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Creating A Website That Provides Classroom Teachers With Resources And Tools To Develop A Language-Rich Classroom

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CREATING A WEBSITE THAT PROVIDES CLASSROOM TEACHERS WITH RESOURCES AND TOOLS TO DEVELOP A LANGUAGE-RICH CLASSROOM

by

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To all the educators who teach with the strong belief that “the classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility.” –bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The central question of this project is, *How can a professional development resource help classroom teachers create a language-rich environment that can support the development of academic language for all learners?* As an English as a Second Language teacher, I collaborate across classrooms, grade levels and programs to support the needs and language growth of English Learners (ELs). As such, I am in a unique position to work directly with a number of different teachers and engage with heterogeneous groups of students. Our school serves PreK-5 students in a mid-size urban district. Eighty-five percent of our students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Sixty percent are EL designated. Our school has two distinct programs: a dual language program (DL) and a general education program also known as the community, or mainstream program. Through collaborative teaching practices, I have been able to develop an understanding of different teachers' styles and expectations, and acquire added insights into the needs of our diverse learners.

Our students bring different language practices and proficiencies to the classroom. David is reading predictable pattern books featuring simple text in the third grade. He has good listening comprehension skills and enjoys story time. He can demonstrate his

learning orally during the reading lesson, but needs support to produce written responses and share his thinking when working independently. Ma Ma is an EL student. She has developed proficient conversational skills since entering a mainstream classroom in second grade. Ma Ma is curious and asks a lot of questions when working one on one with an adult. She is distracted during large group lessons and appears to be daydreaming. She does not participate in whole group discussions and does not share during partner talks. She is often confused when given an assignment and will copy answers from a peer. Tia attends the DL program. She is learning in two languages, English and Hmong, which she also speaks at home. In second grade, she received 30 minutes of English literacy instruction daily. Now that she is in the third grade, she is expected to demonstrate her learning in both languages. She rarely participates during the English reading lesson and remains silent when called upon, but she actively shares during the Hmong Reader's Workshop. Leila struggles to read and write at grade level. She engages in negative self-talk and tends to automatically shut down when asked to read or write. However, she is excited when she completes her writing assignments and loves to present her work in front of an audience. She invites family members to attend her presentations and interprets for them in her native language with amazing ease and fluency.

Students like David, Ma Ma, Tia, and Leila represent a narrow sample of the different learning abilities and language needs we address and support in one given day. In my position as a collaborative teacher, I ensure that the language demands of the task at hand are addressed and that students have ample opportunities to develop background

knowledge, use new vocabulary, and engage in academic discussions. I provide modeling and sentence starters and frames to support students' learning during partner discussions and group sharing and prepare them for writing. Through co-teaching practices, I support the learning of all students whose developing language skills are crucial to their learning growth and academic success. Creating a collaborative culture demands commitment and investment. It is essential for teachers to work together and take responsibility for helping all students learn if we want to create positive change and reverse achievement trends. Practices implemented through collaboration need to be expanded throughout the day for students to develop the language they need to access and demonstrate learning in various content areas. To facilitate such growth, classroom teachers need to become more language-aware, explore the research and theories that can help them understand better the linguistic needs of their students, and develop tools to support and enrich the language experiences of their learners.

This school year 2018-2019, I have joined the English Learner in the Mainstream (ELM) initiative at Hamline University and committed to providing coaching and professional development sessions (PDs) in my building to prepare all teachers to work more effectively with ELs. ELM supports the implementation of Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success Act (2014). The MN LEAPS Act has drawn more attention to language learning in Minnesota. It has established, among many other initiatives, the development of bilingual and multilingual seals on high school diplomas to allow students to demonstrate their language ability in a language learned at school or home. It builds a strong foundation for language policy and highlights the linguistic

assets of heritage language learners in the state. It also requires educators to be skilled in developing the English language proficiency of their English learners. This is a key piece of legislation that provides a foundation to reorient and refine our preparation, practice, and development. As an ELM coach, I have answered questions from classroom teachers and shared resources and strategies to support language development in the mainstream classrooms. As I reflected on how to best support my peers, a website presented itself as an effective platform to centralize information on language development and make it more easily accessible to all teachers in a format that takes into account the specific context of our school building, the programs we offer, and the learners we serve. The central question of this project supports the need that arose in the context of these new responsibilities, but it also supports the core values that inform my teaching as a language teacher and the expertise I have acquired throughout years of teaching. In this paper, I will support the idea that all students need rigorous language instruction to develop the skills that they need to achieve academically and that EL teachers can help lead discussions in their schools to promote language awareness and support the professional development of their mainstream colleagues. I will frame this discussion in an asset-based approach to education focused on strengths. It is my personal and professional experiences that formed my teaching philosophy and the beliefs that are at the core of this project.

