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## Using Multicultural Literature To Teach Grammar To English Learners

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USING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE TO TEACH GRAMMAR TO ENGLISH  
LEARNERS

by Laura Anderson

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters  
of Arts in English as a Second Language.

Hamline University

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction and Background

#### Introduction

As an elementary teacher, it is my professional assumption that public schools aim to be inclusive of all students. The issue I am confronting is how inclusive the literature that is available for students to read in their school classrooms and libraries is. Inclusive in this case means representative of all of the cultures, races, ethnicities, and languages present in the school. Are all students represented across schoolwide curriculums and lessons? It is important for teachers to be self-reflective in their practice to evaluate if and how they represent the cultures of their students. Teachers know that the multicultural, multilingual nation in which we live is reflected in our students. As (Richard and Ernst, 1993) asked, how do teachers represent this reality in the materials used to teach their diverse learners? A premise of this capstone is that teachers of all disciplines should step up and advocate for their students to make sure their school truly is inclusive and one way teachers can do that is to develop culturally relevant lessons employing multicultural literature.

My professional obligation is that all students have the right to see characters similar to themselves represented in literature, and represented in a way that is culturally and linguistically positive. As Bishop argued, literature should serve as “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” (as cited by Harris, 2002, p. 75). This leads me to my driving research question, *What are the implications for using multicultural literature as mentor texts to teach academic English language grammar structures in an elementary*

*setting?* My assumption is that by using multicultural literature in which students see themselves and build a positive self-image will facilitate their learning of English language structures. The purpose of this capstone project is to develop a curricular unit to implement culturally relevant English language lessons using multicultural literature as mentor texts for English learner (EL) students in an elementary setting. In this capstone, a mentor text is defined as a story that is used in instruction to teach a content or language-specific concept. English language grammar structures are defined in this capstone as the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses in an English sentence. Linguistically, this is referring to the syntactic structure of a sentence. My goal is to create meaningful English language lessons that incorporate multicultural fiction books with characters and content representing all types of backgrounds and experiences.

Chapter One explains my past personal and professional experiences that inspired my passion in pursuing this goal, conducts a literature review on current research behind diverse literature and EL best practices, and explains the process and result of creating the curriculum. This chapter first describes my personal experiences as a young reader and student. Then, this chapter explains my travel experiences that exposed me to people of other cultures and languages and made me culturally aware and how I chose my undergraduate major and its resulting practicum experiences. My professional experiences as an English Language (EL) teacher and Master of Arts in English as a Second Language (MA-ESL) graduate student are discussed. Throughout the chapter I explain how my personal experience from a child to a professional has led me to pursue this topic as my capstone project. Finally, there is a summary of upcoming chapters.

## Experiencing Culture Through Books As a Reader and Student

I was raised in a lower-middle class White family in a small rural Midwest town with the vast majority of the population being from the same socio-economic background and ethnicity as my family. Growing up, reading was a passion of mine. My favorite afterschool and summer activity was going to the library to check out a bag of books. Reading transported me into the lives of other people and characters to experience the world from my own backyard. This was important to me because there were no exposures to different cultures in my real life. This experience as a reader helped shape my understanding of the world. Reading helped me understand what it is like to live a life different than mine. Reading also validated my own life and experiences through characters similar to me.

Continuing through high school, reading was still important to me but did not have as much time as desired for self-selected reading for fun. Reading for assigned school work took precedence. If there was a choice in book selection for an assignment, I tried to pick books that featured characters from other cultures, such as *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini and *The Girls of Room 28: Friendship, Hope, and Survival in Theresienstadt* by Hannelore Brenner. I craved reading books that showed diverse human experiences, which inspired one of the goals of this project: to promote cultural identities through using multicultural literature in academic settings.

My hometown itself was not diverse, and I had very few classmates from different backgrounds. Therefore, my experiences with international travel and the extension of

my family, discussed in the next section, played a pivotal role in my understanding of the world and human experience.

### **Experiencing Culture Through Travel and Family**

During the summer of 2008, before my junior year of high school, I was lucky to be able to travel to Peru for three weeks to attend the wedding of my brother and his Peruvian fiancée. This was my first experience outside of the country, where I was exposed first-hand to a different language and culture. It was fascinating how the daily life of people a continent away could be so similar and different to my own. Even though my Spanish language proficiency was not strong, I could still make connections with people over food, family, music, and beautiful sights and products. The world became smaller and bigger at the same time. I was becoming culturally aware.

An important result of this trip was welcoming my new Peruvian sister-in-law to my family. She taught my family many aspects of Peruvian culture, such as holiday traditions, traditional dances, and Spanish phrases. She helped teach my family how to be open-minded and welcoming of people that are different than us. Through her, we were able to get an insight to the difficulties of the immigration process in the United States. Now, she and my brother have two sons who they are raising to be bilingual. My nephews have traveled to Peru twice, and are being raised to be knowledgeable about both of their cultures so they feel strong cultural identities.

As a teacher and aunt, books are a favorite gift to give to family members. Having a culturally and linguistically diverse family led me to again think about how “white”



characters prevail in literature. Picking out books now makes me pause and think, “What messages am I sending about culture and identity by giving someone this book?”

### **Experiencing Culture Through Undergraduate Experiences**

After high school, I attended a large university that had much higher ethnic diversity than my high school. According to College Factual (2018), twenty-four percent of the students attending my university were ethnically diverse. I gained meaningful insight by being exposed to, learning about, and interacting with people from other cultures in person. One sociology course challenged me to reflect on my own identity and culture, and through that course I learned about different lenses of identity such as age, gender, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, disability, religion, race, and ethnicity. It was an eye-opening course that encourage me to reflect more about cultural identity.

In 2012, during my sophomore year of college, I decided my career path was in education because of my passion for children, reading, and learning. My major was in Elementary Education and I received a K-6 Minnesota teaching license. Through classroom practicum placements in my undergraduate education classes, opportunities were presented to work with EL students in their classrooms. My practicum placements took place in Kindergarten, First Grade, and Fifth Grade classrooms across three districts that had anywhere from ten to forty percent EL students. This was my first experience working with EL students and it sparked my interest in learning about the potential of these students. This was my first exposure to classrooms that were full of cultural assets - multicultural students. In my opinion, cultural assets were untapped.

