instruction, instructors reflected on the importance of viewing students as people first. This conceptualization contributes to their work towards equity. Participant 2 describes their approach to allowing first language use in the classroom as a way of showing respect to the value of the students' identity and heritage.

> They're valued as people, and they're valued as representatives of this culture. And this culture is great. It's so great that I, as a teacher, want you to speak some of your language in my class... I'm sending a really powerful message... I don't fight overall language speaking. I think it's especially being a foreigner myself ... it's very important for me to raise my kids bilingually ...and they will only work ... if they have a lot of respect for that language. They will not want to speak the language unless they see it as like a language worth speaking. and so... it's not just teaching them the words and the writing. That's secondary.

In addition to valuing and respecting the humanity of the student, instructors shared their own experiences which motivate them to equitably serve their students. Participant 3 expressed how their experience as an international student has influenced their approach to working towards equity.

> I think basically... it also has something to do with the instructor's attitude…I was thinking about the way I first came to America as an immigrant student, an international student. A lot of professors I worked

> with back then - like that was 20 years ago. I felt alienated in a lot of ways within the English department, so I try not to do things and speak to students in the ways that I felt very alienated... I try to be more understanding and supportive... Basically, I think the most important thing is just ... to have an open-minded kind of attitude towards them ...to build a safe environment for them to feel they can ask questions, they can express their frustrations and things like that... because back in my time a lot of English professors … had very little experience teaching international students…they... had this very self-centred perspective towards other cultures... for a language instructor ... the experience of a different language is very important. If you have your own experience, traveling outside your own comfort zone, that will definitely help…I'm trying... [to] make use of my own multicultural experience and... bring that into my teaching - that actually helps a lot, because I will talk with my students about my own experience as a foreigner, as a language learner and as a trans-cultural explorer, and that actually helps me get closer to them. ... I am pretty confident that helps them to feel... closer to me as well.

One barrier to equitable instruction and a concern that many instructors shared was how to reach all students, and, secondly, what happened to students that failed to continue. These questions drive instructors to consider how to ensure the persistence and engagement of all learners. Participant 4 speculates on why some students don't succeed and what teachers need to be aware of to reach them, reflecting on systemic barriers that may play into the success or failure of students.

> I'm mostly thinking about the domestic students, but … it could influence the international students as well- things like frustration, boredom, acting out in class or dropping out of the program. Maybe shutting down, not feeling safe enough to share or trust the environment ... maybe an insecurity of... Do I fit in here? Sometimes those awkward interactions, because ... they don't feel accepted or included into the group… those are things I feel that [are]challenges for students... and then... the academic level. ... struggling academically, trying to keep up... not being not feeling safe to ask questions, to ask for clarifications. repetitions, that kind of thing, if everybody else seems to be getting it... I still think that we can have a better awareness of ... the general needs of groups and of students and also just a general... understanding… A belief in … a desire, and that it is our general goal to undo these biases ... these institutional biases... And if that is an overarching goal, then that sort of directs a lot of our lower goals.

Participant 5 echoed these ideas with their thoughts on the challenges of students' disappearing from class:

> I'm seeing my students who choose to engage... for the whole course succeeding, and their skills improving, meeting their goals... when the student drops out or doesn't attend regularly... I don't necessarily know the reasons why they're doing that…I wonder, is there something else I

> could do or not be doing to keep that student... [to] motivate them to come to class and to really learn... if they're not coming and engaging, they're not learning what they could. They're not progressing... I feel like those students who are coming and engaging, for the most part…I feel pretty good about the equity in my classroom and the outcomes, but… there's some students who are falling through the cracks... and that's a question- it's just not knowing.

Participant 5 also acknowledges the real emotional and psychological issues that may prevent some students from continuing with class:

> ... a couple of those students... lately Ukrainian students, only one has said... it's basically been a traumatic experience for her... there's some trauma going on…for some students, and I just can't overcome that...at the moment school's not a priority. But ... maybe my international students, their challenges are more like culture shock and loneliness, depression.

Participants expressed the values of empathy and compassion as influences in their perceptions of equity. Participant 6 explained their motivation to serve their students:

> I define [equity] as providing the same opportunities for people who come from disadvantaged groups, to… [the] general population ... I got into this field because I was interested …in working with immigrants and refugees…who ... come in with an obvious disadvantage...for me, it's defined as helping these groups to have same opportunities...the longer answer is that I was raised in a progressive Christian household, and so I think that's a value that's always been....passed on to me ...some social work is a good idea to deal with...social inequities, sometimes injustices... some of it feels fairly organic. I've always had a of soft place in my heart for people who... come from different countries and have a different perspective from our own.

Several instructors used the word humility to describe equitable practice. They conveyed the importance of showing students that although they are the teacher, they are not the authority. Through their attitudes and approaches, they allow their students to experience learning in their own unique ways. They shift the power dynamic in the classroom to demonstrate an authentic respect for their students. Participant 8 describes the value of humility:

> Empathizing and ... showing some humility that you're not just going to dictate how everybody's going to … be learning this way, [be]cause this is the best way. I think…for a lot of us, it's quite hard to articulate what we do, but I think we do it, a lot of this naturally, because we and, this isn't particularly humble, but I think because we're good people who want to help ... We've got some innate sense of... it's not a sixth sense, because I think most people have got it, but some people... probably wouldn't be very good at what we do because ... They're maybe not very good listeners or can we define that? Can we articulate it? sometimes it's a bit difficult.

Another aspect of humility is empathizing with the students and being authentic. Participant 10 elaborated on how they convey their own experiences to create a more comfortable learning environment for their students:

> Showing the students that you're a learner too, I think is big- that instructors are not the end all and be all of knowledge... I think when students realize how many mistakes I make and how many things I don't know, and I'm being super honest about it, I think they're more apt to tell you what they don't know... and that's just ... it's worked for me… I think being real with a student… there's already a power dynamic in the classroom... We are up, and then they are down. And that's just the given. And so, to make students realize that, yes, we are the... authority in the classroom just by [the] nature of our job. But really... we don't know everything. I often tell students. If I were learning your language in your... country, I'm not sure how successful I'd be because, ... it's difficult. It really is. And then also, if I was a person learning your language, and I needed to feed three children, clean... That's just extra hard. So just having empathy for that, I think, goes a long way - a really long way.

Instructors realize how qualities such as kindness and compassion are equally important in how they teach as to what they teach. They show the students that they can empathise with them through their attitudes and their actions. Participant 12 explains:

> Sometimes people need more time. And sometimes people do make errors...know, that's where we need that kindness and that patience...and absolutely being that model for my students is important...so I demonstrate to the students...how to be kind, how to how to be patient, how to be helpful, how to support someone, even if they make a mistake… and then also to show them I do the same things…I also make mistakes, and that's perfectly normal...another thing I emphasize to students is this idea that practice makes progress. It doesn't make perfection, because what is perfection? Just because I speak English as my first language doesn't mean I speak perfect English... I like to dissuade that idea and give them something more viable to aim for, not this idea of perfection, so that way students hopefully don't have those impossibly high standards.

Participant 7 also commented on humility in serving students. Instructors need to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of their students.

> There's so many things that we can keep doing and keep trying, and that we constantly keep trying, and keep adapting...and soliciting students' feedback - like that's a big thing, too. which I try to intentionally do ..and capture … What are they needing? How did this work? and reading through it and trying to keep adapting each quarter to meet those needs better. And the students' needs will keep changing, too. But being intentional about … getting that feedback and continuing to be humble and adapt our techniques.

Lastly, an instructor's attitude of service may involve self-assessment of their course and allowing for grace. Instructors consider the barriers that students may encounter, and they react with solutions that reflect compassion and understanding. Participant 5 describes this measure that contributes to equitable instruction and social justice.

> …just looking at your whole infrastructure of your class and accounting for…grades and having a kind of grace, I would say, built into your grading system because ... Is there a way to overcome challenges for your students... if they meet some barriers, are they just going to fail the class?... A lot of that's how we structure our grading system and our assignments.

Summary of Theme Four

This theme considers the instructor's attitude of service and commitment to social justice. It relates to the concepts of equity proposed by Banks (1993,2007), Mcgee-Banks and Banks (1995), Celeste (2016) and equity-mindedness as proposed by McNair et al. (2020), Bell (2016) and Marrujo-Duck (2017). The participants are often motivated by very personal experiences and by a desire to make their classes a more equitable space for their students. This finding is also supported by Castañeda (2004)'s research on faculty perspectives of teaching in diverse classrooms. An attitude of service reflects the emotional considerations that are important for the implementation of equitable instruction, in addition to efforts toward social justice, which Gorski and Swalwell (2023) point out is a necessary component of equitable education. These participants express the desire to serve their students to succeed and achieve their goals.

These emotional and psychological aspects of an attitude of service demonstrate how participants are motivated to engage with equity. Gorski's (2016, 2019) equity literacy framework and Gorski and Swalwell (2015, 2023) argue that awareness of injustice and inequity is the first step towards responding to inequity. This step must be sustained in order to achieve the end goal of the action of transformative equity practice, which occurs through redressing, cultivating, and sustaining equity (Gorski and Swalwell, 2023). McNair et al. (2020), Malcom-Piqueux, and Bensimon (2017) also point out awareness as a step in equity-mindedness.

It is important to note that the theme title may suggest that equity work is service and not the rectifying of injustice, especially since the development of this theme includes ideas such as altruism and humility. This theme reflects the personal experiences and values that I perceived that these participants brought into their development of equitable instruction. However, Bensimon and Malcom's (2012) research shows that awareness increases the interest of educators in 'doing good' (xiii).

The following spider chart shows the qualities that were identified through theme 4.

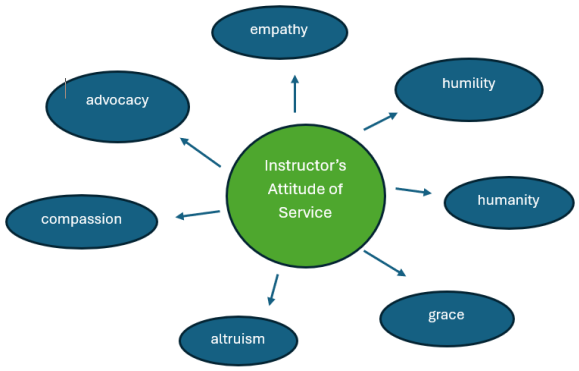


Figure 4-6: Qualities of Theme 4: An Instructor's Attitude of Service

In the next section, I will explain the impact of political and institutional concerns and how they affect considerations of equity and equitable instruction.

Theme 5: Considering the Impact of Political and Institutional Concerns

Many participants' perceptions of equity have been influenced by political and institutional concerns. Policy affects funding for immigrant and refugee student programs and influences the outcomes that students must reach to maintain that funding. Curricular decisions made to address all students' needs and goals may also be impacted by this. Furthermore, institutional priorities and culture may affect how instructors engage with ideas about equity and experience equity themselves. These concerns interact with many aspects that the participants consider when defining equity and providing equitable instruction.