Personal Background

Languages are a big part of my life. My language journey started in France where I was born and raised. I remember very vividly learning how to read in elementary

school. I also remember times when I had to learn French grammar and spelling rules and recite them verbatim, color code parts of sentences, memorize poetry, and write from dictations. French grammar classes continued through secondary school though we had more time for literature discussions, essay writing, and research. I have always been an avid reader; my parents had a spare room with bookshelves full of books. I was a shy child who found solace in writing and reading. I started taking both English and Spanish classes in middle school, and my foreign language classes were my favorites, so much so that I pursued a master's degree in English after high school. In my last year of college, I applied for a teaching assistant position in a French immersion program in the United States both to experience life abroad and to hone my English skills. I remember being fascinated by the immersion setting. Though I was working in an American school, I was surrounded by students and staff who spoke, taught and learned in French all day. I have been immersed in the American language and culture since. Though I am currently teaching ELs in a public elementary school setting, I have taught French as a foreign language for many years too.

As a mother of three married to an American man, I have also experienced the challenges and rewards of raising bilingual and biliterate children in a multilingual home. There were times when my children refused to speak French and times when I lacked the patience to teach them. If speaking and listening came more naturally, reading and writing required more sustained efforts on all parts. As they are growing up, it is a source of pride to see my children navigate both cultures and languages with such ease. Many families of immigrants or refugees experience language loss. Many want to preserve the

ties to the culture and language, but we do not live in a society that genuinely embraces and nurtures multiculturalism. As a young mom, I delved into research and read many articles about the benefits of a bilingual brain, but ultimately the personal and emotional connections to the language and culture were strong and influenced my choices more so than the research and science. There was no doubt in my mind that my children would speak French and embrace the culture. I understand that I had the resources, privilege, and capital to pursue this goal. My values about language and culture and my personal experience affect the way I see my students and how I draw on their experiences, create a learning environment where they are recognized and respected, and advocate for their social, emotional, and academic needs. My interest in the development of bilingualism and biliteracy, and my views on language use and practice in the classroom, spring both from my personal and professional experiences.

Professional Background

As previously stated, I currently teach ELs in an elementary school setting in a mid-size urban district. As of the school year 2018-2019, there are 392 students enrolled in grades PreK-5. Our school offers two programs, a community program and a Hmong dual language program (HDL). I teach and provide language support to our ELs in both programs. Sixty percent of our students are currently identified as ELs. Fifty-seven percent of our student population is Asian. Hmong students make up the majority of our student body. The context in which I teach has done much to shape my teaching philosophy.

As a result of learning about our students and their experiences, we can create a school culture that supports meaningful learning and teaching. According to the Minnesota Historical Society (n.d.), Hmong refugees have been settling in Minnesota since the mid-1970s as a result of the communist takeover of Laos during the Vietnam War. The 2010 census counted over 260,000 Hmong people in the United States. Minnesota's Hmong population, the largest in the US, is estimated at over 66,000, reflecting a 46 percent increase since 2000. Vang (2008) states that community leaders and service organizations disputed these numbers and estimated the number of Hmong Minnesotans living in the state closer to 70,000 at that period. The author also highlights that the Hmong population is diverse despite a common perception that people of Hmong ethnicity are all refugees. Today, the Hmong children attending our school are children and grandchildren of refugees. Most were born in the United States. As second and third generation Hmong-Americans, their experience with the Hmong language and culture is also very diverse.

