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Creating a Culturally Proficient EL Program: An Evaluative Toolkit

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Creating a Culturally Proficient EL Program: An Evaluative Toolkit

by

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Abstract

Improving achievement of English learners (ELs) requires districts to examine the effectiveness of their EL programs, a measure required by Federal Title III law. This capstone project examines *how might an EL program review toolkit, including an analysis of data, policies, practices, and beliefs, shape an EL program?* To answer this question, a program evaluation toolkit was created to help leaders of EL programs evaluate the effectiveness of their EL programs. Leading a team of teachers through the EL program toolkit, the author and team analyzed qualitative and quantitative data, identified an area of growth, and created a vision and plan to improve the EL program in their suburban high school in Minnesota. The EL toolkit allowed the team to create a more culturally proficient program, and in turn, potentially increased graduation and academic outcomes for ELs.

Keywords: English learners, ELs, ESL, English learner program, Title III, program evaluation

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Chapter 1

Research Question

"Your beliefs become your thoughts, Your thoughts become your words, Your words become

your actions, Your actions become your habits, Your habits become your values, Your values

become your destiny." - Ghandi

What we believe drives everything we do every day. Historically in the United States

(U.S.), there have been differing beliefs about learning and educating students in English

(Quezada, Lindsey, Lindsey, 2012). The beliefs about students learning English in US schools

both shape, and have been shaped by policies and practices at the local, state, and national levels.

In addition, educator's beliefs about students who are learning English influence how students

are served in their schools and classrooms. This leads to the question, *how might an EL program*

review toolkit, including an analysis of data, policies, practices, and beliefs, shape an EL

program?

The Problem

English learners (ELs) are frequently a demographic group of focus in urban, suburban,

and rural school districts across the United States. According to Minnesota Department of

Education's (MDE) annual report on ELs (2017), ELs continue "to rise at a faster rate than total

enrollment" (p. 12). In the 2016-17 school year, 8.4% of all students were identified as EL in

Minnesota, and speak about 252 different languages, with the majority of these ELs are enrolled

in kindergarten through third grade (MDE, EL Report, 2017). Of the 71,919 ELs in Minnesota,

13.5% assessed at an English language proficiency (ELP) level of 1, 20.3% assessed at an ELP

level 2, 38.8% assessed at an ELP level 3, 24% assessed at an ELP level 4, and 3.2% assessed at

an ELP level 5, as measured by the ACCESS for ELLs assessment (MDE, EL Report, 2017). In

addition, data show that ELs do not meet educational standards at the same rate as their

English-only peers as measured by state standardized assessments (MDE, EL Report, 2017).

While there has been a significant increase (300%) in ELs in Minnesota over the past 20 years,

teacher training and professional development for educators in the classroom has not been

emphasized until the 2014 Minnesota Learning for English Academic Proficiency and Success

(LEAPS) Act. The passage of this act added emphasis on ELs in all parts of the education

omnibus bill, including a requirement that all teachers and administrators are trained in best

practices in English language development (Johnson, 2017).

Knowing ELs are not achieving at high levels in our systems, and that educators have just

recently been required to have training in educating ELs, leaders must examine the current

practices and policies in their schools and districts so they can better meet the needs of ELs in

their schools and classrooms. In this chapter, I will share my personal journey toward, and

interest in examining the current policies and practices which shape the EL program, and impact

achievement of EL, as well as a rationale for this project.

Background

Over the past six years, I have worked as an English Learner (EL) coordinator in three

districts in Minnesota, and have consulted as an EL specialist with many more districts in both

Minnesota and Wisconsin. While each district I have worked in follows federal Title III law, as

interpreted by the state, each district had differing practices and beliefs about what service

models are best for the English Learners in their system. In my most recent position as an EL

coordinator for three and a half years in a third-ring suburban school district, I collaborated with

directors, site administrators, and EL teachers to shift the EL program to a more inclusive model.

We started with a detailed program review which included analyzing student data and records,

interviewing teachers and administrators, and reviewing best practice research, including

changes in the language of education legislation to be more inclusive of ELs. This review led us

to implement a more inclusive EL program service model where ELs are served in mainstream

classes, with students receiving additional pull-out service based on their ELP levels.

WIDA, the consortium which holds the English Language Development standards and

assessments for Minnesota, measures students proficiency in English on a scale of 1.0 to 6.0.

Students at an overall level of 1.0-2.0 are students have limited vocabulary, sentence structure,

and depth of use of the English language; they are able to speak in words and short phrases, and

respond to simple questions (e.g. *What is your name? Where is the bathroom?*). Students at an

overall level of 3.0-4.0, have a good understanding of social language, are speaking in longer,

more complex sentences, and are able to answer more difficult questions (e.g. *Why did you read

that book? How did you get that answer?*). In Minnesota, students show proficiency in English

when they reach a composite (overall) score of 4.5, and at least three domains (listening,

speaking, reading, writing) of 3.5 or higher (MDE, Standardized EL Procedures, 2017). Prior to

the program change, over 80% of ELs in the district had an ELP level of 3.0 to 6.0 as measured

by WIDA's ACCESS for ELLs. The majority of these students were not new to the U.S., yet

they were being pulled out of core content classes every day for up to ninety minutes. Because

ELs up to ELP level 6.0 were being pulled out of core content classes for so many years, they

were not graduating on time with the required credits needed in core content areas (English

language arts, math, science, social studies). Parents of ELs were refusing service because they

believed their children spoke English well enough, and did not want their children segregated from their peers, and pulled out of their core classes.

