A Cycle of Anxiety

A Phenomenological Study of ELL Students and their Experiences with Anxiety in Higher Education

Gary Abbott, Ed.D.
NJTESOL
May 31st, 2019

Overview

- Student Engagement and ELL Challenges in Higher Education
- Identity, Connection, and Agency
- Study
- Cycle of Anxiety
- Breaking the Cycle
- Questions and Discussion

Kuh's Engagement Theory

- Student's role
  - What do the students bring to the college?
    - Willingness to connect physically and psychologically
- Institutional role
  - What does the college do to support the students?
    - Advising
    - Collaborative learning experiences
    - Mentoring
    - Validation

ELL Students in Higher Education

- Academic Challenges
  - Placement testing
  - Conversational fluency vs academic proficiency (BICS/CALP)
  - Western style of teaching
  - Prior educational background
- Social Challenges
  - Family and work responsibilities
  - Family support and expectations
  - Cultural conflicts
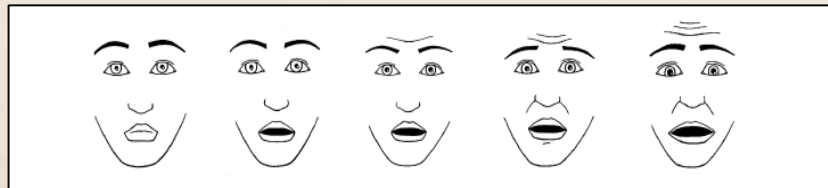
ELL Students in Higher Education

- Institutional Structural Challenges
  - College processes
  - Appropriate advising and counselling
- Institutional Cultural Challenges
  - Marginalization and deficit attitude towards ELLs
    - Stigma, silencing, peripheralization

Anxiety and Identity, Connection, and Agency

- Academic Identity
  - Enhanced by a feeling of belonging in the classroom and college
  - Diminished by watered down curriculum and deficit attitudes
- Connection
  - Encouraged by positive interactions with classmates and professors
  - Discouraged by a perceived lack of language proficiency and shaming
- Agency
  - Strengthened by easy access to needed resources
  - Weakened by difficulties with identity and poor connections

Phenomenological Study

- Interpretative
  - What meaning do the participants make of their experiences with anxiety?
  - The importance of historicity
  - Bracketing
    - Reflection upon experience, practice, pre-conceptions
  - Data
    - Three interviews – historicity, experiences, meaning
    - Journaling
    - Graphic elicitation – Children's Fear Faces

The Participants

- Five traditional immigrant ELL students
  - Four female, 1 male
  - Two from Middle East, 2 from South America, 1 from India
  - All in the last level of ESL
  - All with previous higher education in home country
  - Mix of academic goals

Ranking Experiences with Anxiety

Experience	Aaron	Deborah	Esther	Leah	Hannah	Ave
Embarrassment	3.4	5	4	4.5	4	4.2
Powerlessness	3.9	4.3	4	5	3.3	4.1
The Unfamiliar	3.7	4.0	2.9	4.3	5	4.0
Threats to Progress	2.8	4.5	5	4	3	3.9
Letting Others Down	3.3	n/a	4	4	4.3	3.1
Lack of **BISC	3.3	2.5	n/a	4	4.5	2.9
Lack of Family Support	4	3	4	n/a	3	2.8
Confrontation	3.5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.7

Deriving Meaning from Anxiety

- Anxiety and Identity – Perceived Inadequacy
  - Prior capable Identity
  - Offset by a new, less capable identity
- Anxiety and Connection – Self-Isolation
  - College context – classmates, professors, and the institution
  - Family
- Anxiety and Agency – Helplessness
  - College
  - Family
  - Self

A Cycle of Anxiety

- Perceptions of inadequate English proficiency creates anxiety from being a less capable student.

- Students self-isolate to avoid embarrassing themselves.

- Self-isolation inhibits their ability to access resources, which perpetuates the feelings of inadequacy.