While all of the schools had ESL teachers to support the EL students, there was not as much noticeable support in the general education classrooms. In the EL classrooms, there were representations of cultures in posters, decorations, books, and lessons. Culture was a common topic and students shared about their similarities and differences, which highlighted an interest in inclusiveness, diversity, and cultural identity - important aspects in making a learner feel welcomed and appreciated. In the general education classrooms, the posters and decorations were more generic, and in my observations, the lessons were based on the schoolwide required curriculums. While I viewed the ways that the schools supported their EL students through school-wide initiatives such as parent nights, positive behavioural interventions and support (PBIS), and responsive classroom, it felt to me that the students were expected to fit into the mold of a middle-class Caucasian student and expected to be engaged in lessons that may be irrelevant to them. Through this experience, I witnessed little inclusion and culturally relevant teaching practice.

For student teaching to fall 2014, an opportunity was presented to complete six weeks of student teaching in Costa Rica at an English speaking international school. I wanted to broaden my worldview, become more culturally aware, and gain experiences teaching students of other cultures. My student teaching position took place in a class of fourth graders that consisted of eighty percent EL students. Since this was an international school, students came from all over the world. It was empowering to see how strongly cultural uniqueness and national pride were celebrated at this school. The students were served traditional Costa Rican lunches at school with fresh ingredients,

they performed cultural performances, had cultural potlucks, and learned about the history of other nations as well as Costa Rican history. Flags from were displayed from students' home countries. Elementary students took Spanish classes to gain and promote bilingualism for native and non-native Spanish speakers. Students were able to talk to each other in their home language. Students were encouraged to discuss freely about their past experiences from their home country and share their banks of cultural knowledge with their class. It was a positive, inclusive school culture. Surprisingly, that is not something that I had observed happening in any of the classrooms I had worked in the United States, with the exception of a few EL classrooms; culture was not celebrated, but seemed to be hidden and covered up. A long-term goal of this project is to promote positive cultural identity through one small action - having inclusive, multicultural literature present in my school for students to read for fun and to learn from academically and socially.

### **Experiencing Culture Through Professional Experiences**

A few months after student teaching, I accepted my first teaching job for the 2015-2016 school year at an elementary school in a rural but large and diverse district. During the interview, the administrators said they were hiring for multiple elementary classroom and EL positions. I stated either type of position would be great, but my license is only Elementary K-6, not ESL. Based on my interview, attitudes, and experiences working with EL students, the administration offered me an EL position for second grade. I accepted with the understanding that while teaching on a variance there must be progress towards an EL license within three years.

In my elementary building, the enrollment demographics on Minnesota Report Card (2018) show that fifty percent of the students are EL students, and seventy-seven percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. Fifty-eight percent of the student body are Hispanic, twenty-two percent White, eleven percent Asian, and eight percent Black. In second grade alone, there were about 125 EL students. My caseload consisted of 35 EL students from three different general education classrooms. The majority of my students were born in the United States or moved here as a young child. Three EL students that arrived in second grade over the course of my first year were new to this country.

My observations were that even though EL was the norm in this school, the culture of the students took a backseat to academics. The focus of the school was on catching up the students that are falling behind grade level, whether that be due learning a new language or some other factor, while also challenging the students on or above grade level. In a curriculum and results driven setting, it is hard to find time for social-emotional learning and cultural learning.

With all of my undergraduate experiences working with EL students in the classroom, it was surprising to me to feel unprepared to plan lessons for EL groups at various language levels. It was a struggle to figure out what to teach, since at the time there was no EL curriculum. How do I teach language? What parts of language are needed to teach students at this grade level? Even though there were two other EL teachers in my grade level, nobody had direct answers about what should be taught on a day to day or yearly basis. My decision was to focus on phonics and reading skills based

on what the students were learning in their classrooms. Plans were made day by day and made it through the first year. The first year was a huge learning curve. It was clear that I made personal, caring connections with students, and I believed the students were taught properly with the resources available. However, I worried whether or not lasting academic and personal difference were made in the lives of my students. This led me to think about different ways to create a meaningful language curriculum in order to help my students grow socio-emotionally and academically. Multicultural literature came to mind.

The summer after my first year of teaching, I began taking online graduate courses through Hamline University to pursue an additional license in English as a Second Language (ESL) and a Master of Arts in ESL. Teaching EL students felt like my niche in the world of education because it combined my interest in learning about other cultures and working with youth. Freedom to create meaningful lessons without being bound to a school curriculum was also a benefit. My goal was to become a qualified EL teacher in order to best serve my students unique needs. A year of teaching experience and ESL graduate classes under my belt strengthened my confidence going into my second year of teaching in 2016-2017. It also helped that a vocabulary curriculum was purchased to use with language Level 1 and Level 2 EL students. The curriculum was for students that are new to country or speak little English. In addition, I began to co-teach writing in two general education classrooms. My small group lessons relied on the curriculum and lessons created by me in the previous year because my focus during this second year of teaching was on learning the new newcomer curriculum and building

co-teaching relationships.

After two years of teaching and one year of graduate classes, it was exciting to lesson plan for my third year of teaching. It was helpful to have a bank of resources previously used, as well as ideas for how to improve my teaching. Because multicultural literature was missing from my classroom and lessons, I began to brainstorm a wishlist of multicultural books to someday include in my classroom library and lessons. During my third year of teaching in 2017-2018, my caseload included teaching newcomer students and intermediate language level students. Writing was co-taught in two classrooms. In that school year, there were seven Level 1 newcomer students on my caseload, and they quickly became my main focus. Instead of spending my planning time on creating lessons using multicultural books, time was spent on building up a literacy curriculum for my newcomer students to supplement the purchased vocabulary curriculum. However, multicultural books were always a high priority in my mind.

### **Personal and Professional Significance of Research Question**

Reflecting on my experiences as a child, reader, student, and teacher, it was easy to realize that it was never a question whether or not books could be found that represented *my* race and culture, or if I could count on the school curriculum to represent my race and culture. It was easier to see the lack of other cultures than it was to see the abundance of my own. It was a privilege I did not know was granted to me. It is a privilege that should not be awarded to only select groups of students.

Working in an ESL position with little curricular guidelines, the opportunity is presented to create a curriculum that is meaningful and impactful personally and

academically for ESL students. I can take this chance to introduce students to culturally relevant books that represent their culture to promote cultural identity. Multicultural literature can and should be utilized in academic lessons and classroom libraries. It is a small way to give back privileges and rights EL students may otherwise be denied in other settings, educational or not.

### **Summary**

Chapter One introduced the research question for this capstone project. It also explained my past personal and professional experiences as a student and teacher that led me to developing this research question. Last, it discussed the personal and professional significances of this research question.