Washington State Mission

One significant finding was the impact of institutions and policies on instructors' understanding of equity. This is not surprising considering how the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) (n.d.), which according to its website, 'advocates, coordinates and directs Washington state's system of 34 public community and technical colleges', values and supports efforts at promoting equity (SBCTC, 'About Us'). The state board Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) office collaborates with institutions to implement a strategic plan that is intended to increase rates of completion for all students, but especially historically unrepresented students (SBCTC, 'Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion').

These efforts for equity seem to have made a difference in instructors' perspectives on equity. Here, instructors reflect on the influence of institutional priorities in their understanding of equity. Participant 12 speaks of the Washington States mission and priority to promote equity at their institution.

> First and foremost, the fact that we have… not only a whole director position [office of equity and inclusion] for it, but that we have a team of people who work to support it at the college and to provide education activities or… the professional development opportunities that we have... having that institutional support really helps. Because I think a lot of people have a vague idea…have heard of equity…and obviously want students to have the same opportunities, but they don't necessarily know... always how to tangibly apply that to a classroom or... their own background may influence, for better, for worse, or not at all, their understanding of equity…having institutional support and policies and culture really create those opportunities to first learn about it and then to implement it...if you have an institution that's very supportive of this and has a culture of equity ...It's in our mission. It's in our values...having an institution that supports it makes a huge difference.

Participant 9 describes the influence of the mission of the SBCTC at their current institution:

> …like [at]my previous college. These were never, ever conversations… I wanted to make sure I was doing what was best for my students... I … thought about it in terms of fairness, but I never really… thought about equity and... now ... it's a regular conversation...my understanding of equity is then impacted by the college and SBCTC... what I know is basically what they've taught me. I mean... I read books, I listen to podcasts, all that, but, like a huge part of my understanding, as in terms of education, at least, is ... my college and SBCTC, what they've informed me of.

The institution clearly has some effect on the participants' conceptualization of equity. Participant 4 describes that the culture affects how the instructors engage with the concepts of equitable instruction:

> [Institutional policies] I think they set the tone... I do feel that having them [policies] in the up there in the forefront, I think, influences the things that we focus on…and also, I think our program has a real willingness to evaluate... and reflect on what we're doing and maybe pivot and change as we need to on a program level... we're really open to change as we as we need to. And I think ... that's really good.

Participant 5 also spoke of the institutional atmosphere at their institution:

> [Regarding institutional influence]I think significantly but maybe not primarily...I engage in professional development…consistently, but not…frequently, but it's definitely a value of the college where I've taught for more than 20 years, and there's just like overt and deliberate, E&I [Equity and Inclusion] PD [Professional Development]…it comes from the top, from the President [of the institution].. it's definitely a value that's supported and encouraged also from our dean…we're going to do OER (Open Educational Resources) for equity reasons.

In addition, Participant 10 mentioned the policies that support students with disability accommodations:

> The institution for which I work is really has equity in its forefront…especially with our students. So, my idea of equity with regards to work…an example... disability accommodation...I definitely take that into consideration when I teach, as you know the needs of the students…I'll accommodate. You have accommodations? I'll do it for you …for sure.

However, not all instructors' definitions of equity aligned with their institutions' understanding. Many spoke of a desire for a broader definition of equity, especially considering the marginalization of English language learners on college campuses. Participant 4 shares their perspective:

> Our college has really been focused on race, racial equity, which is, of course, super important. But I would like to see a broader definition of equity, addressed to include a lot of the socioeconomic… and…age and ...just bringing those in... that leads me to the importance of getting involved in the college community. Participating in different groups, programs, workshops and using our voice to bring... an awareness of our program and our students up to the forefront is important because we can. We [the ESL program] can be invisible right? ... it's something that we can take back to our students, too… When you know more about your school, you can bring that back to your students, and just in general helping to support and grow a robust program, I think, is something that we can do.

Participant 2 expressed frustration over the way that equity has become politicized. They feel equity should be more about examining the individual student and considering their needs:

> I think we are making it more complicated than it really is, and I think we're taking away from the real human approach behind it...I don't think anybody would argue that when you're trying to put 2 pieces together, they have to fit and connect. I don't think anybody in the world would argue with that concept. But when we complicate it with all the politics involved with it and the race… people start getting very emotional about the topic. And they're not really looking at: here is the student, he has trouble with this. I need to explain it in a way that it matches this student, rather than the politics behind it. I think we're doing more harm than good...through the politics that's attached currently to our discussion.

Participant 6 expressed the viewpoint that efforts towards equity could backfire and result in low expectations. They opined that institutions need to be more critical about ideas that may ultimately impact students negatively. They felt that institutions need to do more practical efforts to improve equitable instruction and expressed concern about institutional policies that 'might have originally come from a good place, but sometimes they feel a little bit weaponized'. They believe that a more critical approach to implementing equitable practices is necessary:

> I think there's a danger of institutions…feeding into…I've heard the term being called the bigotry of low expectations …because you assume that [if] they're of a disadvantaged group that they can't do as well. It's sort of like... you're looking down on them in a way, that... they just can't do it because they're of this group or that group. And so you put such low expectations…you could be setting them up to not be as successful later on, because you haven't pushed them enough to do a bit more to challenge them…the idea of critical thinking almost seems like in some people's mind is how do you apply this, as opposed to how much of it is really a good idea…Are there downsides to it? ... I think equity is an important idea... [but] I'm not always comfortable with how the institutions are approaching it, and sometimes I also feel like it feels performative because we talk a lot about it. But then, when push comes to shove, do we provide enough technical assistance?

Effects of WIOA Policy on Curriculum

Programs that serve domestic/resident students are funded by the government and require adherence to the provisions of WIOA. Therefore, course outcomes are affected in programs that serve both populations of students. The College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) are the measure of compliance.

Participant 9 explains how their course outcomes are decided in light of these standards:

> I would say that our course outcomes were not designed based on the needs of the students but rather based on CCRS... the college and career readiness standards ... And the CASAS levels right, which are linked? ... it's based on what the people who give us our funding want us to do.

Participant 11 points out the limitations of the curriculum at their institution and how expectations for student outcomes restricts the relevance of the outcomes to their students' needs and goals. Furthermore,

> Our curriculum stresses...jobs, and for many of our students, that's just way off their radar. They're raising their kids... they're retirees. They're... raising their grandchildren or they're caring for their grandchildren... it's not what they want to do... at this point I just have to remind them... we're funded through... federal and state grants... with the intention of helping you get jobs... But I just have to remind them... you're still learning English, and you know this is all very practical to you.

In a merged program, though, the international students are not bound by the same federal guidelines as the domestic students. Participant 7 explained how their program is dealing with the how to accommodate diverse needs and goals in a merged program, when the course outcomes might be influenced by CCRS:

> We've been working on our COGs [course outcome guides] a lot the last couple of years especially because we merged programs...with that we had to re-examine a lot of these things and just looked at some of the more Adult Ed COGS recently, which were very focused on just the CCRS ...I think we have both the parts of the tension going right now of what we need to for state mandates and funding, and what we're able to adapt and change, and trying to figure out how those go together.

Instructors emphasized that the size of their programs might affect their ability to equitably address all students' needs and goals. Increased curricular options would improve the applicability of classes to students' needs and goals, but often programs are not able to offer more classes. Participant 9 proposes having more levels of certain skills as a way to increase equity; however, they acknowledge that funding makes this impractical.

> But I also don't think is feasible for most community technical colleges based [on]... the way that our funding is structured. It would be more equitable if we could have … instead of having, like level 1, level 2, level 3, if it was grammar level 1, writing level 1, reading level 1, because students aren't coming in ... with all their skills at the same level… that is a way that we could enhance the equity in our programs.

Participant 5 adds that that electives could also help in addressing student's needs and goals, but that

> I would love if we could offer more options …our program's small, and so we have to keep things kind of general. It'd be really great if we could offer electives or something like…practical daily communication or …occupational focus... English for health care, or... if their goals are in a certain area, if we could offer something more specific. But we don't have that option.

The size of the program might also affect the content of a class and student expectations. Instructors indicated that with respect to the course outcome guides, the time and attention that is given to each outcome will vary depending on the students and the course. Participant 1 points out that:

> We're such a small program that we can't offer everything to everyone at every time …we try to make changes as challenges come up or as we learn things. And even if we have everything in the COG, that that doesn't guarantee …that means that we need it, especially if it's in the COG. And I think, this is important... maybe we spend more time on this. But then a student sees like something else, and they think, oh, wait! We're only spending like a day on this other outcome?! So, it's kind of... push and pull.

Also, participant 12 admits that sometimes there is a conflict between what some students may want and what the course will cover. They point out how they deal with the expectations for an exit level class.

> …Students... come into this class with the understanding that it is an advanced reading and writing course, and... from day one, I say that ... you will not need to do any presentations in this course. This course will include some grammar; it's not even a grammar focused course. It will be more embedded in the writing.

Participant 7 mentioned how institutional administration helped to create a more equitable approach to course offering at their institution. While domestic and international students were together in the daytime classes, evening classes remained domestic students only. Therefore, these students did not have access to the same skills classes as their counterparts in the morning. Here participant 7 speaks of the institutional adjustments which allowed the evening students to participate in daytime skills classes:

> We ... had some evening students... who wanted to take the extra skills class to focus more on their speaking/ listening...and we had it in the COGs... that it was only for the daytime core classes to link with the skills class... I appreciated that my dean and colleagues... agreed to make it more equitable. We rewrote the COG so that the evening core class would also count and could be linked to the afternoon skills classes for the very few students who could actually take it with their schedules. But it's an

> option now...that institutional support is huge… recognizing when there are those gaps and being able to say, “Hey, I think there's a problem here, and actually being able to have an open conversation, and people willing to help work on it”.

Institutional Walking the Talk

One issue that instructors talked about was whether institutional equity efforts were sufficient and whether institutions were really invested in fostering equity for all marginalized groups. Some participants expressed frustration that institutional administration did not fully understand the challenges they deal with in the classroom. Moreover, they pointed out a short-sightedness when it comes to the interests of ESL students and also associate faculty.

One particular concern was the gap between the ideals of equity and the practical realities. Institutions may have the best intentions in establishing equitable policies and missions, but there needs to be an awareness of how to implement these ideas practically. Participant 10 reflects on their experience:

> I think... having been in higher ed…for a while, we kind of mold our idea of what equity is. Sometimes I think our institution is very lip service heavy…The words sound good, but the actions ... don’t usually equate and that goes with... many places in the world. And I think a lot of ... ideas regarding equity, they are ideas. They are ideal, but not necessarily practical or applicable in real life.

Participant 8 reiterates the need for administration to understand what goes on in the classrooms. In order to help facilitate equitable instruction, there is a need to

> talk to program leaders and deans and in meetings... about the challenges that we face as teachers... talking about the equity is one thing, but then actually being…reasonably able to act on it, given the constraints of how many people we need to have in the classrooms... we could facilitate the success by bringing more awareness to the colleges, about what the challenges are in reality on the ground in the class ... I guess that's like the theory versus the reality.