In addition to leading this shift in EL programming, I was also a participant and trainer in cultural proficiency work. In 2014, the school board approved a plan to create a Culturally Proficient School System (CPSS) based on the Conceptual Framework for Cultural Proficiency (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, Terrell, 2009). The training provided to educators in this district was an inside-out approach, based on reflection and dialogue, where educators examined their beliefs, values, and strengths, and how they impact every decision made in the district/school/classroom. In the first year of the plan, the cabinet completed a book study, consulted with Delores & Randall Lindsay, authors of the text, and created department Action Plans. In this same year, administrators were trained in Adaptive Schools (Garmston, Wellman, 2016). In the second year of the implementation, district level directors, supervisors, coordinators, as well as principal and assistant principals participated in eight days of training in the framework, followed by a year of weekly leadership meetings. At the same time, the director of Equity and Student Support Services, another coordinator, and I trained a group of eighty teacher leaders (chosen by each site's principal) in the framework. In addition to the administrators and teacher leaders being trained, I collaborated with a principal at an elementary school to pilot the training with all staff at that site. The second year is also when department plans were implemented, and CPSS was woven throughout the curriculum and instruction cycle. During the third year of implementation, the administrators and CPSS teacher leaders trained staff at their sites monthly, and during district PD days. Administrative assistants, and food services staff were also trained during the third year. The fourth year of implementation varied by site and program; some sites had the

CPSS framework deeply embedded in everything - their meetings, conversations, and trainings - while other sites were still developing an understanding of the different components of the framework.

Rationale

After leading administrators, teachers, and staff through four years of the implementation of CPSS, and after moving toward this more inclusive model of EL service in our district, we saw improvement in academic achievement in ELs. When I examined this change, I noticed that 1) principals were more informed and engaged in EL service, 2) classroom and EL teachers were collaborating and co-teaching at higher levels than prior to these program changes, and 3) students were spending more time in their core content/mainstream classrooms, thus in turn, participating in more grade level standards work. These observations made me curious about how this shift happened. I reflected on the work we accomplished realized that the program review and CPSS work had a big impact on our ELs. I wondered if I could apply this strategy in my next district, and if it would have the same impact.

As I reviewed literature relating to this topic, I notice that there is a lot of research about student achievement, and an increasing amount of research around perceptions: perceptions held by ELs about their schools, teachers, and programs, perceptions held by classroom teachers about ELs, and perceptions held by classroom teachers about EL teachers. I also know that much of the literature about improving achievement for EL program recommends comprehensive school reform; and to begin school reform, leaders must examine current practices and policies. While there are many guiding questions in different document and literature (e.g. United States Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition's EL Toolkit), I have not

found a comprehensive tool that combines quantitative (demographic and academic achievement data) and qualitative (perceptions, beliefs) data about an EL program in an easy to use format. As a leader of an EL program, I think it would be beneficial to have something tangible, practical, and immediately useful to evaluate and improve EL programs. This project fills this void.

For this project, I created a toolkit that educational leaders can use to examine and evaluate how ELs are served in their schools. This toolkit consists of nine documents and spreadsheets that leaders can use to collect data, protocols for using these documents, and an action plan template to improve the EL program in their school or district.

Summary

In this chapter, I shared the research question and problem, then shared some background information, and finally, a rationale for this study. I was curious to know, how might an EL program review toolkit, including an analysis of data, policies, practices, and beliefs, shape an EL program? Chapter 2 reviews the literature and research about: factors which influence student achievement, characteristics of culturally proficient EL programs, and frameworks that address beliefs and values in a culturally proficient EL program. Chapter 3 outlines the project created to examine and evaluate EL programs. The conclusion of this project is shared in chapter four.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to identify factors which positively impact the achievement of English Learners (ELs), examine the characteristics of a culturally proficient EL program, and explore frameworks which can be used to analyze beliefs and values in a culturally proficient EL Program. In sum, this chapter shares literature and research related to the question: *how might an EL program review toolkit, including an analysis of data, policies, practices, and beliefs, shape an EL program?*

The first section of this chapter examines three different aspects of factors which impact student achievement; these factors are based on the student, the teacher, and the administrator. Each of these perspectives plays a role in the extent to which ELs acquire language and academic achievement.

The second section of this literature review identifies characteristics of culturally proficient EL programs. While there are many types of programs to serve ELs, this section will include only research related to English Learner programs, not bilingual programs. Knowing that bilingual programs (focused on building literacy and content in both English and the student's native language) have been shown to be the most effective way to increase language skills (Quezada, Lindsey, & Lindsey, 2012), the majority of districts in Minnesota, serve more than five languages, and very few of these districts have bilingual programs for ELs (MDE, EL Report, 2017). This section in this chapter focuses on English language development programs.