Chapter Two will review professional literature on the topics of diverse and inclusive literature, ESL best practices, and curriculum development to strengthen my knowledge of the research question. Chapter Three will describe the steps taken in creating an English language curricular unit based on my knowledge from the literature review. Chapter Four will be a reflection of the capstone process.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Chapter One described my personal and professional experiences as a student and English as a second language (ESL) teacher that inspired my interest in the topic of using multicultural literature in English language lessons. In Chapter Two I review literature to support my research question, *What are the implications for using multicultural literature as mentor texts to teach academic English language structures in an elementary setting?* The literature review covers the topics of multicultural literature, English language instruction, and culturally responsive teaching.

Multicultural literature, the first topic addressed in this chapter, is the central focus of the capstone project. My goal is to find quality multicultural children's literature written by authentic authors that is age appropriate, culturally relevant, and promotes a positive cultural identity. This section will discuss the importance of using multicultural literature in lessons, as well as how multicultural literature can promote a positive cultural identity. Additionally, I will explain how different research-based criteria can be used to evaluate the quality of multicultural children's literature to choose to use when creating my English language curriculum. Definitions of key terms will be stated in following sections.

The second topic addressed in this chapter is English language instruction. In order to create a curriculum for English language learners using multicultural literature, I need to be knowledgeable about research based best practices in ESL teaching and



learning, such as using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to teach English grammar. I will discuss theories of second language acquisition to review how new languages are learned and the implications of these theories in language teaching.

The third topic addressed in this chapter is culturally relevant teaching. This section will define cultural relevancy and its implications when teaching EL students. Guiding principles in culturally proficient teaching, teacher roles and teacher perceptions will be addressed. As an educator, I need to reflect on my perceptions and principles to assure my teaching and curriculum is equitable for all students

### **Multicultural Literature**

Fox and Short defined multicultural literature as “books about specific cultural groups considered to be outside of the dominant socio-political culture” (as cited in Yoon, B., Simpson, A., & Haag, C., 2010, p. 110): groups that have been marginalized in some way. According to Carteret (2010), the current dominant socio-political culture in the United States, or the group in the majority that holds the most power is the White middle class. Multicultural literature then would include storylines about any people that are not considered to be in the dominant culture of the White middle class. Salas offered a more specific definition of multicultural literature, that it consists of literature that “focuses on people of color from diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious groups” (as cited in Yokoto, 2001, p. 4). In this project, the multicultural literature mentor texts chosen for the lesson plans will include main characters from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Another similar term for multicultural literature, which encompasses more than ethnic differences to include variety in sexuality, gender, and ability, is noted by Steiner (2016) in the field of literacy and education as *diverse literature*. Similarly, *culturally relevant texts* are defined by Ebe (2010) as “those that readers can connect to and can draw on their background knowledge and experiences to make meaning” (p. 194). In a culturally relevant text, the content is true to the life of the reader.

Titone, Plummer, and Kielar (2012) described how being true to the life of the reader means that the text reflects the everyday reality of the children reading it and becomes accessible and interesting to them. The reader has lived similar experiences or has some similarities to the characters, meaning that the text is written authentically and accurately. An important aspect of a culturally relevant text identified by Senokosoff and Jiang (2015) is that the text shows non-mainstream characters in positions of power that are capable of facing their own challenges and solving their own real-life problems.

For the purpose of this capstone project, I will use the term *multicultural literature* to encompass all of the above definitions: literature that shows authentic, diverse perspectives from various cultural and linguistic groups in positions of power. This definition will guide the selection of multicultural texts for the curricular unit in this capstone. Upcoming sections will report the increase of diverse students in schools, which strengthens the importance of using quality multicultural literature in schools.

### **Increasing diversity in American schools and role of multicultural literacy.**

Schools in the United States have increased in percentage of some racially and ethnically diverse students over the past two decades while the percentage of both White and Black

students has decreased. The following statistics have been collected by the US Department of Education (2016). Between 2000 and 2016, the percentage of United States (U.S.) children ages 5-17 in certain ethnic groups increased: Hispanics, from 16 to 25 percent; Asians, from 3 to 5 percent; and children of two or more races, from 2 to 4 percent. The percentage of White students decreased from 62 to 52 percent over the same time span, and the number of Black students slightly decreased from 15 percent to 14 percent. The number of English language learners (ELL or EL) in schools has increased over the past two decades as well, from 8.1 percent of public school students in 2000 to 9.5 percent in 2015. That is an increase of over 1 million students. According to the Department of Education in the state where the project will take place, the percentage of EL students in 2017 was 8.3 percent, or above the national average (Minnesota Report Card, 2018).

Given the increase of ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse students in the United States, along with the decrease of the dominant White culture, it is my personal and professional opinion that it has become ever important for multicultural literature to be present in school libraries, classrooms, and lessons. Also noting the lack of multicultural literature in schools is Wissman (2018). Her concern is about the lack of culturally diverse books published and available in classrooms and libraries. Senokossoff and Jiang (2015) also assert that as classrooms become increasingly diverse, teachers must learn how to meet the needs of students of all cultural backgrounds in order to help students keep their diverse cultural heritage and to develop cultural competence toward their own and others' cultures.

Not only is multicultural literature important for socioemotional reasons such as cultural competence, multicultural literature can promote academic success. According to research compiled by Ebe (2010), using culturally relevant texts with ELs increases reading engagement, reading proficiency, reading comprehension, and metacognitive awareness during reading. Titone et al. (2012) found that student motivation to learn also increases when using multicultural literature. The research supports my choice to use multicultural literature in the curricular unit for EL students. Multicultural literature does not only help EL students grow academically, but socioemotionally as well.

Identity of self plays a role in the success or failure of students. Students define themselves based on the direct and indirect messages they receive from their environment, peers, and authority figures. Wissman (2018) asserted that “schools can be places of erasure and disenfranchisement for culturally and linguistically diverse students” (p. 62). Since culturally and linguistically diverse students are not part of the dominant cultural group, my experience is that some students receive subtle or overt messages that they are “other,” different, or not as worthy, which corroborates Wissman’s (2018) assertion. One implication of Wissman’s (2018) research is that if learners experience being other at school their feelings of self-worth can suffer, causing a negative self-identity and failing academics. Using multicultural literature in academics is one way teachers can send affirmative messages about self-worth to their EL students.

As an EL teacher, I insist that students’ multifaceted identities be honored. As Feger (2006) wrote, “Language and identity are inseparable” (p. 18). An important outcome of EL education, identified by Titone et al., (2012) is that it includes the learner

being “able to see him or herself in the educational materials” ( p. 24). The reason for learners being able to see themselves in educational materials is that culturally relevant instructional materials “allow students to feel secure and self-confident,” promoting a positive cultural identity (Titone et. al, 2012, p. 27). Using quality multicultural literature in lessons can help students socio-emotionally by affirming a positive cultural self-identity. Given the importance of having multicultural literature in the learning environment, it is important for me to understand how to recognize high quality multicultural literature; that is addressed in the next section.