Some participants were concerned with how English language learners were treated with regards to the mainstream population on campuses. Participant 5 talked about the marginalization of all ESL students on campus:

> I've been focusing [on] the differences between the domestic and international students in the class, but then there's also equity with the broader college population... whether they're domestic or international, do they have the same access as like the mainstream... college population…I just wanted to bring that up as equity, too... they’re all not native English speakers...so just the whole group is in a different marginalized kind of community on campus.

However, issues of equity also resulted from perceived inequities in services that are provided for international and domestic students. Some participants felt that that there was inequity in the information and guidance that international and domestic English language learners received. Participant 5 shows how they had to advocate for their domestic students when the institution wasn't providing resources equitably.

> An international student adviser ... wanted class time to meet with my students, to tell them about how to enrol in the college level [classes] in the fall. But the domestic student adviser did not want to meet with my students to give them the same opportunity and so I talked to our division chair about…that the advisors from the domestic student advisor and the international [should] align with each other as much as possible or makes sense, so that all the students have the same opportunity.

Participant 4 saw biases in how their institution served ESL students of different statuses and failed to address neurodivergence or students who have greater needs. They describe without institutional support for on the ground practices, ultimately the instructor becomes responsible for filling the gaps. This is not ideal, nor sustainable.

> There are pretty big gaps in meeting the needs of our domestic students... first of all, in scheduling ... I really wish that we had more flexibility to teach more online, because that seems to really meet a need for a lot of our domestic students... Or a reliance on teachers to put in all that extra effort outside of the classroom for free, and I think if we were really dedicated to meeting those more specific needs that we would broaden the program to include much more scaffolding and support...we don't really have any focus on the needs of, neurodiverse students or students who have had poor past school experience. I don't see any support for those things beyond what each individual teacher is able to do.

Lastly, some participants expressed frustration with an institutional system that subjugates associate faculty to inequitable treatment. While participant 3 felt distant from the policies of their institution,

> I'm not exactly sure that I understand all of the …policies... because I, as an associate faculty member, I feel…in a lot of ways kind of distant from it,

other participants were much more vocal about what they perceived as unfair expectations from their institution. When an institution relies on associate faculty, participant 6 argues, the security of their position and salary affects their motivation to comply with institutional demands for equitable instruction. It is important to note that this is not because they do not desire equitable instruction for their students, but rather because the additional institutional

demands feel unwelcome when their own position is unstable and perhaps undervalued. Participant 6 explains:

> And the fact is ... there's not enough attention in institutions paying to the fact there's so much socioeconomic inequity, and the faculty ... that some people are paid a lot more or have secure positions. Some of us are ... basically month to month. And yet a lot of the same expectations are being pushed out there ... It's inequitable in the sense that some people are more secure, and others are less, and you don't know what things mean when you turn down things... Could it mean I don't get the promotion I want? Could it mean I don't get the classes I want? Could it mean I don't get enough classes? I don't know what it means, and that's an insecure position to be in. And I'm not always sure there is an equitable understanding of how we're all in these different positions, which doesn't help the department as far as meeting all these different student needs, and it doesn't help for a healthy campus environment.

Participant 4 also pointed out the negative effects of relying on associate faculty for equity goals in ESL classes:

> We have an inequitable reliance on associate facility, and I think that hurts domestic students. It gives us higher turnover ... less commitment to the long-term goals of our program and our students, and also less of the connection to the college community and college culture that could serve our students.

Summary of Theme Five

This theme describes the effects of institutional and state policies and pressures that may affect programs of diverse English language learners. Previous research has shown that federal mandates may not align with student goals (Fernandez et al., 2017; Shufflebarger, 2022; and Wrigley, 1993). Although participants largely related that the Washington state mission had positive effects on their understanding of equity through institutional prioritization, it also resulted in restricting the curriculum due to funding constraints. Finally, there was a concern that institutions are not doing enough to really follow through on their equity goals. This was demonstrated through reports of inequities experienced by students of different statuses, neurodivergence, and also by associate faculty. These factors all affect instructors' perceptions and implementation of equitable instruction.

Equity frameworks often position equity within the political realm. Banks (1993) speaks to the goal of creating informed citizenry. In addition, Gorski (2016) argues that equity literacy is about understanding and working against

oppression. Gorski (2020) explains that the equity literacy gives tools to both the practitioner and the institution to identify, eliminate, and cultivate equity.

Institutions are responsible for responding to policies, and for the leadership that sets the tone and culture of the college. These findings demonstrate the influence that the institution can have in influencing the culture and the instructor's knowledge of equity. For example, at my institution, a course on the foundations of equity and inclusion was offered to all interested faculty and staff. Research on equity-mindedness in higher education by Bensimon (2007), Bensimon et al. (2007), Bensimon et al. (2016) and McNair et al. (2020) demonstrate that institutions need to lead equity efforts, while Gottlieb (2016)'s research showed that stakeholders' prioritization of equity can positively influence equitable instruction.

Bensimon and Malcom's (2012) and Felix et al. (2015) research on equity scorecards show the influence of the institution and its interaction with the practitioner to decrease equity gaps. Felix et al. (2015) explain that the Equity Scorecard measures the persistence of racial equity gaps and demands institutional and individual responses. It requires the institution to aggregate and examine its data to seek solutions.

It is clear that the role of the institution and the political will of the community is very important when facilitating equitable instruction. However, some participants did express dissatisfaction or cynicism with the institutional role. Participants felt that the institution should make a better effort to truly understand the realities of the classroom. Also, some described the fear that equity efforts might produce harmful low expectations, an idea that the McNair et al. (2020), suggest may be associated with the effects of systemic racism. Some participants spoke about concern of their vulnerable status as associate faculty. Previous studies by Sun (2010) and Eisenhour (2020) pointed out a reliance on part-time faculty, and Eisenhour (2020) identifies a disconnect between adjunct and full-time faculty. Her findings support the need for a supportive institutional climate for change.

The findings presented here show the influence of statewide equity initiatives on participants' understanding and implementation of equity, but there seems to be a need for institutions to do more in terms of creating a culture that values all the members of its community.

The following chart shows the factors at play in the theme of political and institutional considerations.

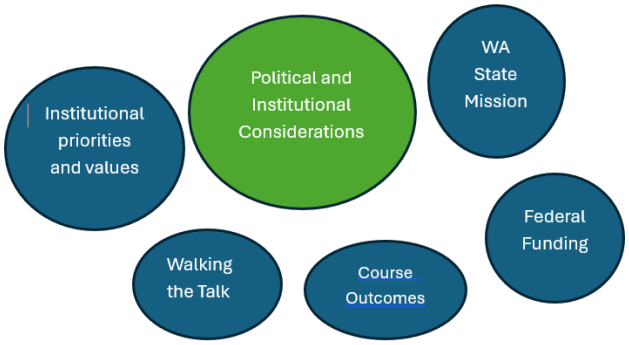


Figure 4-7: Graphic of Theme 5: Political and Institutional Considerations

Theme 6: Equity is a Work in Progress

The final prominent theme was the importance of equity as a work in progress. Instructors facilitate equity by continually learning. Participants demonstrated a desire and willingness to continue learning and recognized that the work of equity is never completely done. They do not claim to be experts on equity but express a strong intention to become more knowledgeable and informed about equity and serving students equitably. Furthermore, they understand that as the demographics of their classrooms change, so do the factors that influence the needs, goals, and characteristics of the learners. Therefore, providing equitable instruction may require making adjustments as well. Additionally, part of this theme is the issue of time. The availability of time, or lack thereof, is a factor that affects many of these themes. Many participants would like to have the resources to equitably serve the needs and goals of their students; nevertheless, they are faced with the reality of the limitations of time. Despite instructors' best intentions, limited time in the classroom may affect the quality of equitable instruction.

Participants value the importance of continuing to learn and reflected on how important the search for knowledge is in the pursuit of equitable instruction. Here, participant 1 says, 'Maybe the most important thing is how much I *don't* know. which isn't bad … because you learn more, you ask more questions'. Participant 12 framed the basis for this learning as the central belief of providing equal opportunities to their students:

> I think this is something that I'm still thinking about, because I'm still learning about… what equity is and how it can be recognized in different

> contexts. But I think for me, it's how students can have equal opportunities to have success.

Many participants noted that this journey for an understanding of equity in the ESL classroom is one which will change as it reflects increasingly diverse classrooms. Participant 12 emphasizes the necessity for continued growth and learning about equity, even when it is difficult and uncomfortable. Furthermore, they point out that not all faculty may be particularly concerned about learning more about equity and equitable instruction.

> Is it something that I think everyone is on board with? Completely? No, regretfully, and I think, just because of our own life experiences and the content areas in which we teach, that some people are going to be more invested in this than others are...I'm still learning and want to keep learning, and I recognize the fact that...this is not a journey with an endpoint, but you're always going to be learning more.

The ESL classroom is subject to influences from many spheres of global life. Global political events may have direct or indirect effects on the policies, demographics, or emotions of the students. Therefore, it is important for instructors to participate in continual learning. Participant 7 observes, ‘There's no finish line for me at all of the learning. It will be continuing as cultures, and the climate and politics and everything keep adapting and changing’.

Learning from Observation and Experience

As a work in progress, participants learn about equity through a variety of ways, among them experience. Experience includes trial and error, observation, and reflection. Participant 1 spoke of the importance of ‘trial and error, like learning from my failures’, while other participants identified learning from noticing. Participant 2 explained how they approach understanding equity:

> I think I do it mostly by observation... you start with a …lesson, and then you watch how they are responding to what you're giving.

Participant 4 showed how they came to an understanding of equity through observation and how they applied observation to determining achievement gaps in order to better support students. They said:

> [they came to an understanding of equity] through experience, through observing students who succeed - the students who continue on in the program and…comparing them to the students who have struggled, the students who have failed, dropped out - the students who I felt like I just couldn't reach ... why aren't they succeeding the way that this group is succeeding? ... And then also just from observing broader student experience from my teaching in high school and observing again the success versus failure or not reaching students... Who were the ones that

> were able to go on to college? Who are the ones that dropped out... who are the ones that did well in their other classes beyond my class?

Instructors hone their thoughts and practices regarding equity through experience. Working gives instructors exposure to many different students, institutional administrations, and cultures. Many instructors commented on how their experience impacted their understanding of equity in various ways. They learn how to provide equitable instruction through their vocation, as participant 5 said, ‘over years of instruction, learning with my students, different challenges I faced with real students in the classroom, some failures and successes’. Participant 8 also mentioned how experience shaped their understanding of equity through interacting with unique characteristics:

> I suppose a combination of both things just working in multicultural classrooms for so long, and so it's naturally absorbing an understanding and appreciation of the different languages, the different religions, the different clothes, the different sorts of national characteristics.

Participant 5 elaborated:

> My understanding ... comes from ... experience…working with a ton of different types of students…I've had students who are incredibly wealthy in a way that I'm sure that I still don't totally understand how wealthy they are. And students who were unhoused ...everything in between students who have all kinds of different learning styles, and that's...my current journey right now...trying to understand different learning styles, and how I can ...regardless of whether a student’s diagnosed or not, still be…helping to educate in a way that reaches different types of learning styles…I think it just comes from the experience of having a lot of different types of students.