Language professionals and policymakers have spoken about the value of heritage languages as a resource to the nation. Brecht and Ingold (1998) conclude that heritage speakers attain linguistic and cultural skills that can be very rarely achieved by non-heritage speakers. A report from the University of California (2001) argues that it is urgent to preserve this language resource for the nation, but also individuals, families, and communities. The authors cite cross-cultural understanding, identity, equitable access to social services and social justice as well as cognitive development as benefits to nurturing multilingualism. Rumbaut, Massey, and Bean (2006) demonstrate the rapid loss

of the Spanish language among Mexican immigrants in the United States. They conclude that without strong social structural supports, the chances of sustaining fluent bilingualism in America are slim. The less socially prestigious and dominant languages in a society are also the one most subject to language loss (Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary & Rogers, 2018). I believe it is essential that public opinion shifts to see all heritage languages as assets and that, as a nation, we unequivocally support initiatives that preserve, encourage, and foster languages in the United States. DL programs offer a unique opportunity to promote bilingualism and biliteracy in a monolingual environment. Minnesota was the first state to provide such a program in the Hmong language. It is, therefore, a source of pride and responsibility to ensure that our DL program offers high-quality instruction in both languages within the guidelines that define exemplary dual language programs and practices.

I think it is urgent to shift our perceptions and teaching mindset about our EL population as well. Our students and their families have so much to offer our schools and communities, yet a deficit lens often dominates discussions. As educators, we must speak up and respond to bias, stereotypes, as well as challenge practices that harm our students and their families. As achievement data supports that too many EL students are struggling in schools across the nation, I believe that EL teachers can advocate and collaborate effectively to engage their colleagues into meaningful discussions that can shift this trend. Many reports highlight that mainstream educators are still underprepared to meet the linguistic and academic needs of ELs. The MN LEAPS Act (2014) sets a higher bar for prioritizing ELs' language development and academic needs. LEAPS requires that all

teachers be prepared in English language development and content instruction to effectively instruct the English learners in their classrooms. We need to hold ourselves to high expectations as we implement these requirements at the state, district, and school levels.

Deficit-based theories also impact the teaching and learning of students in low-income schools. The number of students receiving free and reduced lunch is a measure of poverty in the school system since we base its calculation on family income. As an indication, 85 percent of our students currently qualify for the program. Paul Gorsky's work focuses on reaching and teaching students in poverty. He warns against the many myths that surround these children and encourages teachers to stand up against these myths. I remember reading Gorky's work early on and his ideas have helped shape my approach to teaching ever since. Gorsky (2008) addresses the question of standard English in particular. He highlights that there are different ways of speaking English and yet we often perceive these variations as deficient or less sophisticated. Educators can shift their mindset to the notion that language differences do not equate to language deficit to create an environment that is pedagogically responsive to the linguistic and cultural needs of their students while supporting the acquisition of the language of school. Nieto (2008) illustrates that "Nice is not enough" (p.29). She states that to make accommodations for difficult home life, poverty, or language, teachers tend to lower their expectations, a practice which harms students of color more disproportionately. The field of EL is not immune to this culture of "good intentions gone wrong." Zwiers (as cited in Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008) concludes in his study of academic language practices

that teachers are willing to accept insufficient answers in order to reduce the pressure on their EL students. Fisher et al. (2008) call it “the soft bigotry of low expectations” (p. 2). They acknowledge the importance of differentiating for language levels, but state that we should approach academic discourse in our classrooms with the same rigor that we devote to our content. I strongly support that more can and should be done to address inequalities and provide the learning environment that all students deserve to feel successful in school. Our mindset and teaching philosophies impact our perceptions about students and inevitably our school culture and achievement.

Our school has recently adopted the Innocent Classroom model, a teacher training program working to build and strengthen relationships between teachers, students, and community. A core element of Innocent Classroom is the restoration of innocence for students to be free of the negative narratives that hold them back during the time they are in school. It is also based on building relationships and understanding students. There is an underlying commonality between all these theories and models that help teachers learn to build practices that meet the needs of their community.

My language skills have expanded my opportunities both in France and in the U.S. I believe that each child deserves a chance to succeed in school, and that purposeful and rigorous academic language development is critical to unlocking their full potential. This belief is anchored in an asset-based approach to education that values diversity, and provides opportunities to learn in a culturally and linguistically responsive environment that incorporates rigor and high order thinking.

Project Rationale

The responsibility for teaching language does not fall solely on EL teachers. EL teachers are, however, experts in language development practices that can benefit all students. Our experience and understanding of language can shed light on the various language experiences at play in any school setting. I believe that creating an environment that places a strong emphasis on language development and encourages classroom teachers to take on a more significant role in promoting the language development of all learners can better support overall student academic achievement. Advocacy starts with empowering each other to grow as professionals, building relationships with colleagues, collaborating, and sharing resources. This perspective is at the source of this project.

Teachers develop their teaching practices over time through a teacher preparation program, ongoing training, experience, and reflective process. My goal is to design a resource that teachers can use to develop their understanding of quality research-based language development practices as well as the students we serve in order to better address their academic and linguistic needs.