**Evaluating quality of multicultural literature.** It is important for me to find multicultural literature that is written by authentic authors and is age appropriate, culturally relevant, and promotes a positive cultural identity. Yoon (2010) commented on the unintended messages teachers may be sending students through their choice of multicultural literature. Yoon (2010) described how “Literacy teachers may not realize that certain multicultural texts deliver the messages of underrepresented groups’ assimilation into a mainstream culture” (p. 110). The goal of this type of text should not be to assimilate culturally diverse students into mainstream or dominant cultural norms, but to accept and appreciate who they are and their strengths. Not only should these texts highlight the strengths of students as mentioned in Chapter One, but Bishop (1990) asserted that classroom literature needs to be reflective of the students in the classroom.

Bishop was a Black professor of children’s literature and is widely quoted on the topic of multicultural literature and her metaphor of how it can be mirror for students:

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (1990, p. ix)

Teachers should evaluate the literature available in their classroom and library to assure all of their students can access books that serve as mirrors for each of their students.

Wissman (2018) finds that “rarely do culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students have access to books that act as ‘mirrors’ of their lives and experiences” (p. 62).

Through conducting this literature review, I have found not only resources to help me locate multicultural titles, but also research-based ways to evaluate the quality of multicultural literature.

Several research articles (Harris, 2012; Williams & Bauer, 2006) recommended looking at national book lists and literature award winners to find multicultural titles. Both authors suggested selecting award-winning books through the American Library Association, while Harris (2012) recommended looking for specific awards titles such as the Coretta Scott King award or Pura Belpré award (Williams & Bauer, 2006). Harris, (2012) also suggested notable book lists compiled by the National Council of Teachers of

English, National Council of Social Studies, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Magazine Awards, and the National Book Awards. Williams and Bauer (2006) added additional suggestions of looking at the International Reading Association's "Choices" booklists and the Center for Children's books. Three studies, summarized below, posit that once multicultural book titles have been collected, teachers should review the books to assure that the book is culturally relevant and promotes cultural identity.

Titone et al. (2012) concluded from their study on how to create culturally relevant educational materials that five distinct characteristics should be present in instructional material to increase engagement, language acquisition, and self-worth of ELs:

- Content that is true to the students' lived experiences (reflects everyday experience and is therefore completely accessible to the learner);
- Illustrations in which learners can see themselves, their surroundings, and their values -- as if looking into a mirror;
- Use or mention of learners' first language even if only minimally;
- Content, illustrations, and language which directly communicate respect for the students' native/home culture; and
- Content, illustrations, and language which explicitly communicate hope, care and/or positive regard of the learner to the learner. (p. 39)

Yoon, Simpson, and Haag's (2010) research identified other factors to consider when evaluating the quality of multicultural books.

Yoon et al. (2010) examined four multicultural picture books for the underlying ideologies of either assimilation, cultural pluralism, or both. These authors state that the goal of assimilation is to target culturally “different” students to help them adjust to a dominant norm. Conversely, Yoon et al. (2010) went on to state that books with a message of cultural pluralism target all students to challenge the dominant norm and become “more concerned with human diversity, choice, and equal opportunity” (p. 111). These researchers used the lens of ideology to examine the broader social belief communicated through the multicultural texts.

Based on their work, Yoon et al.(2010) suggested that teachers use the following criteria when reviewing multicultural literature:

1. Ideology through inferred messages
  - a. How does the text ensure that the central character(s) maintain identity in the native culture?
  - b. How does the text support native culture in the resolution of the story?
2. Representation of all people
  - a. How does the text provide readers from both the dominant and native cultures with opportunities to see the values of both cultures?
3. Promotion of critical pedagogy
  - a. How does the text challenge the traditions of the dominant culture rather than assimilation into the dominant culture? (p. 116)



Lastly, Ebe (2010) created a Cultural Relevance Rubric for teachers and students based on the work from Goodman.

Ebe's (2010) Cultural Relevance Rubric is a useful resource for both teachers and students. After reading a book or other text, teachers and students use the rubric to rate the book on a scale of 1 to 4 for each of the following questions, with 1 meaning yes/high relevance and 4 meaning no/low relevance. The higher the score, the more culturally relevant the story is to the particular reader giving the score. Teachers can decide to hand out the rubric for students to complete on their own, or read through the rubric items with each student to open up discussion.

Ebe (2010) created the rubric to see if there is a connection between culturally relevant texts and proficiency on reading assessments. Nine participants read two different books, filled out the Cultural Relevance Rubric for each book, and then the relevance of the books was assessed through miscue analysis and oral retellings. The result of the study showed that the nine reading participants were more proficient in reading the story that they had identified as being more culturally relevant. Below is the Cultural Relevance Rubric.

1. Are the characters in the story like you and your family? (ethnicity of the family)
2. Have you ever lived in or visited places like those in the story? (the setting)
3. Could this story take place this year? (the year the story takes place)

4. How close do you think the main characters are to you in age? (age of the characters)
5. Does the story have main characters who are boys (for boy readers) or girls (for girl readers)? (gender of characters)
6. Do the characters talk like you and your family? (the language or dialect used in the story)
7. How often do you read stories like this one? (the genre and exposure to this type of text)
8. Have you ever had an experience like one described in this story? (the reader's background experiences) (pp. 197-198)

Conducting evaluations of multicultural literature when selecting books to use in the curricular unit for this capstone is a critical step to ensure that the messages presented to students are culturally relevant, pluralistic, and promote a positive cultural identity. The next section of the literature review will look at English language instruction to investigate how multicultural literature can be used to teach the English language to EL students.

### **English Language Instruction**

English language instruction is based on understanding the fundamental nature of language. Crystal defined language as “the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs, or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression” (as cited in Wright, 2017, p. 184). Linguists study the branches of language, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Phonology is the study of the sounds in a

language. The English language has 44 different sounds, or phonemes, but only 26 written symbols. Morphology is the study of the structure of words, such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words. Syntax is the study of the rules determining the formation of sentences. Many teachers refer to syntax as grammar. The curricular lessons in this capstone will be focused on syntactic structures, or grammar but semantics will influence my selection of vocabulary words.

Semantics is the study of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences.

Semantics is an important language skill for comprehension and vocabulary instruction. Wright (2017) suggested that “teachers can use their understanding of semantics to develop vocabulary lessons that are based on lists of semantically related words” (p. 34). As I select vocabulary to be taught in the curricular unit for this capstone, I will look for pairs of semantically related words or phrases. Pragmatics is the study of the “invisible” meaning in social interaction. Teachers can use what they know about pragmatics to teach ELs successful rules of interaction in social and academic contexts.