Participant 10 expressed the influence of practice.

> I've been a teacher for...22 years, so I think I've come up with my own version of this definition. I think it coincides with... institutional and academic definitions ... But I think more applied to what we do for work.

Experience shapes how instructors define equity and how they implement equitable instruction. Participant 7 explains:

> A lot of it is also experience, and I think it's something that has built for many, many years, and of living in different countries and working with a lot of different types of people, and personalities and learning styles and backgrounds and international students and refugees and immigrants.

Personal experience is a crucial part of this. Participant 12 spoke of their own experience as a language learner in addition to learning from experience in the classroom.

> I think a lot of it is due to my own experience... I think about my own language learning experience, and ...my educational background. And then seeing it in the classroom... seeing where students come from, how students don't always come to the classroom from same backgrounds, and that ... there are inequities in terms of ... access to money, access to time, access to materials…it's my own life experience. It's my educational background … And it's my own personal experience as well as pursuing outside professional development and learning more about equity, inclusion, just kind of overall, not necessarily specifically for the language classroom. But how to ensure, you know, more equity in our classrooms in general.

Another aspect of personal experience is family relationships. These relationships also inform instructors' definitions of equity. Participant 7 pointed out that

> ... just recognizing our own personal experiences, too… I know my husband has very different learning styles from myself. I've learned a lot, and I learned a lot of compassion through that for other people ... I have kids who have health issues and ... severe medical problems, so seeing equity in relating to that and that lifestyle and all these different parts of life... that continually come together and keep shaping and forming my approach to teaching and just communicating with people in general.

Participant 4 mentioned how helping their daughter contributed to their understanding:

> Through my own personal experience with my daughter… thinking about the ways and reasons that she has struggled and what could be done better…

Learning from Collaboration and Reflection

Instructors facilitate equitable instruction through becoming more informed by discussion and collaboration with colleagues. Many participants described the benefits of having a strong network of people with whom to probe ideas and work to determine what practices will be most equitable for their students. Sharing valuable books and ideas is one way that instructors continue to learn and expand their knowledge and awareness of equitable practices. Participant 5 mentioned learning from, 'my colleagues too… who are also thinking this way and bringing up ideas like, have you thought of this? … reading a book and sharing what they learned in the book'; participant 4 added a need for more formal involvement from the institution:

> …informal chats and I love when we share things like "What's working for you or what are you doing?" And I think that's super helpful. I also would love to see ... more formal discussions - discipline discussions about bringing ideas that worked…Let's talk about how we're handling this specific topic... I would like to see that… brought in maybe to a lot of

> other aspects… I attend a book talk ... how about I bring some of those ideas back to our group, and we can talk about them... talking to colleagues, I think I get so much out of.

Discussions of current topics regarding equity is a way instructors build their equity toolkit. For example, minimum grading is an equitable practice in which students receive half of the total points, regardless of completing the assignment. This practice allows for struggling students to still have a chance to succeed if they have setbacks during the term. Participant 1 mentioned how discussions about the topic of minimum grading was a way that spurred them to think about equity in a deeper way. They said:

> More recently, with our conversations and policies on minimum grading, I think like that's definitely ... made me question things in a good way, question things like for what I thought I was doing to help promote equity in my classroom, where maybe it was, I was really just more promoting equality and not equity... that's kind of helped.

Participants also learned about equitable instruction through reflection. Reflection is a necessary step in assessing individual efforts towards equitable instruction and considering ways to make instruction more equitable. Participant 4 explains their process:

> I try to sort of soft monitor and reflect a lot…so afterwards, think about, so how did that go? What could I have done better? ... How do I change that for the next time? I'm trying to educate myself. I'm trying to learn more and to improve my awareness about what students are bringing in the classroom about how I can reach them better.

Participant 12 also spoke about the importance of reflection:

> I think we need to reflect. I think it's always good to have ... personal reflection or class reflection, program reflection, have the students do their own reflection of okay, what's working, what's not... also, as faculty and as a program can do that more often…we're a year and change into this new integrated program… I think soon we will need to sit down as a whole group and go, okay, what's working? What's not?

Participant 1 added that participating in this study helped to encourage that examination of their own practice.

> These questions were like, really helpful, because…[with] a peer observation, somebody watches you teach, and then, after class, you talk, and someone says like, "Oh, I saw you do this…why did you do that?" ... and the knee jerk responses, I always do that, and then I have to dig deeper. I'm like, wait, why do I always do that? And is that the best way? And so ... I think this was really helpful... to kind of have this ... opportunity for self-reflection, and to have to... vocalize it. And I'm really excited to see... what you do with this and what other people say too.

Participant 8 expressed the process of reflection in considering the course outcomes and how they fit the needs and goals of the students. They spoke of a need for more deliberate, formal reflection in order to ensure that the outcomes align more with the students' needs and goals.

> I think there's a there's a reflection. going on, maybe mentally and amongst the teachers, but maybe not necessarily so much formally and written down…I'm not sure that it does reflect it very well.

Changing Times

The discussion of equity in education also reflects the concerns of current times. In part because of the timely prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, instructors point out that it is a time in history in which society is trying to rectify past injustices. Participant 11 reflected on their experience in which equity has become much more important. They said:

> Equity has to be a part of the dynamic... it's integral. And... when I was an undergrad...I was involved in…intercultural studies… But there was back then, mid-nineties, there was no discussion whatsoever of equity... and you know it was just a matter of time, I guess, but it's kind of sad that it has taken. Oh, gosh! 25 years, 35, whatever it's been since then... to get where we're at now. And yet... looking at our current society, we have so much further to go.

Participant 3 pointed out how

> in recent social and cultural environments, there are more and more discussions of the idea of equity... that also reminds me more of the importance of feeling and actually practicing equitable teaching

and that

> I'm trying to be more inclusive and encouraging…the whole classroom is in great rapport, and they talk with each other. different age groups and backgrounds…I'm trying to help build this…environment where they can talk with each other…I'll be continuing this similar kind of efforts.

Participants attributed the culture of the current times as a factor in increasing awareness of the importance of equity and working against structural racism and oppression. Participant 11 explained,

> …especially in the post George Floyd Era, we've really started to wake up to the fact …we're not living in a equitable society, and there's many layers of that, too... it's inspired me at least to read a lot of books on it... join… book clubs and such, and just follow these issues from a perspective that I hadn't been aware of and frankly hadn't been…exposed to.

Participant 8 elaborated on this importance:

> There's progress and awareness that we can't assume that treating everybody equally is good enough. We need to have some consideration of where they're coming from.

They continued to describe the context of working at a Japanese institution thirty years ago.

> …different because of the timeline, but also different, because in that environment there wasn't really much of an understanding of this... I don't think there was much thought or much talk about how, even though everybody's Japanese, still ...people at different ages, different family backgrounds, like coming into the classroom differently. (Participant 8)

As described in theme 5, recent institutional support provides a means for instructors to develop their skills and a foundation in the principles of equity and equitable instruction. Participant 11 stated, 'We've had a lot of great trainings … I would say right at the beginning of the pandemic is when many of them started,' while participant 8 mentioned:

> The past couple of years there's been a lot of professional development opportunities going on within the community colleges where we're talking about …these ideas and in meetings.

Moreover, participant 7 explained how

> the last few years have given me the terminology to more directly express a lot of these topics…and...a lot of trainings around it.

They emphasize the importance of this support:

> Institutional encouragement is so helpful…to have that support and the encouragement of the conversations and the space for the conversations, ... I really appreciated, I think most, as we read and learn … to have intentional conversations with my coworkers about these topics, and then they just come up naturally, in shared offices and questions about grading and what's equitable here...I really appreciate that, and I think if the institution wasn't supporting that theme or encouraging, it would still come up some, but not to the same extent as we're all kind of delving into it together. (Participant 7)

Participant 3, commented on the improvements in the campus culture, and how it helps create a more inclusive environment for English language learners.

> I noticed there's more work coming from office of equity and inclusion in recent years. like a lot more discussions and attention to the problem and issues of equity in recent years... all these… activities and things that they are trying at least to increase public awareness …I think that's a good thing.

Time

One aspect that must be addressed is the effect of time on providing equitable instruction. Time is a factor that pervades many of the themes previously presented and unfortunately, may hinder the implementation of equitable instruction. From facilitating access to individualized instruction, time is a concern and a barrier to providing equitable instruction. However, participants demonstrated an awareness and desire to mitigate the influence of the lack of time in their students' lives, as well as in class instruction. This aspect relates to equitable instruction as a work in progress because there are no clear answers regarding how to resolve this issue.

Here, participant 2 explains the complexities of time in a class of students with very diverse needs and goals.

> I think the biggest barrier is how much time the students are available to devote... When you're teaching international students, going to class and doing their homework is their job. That is their primary responsibility. That is what they're here for. I don't feel guilty at all about assigning significant amount of reading and homework and expecting that that reading and homework is done. However, when you are dealing with the domestic population, school is just a part of their lives. They have jobs, they have families. They have responsibilities that are way more important than that reading assignment that you have asked them to do. The fact that they came to class is already huge... we are just a small part of their everyday line. and it's more important that they come at all, than they don't come. That is where I'm worried about the equity- the way we have structured our instruction and ... how do we structure it so we can provide that support that the instructor can and it's usually the students who are going to suffer the most are the ones who have the least.

Many other participants echoed the different time expectations and demands that students with diverse needs and goals may have. Participant 10 expressed these differences:

> Some international English language learners may need more time to do and like learn things. Conversely, some domestic English language learners may also need more time, because oftentimes in our classroom they have many other engagements, you know, like jobs, families, etc., that perhaps ... an international language learner may not have. So also, being cognizant, or that you know, they have really rich lives outside of the classroom, to give them a break. And ... kind of give them grace with regards to time.

Participant 5 described the different demands on time that both kinds of students may have. They showed how the amount of time in the classroom may affect how equitable learning can be.

> There's some limits ...[to] success as far as equitable instruction ... the international students, are coming to 20 credits. They're in all the classes. They have all so much more opportunity and input …for their language development. But then I may have a student - a domestic student who's only taking my core class. And... I see the limits there... They're not getting the same ... broad instruction and the same amount…There's some limits, and it's not equitable in that way for all my students.

Participant 2 also underscores the need to be in physical community with students in order to provide the instruction necessary to meet students' needs and goals. They state that:

> If you can't come and you really can't come. then you're falling behind, and it makes things worse and worse… That is the equity piece that I don't know. I don't really have strategies because it's a systematic thing.

Participant 3 also pointed out how immigrant students' learning may be affected by time constraints and uncertainty:

> Part of the difficulty and frustration for immigrants' life is, they are not sure themselves. They are not even clear what they could do. And ... for a lot of women, especially. They have their family to take care of. So, they have limited time.

Instructors wrestle with finding the time to address all students' needs and goals. Participant 4 described the strong desire to meet all students' individualized needs, but the frustration and difficulty in implementation, when there is simply not enough time.