Summary

The guiding question of this project is, *How can a professional development resource help classroom teachers create a language-rich environment that can support the development of academic language for all learners?* In this chapter, I have discussed my personal and professional experiences and teaching beliefs that motivate the creation of this project. In Chapter Two, I will review the literature that supports a deeper understanding of the diverse language experiences co-existing in a targeted school and

present the resources that will form the core foundation of the website. In Chapter Three, I will describe the website project and how it is articulated around the research and resources highlighted in Chapter Two. In Chapter Four, I will reflect on the learning process of creating this project.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

At school, students access the content of any lesson through language. They listen and process the information that they hear or read. They ask questions. They share their thinking and ideas orally or in writing. Teachers have the responsibility to ensure that all students have the language skills to perform these academic tasks effectively. Consequently, educators need to be well aware of the language ability and profile of their students, provide the necessary language scaffolding to build on their students' linguistic repertoire and foster their comprehension and communication skills of more complex ideas. To create a language-rich environment that supports these goals, educators need to develop their own understanding of how academic language impacts learning and implement language development practices that meet the need of their diverse student body. They need to build background knowledge in language development and be current in best language teaching practices.

In this chapter, I will provide background information and research-based theories that support a better understanding of our students and the diverse language experiences co-existing in the targeted school. I will highlight tools and resources that classroom teachers can use to create a language-rich classroom that can support the academic and linguistic growth of all learners. I will frame this discussion in an asset-based approach to

education that focuses on strengths and growth mindset. The guiding question of this project I intend to answer is: *How can a professional development resource help classroom teachers create a language-rich environment that can support the development of academic language for all learners?*

Understanding our Students

To create educational experiences that support meaningful language development, classroom teachers need to develop a solid understanding of their learners and the complex interplay of factors and circumstances that can influence their learning in the classroom.

Asset-based approach to teaching. Teachers know that learning does not happen in isolation and that it is important to focus on building relationships if we want to create an optimal learning environment. The lens through which we teach sets the tone and impacts our students' learning experiences. When educators view and understand the linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds of their learners as assets, they learn to draw from and build upon these experiences to foster engagement and unlock their students' potential.

Flores, Tefft Cousin and Diaz (1991) urge educators to reflect on how they look at students and shift mindsets when it comes to individual perceptions and personal bias. The authors claim that children who come from non-mainstream backgrounds, namely children from historically marginalized or low socioeconomic backgrounds and bilingual or English learners are often labeled at risk early on in their school career. One of the most pervasive myths about 'at risk' students, as described in this research, is that their

language skills are often perceived as inadequate for dealing with the complex use of language required in school. Additionally, teachers tend to blame parents and home life and do not fully value families as partners in the educational experience of their student. The authors highlight the experience of a school that committed to a long-term transformation in beliefs and attitudes about their students and families through staff development, coaching and modeling. The staff's reflection and work initially resulted in feelings of guilt due to previous behaviors and actions, but importantly led to changes in instructional practices that positively impacted the academic achievement and life of their students and interrupted a cycle of debilitating negative narratives.

Hart and Risley (as cited in Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009) discuss language use among children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. They point to differences in vocabulary size in students who come from low socioeconomic status. Dudley-Marling and Lucas (2009) claim that the results of this study have framed this discussion in a negative way. They examine the biases and stereotypes that focus on what students are missing and tend to blame parents in poverty for not providing their children with sufficiently rich language learning environments. The authors also acknowledge research that leads to more transformative questions such as, "What is it about school that manages to transform children who are good at learning…. regardless of their economic and cultural differences, into children who are not good at learning, if they are poor or members of certain minority groups?" and "Instead of getting the child 'ready' for school, how do we get the school 'ready' to serve increasingly diverse children?" (p. 368). They conclude that language plays a crucial role in school success and undeniably

children must learn the language of school to succeed. They state that it is the responsibility of educators to provide access to the language students need to perform in school, and encourage teachers to make space for their students' linguistic and cultural experiences as tools of learning. They also emphasize the importance of teaching "what can be done with language, rather than what cannot" (p. 369). They recognize the need to respect who our students are while providing them with the crucial language experiences that they need to be successful in an academic environment.