Teachers should be aware that the goal for EL students is to become proficient across four domains of language, in the receptive domains of listening and reading and the expressive domains of speaking and writing. The lessons in the curricular unit will include learning activities to practice skills in all four domains. In order to provide effective language instruction for ELs, teachers need to have at least a basic understanding of the different branches of language, as well as theories about how second languages are acquired and that are addressed in the next section.

**Second language acquisition theories.** Numerous theories account for second language learning. Before the 1970s, behaviorist theorists believed that language development was a formation of habits formed in the first language. Therefore, mimicry and memorization were key activities in classrooms (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Innatist theorists, such as Noam Chomsky (Wright, 2017) suggested that underlying rules of language are naturally acquired innately and understood based on input and context. Wright (2017) also noted a more recent, widely known theorist in second language acquisition is Stephen Krashen.

Krashen (Wright, 2017) presented five cognitive hypotheses of second language acquisition in the 1980s. Wright (2017) acknowledged how Krashen's theories were influential to the field, but have been widely criticized as well. Wright (2017) continued that Krashen was a big proponent of the fundamental difference between learning a language and acquiring a language, which he named as the *acquisition-learning hypothesis*. Krashen posited that learning is a conscious process and results in knowing *about* a language, but the vast majority of language is acquired subconsciously and results in *knowing* a language (Wright, 2017). Krashen's second hypothesis (Wright, 2017) is the *natural order hypothesis*, which asserts that parts of language are acquired in a predictable order. This hypothesis helps EL teachers plan when to teach certain language skills to a particular student based where they are in the sequence. His *monitor hypothesis* (Wright, 2017) explains that learners can internally self-correct learned language, which improves accuracy.

The next two hypotheses will help guide the creation of the lessons for the curricular unit in this capstone. Krashen's most widely known hypothesis is the *input (comprehension) hypothesis* (Wright, 2017). This hypothesis postulates that language is acquired when we obtain comprehensible input, or when we understand what we hear or read. Krashen (Wright, 2017) created formula to explain this further:  $i+1$ , where  $i$  represents a student's current level of language proficiency and  $+1$  represents input just slightly past that level. Many educators liken this to Zone of Proximal Development, or what learners can do with a little support or scaffolding, that was developed by Lev Vygotsky. As I create the lesson plans for the curricular unit, I will be cognizant of what my students know and can do to plan for what they can learn next with a little support. Krashen's last hypothesis is *affective filter hypothesis*, which describes how emotions and environmental factors can affect second language learning.

The affective filter "controls how much comprehensible input gets through to the learner" (Wright, 2017, p. 52). Factors such as anxiety and low self-esteem trigger the affective filter to keep out new input, even if it is comprehensible. Wright (2017) explained the effect of the affective filter on language teaching:

A major goal in language teaching and learning is to "lower" the affective filter to maximize comprehensible input. This hypothesis has been useful in explaining why individual students make different amounts of progress when presented with the exact same input (p. 52).

When students feel safe and comfortable in a classroom environment, their affective filter is lowered and they are able to learn new language concepts.

I believe that teachers know that ample time should be spent building a safe classroom community in which students feel comfortable taking academic risks. A reason for using multicultural literature in language lessons is to lower the affective filter by creating a classroom environment where students feel like their life experiences and voice are valuable. Multicultural literature can make students feel safe and respected, which can result in learning through comprehensible input. Research based practices in the instruction of English learners should also be utilized when creating English language lessons.

**Research based best practices.** Research in the field of ESL has been continuously expanding for the past three decades. Given the vast amount of information, this section will briefly highlight areas relevant to the purpose of the capstone: oral language strategies, literacy strategies, vocabulary instruction, and best practices in grammar instruction. First is an explanation of research based resources provided by WIDA.

The goal of the multi-state professional organization for educators of ELs, WIDA, is to “advance the academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are culturally and linguistically diverse through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators” (WIDA, 2014). WIDA provides an extensive bank of research-based resources for EL educators. Many of these resources will be utilized in this capstone project, such as the English Language Development (ELD) Standards and ELD Lesson Plan template.

Another valuable resource to be utilized when lesson planning is WIDA Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition Grades 2-3 (2016), which “provides examples of what language learners can do at various stages of English language development in listening, speaking, reading, and writing” and “examples of academic language use for four specific communicate purposes: recounting, explaining, arguing, and discussing” (p. 2). The WIDA Can Do Descriptors document will be referenced when planning the learning objectives and learning activities for each lesson.

The last WIDA resource that will contribute to this project is the yearly statewide assessment for ELs called ACCESS. The ACCESS test determines an EL student’s overall language proficiency and specific proficiency levels in the four domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Proficiency levels range from Level 1, known as Entering or beginning level, to Level 6, Reaching or proficient. The lesson plans will be written specifically for students of proficiency levels 2 and 3, but accommodation supports will be explained to modify the lesson for lower or higher language proficiencies. In addition to WIDA resources, best practices in oral language strategies will also influence the design and content of the lessons I will develop.

**Oral language strategies.** Oral language consists of the language domains of speaking and listening. According to the CREDE Report, as summarized in Wright (2017), on average ELs take several years to become proficient in oral language and generally make quicker progress from Level 1 to Level 3 and slower progress as they move beyond Level 3. The CREDE reviewers “suspect this slowdown is due to the lack of instructional attention to oral language development once students reach the middle

levels of language proficiency” (p. 152). Research by CREDE supports the ample use of oral language activities throughout the curricular unit I am developing. Research based activities for oral language in the field of ESL include interactive read alouds, total physical response, and cooperative learning.

One oral language strategy to use with ELs is interactive read alouds. Wiseman (2011) describes how interactive read alouds differ from standard read alouds where a teacher simply reads a book aloud to students. Interactive read alouds also involve discussions and student interactions in order to make meaning from the text. Giroir, Romero and Roberts (2015) insist there are many benefits of interactive read alouds for ELs, such as the “meaningful ways that language structures and vocabulary are contextualized to support deep understanding of new linguistic concepts. Read alouds that infuse interactive, text-based discussions provide an authentic context that makes academic language accessible and meaningful to ELs” (p. 640). Context is key to understanding new vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures. Learning new language in context allows ELs a range of contextual elements that support deeper connections between form and meaning. Vocabulary strategies will be discussed more in depth in a following section.