> The first thing that came to my mind was time. I might know what many of the students need but having time to focus on all of those different needs…there's just not enough time...and just the huge diversity of the needs and the goals... I mean you always wish that you could do more, right? ...I just wish I had more time....students need more support; they need more scaffolding, but that all takes so much time, and I wish that I really could have time for doing a lot more of that like the meta stuff… that helps students …build that awareness of what they're doing and how they're doing it. And you know... 'Did I meet my goals?'... I see the value in that, but there is just not time to do enough of that... the time thing is really a big frustration.

Participant 8 also pointed out this challenge and how it affects their expectations in the classroom.

> The biggest challenge is time, because you'd like to be able to teach everybody differently within that classroom. But that's just impossible when you've got 25 to 30 people.

They explain how they handle assignment deadlines in their courses.

> I don't really have [deadlines]... this is going back to the difference between... international students and domestic students... that the

> domestic students - It's a real challenge for them to get to everything done by Friday. They need the weekends to really ...do their assignments and the tasks that they've been set so I like to be as flexible as I possibly can with deadlines.

However, they express that this can create its own challenges in both logistics and learning, ‘If it then becomes as a case of some students not managing to get week one stuff done until week 4’ (Participant 8).

Participant 8 also expressed frustration that due to the factor of time, it is difficult to address everyone’s very different needs and goals. They say,

> It would be really nice if you could have an individual thing for each of the 28 people. But you just can't ... then there's the outliers who, you know, the people who can't do technology at all because of the age ... or where they've come from... I suppose frustrated really because ...It is a challenge, and …unless you're teaching one to one. it's frustratingly ineffective. I think I'd like it to be more effective.

They explain this frustration in this example about laptops, an institutional equity effort.

> We can provide you with a with a laptop…which is absolutely fantastic. But at the same time, …they’re given a laptop...and they're not shown how to use it, or they're faced with ‘What's your username?’ and ‘What’s your password?’, and they haven't got a clue... it’s just not very helpful - the laptop is wonderfully helpful, but if you can’t use it...

Participant 10 described the crucial nature of time in equitable instruction.

> The factor of time, I think, is a big one when it comes to equity in the classroom... I think it's common for other…class settings, to have a very pronounced... time structure… But if you're thinking equity…that really needs to be flexible and accommodating, because not all students come in with the same background knowledge, skill set, ability...to make sure they have that in an equitable classroom... give them grace with regards to time.

Time can be an important factor in delivering equitable instruction because students learn differently. Participant 10 elaborates that ‘Proportionally maybe some skills require more time... some students…may require more time than other students’. Furthermore, they explain

> I also many assignments…untimed because again... I think time really can cramp a lot of learning… It's like equitable and pedagogical… you need more time, then here is more time…I think time is a big equity factor.

Participant 12 commented on the importance of time in equity. They state that

> Elements of an equitable classroom for me is that that students get access to enough time…allowing students time to respond to things and different ways to respond to things... you can participate in class by speaking in

> class. You can also do like a Canvas discussion as to allow you more time to formulate your thoughts and responses.

However, participant 12 also points out that time can affect whether all students get what they need and want.

> I think the reality is given, sometimes our class sizes ... the length of time that we have in our quarters, I don't know if we can address everything, but I think we should aim to... address what we can.

Staying Educated and Positive

Instructors expressed an awareness that equity work is ongoing. They admitted that they did not have all the answers; however, they were willing to keep learning and doing the work necessary to support students and work towards the removal of structural barriers. In order to facilitate equitable instruction, instructors prioritize lifelong learning. Participant 4 explains how they stay educated, also pointing out the value of work that is already being done:

> We can continue the amazing work that we are doing in the classroom... that we're already doing so much, but I think what we could continue to do is to educate ourselves…by reading, by talking...learn as much as we can about things like biases in education ... And inequity... take the offers for workshops and course work, and especially if we can get paid for it... build that awareness and sort of exercise, those muscles of how we can help to dismantle those things...just keep trying...to be on the lookout for stuff that you see, and... continue to be adaptable in our classrooms, and with whoever walks into our classrooms and the different needs and goals.

Participant 12 communicated how

> I think it's an ongoing thing, and it's something that I'm still looking to learn more about. I'm still... self-reflecting and dealing with my own inequities... my own personal background... we are trying to create an environment where all students can be supported... recognizing that in the past, that was not the case... it's okay to be vulnerable, and it's okay to make mistakes. And it's okay to learn all together...and that atmosphere of respect and kindness that is so important. And it goes both ways - not just the students need to do – the teacher needs to do it too... You don't just like reach an end point. You're always constantly seeking to get better. and I do look for new ways, like how can I create a better situation in my classroom in so many ways? not just for equity, but to recognize the fact that ...this is an ongoing journey...I've been teaching now for 14 years...when I think back to where I was over a decade ago, I've come so far, but I'm continuing to learn more about it, because it's an ongoing- it's a changing field.

Participant 9 echoed this sentiment:

> I think it's just staying educated...Like doing the trainings that are offered to you, reading, listening to podcasts, like staying, educated on what the equity challenges are, and how you can help with those like I would say ...that's just the number one thing -like there's not like a magic trick of things you can do that would be equitable like. It's just getting all the information that you can and then implementing as much of that as you can in a way that... makes sense for you.

Instructors work to provide equitable instruction by staying educated about their students and responding to the current students in their classroom. They are continually working to learn more in order to support their students in meeting their needs and goals. They seek ways to ensure that their students succeed. The needs of the students are constantly shifting, and the approaches might need to change as well as Participant 9 explained:

> I think equity work is just always an ongoing process... there's no like end…it's not like... I'm a hundred percent equitable now. I have no more work to do... it's ... staying educated cause we're also always going to have different students in our class… maybe now, I only have one unhoused student, which still feels like a lot. But …in the future, maybe it'd be a lot more. And that would be a bigger focus of... trying to make sure that... that's something that we are working on in a larger scale at the college and not just… me helping one student with those resources. But it could also [be]… a new problem in my classroom that I've never had before... And so, no matter how much equity work we do, there's always more work to do to make sure that every student has an equal opportunity to success.

Participant 7 emphasized how interconnected the field of English language teaching and global political events are:

> In this specific teaching situation ... whatever is going on in the world directly and quickly affects our classrooms ... more than a lot of other education environments because of the nature of English language, learning, and international students. And it just it affects quickly so that dynamic also makes equity such an ongoing and a quick, responsive, ever-changing thing. So that was one thing that came to mind… war breaks out in Ukraine – bam, my Ukrainian student looks like a ghost that day... whatever you see in the news, on the headlines hits quickly in our classrooms to respond to.

A work in progress shows how instructors are constantly working towards learning about equity and ways to create equitable instruction. Participants explained how they continue to educate themselves about equity and how to apply these principles to their classes. Participant 4 explained how instructors can implement equitable instruction:

> In general, I think we can educate ourselves right about equity and about our student population... we can advocate for our students… So when we see an inequity, or something that hasn't been thought of, or is not being addressed that we speak up about it and advocate for our students.

Participant 8 expressed the idea of a work in progress:

> I don't feel like I'm much of an expert on this stuff. I feel like I'm still very much a novice in terms of talking about it and learning about it myself. but I'm interested in it, and I appreciate it.

In contrast, while participant 6 also expressed the idea of a work in progress, they pointed out the context of having an unpredictable courseload:

> I feel like I'm consistently a work in progress because I'm also often dealing with new classes that I haven't taught before, or I've only taught one time and so there's inequity there, too... I also am observant of other teachers and look to see ... they're doing this – and oh that's probably something that I should have done.

Instructors have good intentions in implementing equitable instruction, and they are dedicated to doing the best that they can. Participant 4 calls attention to the fact that this work is not always easy:

> The general culture of being open to new ideas, being willing to discuss new and maybe a little bit uncomfortable or unfamiliar ideas...And again, this is work in progress...when you say, how do you respond equitably... I'm sure I'm not always equitable ... But I'm doing my best. And so, some things that I really try to do is ...as much individualized instructions as I can.

Participant 12 also explains, 'What are ways that we ourselves can continue to ... improve ourselves as instructors to help them? ...it's an ongoing journey,' while participant 10, expresses:

> I always make efforts ... I strive to implement an equitable learning environment. And I know I can only do so much. I think making the classroom equitable is ... very important to all of us- the effectiveness I don't know.

I will conclude theme six with the optimism of participant 7's reflection on their success in implementing an equitable learning environment. They describe an exhausted student who said, 'Life is so crazy and hard, but this class is my safe and rest place'.

> Yes, like life is chaotic, especially a lot of the things they're going through, and to have her specifically say, this classroom is my safe and my rest place. I thought, awesome, … something worked at least for her... this is a place she's able to let down her guard, she's able to put those things to the side and focus on learning. And she has relationships built, she feels connected and safe. That was one of the most encouraging things, more than assignments and other things...to have her speak that

> randomly at the beginning of class made me know something was working, but it is ongoing, for sure. (Participant 7)

Summary of Theme Six

Theme six shows the participants' willingness to commit to lifelong learning to serve their students in equitable ways. Their journey is a 'work in progress'. These instructors are equity minded. They reflect on the areas that they can improve and work to empower students as well as they can. Furthermore, they consider systemic barriers and how their practice might reduce them. As McNair et al. (2020) and Bensimon et. al (2007) have proposed, equity is facilitated through the responsibility of both the institution and the efforts of the practitioner. Marrujo-Duck's research (2017) also connects to the necessity of faculty engagement in these efforts. These instructors also demonstrate the reflection that Cavales Doolan (2019) argues is necessary for successful implementation of equitable instruction.

Prior studies by Fernandez et al. (2017) and Doron (2021) conclude that there is no 'one size fits all' in equity work. Instructors learn about equity and implementing equitable instruction in many ways. They learn from observation, experience, collaboration, and reflection. They are reacting to current events, shifts in culture, and the challenges of serving their students' needs and goals when there is simply not enough time. However, in spite of this, they stay educated and positive. This theme shows how instructors frame their efforts towards equity and how they continue to work towards the success of all of their students.

The challenges of time also cannot be understated. Time is necessary to provide the level of instruction that truly meets the needs and goals of all students. Moreover, insufficient time in the classroom can increase the inequities of the quality of instruction that students of different needs and goals receive. In Marshak's (2012) research that looked at simultaneous education of parent and child ESL students, she found that a lack of time and work schedule difficulties were significant in preventing adult students from attending class. While this challenge cannot be solved easily, it is one that instructors will continue to grapple with.

By engaging with colleagues and reflection in order to seek ways to provide equitable instruction, these participants are demonstrating equity-mindedness (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Gorski, 2020). The work of an equity-

minded instructor is never through, as these instructors have shown, and it will not end until equity is sustained, according to Gorski and Swalwell (2023). Furthermore, the work requires intentionality, and 'deep, transformative awareness' (Gorski & Swalwell, 2023, p.41). As the participants pointed out, the demographics of the ESL classroom are continually changing.

The following chart shows the main features of theme 6: a work in progress.