The last section of this chapter describes the frameworks of beliefs used within a school system that has begun its journey towards cultural proficiency, and the implications of using

these frameworks to create culturally proficient EL programs. These frameworks are based in psychology and address the beliefs and values which are held by students, teachers, administrators in a system.

Factors Which Influence Student Achievement

Researchers are regularly examining student achievement in education, as is evidenced by Hattie's 2009 book, *Visible Learning*, and Marzano, Waters, and McNulty's 2005 book, *School Leadership that Works*. In each book, the authors share their analyses of hundreds of studies regarding student achievement and the factors which positively impact student achievement. The student, teacher, and administrator factors identified in this research as having positive impact on student achievement are also aligned with EL Best Practice research.

Student factors. Some factors which influence English Learners' (EL) achievement are related to acquiring an additional language, and to a student's beliefs about their abilities. Factors related to language acquisition can be internal or external (Collier, 1987; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Spolsky, 1989; WIDA 2012). Some of the internal factors include: age, motivation, affective filters, literacy in native language (L1), learning styles, and attitudes. Some external factors to learning a second language include: first language distance from second language, interactions with target language, family and peer support, and time in country. All of these factors impact how quickly a student will learn English.

In addition to language acquisition factors, students' beliefs about their ability, their self-efficacy, and learning at their level strongly impact their academic achievement (Hattie, 2012). Given this research, educators must recognize their assumptions about different dialects of English, scaffold their instruction to meet the student at their English proficiency and

academic levels, explicitly teach self-efficacy skills, and help students gain confidence in their abilities.

Teacher factors. Hattie's (2017) most recent research suggests that collective efficacy is the most influential factor that impacts student achievement. Collective efficacy happens when educators share common beliefs and collaborate closely with each other, using multiple data sources, to increase student achievement (Donohoo, 2017). When educators share a collective responsibility for student learning, and view themselves as an important part of a professional learning community, student achievement will increase (Garmston & Wellman, 2016). To positively impact the achievement of ELs, classroom and EL teachers must collaborate closely, and must believe that they are both responsible for the English proficiency, *and* the academic achievement, of ELs.

In addition to collective efficacy, another high impact factor which influences achievement of ELs, is a teacher's "estimate of student achievement" (Hattie, 2017). This means that what an educator believes about a student's ability impacts how the teacher teaches the student, to what depth the teacher teaches, and how much the student learns. Research also suggests that speaking a non-standard dialect of English has a negative effect size (-0.29) for student achievement (Hattie, 2017). Educators with ELs in their classes have to reflect on their beliefs and assumptions about ELs.

Hattie (2017) also found that using various teaching strategies, and explicitly teaching learning strategies will accelerate learning for all students. The following are considered high impact teaching strategies: jigsaws, scaffolding, reciprocal teaching, classroom discussions, and cognitive task analysis (Hattie, 2017). Explicitly teaching students the following high impact

learning strategies can improve, and even accelerate, the achievement of ELs: connecting to prior knowledge, summarizing, mnemonics, as well as many meta-cognition and self-regulation strategies (Hattie, 2017). These teaching and learning strategies match what can be found in best practice research for ELs (Council of the Great City School, 2009, Vogt, et al., 2007, Walqui 2006).

Administrator factors. In their book, *School Leadership that Works*, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) suggested that, while some research show principals have little impact on the success of students, they do have significant influence over many aspects in their school (U.S. Congress, 1970). Marzano, et.al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of research related to administrator factors which influence student achievement, which resulted in twenty-one correlated responsibilities of a school leader. In order of correlation, these responsibilities are: situational awareness, flexibility, discipline, outreach, monitoring/evaluating, culture, order, resources, knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, input, change agent, focus, contingent rewards, intellectual stimulation, communication, ideals/beliefs, involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, visibility, optimizer, affirmation, and relationships.

The two traits that encompass these twenty-one responsibilities of effective educational leaders are first-order and second-order change (Marzano, et al., p. 65, 2005). "First order change is incremental" while "(s)econd-order change is anything but incremental" (Marzano, et al., 2005, p. 66). Making change that fits within the current beliefs and values, without changing the context or paradigm is first order change; it does not require educators to think differently. In developing a culturally proficient EL program, administrators will likely encounter a "dramatic shift in direction" which will require "new ways of thinking and acting," (Marzano, et al., 2005,

p. 66,) called second order change. Leadership responsibilities most important to managing this change are, in order: (1) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, (2) optimizer, (3) intellectual stimulation, (4) change agent, (5) monitoring/evaluating, (6) flexibility, and (7) ideals/beliefs (Marzano, et al., 2005).

When leading a culturally proficient EL program, administrators must be instructional leaders for ELs. They must know the expected grade level standards, provide time for teachers to collaborate and dialogue about beliefs and values, and coach teachers to scaffold instruction to meet the needs of ELs.

Characteristics in Culturally Proficient English Language Programs

Research and literature shows that bilingual programs are the most culturally proficient EL programs due to their additive nature, which includes instruction in and continuing development of student's home language (Quezada, et al., 2012). However, given the linguistic diversity in Minnesota, districts most often use English language development (ELD), content-based EL, sheltered, and pull out or resource EL classes or programs. Vialpando, Yedlin, Linse, Harrington, and Cannon, (2005, p. 14) wrote "...the most favorable program models for promoting the academic achievement of language-minority students are those which enable students to continue to develop academic skills while they are learning their new language." Given the goals of increasing both English language acquisition, as well as academic achievement, a combination of EL program models must be used to create a culturally proficient EL programs.