Drawing on all substantial research on culturally responsive teaching, Hollie (2018) also acknowledges the importance of recognizing the linguistic and social resources our students bring to school and draw on these resources to support learning and more specifically the language practices valued in school. He adopts the term *cultural and linguistic responsiveness* (CLR) and defines it as the "validation and affirmation of [home] culture and language for the purpose of building and bridging the students to success in the culture of academia and in mainstream society" (p. 27). He adds that CLR most benefits underserved students, whom he defines as students who are "stuck in a situation where the institution is failing them, so…. they simply check out emotionally and mentally" (p. 46). We often expeditiously label these students underperforming or underachieving.

Gloria Ladson-Billings is also known for her extensive work in culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) looks for patterns in teachers who are successful with typically underserved students, more specifically with African American students. She expresses frustrations over the hardship of identifying a thread in the teaching practices

of the teachers she has observed. She ultimately determines that these overlapping qualities go beyond the surface of teaching strategies. They involve how educators identify with teaching, their beliefs about success, their sense of responsibility, and their connections with students and the community. She provides examples on how these teachers include their students' culture and language as a vehicle for learning, welcome parents into their learning community, and question curriculum, material, and status quo in and outside their school building.

Zwiers (2011) reminds us that dominant groups strongly influence what is valued in society, such as academic language and literacy practices. He reiterates that we need to create learning spaces where students' cultural and linguistic capitals are valued. He urges teachers to help students expand on their linguistic repertoire to get them ready for school and eventually work, and also remarks that teachers should be willing to push back on society's dominant perspective.

As this research points out, respect is at the core of building a strong school community, and it includes taking into account what our students know, their background, experiences, who they are and where they come from while keeping high expectations for learning and developing students' understanding of the language of school. Educators must commit to reflect on their practices and beliefs, challenge the status quo, and improve their understanding of language learning and knowledge construction to transform education. Stenhouse points out (as cited in Flores et al., 1991) that " It is teachers, who in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it" (p. 377). In the field of English Language Learning and Dual Language (DL)

education, this core understanding is also prevalent. To best support ELs and bilingual learners, educators must also have a clear understanding of their students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and a knowledge of second language acquisition theories that more specifically define their instructional needs.

Teaching English language learners. In a report published by the Minnesota Department of Education (2018), MDE iterates its commitment to WIDA. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) joined the WIDA Consortium in 2011. WIDA (formerly known as World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) provides language development resources, standards, and assessments to support the academic success of multilingual learners. By joining the consortium, MDE embraces the WIDA guiding principles and the asset-based "can-do" philosophy of English learner education. WIDA's can-do philosophy (WIDA, 2014) highlights that linguistically and culturally diverse learners bring a unique set of assets that have the potential to enrich the experiences of all learners and educators such as diverse strategies for language learning, different perspectives and ways of thinking, and diverse approaches to learning and expressing content knowledge. In the WIDA framework, teachers are empowered to collaborate to promote effective strategies and grow their students' potential. Administrators, families, and communities are also empowered to advocate, learn from each other and create "a vision, time, and space for meaningful collaboration in support of language development and academic achievement of language learners"(p. 2).

Theories of second language acquisition enable us to develop a deeper understanding of language use in school and how to better support the needs of bilingual,

multilingual, and EL students. These foundational theories also inform WIDA's core beliefs and philosophy and are described in the Guiding Principles of Language Development (WIDA, 2010), a key document for teachers of multilingual students. WIDA highlights the importance of learning and teaching language through content and meaningful interactions. Because language operates throughout the curriculum, WIDA supports that it should be taught in conjunction with the content to allow students to complete tasks and make meaning. Students' development of academic language and academic content are presented as interrelated processes.

Language acquisition research also highlights the interdependence of the home language and the language taught at school (referred to as L1 and L2). In other words, languages interact and influence each other. WIDA (2010) points out that students' academic language development in their native language facilitates their academic language development in English, and conversely their academic language development in English informs their academic language development in their native language. It is important to encourage language development in the home language as strong language skills will positively influence the learning of English at school. Parents often ask how they can help when they do not speak English fluently. Reading, talking, learning in the home language benefit and support learning at school even when learning occurs in English.

WIDA (2010) acknowledges that students draw on their metacognitive, metalinguistic, and metacultural awareness to develop proficiency in additional languages. They note the contribution that the home language and culture have on the

English language development. Implications for teachers include meaningful activities that foster the home–school connections. Cummins (1981) also demonstrates that a multilingual child can rely on the conceptual learning learned in any language to make sense of the same concept in another language. This theory is known as the common underlying proficiency (CUP) theory. It states that when a child understands a certain concept in her native language, she will transfer that concept while learning the labels, or words to express that same concept in a different language, dispelling further the myth that students are empty vessels. Teachers can assess background knowledge to identify if the instructional needs are content and/or language related.