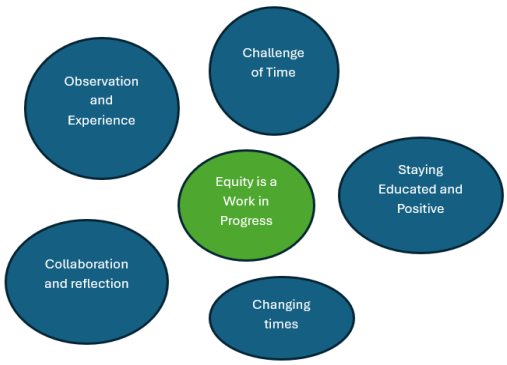


Figure 4-8: Graphic of Theme 6: Equity is a Work in Progress

Summary

The results of this study demonstrate that instructors work to provide equitable instruction in many ways. The interaction of many concerns informs instructors' perspectives and the implementation of equitable instruction. Here are the main findings of this study: instructors work towards equity through facilitating access to content, learning, and cultural capital, centring the individual through knowledge of their students, and facilitating and promoting community and belonging. Moreover, an attitude of service can be observed in these participants, and their understanding of equity and implementation of equitable instruction are influenced and affected by political and institutional decisions and priorities. Instructors strive to provide equitable instruction though lifelong learning and demonstrate the willingness to show that although this learning is a work in progress, serving the students' needs and goals is at the forefront of their efforts.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview

This dissertation explored the perspectives of English language instructors who teach in a program of students with diverse needs and goals. The context of the study was inspired by the decrease in international student enrolment before and during the Covid pandemic, which led to more programs combining the populations of international students and domestic resident and refugee English language learners in the same classes. The study sought to understand how instructors define equity in such a context and what they do to implement equitable instruction.

While equity has been examined in K-12 classrooms and in regard to higher education, few studies have examined how instructors are addressing the challenges of teaching in programs with ESL students of diverse needs and goals. Thus, this research contributes to the existing literature on equity and equitable instruction by examining the perspectives of English language instructors and how they serve students equitably. The study was qualitative and used nine semi-structured interviews and one focus group with three participants as the methods of data collection. The results were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022a) reflexive thematic analysis. The findings determined that instructors who are equity-oriented use a variety of intentional methods and approaches to implement equitable instruction for their students; they are also motivated and affected by their own attitudes and experiences, as well as institutional and political concerns.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this dissertation is Banks (1993, 2007) and McGee Banks and Banks (1995) equity pedagogy. This pedagogy supports techniques and methods to support racially and ethnically diverse students to acquire the skills and knowledge to be able to function and contribute to a society that works for the benefit of all its citizens. Banks (2007) explains that

> To help students of color and low-income students to experience academic success, and thus to become effective citizens, the school must be restructured so that these students will have successful experiences within a nurturing, personalized, and caring environment. (p. 13)

A component of this is the necessity of teachers to examine and reflect on their own beliefs and practices.

Gorski (2016, 2019, 2020) and Gorski and Swalwell (2015, 2023)'s Equity Literacy Institute and Framework was also instrumental in framing these findings in terms of equity mindedness. According to their framework, equity needs to be centred in education, and transformative action is the end goal of equity theory. This action must come from individual and institutions.

Lastly, Bensimon's (2007) research on equity mindedness, through the Center for Urban Education and her collaborations with other researchers, influenced the interpretations of this study. This research includes work by McNair et al. (2020), Bensimon et al. (2007), Bensimon et al. (2016), Malcom-Piqueux and Bensimon (2017), Felix et al. (2015), and Bensimon and Malcom (2012). The Center for Urban Education highlights their tool of four phases in order to enact institutional and individual practitioner change. These phases are 1) Laying the Groundwork 2) Defining the Problem 3) Creating Solutions Through Inquiry, and 4) Sustaining and Scaling the Work (CUE, 2020).

Creating an equitable learning environment through which all students can succeed, achieve their goals, and create a just society is one goal of equity frameworks and equity-minded instruction. This includes reducing achievement gaps that reflect injustice and societal inequity. While most equity theories and frameworks consider the impact of race-based achievement gaps, there have been some efforts to include a broader definition that addresses more factors. There has been pushback, though, that to rectify past injustices, racial equity has to be the main focus (Gorski, 2019; Gorski and Swalwell, 2015). Also, although terms like equity-mindedness may refer to McNair et al. (2020) and Bensimon's (2007) research and framework, I will use equity minded and oriented to describe the perspective and actions of the participants in this study.

Findings and Discussion

The themes that were developed in this dissertation reflect how the participants define equity and what they do to provide equitable instruction in their classes. The findings reveal an interplay of many aspects of student-centred learning. Of the six themes described in chapter four, themes one through three describe intentional actions that instructors cultivate in order to create a student-centred environment. These first three themes are aspects that instructors can demonstrate some control over and serve as the means through which instructors create an environment that supports the needs and goals of all

students. The latter three themes detail factors that might inform instructors' definition of equity and the external forces that affect equitable instruction in the classroom.

Theme 1: Equity through facilitating access

The first finding is the theme of equity through facilitating access. Instructors provide equitable instruction through providing access to content and learning and cultural capital. Access to learning has been described in many studies as a purpose of equitable instruction (Grubb et. al., 2003; Chisholm & Beckett, 2003; Schmitt, 2018). Access affects the distribution of power and diminishes the effects of inequity. Equitable access ensures that all students are able to develop the knowledge and skills they need in order to meet their needs and achieve their goals.

Making content relevant is a critical element of equitable access to content. The participants described what they do in the classroom to make content relevant for their students. They offer choice and flexibility in assignments and assessments, and they offer options to students, so the assignment is more personal. Making content relevant for students is an equity practice that aligns with Shufflebarger's (2022) research; equity objectives include prioritizing student voices and encouraging students to express their experiences or opinions. Culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Bell, 2016; and Cavales Doolan, 2019) is also an approach that contributes to making content relevant for students.

Participants also described using multiple modes of instruction, low stakes practice and leveraging student strengths. Many of these practices align with Wang et al.'s (2008) explanation of differentiated instruction. They describe differentiation as

> diversifying learning activities according to formats, levels of difficulty, amount of teacher and peer support, and students' interests... allowing students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways, using alternative assessment among others. Differentiation at the level of content, process, and products can also include flexible grouping and tiered activities, as well as flexibility in the use of time, materials, modes of teaching, and so forth. (p.3)

The participants mentioned many of these factors as ways that they provide access to content and learning for their students. Moreover, working towards providing access to technology, materials, and resources, are tangible ways that

participants provide equitable access to content, offsetting the disparities that may arise from differences in financial situations.

Access to Bourdieu's (1986) idea of cultural capital is another feature of this theme. Participants expose their students to institutional and cultural norms, campus resources, and of course, English. As a result of these efforts, students develop cultural capital and agency. Participant 4 emphasizes this connection: 'Language ... is power... how will this …improve their lives? And how will this give them agency?' Several studies have shown the transformative effects of cultural capital on the identity and agency of English language learners, especially in terms of students transitioning to credit classes and the positive effects of increasing agency and future options for ESL students (Suh, 2017; Becker, 2011). Access to cultural capital supports students to develop confidence and strength in their own independent learning and pursuit of their individual needs and goals.

Theme 2: Centring the individual: knowledge of students

Equity-oriented instructors consider the unique backgrounds, circumstances, situations, and experiences of students. Participants described how they learn about the needs and goals of their students through observation, conversations, and student feedback. Instructors develop an awareness of the diverse circumstances of student life experience so that they understand their students as human beings. They also consider individual attitudes and motivation to ensure they are supporting all student goals. Moreover, they avoid stereotyping, even when there are apparent similarities in student goals.

Centring the individual allows instructors to 'draw on student experiences and priorities in schooling, thus validating student knowledge and life values, and enabling them to scaffold student learning from the familiar' (Hogg, 2011, p. 667). The students' funds of knowledge are valued and serve as a basis for learning. Furthermore, centring the individual is an equity practice that correlates with Souto-Manning et al.'s (2019) definition of equity in that 'equity means an equality of (possible) outcomes, which may demand different conditions, supporting the individuality of human being and the diversity of humanity' (p. 63).

By centring the individual, instructors come to know the individuals in their classrooms, which Van Ngo (2007) attests involves validating 'their

experiences, emotions, spirituality, and culture'. Valadez's (1993) research supports how important it is for students to feel as though instructors care about them as individuals. This intentional equity practice helps students feel valued for who they are and can have positive effects on their learning and confidence, thereby helping them meet their needs and complete their goals.

Theme 3: Community and belonging

Equity is provided through the intentionality of creating community and belonging. The participants overwhelmingly described how important it is for students to feel welcome and that they belong. For example, participant 2, stated, 'I feel like that sense of belonging is really key. That's … how you know you're being equitable'. Schlossberg (1989) states that when students feel as though they matter, their connection to the institution increases. As a result of this, students are more likely to persevere and achieve their goals.

The theme of community and belonging encompasses how instructors create a safe community for students to learn. This in turn supports students in working towards their needs and goals. The participants emphasized building community through creating an inclusive, welcoming environment. Learning occurs through community, and this environment supports the lowering of Krashen's concept of the affective filter. When students feel comfortable and relaxed, they are better able to acquire language. Therefore, the benefits of student belonging and feeling part of a community are essential in supporting students to satisfy their needs and achieve their goals.

It is important to point out that culturally relevant pedagogy plays a part in community and belonging as well as access and centring the individual. When students feel seen and recognized, they are likely to be more engaged and confident in their learning. Borjigin (2017) articulates the inclusive learning environment that that culturally relevant pedagogy can create, thereby encouraging students to connect to the American educational culture. Flynn et al. (2017) describe how culturally relevant educators encourage community building in the classroom, the benefits being a strong sense of efficacy and visibility.

Theme 4: Instructor's attitude of service

The theme of an instructor's attitude of service highlights the participants' underlying emotional and psychological perspectives that

contribute to their understanding of equity and their desire to serve their students equitably. This theme was generated both semantically and latently. Some instructors directly stated the qualities that contributed to this theme, while others demonstrated this attitude through their teaching examples and our discussion. Through this theme, participants expressed their care for their students and their obligation to help serve the needs and goals of all students.

This finding may relate to the general motivation of people who choose to enter the field of teaching. It seems logical that many who enter this field do so to contribute to society and enhance the lives of others. This theme, though, is further underpinned by a sense of social justice and working to make opportunities for students more equitable. Teachers want their students to be successful, and these participants showed how much they are willing to do to support their students' future success. This attitude of service correlates to the 'moral responsibility' which Castañeda's research mentions as a basis for meeting the needs of diverse students (p. 10).

Theme 5: Considering the impact of political and institutional factors

The findings showed that the state and institutional prioritization of equity was instrumental in supporting the participants' understanding of equity and implementation of equitable instruction. Beginning with the WA state mission and through institutional leadership, the emphasis on equity was clearly felt and mostly appreciated by the participants. This correlates with Marrujo Duck's (2017) research regarding equitable outcomes in California; she argues that the tone that the institution sets makes the difference between authentic engagement or mere compliance. She states that

> visits to ten separate community colleges increased my appreciation for the role of institutional leadership, structure, culture, and policy in shaping practice and thus student success. (p.236)

The findings show that the state mission and the institutional leadership strongly influence the promotion of equitable instruction through professional development, events, and a transparent concern for the success of all students.