How students are served in the EL program must be based on the student's English language proficiency (ELP) level, and "should not keep ELs in segregated EL programs (or

"EL-only classes") for periods longer or shorter than required by each student's level of English proficiency, time and progress in the EL program, and the stated goals of the EL program" (USDOE OELA, 2017, Ch. 2, p. 1). This requires districts to examine how students are served at each language proficiency level. Service may be more involved at lower proficiency levels, and less involved at higher proficiency levels, depending on student's ELP level, educational history, time in US schools, age, and more.

In addition, the reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), emphasized an increased priority and accountability for English Learners (ELs). The law emphasized that *all* educators are responsible for *effective* instruction of ELs (USDOE OELA, 2017). This federal laws also align with Minnesota's Learning English for Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act, which was passed into law in 2014. The LEAPS Act "revises many state statutes to add an increased emphasis to support English learners" (MDE, EL Report, 2017, p. 5). These laws require all educators to receive ongoing training in effective and culturally responsive instructional practices for ELs.

The literature about effective instruction for ELs includes: teaching content and language aligned to state core and ELD standards, teaching language in context, scaffolding instruction to each student's ELP level, and explicitly teaching learning strategies (Calderon, et al., 2011, Council of the Great City Schools, 2009, Hattie 2017, Quezada, et al., 2012, Vialpando, et al., 2005, Walqui, 2006, WIDA, 2012). Most of these learning and teaching strategies are also found to have a positive impact on student achievement, and are good practices to use with all students (Hattie, 2017).

Frameworks to address Beliefs and Values in a Culturally Proficient EL Program

As Taylor claims in Psychology Today (2012, May 7), "Your values form the foundation of your life. They dictate the choices you make and determine the direction that your life takes" (para. 1). Our personal beliefs drive everything we do every day. Elmore (1995, as cited in Garmston and Wellman, 2016) suggested that "the real work of changing schools lies not in changing things, but in changing norms, knowledge, and skills (energy) at the individual and organizational levels" (p. 3). In a school district, the beliefs and values of the individuals within the organization, as well as the societal beliefs and values, influence the organizational belief system and the policies and practices created within the district. The following tools and frameworks provide educators with tools to examine their beliefs, values and assumptions. This section contains a review of these frameworks important for implementing a culturally proficient EL program.

Conceptual Framework for Cultural Proficiency. Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009, p. 4) defined cultural proficiency as:

> … a model for shifting the culture of the school or district; it is a model for individual transformation and organizational change. Cultural proficiency is a mind-set, a worldview, a way a person or an organization make assumptions for effectively describing, responding to, and planning for issues that arise in diverse environments. For some people, cultural proficiency is a paradigm shift *from* viewing cultural difference as problematic *to* learning how to interact effectively with other cultures.

Cultural proficiency is an *inside-out* approach in which educators examine their beliefs, values, and assumptions through reflection and dialogue.

While the cultural proficiency conceptual framework was created to "(improve) service delivery to children of color who are seriously emotionally handicapped," the framework has implications across any program or system in which multiple cultures are served (Cross, et al., 1989, p. 1). Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009) adopted the framework to use in their work in educational and organizational development.

The conceptual framework for cultural proficiency, as adopted by Lindsey, et al. (2009) contains four interrelated tools; these tools provide language that allows one to identify their personal and organizational beliefs and values, including those beliefs and values held for students who are learning English.

The first tool, Overcoming Barriers, describes the things that get in the way of educators' ability to become more culturally proficient. These barriers include: resistance to change, being unaware of the need to adapt, not acknowledging systemic oppression, and benefiting from a sense of privilege and entitlement (Lindsey et al, 2009). Using this information to create a culturally proficient EL program, educators must take time to reflect and talk about at their personal and organizational beliefs, and identify the forces that block achievement of ELs.

The second tool, the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency, serve as "core values to develop our capacity for personal and professional work that results in English learning students being academically successful" (Quezada et al., 2012, p. 25). Similar to WIDA's guiding beliefs, these guiding principles view difference (including different language) as an asset. The guiding principles of cultural proficiency, as defined by Lindsey, et al. (2009, p. 6) are:

- Culture is a predominant force in people's and school's lives.

- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.

- People have group identities and individual identities.

- Diversity within cultures is vast and significant Each cultural group has unique cultural needs.

- The best of both worlds enhances the capacity of all.

- The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.

- School systems must recognize that marginalized populations have to be at least bicultural and that this status creates a unique set of issues to which the system must be equipped to respond.

- Inherent in cross-cultural interactions are dynamics that must be acknowledges, adjusted to, and accepted.

These guiding principles inform healthy practices, policies, and behaviors found in a culturally proficient program.