Key strategies that are shown to be effective for ELs in interactive read-alouds include teaching vocabulary in context, facilitating negotiated interaction around text, and sustaining linguistically and culturally relevant learning environments (Giroir et al., 2015). The multicultural literature chosen as mentor texts for the curricular unit in this



capstone will be introduced through an interactive read aloud format. Another effective listening strategy for ELs is total physical response.

Total physical response (TPR) supplies a listening strategy in which the teacher provides a set of commands in the target language of English and students respond with a specific action. Students can demonstrate their listening comprehension “by responding with their whole bodies within the context of a variety of academic lessons or tasks” (Wright, 2017, p. 166). This learning strategy will be used throughout the curricular unit in this capstone in a variety of ways to reinforce listening comprehension. Utilizing student groupings, such as in cooperative learning, is an additional effective way for students to practice oral language.

Cooperative learning involves student collaboration in pairs or small groups to reach a goal such as completing a specific task or completing a project. Grouping students in pairs or small cooperative learning groups is a form of “scaffolding provided by classroom peers that contributes to the oral language development of ELs” because students have to talk and listen to their peers to complete the task (Wright, 2017, p. 170). In cooperative learning groups, the affective filter of ELs may be lowered because they may be more comfortable speaking to a few peers rather than to a whole class. These groupings also allow time for ELs to practice using new academic vocabulary and target language structures in context. Kagan and Kagan (2009) outlined different ways for grouping and structuring students for cooperative learning. I will be using Kagan’s cooperative learning structures in the curricular unit created for the capstone to support oral language.

### **Research based literacy strategies recommended for use with EL Students.**

Literacy is a combination of the language domains of reading and writing. The CREDE Report (summarized in Wright (2017) reported that “effective literacy instruction for ELs provides direct instruction in interactive learning environments” (p. 187). As mentioned previously in the article by Giroir et al. (2015) *interactive read alouds* are a strategy to support literacy because learners are exposed to new vocabulary and language patterns in context. By using interactive read alouds students also can hear the teacher model fluency, pronunciation, and intonation. Wright (2017) compiled research on other research based models of reading instruction. *Shared reading* is similar to read alouds with the exception that students read aloud with the teacher a text that is at their reading level. *Guided reading* is a structure for reading instruction in which students are in small groups reading the same text that is at their level, with the goal of increasing reading levels by practicing learned reading skills at their level.

Much like reading instruction, there are three different ways to structure writing instruction: a) modeled writing, b) interactive writing, and c) guided writing (Wright, 2017). In *modeled writing*, a teacher models how to write a particular text through a demonstration while thinking aloud to describe the process of writing. In *shared writing*, a teacher guides a group of students to compose a text together. The teacher assists by writing the text and providing error correction. *Interactive writing* is similar to shared writing, except that students also take part in the physical writing. In *guided writing*, a mini lesson on a particular writing skill or strategy is taught and then immediately practiced with support from the teacher.

The lessons in the curricular unit in this capstone project will include different forms of literacy instruction such as interactive read alouds, shared reading and writing, and guided reading and writing. Research based reading activities involving speaking and writing before, during, and after reading a text will support comprehension and will also be included in the curricular unit. Multicultural literature will serve as mentor texts, or examples of the target language skill in the curricular unit. Since reading provides a good source of comprehensible input for ELs to learn English and is a critical skill for elementary readers to develop, ample lesson time will be spent on the language domain of reading.

**Supporting vocabulary development by using multicultural literature.** As mentioned in previous sections, vocabulary can be instructed through oral language and literacy activities. An important piece of vocabulary instruction is providing context for the vocabulary words. Multicultural literature can serve as a contextual example, or mentor text, for the chosen vocabulary words. Work by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) highlights the importance of choosing Tier 2 words for vocabulary instruction. According to Biemiller and Boote (2006), Tier 2 words are all-purpose academic words, or “words worth teaching” because they are found across multiple academic content areas. After choosing multicultural literature for the curricular unit and deciding the language objectives, I will review the texts for Tier 2 vocabulary to teach. Beck et. al (2015) and Biemiller and Boote (2006) both have researched how to structure vocabulary instruction across a five day sequence.

**Supporting grammar development for EL learners.** The approach to teaching syntactic structures, otherwise known as grammar, that I will use when writing the EL curriculum is called *Systemic Functional Linguistics*, as explained in the books *Grammar and Meaning* by Humphrey, Droga, and Feez (2013) and *A New Grammar Companion for Teachers* by Beverly Derewianka (2011).

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The website Teaching Tolerance (2018) states, “culturally responsive teaching recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning, enriching classroom experiences and keeping students engaged” (p. 1). Paris and Alim’s assertion that teaching should go beyond relevance and responsiveness to “perpetuate and foster-to sustain- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for social transformation” and “culturally sustaining pedagogies discard assimilationist teaching where students are ‘asked to deny their language, literacies, cultures, and histories’” (as cited in Nash, Panther, and Arce-Boardman, 2017, p. 605). Nash et al. (2017) posited that culturally responsive practices are purposefully sequenced and interconnected experiences that “build, extend and sustain students’ local and cultural knowledge” to support language and literacy (p. 605). These definitions help to inform my project.

**Teacher perceptions of the nature of culturally responsive classroom.** Since not all teachers are aware of the principles of a culturally responsive classroom, they may lack the knowledge of diverse cultures and the cultural/ethnic backgrounds of the students they teach, which may hinder the teachers’ ability to be an effective teacher for

all students. For example, Capella-Santana (2003) described how “teachers may underestimate minority students’ academic abilities and consequently present them with less challenging and demanding curricula, thus limiting their academic opportunities” (p. 182). Conversely, Capella-Santana (2003) also noted how, “multiculturally aware teachers, who take into consideration their students cultural/ethnic backgrounds, have been able to develop curricula that foster the academic success of minority students” (p. 183). In my professional opinion, teachers should strive to become multiculturally aware and research culturally responsive practices in order to equitably teach all of their students. One stepping point for teachers to do this is by incorporating multicultural literature in academic lessons, such this capstone project will demonstrate.

### **Summary**

Chapter Two reviewed literature on the topics of multicultural literature, diversity, best practices in English language instruction, and culturally responsive teaching to support the research question, *What are the implications for using multicultural literature as mentor texts to teach academic English language structures in an elementary setting?* Chapter Three will provide a detailed description of the capstone project, which is the creation of a ten lesson curricular unit intended to teach grammar to elementary EL learners through the use of multicultural literature as mentor texts.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description and Methods

#### Overview

As an EL educator, I want to promote appreciation of cultural diversity and assure that my young English language (EL) students have a positive cultural identity. To support the development of positive cultural identity I want my students to be represented in our school in literature, lessons, and curriculum. My interest in developing positive cultural identity resulted in the research question for this capstone, *What are the implications for using multicultural literature as mentor texts to teach English language grammar structures in an elementary setting?* Chapter Three will describe my rationale and plan for completing the project.