+ Anxiety → Less Capable → + Anxiety → Self-Isolation → + Anxiety → Diminished agency → + Anxiety
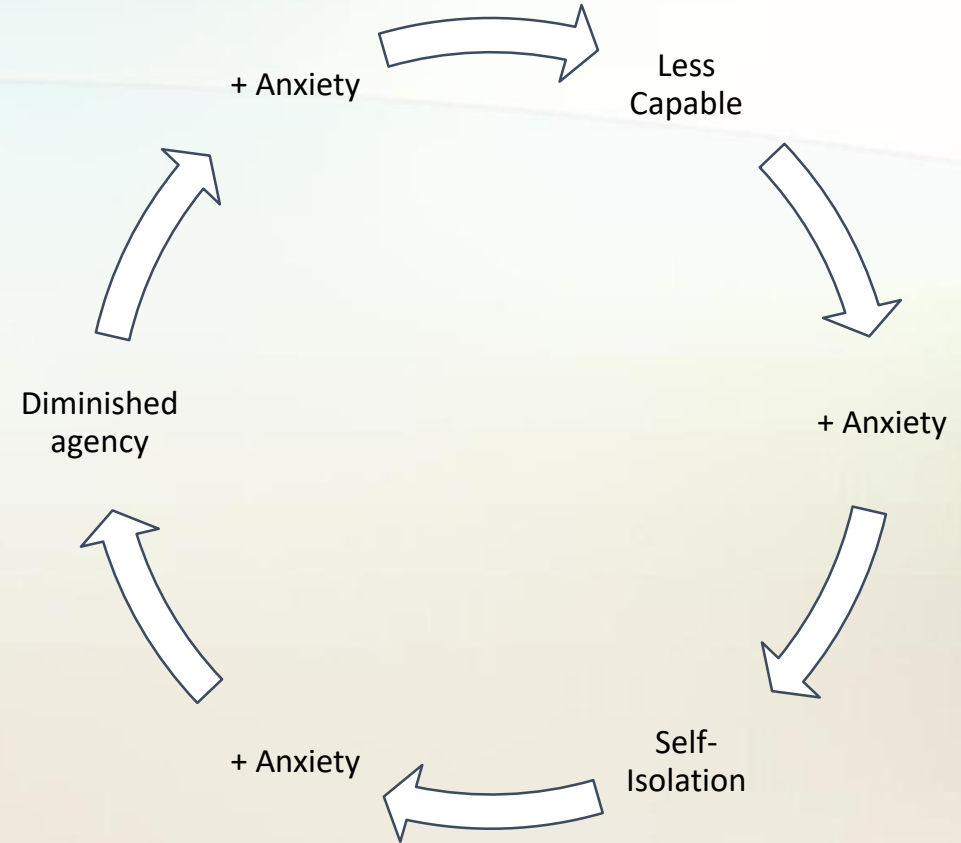
Breaking the Cycle

- Student
  - Self-determination and commitment to family
- Institution
  - Orientation to college and program
  - Transitioning out of ESL programs
  - More focus on developing conversational fluency
  - Developing learning communities
  - Holistic advising and counseling
  - Validation

Questions and Discussion

Selected References

Friedman, E., & Lown, M. (2013, January). *English as a second language (ESL) concept paper: Transforming ESL at NJ community colleges* [White Paper]. Retrieved November 3, 2016, from the New Jersey Community College Council: www.njccc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/NJCCC-ESL-White-Paper.pdf

Holmes, M., Fanning, C., Morales, A., Espinoza, P., & Herrera, S. (2012). Contextualizing the path to academic success: Culturally and linguistically diverse students gaining voice and agency in higher education. In Y. Kanno & L. Harklau (Eds.), *Linguistic minority students go to college: Preparation, access, and persistence* (pp. 201-219). New York, NY: Routledge.

Kanno, Y., & Harklau, L. (2012). *Linguistic minority students go to college: Preparation, access, and persistence.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Kuh, G. D. (2005). Student engagement in the first year of college. In M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, & B. O. Barefoot (Eds.), *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College,* (pp. 86-107). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Ma, J., & Baum, S. (2015). *Trends in community colleges: Enrollment, prices, student debt, and completion.* Research Brief: November 2015, College Board Research.

Marshall, S. (2010, January). Re-becoming ESL: Multilingual university students and a deficit identity. *Language and Education, 24*(1), 41-56.

McMurtry, C. M., Noel, M., Chambers, C. T., & McGrath, P. J. (2011). Children's fear during procedural pain: Preliminary investigation of the Children's Fear Scale. *Health Psychology, 30*(6), 780-788. doi: 10.1037/a0024817.

Selected References

National Junior College Athletic Association, (2016). *Member Colleges: College Directory*. Retrieved from http://www.njcaa.org/member_colleges/college-directory

Pappamahiel, N. E. (2002). English as a second language students and English language anxiety: Issues in the mainstream classroom. *Research in the Teaching of English, 36*(3), 327-355.

Samimy, K., Kim, S., Lee, J.-A., & Kasai, M. (2011). A participative inquiry in a TESOL program: Development of three NNES graduate students' legitimate peripheral participation to fuller participation. *The Modern Language Journal, 95*(4), 558-574.

Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Szelényi, K., & Chang, J. C. (2002). Educating immigrants: The community college role. *Community College Review, 30*(2), 55-73.

Solórzano, D. G., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education*, *69*(1/2), 60-73.

Teranishi, R. T., Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M. (2011). Immigrants in community colleges. *The Future of Children, 21*(1), 153-169.

Toma, J. D. (2006). Approaching rigor in applied qualitative research. In C. Conrad & R. Serlin (Eds.). *Sage handbook for research in education* (pp. 405-423). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Walker, W. (2007). Ethical considerations in phenomenological research. *Nurse Researcher, 14*(3), 36-45.

van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.