The third tool, the Cultural Proficiency Continuum, "provides language for describing both unhealthy and healthy policies, practices, values, and behaviors" (Lindsey, Robins, Terrell, 2009, P. 111). The six points along the continuum range from cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, and cultural blindness on the unhealthy side to cultural pre-competence, cultural competence, and cultural proficiency on the healthy side. The stages on the unhealthy side of the continuum are influenced by the barriers, while the stages on the healthy side are influenced by the guiding principles. The goal of a culturally competent EL program is to live in cultural

competence where educator's and the organization's beliefs and behaviors are inclusive of the EL's native language, view the native language as an asset, and adapt to meet the linguistic needs of the student while maintaining high expectations and rigor.

Keeping in mind that cultural proficiency is an *Inside-Out* approach, the fourth tool of cultural proficiency, the five Essential Elements, declare the actions educators can take to become more culturally proficient. The first Essential Element, Assess Cultural Knowledge, allows educators to examine their personal and organizational beliefs and values, reflect on how their perspective compares to others who may be different. The second Essential Element, Value Diversity, is when educators view diversity as an asset. The third Essential Element, Manage the Dynamics of Difference, addresses conflict. Conflict is natural and normal in our everyday life, and even more so when it "involve(s) people who do not share your history, language, lifestyle, or worldview" (Lindsey, et al., 2009, p. 129). Implementing a culturally proficient EL program will require educators to address this conflict, and provide space for dialogue and reflection. The fourth Essential Element, Adapting to Diversity, means educators need to change to meet the diverse needs of the learners served in their organization. Finally, the fifth Essential Element, Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge, includes a systems-wide perspective at gathering multiple perspectives, creating policies and practices inclusive of difference, and developing and training culturally proficient educators and stakeholders.

Using these tools, Quezada, Lindsey, and Lindsey (2012) combined the the Essential Elements and the Cultural Proficiency Continuum to create a rubric for educators of English learning students. The rubric provides examples of practices educators might see in a system

along the continuum as they assess cultural knowledge, value diversity, manage the dynamics of difference, adapt to diversity, and institutionalize cultural knowledge.

Adaptive Schools. Given the importance of collective efficacy in positively impacting student achievement, one framework that can be used to achieve a culturally proficient EL program is Adaptive Schools. The goal of Adaptive Schools is "to develop our collective identity and capacity as collaborators and inquirers" (Garmston and Wellman, 2014). This goal is achieved when groups of educators use of the Seven Norms of Collaboration. These norms, as defined by Garmston and Wellman (2016), are: (1) pausing, (2) paraphrasing, (3) posing questions, (4) putting data on the table, (5) presuming positive intent, and (6) paying attention to self and others. The group will be more effective when they intentionally practice the Norms of Collaboration.

The norm of pausing means that educators allow wait time during conversation. Pausing can happen at four different times during a conversation. The first is after a group member asks a quest, after a group member responds, before a group member provides a response, or as a collective pause for the group to reflect on the conversation and their thoughts.

Paraphrasing allows educators to show that they are listening to each other. The three different types of paraphrases (a) acknowledge what a group member is saying, or how they are feeling, (b) summarize or organize a group member's thinking, and (c) *abstracting* paraphrases which shift the conversation higher, more globally, or lower, more specifically. The abstracting paraphrase is the most powerful and allows thinking to move in various ways, getting to a deeper understanding. As Garmston and Wellman (2014) wrote, "paraphrasing is one of the most valuable and least used communication tools in meetings" (p. 47).

The norm of posing questions to explore or specify thinking requires educators to be mindful of what they are asking and how they are asking the question. Questions that are asked in an open way, presuming positive intent, encourages all group members to participate. When a group is looking for ideas, the norm of putting an idea on the table might be used so that the idea is not attached to one group member's status. The goal of this is to encourage all group members to participate freely. It is important to also take an idea *off the table* when it is preventing the group from moving forward. This way, all ideas can be addressed or revisited.

Providing data is the work of educators, as they must interpret, make meaning of, and apply the data to their work. To facilitate data conversations, groups must concentrate on the data itself, not the personal story the data was based on; this data is called a third point. Using a third point, and following a data-driven dialogue process helps educators hone in on student achievement.

The norm of presuming positive intent involves the assumption that each group member "is a committed professional who wants to solve a real problem" (Garmston, Wellman, 2014, p. 53). Presuming positive intent means that group members are willing to have "honest conversations about important matters" (Garmston, Wellman, 2014, p. 53).

The norm of paying attention to self and others is one of the most important norms. Paying attention to self means each group member is monitoring their body language, their thought, and their spoken words, as well as the body language, and words of their peers in an effort to communicate in an effective manner.

Summary

This chapter consisted of a review of literature related to the question: *In what ways might beliefs and assumptions, held by educators, positively impact the achievement of English Learners?* I included the following themes in this literature review: factors influencing academic achievement, characteristics of a culturally proficient EL program, and frameworks that address beliefs and values in a culturally proficient EL program. Chapter three provides an overview of the project related to this question.

Chapter 3

Project Description

The goal of this project was to answer the question, *how might an EL program review toolkit, including an analysis of data, policies, practices, and beliefs, shape an EL program?* To answer this question, a user-friendly EL program evaluation toolkit (appendix A) was created and utilized by an EL supervisor in a suburban school district in Minnesota. The toolkit, in a Google documents template format, includes nine tools that (1) collect historical, demographic, academic achievement, and perception data, (2) allow educators to examine data, the impact of the data, and compare to best practice research, and (3) identify root causes, and create an action plan for improvement.