In Chapter One, I discussed my previous experiences of cultural awakening that led me to becoming an English language (EL teacher) and how I have noticed that the diverse population of my school is not reflected in its curricular resources. Chapter Two reviewed literature pertaining to multicultural literature, cultural identity, English as a second language (ESL) best practices, and creating a culturally relevant curriculum. This chapter will provide a description of this capstone project, which is to create a curricular unit using multicultural literature as mentor texts, or examples, to teach English language grammar structures to second grade EL students. The intended setting and participants will be described in depth. This chapter will also include the curriculum framework used to guide the creation of the lessons in the curriculum and theories of education that support the lesson design.

### **Description of Curricular Unit Capstone Project**

For this capstone project, I intend to create one unit of lessons using multicultural literature as mentor texts to teach English language grammar structures to be implemented in an elementary EL classroom. Ten lessons will be described in depth and corresponding resources will be created. The lessons are intended to be taught in small groups of 5-7 students with a timeframe of 25-30 minutes per lesson. Each lesson will include English Language Development (ELD) standard(s) and state content standard(s), content and language objective(s), formative assessment(s), learning activities, and materials. A summative unit assessment will be included for the unit. Learning activities in each lesson will target some or all of the language domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Specific vocabulary will be taught and reviewed over the course of the unit. The format of most lessons will include activating prior knowledge, direct explanation, teacher think aloud, guided practice, independent practice, and lesson closing.

Educational learning theories that will support the learning activities chosen for the curricular unit are constructivist theories based on the work of Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and John Dewey. Constructivist theorists believe that learning is constructed through social interactions and new learning is tied to previous knowledge (Wright, 2017).

This unit of lessons will be a small piece of a larger scope and sequence that I intend to assemble over the next few years to implement multicultural literature academically throughout the entire school year. The lesson plans and scope and sequence

will be shared with other grade level EL teachers so they may implement them if they so choose.

### **Curriculum Framework**

I will be using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework by Wiggins and McTighe (2005) to ground my curricular unit development. In this framework, goal or outcome is chosen first, followed by how students will be assessed, before creating the learning activities. In the education world, a description of this framework is sometimes referred to as “backwards design” because teachers planning in a “forward design” consider learning activities first and then align the activities with learning goals. According to the Bowen (2017) “forward design” puts a focus on teaching, whereas “backwards design” puts a focus on learning. The UbD framework consists of three planning stages: identifying desired results, determining acceptable assessment evidence, and planning learning experiences and instruction (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Stage 1 of UbD framework is identifying the desired results. In this capstone project, this will be done through the identification of ELD and state content standards and the development of corresponding learning objectives. The unit overall will have a desired learning objective, as well as specific learning objectives for each lesson. The standards and learning objectives will become the goal, or the desired results, for what students will learn by the end of the lesson and unit. The learning goal will include an English grammar structure.

Stage 2 of the UbD framework is determining assessment evidence. This will be done through the development of formative assessments for each lesson and a summative



assessment near the end of the unit. The formative assessments will align with the standards and learning objectives for the lesson to assess progress towards the desired outcome. The formative assessments will be used to inform instruction, such as determining if the content needs to be reviewed in a different way or the rigor needs to be increased. The summative assessment will show if students met the intended learning goal for the unit, which will be learning the intended English grammar structures.

Stage 3 of the UbD framework is planning learning experiences and instruction. This will be done through the creation and description of ten lessons plans. English as a second language (ESL) best practices and practices for culturally responsive teaching, as reviewed in Chapter Two, will be considered when planning learning experiences and instruction. Multicultural literature will be selected that can serve as mentor texts for the grammar structures. Based on constructivist theories of learning mentioned previously, students will have opportunities to collaborate with their peers while the teacher takes the role of facilitator.

### **Setting and Participants**

The intended setting is a K-4 elementary EL classroom. In my building there are over 1,200 students in grades Kindergarten through fourth grade. My building also employs 96 teachers, 54 paraprofessionals, 3 administrators, and many other support staff (Minnesota Report Card, 2018). As mentioned in Chapter One, in my school fifty eight percent of the student body are Hispanic, twenty-two percent are White, eleven percent are Asian, and eight percent are Black. Seventy-seven percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. Fifty percent of students are EL, which equates to over 600 students

receiving EL services from an EL teacher. There are 14 licensed EL teachers, with two to three EL teachers per grade level. Languages spoken by the EL students include Spanish, Karen, Vietnamese, Amharic, and Oromo. In second grade alone, on average there are about 125 EL students each school year out of an average of 250 total second grade students. There are ten to eleven sections of each grade with an average of 23 students per class.

My caseload varies from 30-40 EL students from three different general education classrooms. I will be implementing this curriculum with my own second grade EL students, so it is tailored for rural second grade students from predominantly Hispanic heritage as well as some Southeast Asian and Northeast African students. The setting will be in a small group of five to seven students and the intended audience is second grade EL students, age 7-8. Due to my large caseload, these lessons will likely be implemented in multiple small groups. The grouping of the small groups is determined by factors such as language level, classroom teacher input, and academic needs.

The lessons will take place in my small classroom, which is a converted meeting room that consists of a kidney table, small teacher desk, bookcases, whiteboard, and a large touchscreen monitor. Students come to my EL groups during their guided reading rotations. Students bring their school iPad mini and headphones, and have individual EL folders which are kept in my classroom. In my classroom, I also have materials for students to use such as highlighters, markers, colored pencils, crayons, whisper phones, and reading trackers.

The capstone project overall is intended for both content and language teachers to read in order to reflect on the importance of representing different cultures through multicultural literature in the classroom and to see how multicultural literature can be used to teach academic content such as grammar structures.

### **Timeline**

The capstone project will be created in Fall 2018 and implemented in Spring 2019. In order to reach the goal of completing the project by the beginning of December 2018, my intention is to meet monthly progress goals. In August, I will revise Chapters One through Three, create a reference list, and accumulate more resources such as multicultural texts.

In mid-September I will complete Phase 1 of UbD by identifying standards and learning objectives for the lessons in the curriculum unit I am creating. In late-September, after Phase 1 is completed, I will begin Phase 2, in which I will create formative assessments to meet the learning objectives of each lessons and a summative assessment for the unit. In October and beginning of November I will complete Phase 3 when I will create the ten lesson plans and materials. Before the middle of November I will ask for and receive feedback on Phases 1, 2, and 3 from my content reviewer. I will revise the project as needed and complete the project by middle of November. I will then draft and revise Chapter Four of the capstone by the end of November, and submit the project for assessment during the first week of December.