In fact, many studies have shown the importance of the interaction between the instructor and the institution in providing equitable instruction. Felix et al. (2015) show how the institutional use of the Center for Urban Education's Equity Scorecard influences teaching practices. The purpose of the scorecard is to 'assist campuses in embedding equity into their structures,

policies, and practices' (p.25). The scorecard supports the role of the practitioner in examining his or her own practices and how they support (or do not) equitable instruction. The activity gives a sense of 'purposeful agency' to the instructor (p 26). They explain that when instructors have the skills to recognize and identify structural racism, they are able to better respond and facilitate the success of all students. Furthermore equity-minded instructors use evidence to address equity gaps and act to consider how to examine and change their practices (Malcom-Piqueux and Bensimon, 2017; Bensimon and Malcom, 2012).

However, in addition to this, several participants expressed the concern that institutions must also apply equitable principles to adjunct faculty, who may face additional challenges, such as a lack of job security. While Grubb et al. (2003) argue that the community college overreliance on adjunct faculty is a dilemma of community colleges, Marrujo-Duck (2017) points out the real issues adjunct faculty contend with, for example, 'less time to prepare for courses, lowered access to professional development, curriculum design, or departmental decision-making' among others. That is to say that there was a sense that for an institution to profess equity goals, they should show they value associate or adjunct faculty as well.

Working towards equitable outcomes necessitates the work of the practitioner and the leadership of the institution as Marrujo-Duck (2017) found in her research on student learning outcomes. This corresponds with Bensimon's equity-minded framework. However, most institutional data involves the college as a whole, and does not disaggregate whether or not ESL students reach their ultimate goal. From my own work in college assessment meetings, measuring whether ESL students are achieving the college level outcomes is challenging, since the data is complicated. As a result, evidence about student success is vague, and may be defined by such measures as persevering in the program by attending or registering for another quarter. It is difficult to determine if students ever do achieve their initially reported goals.

Theme 6: Equity as a work in progress

In this theme, the participants expressed the idea that equity work is ongoing. This theme is also supported by equity frameworks; however, the participants framed it in terms of English language learners. In order to provide

equitable instruction to students of diverse needs and goals, instructors are constantly learning. They are learning about the changing demographics of their students, which might be influenced by local and global political events. Moreover, they learn from observation, experience, collaboration, and reflection. Reflection is a critical piece of equity-mindedness. Felix et al. (2015) explain that 'guided inquiry helps practitioners change themselves' (p.37). When instructors reflect on their practice, they are more likely to enact equitable changes. Participants described the changing times and perspectives that have resulted in an increased awareness of equity, and a common thread was the importance of staying educated and positive.

Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that instructors employ a variety of methods to provide equitable instruction to English language learners of diverse needs and goals. They create equitable learning opportunities by prioritizing individual access to content, learning, and cultural capital. This access is the means through which students will be able to use their skills and knowledge to realize their goals or fulfil their needs. They use pedagogical techniques such as culturally relevant pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and UDL to make content relevant, personalized, and accessible to all students.

Other areas that instructors consider in order to intentionally cultivate an equitable learning environment are centring the individual and facilitating community and belonging. Teachers learn about their students through interacting, observing, and asking, both anonymously and directly. They consider the individual characteristics of their learners in order to tailor instruction and to make students feel as if they belong.

Instructors consciously seek to create community and a sense of belonging for their students and gauge the success of their efforts to meet student needs and goals through receiving feedback from their students. As a result, when students feel seen, in a safe and trustworthy environment, they are better able to learn. Teachers also think about the institutional and greater community and think about how they can better create opportunities for students to make connections and feel a sense of belonging. They are motivated to create such an environment through their own attitude of service. This is expressed through their care for their students and a desire for them all to succeed.

An important factor that may affect understanding and implementation are institutional and political considerations. If the government values and prioritizes a mission of equity, this affects the instructors' understanding and willingness to work towards equity. The culture affects how instructors view equity, mostly for better, but occasionally with some pushback when faculty feel their needs are not being met by the institution. Overall, though, the findings show that when equity is a priority of the leadership, this benefits how the faculty perceive and execute equitable instruction.

Lastly, a work in progress shows how instructors measure the success of their efforts. They realize that equity work, underpinned by a sense of social justice and personal responsibility, is ongoing, and requires continual learning. It also requires the humility to reflect and assess one's own practices in order to serve students. As student demographics may change depending on global conflicts, or other political or cultural shifts, instructors need to be aware and knowledgeable about how to best help their students achieve their needs and goals. Equity work is not complete until there is justice in society.

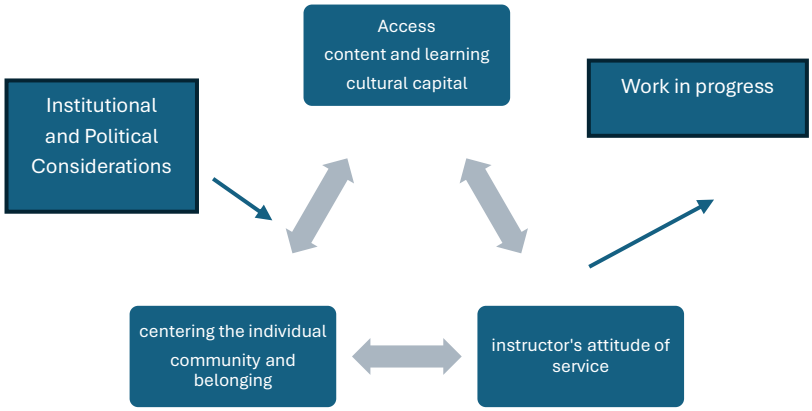


Figure 5-1 Diagram of Findings and Interactions among Themes

Reflections on the Research Process and Limitations of the Study

The decision to pursue this Doctorate of Education was very personal, but it has enhanced my teaching and thinking in many ways. The process of conducting this study has been enlightening and rewarding, but not without challenges, and the final result of this undertaking has certainly been affected by the decisions I made along the way. First of all, the design of the study changed through the process. I had initially intended to interview only three to four instructors in semi-structured interviews and conduct more focus groups,

including a post-findings focus group to focus reflection on the findings and make recommendations for best practices. However, due to delays in the collection of data, I chose to forego the follow up group. This was unfortunate, as I think it would have offered additional insight into best practices.

While the data collection methods were appropriate for a qualitative, interpretivist study, having more than one focus group could have enhanced the findings. The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews with more instructors proved to be a wise one, though. The result was richer, more detailed data. The participants were able to have dedicated time to describe their thoughts and practices. The focus group interaction was very different from the individual semi-structured interviews, and the group really collaborated to produce meaning, generating valuable data. Therefore, having more focus groups might have provided another opportunity to see how the dynamics of a group would have added to the data. One downside to keeping the focus group the same length as the interviews was that it felt more rushed, and we didn't have time to pursue individual follow up questions due to the time commitment requested of the participants.

My search for participants was intentionally broad, and I attempted to recruit instructors who teach in a program that serves students of different statuses together, specifically, international students on an F-1 visa, and resident domestic immigrant and refugee students, who likely have different needs and goals. However, I could have been even more purposely selective by asking for participants who had previously expressed interest in equitable practices. That said, the participants who volunteered likely had an interest in equity, hence their participation.

I also declined to collect demographic data from participants. As a result, I did not have information about participants' self-identity or thoughts or activities involving equity and social justice beyond the context of the interviews. This was intentional, as I wanted to focus on what participants said, and it helped me concentrate on the content of the interviews. However, the lack of information about who my participants were and how their own experiences may have affected how they perceive equity and implement equitable instruction is a key limitation of this study. In fact, *who* the participants are is crucial to the nature of quality reflective thematic analysis. While participants were given the opportunity to describe how they developed

their perspectives on equity during the interviews, I never asked them about their identity, which may have influenced their equity journey. I also didn't ask how they wanted to be represented in this study. This lack of representation does a disservice to my participants and could have added a fuller picture of the results.

In addition, I never asked about any particulars of their programs beyond if their program serves domestic students in conjunction with international students. Finding out if the programs had always been combined or recently combined would have been an important consideration. An important side note is that some of these instructors may have native English speakers in their classes as well, thereby making their classrooms even more diverse. That was a consideration that was not addressed in this study.

Lastly, I did not question how much experience instructors had teaching students of diverse needs and goals or how involved they had previously been in equity issues and instruction, as my interview and focus group questions did not delve into these topics. Therefore, I was unable to draw any conclusions that might have been related to the unique perspectives of the participants. Hayfield et al. (2009) describe reporting findings that occurred across the dataset and patterns that only applied to a particular subset of their participants in separate contexts; however, in the case of my data, it is impossible to know if there might have been some interesting connections that were not made.

Impact on Practice and Practical Recommendations

Raufman et al. (2019) have pointed out that even though English language learners make up a considerable number of students at community colleges, 'There is limited research on the experiences and outcomes of Els at community colleges and other higher education institutions' (p.1). Furthermore, studies regarding equity tend to focus more on K-12. Considering that the ESL classroom is already diverse, the impact of the closing or merging of programs that addressed specific needs and goals makes the classroom even more diverse and challenging. Thus, the results of this study can be of value for instructors to consider the many factors that result in equitable instruction; the concepts and techniques that the participants described may help other teachers employ strategies that will help them serve their students equitably.

Professional Implications

My experience serving the two distinct populations of both students separately for years and then together, when these programs were re-envisioned as one, served as the catalyst for this study. I was able to observe firsthand the features of these populations that the participants described. International students tended to be younger and more academically goal oriented. Domestic students were often older, but most had jobs and families. During the years I taught in these programs, our curriculum and approach to teaching these classes felt different. When the factors prior to, and during the COVID pandemic caused our programs to merge, my colleagues and I were tasked with overhauling the existing programs in order to create a new one which served all students.

I was inspired to seek out the perspectives of other English language instructors to see how they viewed equity and navigated the challenges of a diverse classroom, but more importantly how they structured learning opportunities and activities that supported the goals of all students in the class. As the participants discussed, regardless of the orientation of the curriculum, all students are unique, and a curriculum that prioritizes the majority of students' needs and goals still might not capture all of the individual characteristics of the learners. Therefore, as these participants have demonstrated, instructors need to keep equity at the forefront of their efforts in order to help support all of their students.

The results of this study have a clear impact on my practice and that of other instructors. Personally, I have a vested interest in benefitting from the experience and knowledge of peers in the field. Teachers have a hard job. Motivated by a desire to serve all students, they work to enhance their students' lives with compassion and humanity. They develop creative solutions to complex challenges. Understanding how equitable instruction is implemented affects the quality of teaching and learning in the ESL profession. It seems clear that to facilitate equitable instruction, instructors must centre the student and encourage independent learning. Recognizing and valuing the unique strengths, abilities, and knowledge that each student brings to the learning space is a crucial part of equitable instruction.