Intended Audience

The goal of this project was to create a user friendly way for leaders of EL programs to collect and analyze data to evaluate their EL program. This project was created for use by the EL supervisor in a suburban Minnesota school district. The district includes eight schools where about 30% of the student population speaks a language other than English, and 8% of the student population qualify for the EL program. The EL supervisor used this toolkit with a team of EL teachers at the high school. While the intended audience is leaders of EL programs, the toolkit may be adapted and used by any educational leader looking to increase their understanding of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for ELs.

Rationale

As mentioned in the literature review, the federal Title III and ESEA laws, as amended by ESSA, requires districts receiving Title III funds to evaluate the effectiveness of their

programs (USDOE OELA, Ch 9). In Minnesota, the EL Program Review process includes seven critical elements, based on federal Title III law: (1) student identification, program entrance, and exit, (2) effective language instruction educational programs (LIEP), (3) staffing and professional development, (4) parent, family, and community engagement, (5) accountability requirements, (6) fiscal requirements, and (7) nonpublic school participation in the LIEP (MDE, Title III Program Evaluation, 2018). While MDE's EL program review process was being updated during this project, the information in each critical element was used in the development of these tools.

Although the literature provides examples of what questions to ask, and which data to gather while evaluating an EL program, there was not a comprehensive, user-friendly, way to collect this information found in the literature. This EL program review toolkit was created to as a way for leaders to gather necessary information to analyze the beliefs and practices in their EL program, make informed decisions, and create action plans to improve their EL program.

Implementation Frameworks

To complete this project, three frameworks were used: the Continuous School Improvement Framework, the Framework for Cultural Proficiency, and Understanding by Design (UbD). The Continuous School Improvement framework (Bernhardt, 2018) is the foundation for improving current programming. Based on the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle, the Continuous School Improvement framework focuses on analysis, reflection, and action. The second framework, the Cultural Proficiency conceptual framework, is included in this project as one of the tools that is used to examine beliefs and values in the system (Lindsey, et al., 2012).

The last framework, Understanding by Design (UbD), is the action plan template for program improvement (McTighe & Wiggins, 2011).

      Continuous School Improvement Framework. The continuous school improvement framework, "(1) Shows the big picture of continuous school improvement for whole staff understanding and commitment, (2) helps staff understand the components in the context of the conceptual framework, and (3) organizes the information that makes it easy for staff to own, use, and apply" (Bernhardt, p. 13). Within Bernhardt's (2018) framework, which is based on the Plan, Do, Study, Adjust/Act cycle, the importance of using multiple data points, including demographics, perceptions, student learning, and school processes, is highlighted and reiterated many times. The framework includes five components, where each component answers a question. Each tool in the EL Program Review Toolkit was designed to align to each of the sections in the Continuous School Improvement framework: (1) "Where are we now?" (2) "How did we get to where we are?" (3) "Where do we want to be?" (4)"How are we going to get to where we want to be?" (Bernhardt, 2018, p. 15). The first five tools in the toolkit, the historical analysis (appendix B), demographic data (appendix C), academic achievement data (appendix D), data driven dialogue protocol (appendix E), and the cultural proficiency continuum activity (appendix F) will answer the first question of this framework. The reality-response tool (appendix G) aligns to the the second question. The tools that answer the third question are the best practice review (appendix H), and the comparative analysis (appendix I). The last tool, the EL program improvement plan (appendix J) aligns with the last two questions of the continuous school improvement framework.

The framework also aligns closely with DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many's (2010) questions for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): (1) What do we want students to learn?; (2) How will we know if they learned it; (3) What will we do if they don't learn it?; and (4) What will we do if they already know it? The alignment between these frameworks provides coherence and emphasizes collective efficacy.

Framework for Cultural Proficiency. As described in the literature review, the framework for cultural proficiency includes four tools, the essential elements, the continuum, the guiding principles, and the barriers. The EL program toolkit, as a whole, exemplifies the essential elements of assessing cultural knowledge, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge. While the processes used with the tools in the toolkit include discussions about the barriers and guiding principles, these cultural proficiency tools are not the focus of this project. The focus of this project is the continuum of cultural proficiency. The toolkit includes a tool which utilizes the continuum to analyze the extent to which beliefs, values, and actions that live in the system are culturally proficient (Lindsey, et al., 2009).

Understanding by Design (UbD). The last framework used in this project, the UbD framework designed by McTighe and Wiggins (2011), will answer the question *how are we going to get to where we want to be?* (Bernhardt, 2018). The UbD framework was created as a planning guide teachers to use to plan their classroom lessons (McTighe & Wiggins, 2011). Knowing that a good action plan has goals, intended outcomes, and interim measures, it was easily adapted for this project. The three steps included in the UbD framework, and this toolkit, are: desired results, evidence, and learning plan. One benefit to using this framework is its flexibility; each team using this toolkit can create a plan that works for their own district, based

on the information gathered in this review. The evidence from this plan will answer the question

from the continuous school improvement framework, *Is what we are doing making a difference?*

Project Timeline and Assessment

For this six week project, in September to October of 2018, two activities happened: (1) a

toolkit was created, and, to determine the effectiveness of the toolkit, (2) it was used with a team

of three EL teachers, a school psychologist, a literacy coach, and an administrator at the high

school in a suburban district in Minnesota. Using questions from chapter nine of USDOE's

(2017) EL Toolkit, the cultural proficiency continuum activity (Lindsey, et al., 2009), and

Bernhardt's (2018) Comprehensive School Improvement framework, templates were created for

the toolkit during the last two weeks of September. These templates, or tools, were organized in

one main document titled *EL Program Review Toolkit* (appendix A). This document includes

links to each tool, and outlines the alignment to the comprehensive school improvement

framework, describes the purpose, and explains intended use of each tool.