**Summary**

Chapter Three provided a description of capstone project, educational and curriculum theories that guided the creation of the project, as well as details about the setting and participants for the which the project is intended. Chapter Four will be a reflective conclusion on the capstone project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project was to answer the question, *What are the implications for using multicultural literature as mentor texts to teach academic English language structures in an elementary setting?* Chapter One discussed my professional and personal experiences that inspired me to choose this research topic. Chapter Two reviewed research literature about the topics of multicultural literature, best practices in teaching English learners, and culturally responsive teaching. Chapter Three described the process of creating the project. The project entails ten 30-minute lessons designed to teach the recognition and use of prepositions in reading, writing, and speaking through the use of the mentor text, “The Rainbow Weaver.” The lessons were created to teach to intermediate English learners in second grade, but can be adapted for different ages and language abilities. Chapter Four will cover major project learnings, a review of literature, implications and limitations of the project, future recommendations, and my reflections on the project.

#### **Major Learnings**

Through this capstone writing process, I have learned the importance of creating a school culture in which all students feel welcomed and represented in all areas of the school - from the staff to the curriculum. I have seen that students feel valued when they

can see aspects of themselves within the school. And when students feel valued, they are more likely to engage in lessons and take risks with their language learning.

One easy way teachers and administrators can promote equality and respect of differences in a school setting is by providing quality multicultural literature for students to read in school and for use in academic lessons. Curriculums are not always designed to be culturally responsive or culturally sensitive. While there may be diverse figures present in reading or social studies curriculum, teachers should evaluate if the figures are described in ways that are stereotypical or oppressive. It is my belief that quality multicultural literature could easily be purchased or fundraised to supplement the curriculum. Through this capstone project, I have realized that a single multicultural book could be used in multiple lessons, such as teaching different grammar and writing skills or social skills. In fact, the more familiar students are with a story, the deeper their learning becomes and a stronger connection is made. So, just adding one multicultural text to a class, with purposeful planning, can create many learning opportunities.

I have seen firsthand how using multicultural literature and multilingual literature in a lesson can increase the engagement of all students, whether it is used simply as a read-aloud story or as a tool to teach academic concepts. Even having multicultural literature present on your bookshelves available for students to pick up and read creates a more inclusive classroom environment.

### **Review of Literature**

The literature review was paramount in confirming my beliefs that using multicultural literature is vitally important for students. It also strengthened my

knowledge of best practices for teaching EL students. Multicultural literature promotes positive self-identity and self-worth, which in turn positively affects academic learning (Titone et. al, 2012). Multicultural literature that is unbiased and/or written by an authentic author not only can be a platform for social learning but for teaching specific language skills as well. Reading research about the best practices for teaching EL students helped me to focus my capstone lessons on vocabulary acquisition and creating opportunities for students to practice the language skill in all four domains - reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Learning about systemic functional linguistics (SFL) helped me to narrow the grammar focus to that of prepositions, or circumstances (Derewianka, 2011).

### **Implications**

Based on this project, I have made it a goal to incorporate multicultural literature into my small group EL lessons every week. My next step is to create a year-long scope and sequence which includes grammar and language skills that I teach each year and a mentor text to go with each skill. Some books may be used with multiple skills. I have a collection of twenty or so multicultural picture books in my classroom library now. I would like to share those examples of quality multicultural literature at my grade level and department professional learning community (PLC) meetings along with teaching ideas in order to spark an interest in my colleagues. I will offer to lend the texts to teachers that would like to implement multicultural books but do not currently have the budget. Likewise, I will speak with school and department administration to see if there are ways to provide or fundraise multicultural literature for our teachers and school.

**Benefits to Teaching and Learning**

This capstone project highlights not only the importance of using multicultural literature, but also the ease of implementation. The greatest payoff is that children's identities will be valued. Schools could become more inclusive of all students, childrens' identities would be valued, and biases should be examined.

**Limitations of Project**

At this time, there are a few clear limitations for this capstone project, such as that the lessons have not yet been taught, the lessons require teacher preparation, and the lessons are written for a very specific context. The first limitation is that the lesson plans have not been field tested as of this writing. Therefore, the outcomes of learning are not guaranteed. The lesson plans may need to be expanded or extended in areas that cannot be predicted without teaching it. Additionally, there is no way to guarantee the quality delivery of instruction and student buy-in because of the variety of teaching styles and contexts.

Second, for the teacher there is time, preparation, and money involved, such as purchasing the mentor text and printing and preparing the vocabulary cards and activities. Teachers may also choose to use different vocabulary words or less vocabulary words based on the needs and background knowledge of their students. Although this capstone project was written for a very specific context, it can easily be adapted to other ages,



grades, and language abilities, even for native English speakers. Again, that would take teacher planning time in order to adapt the lesson.

### **Future Recommendations**

First of all, I would strongly suggest to all teachers to look at their curriculum through a multicultural lens. Are there authentic multicultural characters and authors represented in what you teach every week? Is there a way you can bring multicultural literature into your classroom and school library?

I would also like to see teachers using and displaying multicultural literature, whether it is children's literature or young adult, from preschool, elementary, middle school, high school, to even college settings. It would be very interesting to see how this idea can be adapted for different ages and contexts. Additionally, a great lesson or unit for secondary students or in college preparation classes would be to evaluate the quality of multicultural literature based on the criteria discussed in Chapter Two of this capstone. This could spark a conversation about diversity, inclusion, and bias that could benefit not only students but society.

As far as next steps in research, I have a few suggestions. One suggestion is to create formative language assessments to measure language proficiency growth when implementing multicultural literature in EL lessons. I would also suggest researching more specific benefits to using multicultural literature, such as collecting academic data growth and conducting interviews with students.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This capstone project brings to the surface the reality of the demographics in the American school system. An increasing number of students are immigrants or family of immigrants, are students of color, or have some other form of identity or culture that is not in the American majority (US Department of Education, 2016). Therefore, the literature and curriculum in our American schools should reflect our student body. Students should not be made to feel “other” in school, whether unintentionally or not. Schools should be a beacon of safety and acceptance; a place where students can take academic risks and grow emotionally, socially, and academically. Teachers should take a look at what they are teaching. If what they are teaching is biased and exclusive, and if what students are reading in schools is one-dimensional, teachers should take a step forward by selecting multicultural literature that reflect the lives of their students to use with their students. That will help our students have a positive self-identity in an otherwise uneasy political society, it will help them find their voice, become invested in their learning, and maybe learn some academic skills along the way.

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