Teachers are motivated by doing what we love and what we can for our students. At times, this can be challenging and difficult, but always incredibly rewarding, and to be able to transform and help students get to the next phase

in their lives is worthwhile. Throughout my career, I have struggled with my conceptualization of a good teacher. Am I effectively reaching students? Am I supporting them appropriately? Are they learning what they need to learn to face their future goals? This increased my desire to know more about how others are dealing with these challenges, and what their successes are.

A principal concern of mine as an instructor is always how I can best serve my students. I have been challenged to create a learning environment that appropriately values individual needs and fosters a space for students to meet individual goals in a respectful and engaging way, while simultaneously addressing the outcomes of the course. Just as student learning happens in community, so too is this dissertation the result of the collective knowledge of the expertise and contributions of my participants.

Braun and Clarke (2022a) explain that in reflexive thematic analysis, the subjectivity of the researcher is a benefit. The researcher's involvement in the development of themes is impossible to separate from the findings. The positionality that I contribute to this research is that of a white, cis-gendered woman, and an 'insider,' as I am also an English language instructor who teaches in a program with students of diverse needs and goals. My understanding and interpretations of equity and equitable instruction have been shaped by my own learning and personal experience, with the awareness that correcting historical injustices is central to equity frameworks. While English language learners are often marginalized at American institutions, what instructors can do to provide equitable instruction for student needs and goals serves to foster an environment through which all students can succeed.

Identification of Future Research

There are two main areas that would benefit from further research. The most important would be to hear from the students themselves about how well their classes and program serve their individual needs and goals. Finding out from the students directly would help to assess the success of the programs and the teachers' instruction. Becker's (2011) ESL community college research suggests that there is a gap between goals and the achievement of those goals. She points out that while the percentage of students transitioning to credit classes is small, those who do transition are successful. Blumenthal (2002) observes, 'How, then, in light of this diversity of needs and goals, is ESL student

success to be measured?' (p.46). She proposes focusing research on examining whether real student goals were achieved in both the short and long term. More research in this area would be beneficial in evaluating the success of equitable instruction.

The second area of possible future research would be to assess and develop best practices for the implementation of equitable instruction. While this research was able to identify some best practices, a subsequent focus group where participants could discuss the initial findings might have solidified the strategies for other teachers. This may be an area that could benefit from additional research. Another aspect of this might be to investigate what kind of institutional support is necessary for instructors to implement equitable instruction more effectively.

Summary and Conclusion

All classrooms are diverse, and the research in this dissertation is not to be conflated with the idea that there is, as several researchers have pointed out, a 'one size fits all' panacea to the challenge of serving the diverse needs and goals of students in the classroom (Wrigley, 1993; Bondie et al., 2019). The study set out to understand the perspectives of instructors who teach students of diverse needs and goals, and the findings proved that the techniques used by equity minded instructors seek to centre and understand the student, their circumstances, and facilitate their goals through providing instruction that prioritizes their individuality in community.

The research on equity frameworks and pedagogy makes it clear that the correcting the injustices of the past underpins equity theories, but as several participants pointed out, there is a desire to expand the definition. The Equity Literacy Framework (Gorski, 2016; Gorski and Swalwell, 2023) argues that the goal is transformative action. This is also part of McNair et al. (2020), Bensimon (2007) equity-minded framework, and Banks (1993, 2007) equity pedagogy. The application in this context supports transformative action, in terms of helping students realize their needs and achieve their goals.

The findings clearly show that political and institutional leadership contributes to a culture of prioritizing equity. When equity is a value of a government's mission, there are more professional development opportunities and means to learn more. Most participants valued these opportunities and

appreciated this institutional culture. However, there was some pushback in terms of the buzzword of ‘equity’ and frustration with having to do more things for the institution. That said, among all the participants, there was a strong sense of prioritizing the student and their needs and goals.

The principles of equitable instruction derive from a sense of justice and fairness, and it is clear from the findings that when equity is a value championed by leadership, it is motivating for a culture that supports practitioners’ efforts towards equitable instruction. It is important to mention that since the inception of this dissertation, much has changed in the political landscape. Donald Trump’s November 2024 re-election resulted in an attack on DEI initiatives and language. While Washington State’s equity, diversity and inclusion plan is intact, it remains to be seen how unpredictable policy changes at the federal level may affect the prioritization of this mission and ESL programs in general. What will not change, though, is the commitment that ESL instructors have in serving and supporting their students to the best of their abilities. Despite the challenges, the desire to help all students succeed and achieve their goals to support students to participate meaningfully in American society underscores efforts toward equity and equitable instruction.

Appendix A: Ethical Approval

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

22 May 2023

Dear Lia Preftes

College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Project Title: English Language Instructors' Perceptions of Equity and Practical Implementation

Application Number: 400220173

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 22/05/2023
- Project end date: 06/01/2025
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences: socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: (https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf)
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The **Request for Amendments to an Approved Application** form should be used: https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/

Provided on behalf of: College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

The University of Glasgow

socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: English Language Instructors' Perceptions of Equity and Practical Implementation

Name of Researcher: ...Lia Preftes .....

Supervisor: …Dr. Georgina Wardle.....

Please tick as appropriate

Yes ☐ No ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to interviews and/or focus groups being audio-recorded.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

Focus Group Participants Only

Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the study.

I agree that:

Yes ☐ No ☐ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The personal data will be destroyed once the project is complete.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

Name of Participant ..... Signature .....

Date .....

Name of Researcher .....Signature .....

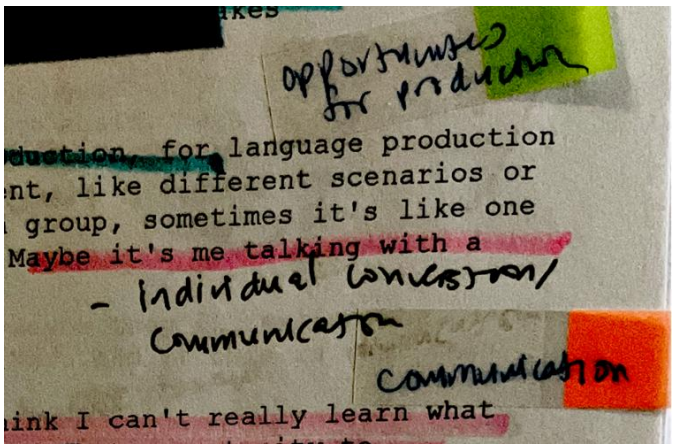
Date .....

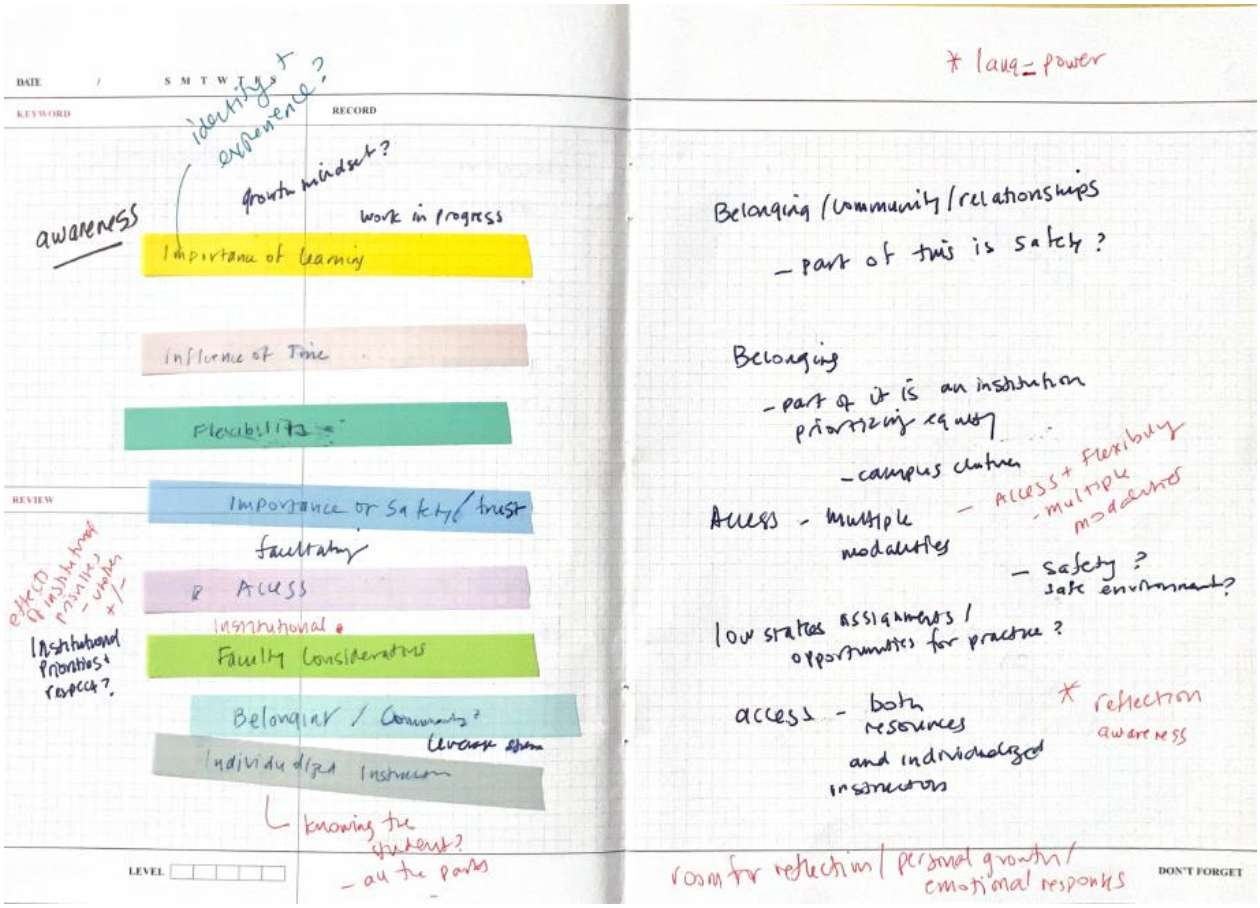
..... End of consent form .....

Appendix C: Interview and Focus Group Questions

1. How do you define equity in English language instruction and assessment?
2. How did you come to this understanding of equity?
3. To what extent do institutional or departmental policies and culture influence your understanding of equity?
4. What are the elements of an equitable English language learning environment?
5. What do you believe equity means in a classroom that includes domestic and international English language learners?
6. How do you identify the different needs and goals of students in your classrooms?
7. What challenges or issues may arise in a classroom where the needs and goals of the students may be very different?
8. How well do your program and course outcomes reflect the different needs and goals of students?
9. How can instructors facilitate the success of learners whose needs and goals might not being met due to changes in the curriculum?
10. How do you respond equitably to these differences? Do you use different pedagogical techniques with students of different needs or goals?
11. How effective do you perceive your efforts to be in implementing an equitable learning environment?
12. Can you describe a practice or assignment that supports equitable outcomes for students of diverse needs and goals in your classrooms?
13. What can instructors do to support the success of all learners in the classroom?
14. Is there anything else that we haven't touched on that you want to tell me?

Appendix D: Examples of Coding and Initial Theme Development





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