To assess the effectiveness of the toolkit, I lead the team through a program evaluation

process using five of the tools in the EL Program Review Toolkit. During the first week in

October, I gathered demographic and academic achievement data. In the second week of

October, the team and I met for an entire day to review the data, and (1) complete the historical

scan, (2) analyze the data, (3) review the best practice research, and (4) complete the

comparative analysis to identify our focus area, and determine our vision for the program. While

we also created an action plan based on our vision and focus area, we did not use the EL program

improvement plan tool. During the last week in October, the project concluded with a plan to

improve EL course offerings, and change student schedules to meet the vision of our program. While the project of creating and piloting the toolkit is complete, the team will continue to analyze the implementation of our plan, adapting as necessary, throughout the school year.

Project Outcomes

How did the EL program review toolkit shape our EL program? Using the EL program review toolkit, our team found that the EL program at our high school segregated ELs for longer than necessary; students received pull out EL classes, and were not allowed to take credit-bearing courses until they reached an ELP level of four. We also found that only seven of the forty-four twelfth grade ELs were on track to graduate. The best practice research helped us identify areas for improvement, and influenced our new EL program vision.

Based on this information, we made a plan and implemented changes to our EL program at the high school. First, we realigned our EL course offerings, and established a more inclusive model for ELs. This new EL service model included a collaborative consultation model to support core classroom teachers with best instructional practices for ELs. Then, we rescheduled over one hundred ELs into core courses. Finally, we created a communication and collaboration plan. At the end of this project (October 2018), thirty three senior ELs were on track to graduate high school at the end of the year. While the evaluation of these changes in the program is ongoing, the toolkit helped the team create a more inclusive, more culturally proficient EL program at the high school.

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Summary

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This chapter described the project created to answer the question, *how might an EL program review toolkit, including an analysis of data, policies, practices, and beliefs, shape an*

EL program?, In addition to the description of the project, the intended audience, the rationale

for the project, the frameworks used, and a timeline and assessment of the project were

explained. In chapter 4, I share my reflections on the whole process of this capstone project.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

In this chapter, I share my thoughts about the capstone project which answered the

question, *how might an EL program review toolkit, including an analysis of data, policies,*

practices, and beliefs, shape an EL program? In the following sections, I reflect on what I

learned during this project, summarize my findings from the literature review, and discuss

implications and limitations of this project. I wrap up this chapter with some final thoughts about

the project I created, and the whole capstone process.

Reflection

The creation of this toolkit helped me personally, as a learner, writer, and researcher, as

well as professionally, as a leader of an EL program. At the beginning of this project, my focus

was on the impact of beliefs and values held by educators. I was going to create documents that

would help leaders examine the beliefs and values in their EL programs. As I began reading the

literature, I realized that, while our beliefs and values guide everything we do, examining them

alone does not create a culturally proficient EL program. At the same time I came to this

realization, my supervisor requested a comprehensive needs assessment for the EL program in

our district. I decided to shift my focus to creating a comprehensive plan which would examine

more than just the beliefs and values in our system. I learned that this shift in focus is part of

being a good researcher, as a researcher must be flexible in their thinking, adaptable in their approach, and precise in execution.

The most challenging part of this capstone was the writing. While I believe I have decent academic writing skills, I was challenged by citing resources, limiting bias in my writing, and being precise in my language. I learned to reach out to multiple people, including the writing center at Hamline University, as I worked on this project. Each person I connected with brought a different perspective to my writing, helping me enhance my skills in writing. As a learner, this feedback helped me grow in my understanding of what it means to be a writer and researcher.

The most rewarding part of this capstone project was leading and facilitating conversations with the team. I learned that the tools in the toolkit, in addition to the norms of collaboration, enhanced my leadership and helped me build trust with the team. Prior to our meeting, the team members had differing perspectives and beliefs about how to improve the EL program, and these differences caused some tension. While using the tools, the team talked about their beliefs, shared their perspectives, and challenged each other. In the end, we were able to build consensus and co-create our vision and plan.

Revisiting the Literature Review

In reviewing research about factors which influence student achievement, characteristics in culturally proficient EL programs, and frameworks which examine beliefs and values, I made many connections and found valuable information. While I had a good understanding of best practices for ELs because of my experience and training, I learned that they are highly aligned to best practices for all students. As I analyzed Hattie's (2017) Visible Learning meta-analysis, I found that all of the teaching and learning strategies found in EL best practice research have high

effect sizes; this means they all have the potential to increase student achievement (Hattie, 2017).

In addition, finding about a negative effect size (-0.29) on academic achievement when students

speak a non-standard dialect of English strengthened my resolve to ensure I was analyzing the

beliefs and values about ELs in our system, and ensure I included a tool in the EL program

review toolkit that analyzes these beliefs and values (Hattie, 2017).

In addition to Hattie's research, the most valuable piece of literature for my project was

the EL Toolkit from USDOE OELA (2017). The EL Toolkit provided many resources for both

the literature review and my project. I was able to find additional best practice research in the

"Resources" section to use in our team's review of research. I also relied heavily on "Tool #1

Evaluating Programs and Services for English Learners" when creating the tools in this project

(USDOE OELA, 2017, Ch. 9, p. 5). I highly recommend teams start here when they use the Best

Practice Review tool.

Lastly, the guiding force in this project was the framework for cultural proficiency

because I knew we needed to examine beliefs and values to create a more culturally proficient

EL program. "Culturally proficient practices, whether individual or organizational, are developed

through intentional willingness to examine our own behavior and values as well as our school's

(or district/board's) policies and practices" (Quezada, et al., 2012, p 22). Each tool was

intentionally created to examine our policies, practices, behaviors and beliefs about ELs, and the

way they are served in our system.

Benefits and Implications

The EL program review toolkit is a benefit to the profession because federal laws require

districts to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their EL program (USDOE OELA, 2017). As

leaders of EL programs prepare for compliance audits, they can use this toolkit to analyze different aspects of their program. However, as stated in the literature, "(a)n evaluation of an EL program should not be limited to data required for ESEA accountability purposes; it should be continuous and include multiple data points on ELs" (USDOE OELA, 2017, Ch. 9, p.2). The EL program review toolkit meets these goals of compliance and continuous improvement. Furthermore, because this toolkit is based on continuous improvement, and is presented in a user friendly, electronic format, with universal and adaptable tools. The toolkit can be used with small teams or large teams, examining parts of a program, or the whole system. With some minor adjustments in the reality-response and best practice review tools, the entire toolkit could be used to evaluate other programs, such as gifted and talented and special education.

Another benefit of this toolkit is that the tools include an intentional focus on equity. Given the high importance of equity throughout education, and knowing that the learning profiles of students are increasingly complex, it is important to look at data from multiple perspectives. Each tool was designed to allow perspectives of all team members, or analysis and comparisons of student groups. Both the demographic and academic achievement tools have data that compares results of different demographic groups (by race/ethnicity, special program status, EL status, and more). The continuum activity requires teams to analyze the extent to which statements about or actions including ELs are culturally proficient. Intentionally looking at all perspectives with these tools will help educators close achievement gaps.

Limitations and Considerations

While this toolkit was effective in reshaping the EL program in this suburban Minnesota high school, there are some limitations to its use and ideas to consider for development and use

of this toolkit in the future. One limitation may be the skills of the leader. Because I have been trained in the Conceptual Framework for Cultural Proficiency, Adaptive Schools, and Cognitive Coaching, I was able to lead teams through some difficult discussions about beliefs and values while using these tools. I am not sure if the impact would be similar with a leader who has not received these trainings. One consideration is to create a training for how to use this toolkit.

Another limitation of this EL program review toolkit may be the implementation of recommended program improvements. I had a team that was committed to acting on recommendations of the program and carrying out the plan. They were so committed to this process and improving the program that the changes to the program all happened in just four weeks! Having experienced failed implementation plans in the past, I did not anticipate the energy and speed of this team; they were motivated to make the vision happen as soon as possible. I recommend further reading on active implementation for leaders who do not have such active teams.

Finally, the size of the group that used this toolkit may also be a limitation. This program review was completed by myself and five other people. This means there were a small number of beliefs, values, and assumptins to discuss, which allowed the team to come to consensus more quickly on issues where our opinions differed. Additional time will be needed with each tool for larger groups.

Final Conclusions

While this short, six week project yielded favorable outcomes, I look forward to continuing the program review with all eight schools in the district. To share this project, I will present this information to other leaders of EL programs at a monthly meeting, and will also

present this information to colleagues in my district. In addition, I may present this toolkit at a conference.

Looking back on the entire capstone process, I can say I am more excited now than when I started the whole process. This project has been closely aligned with my daily work because it is my passion. I truly enjoy gathering and analyzing data, creating resourceful processes and protocols for EL programs, and empowering EL teachers to improve their practice. This project allowed me to show what I learned, reflect on my progress, and contribute to our profession. I can't wait to see the long term impact of this work.

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Appendix

A. EL Program Review Toolkit: https://goo.gl/oeN84u

B. Historical Scan: https://goo.gl/6VHWBF

C. Demographic Data: https://goo.gl/86QSTG

D. Academic Achievement Data: https://goo.gl/z2S2fU

E. Data Dialogue Protocol: https://goo.gl/T4Pmzy

F. Cultural Proficiency Continuum Activity: https://goo.gl/3yxukz

G. Reality-Response: https://goo.gl/swF1PM

H. Best Practice Review: https://goo.gl/BjkLKr

I. Comparative Analysis & Vision: https://goo.gl/6Q1dKE

J. Program Improvement Plan: https://goo.gl/DW8cpv