Second language acquisition research also raises questions on how schools support the learning in the first language and/or through the first language. In general education, this language theory impacts discussions on the value of using the home language in the classroom to access content. In the dual language context, there are also discussions on maintaining or not a separate space for each language and more recently how to teach for transfer. Beeman and Urow (2012) introduce the concept of the "Bridge" as "the instructional moment when teachers bring the two languages together" (p. 4). Most programs allocate time taught in a particular language in a very structured way. The main concern is often the equal representation of language in the classroom. Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) support more fluid language practices and identify the term "translanguaging" to more accurately represent how one language system operates intrinsically with the other. Bilinguals, they claim, use their entire linguistic repertoire when communicating and embrace more flexible language practices that they might be

allowed to use at school, even when bilingualism is perceived as the norm. Translanguaging is without a doubt a benefit of being bilingual, or multilingual. Questions remain about how to create a more holistic, authentic way of using both languages in the classroom. How can educators integrate these practices into their bilingual classroom and move beyond language separation, especially if it is the model followed in their school? How can they create flexible language spaces within that model? How do they validate who students truly are as bilingual, multilingual learners and embrace the amazing abilities of the bilingual, multilingual mind? A better understanding of language development can allow educators to be more strategic and purposeful in activating their students' full language potential.

Zwiers, O'Hara, and Pritchard (2014) emphasize the idea that ELs need to be exposed to grade level content and language complexity. They criticize the tendency to "water down" complex language and thinking to provide an easy access to content at the risk of seeing EL students fall behind their peers. Cummins (1996) looks at the difficulty of tasks students are asked to perform in school and arranges these tasks along one continuum from cognitively undemanding to cognitively demanding and another continuum from context-embedded to context-reduced known as the Cummin's Matrix or Quadrant. This is a helpful framework to help teachers analyze the types of tasks and activities that they expose their students to and ensure that they progress towards the most cognitively demanding part of the quadrant. WIDA (2012) provides examples of instructional supports to scaffold language development and make content more understandable and accessible to students. Examples include manipulatives, working with

a partner, and using visuals (Appendix A). Zwiers et al. (2014) highlight the importance of meaningful language planning and intentional modeling to engage students into higher-level thinking tasks while acknowledging that too much support, overdifferation or overemphasis on language explanation could be detrimental to students who need to construct and negotiate meaning of grade-level material and content and become independent learners. The authors state that it is important to build students' independence, vary linguistic supports and eventually take them away so that students build their abilities to use academic language on their own and advance. The same graphic organizer or sentence starters should not be used or posted on the wall all year. WIDA (2012) supports that students' access to instructional tasks requiring complex thinking is enhanced when linguistic complexity and instructional support match their levels of language proficiency.

Providing ELs with quality instructional practices and understanding how they learn support a more culturally and linguistically responsive approach to serving them. Dual language programs also hold that promise of a more equitable environment for culturally and linguistically diverse students if solidly implemented and supported by all stakeholders. Understanding the guiding principles of DL instruction also contributes to creating an environment where the linguistic and cultural experiences of students are valued, nurtured and built upon.

Dual language education. Howard et al. (2018) define dual language as "any program that provides literacy and content instruction to all students through two languages and that promotes bilingualism and biliteracy, grade-level academic

achievement, and sociocultural competence—a term encompassing identity development, cross-cultural competence, and multicultural appreciation—for all students" (p.12). They state that dual language programs should align their curriculum with the vision and goals of bilingualism, biliteracy, and multiculturalism, integrate language instruction and reflect and value the students' culture.

This review of effective practices in dual language immersion aligns with considerations in the field of heritage language development emphasizing a learning environment that value the students' native language and culture, a strong connection with the community, parental input supported by a well-trained staff that understand the sociolinguistic issues faced by heritage language learners (Brinton, Kagan & Bauckus, 2008). Valdés (2001) defines an heritage language speaker as "someone who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken and who speaks or at least understands the language and is to some degree bilingual in the home language and in English" (p. 3). Though their language proficiency might vary, Valdés acknowledges that these learners have linguistic abilities in both languages. In the process, she broadens the definition of bilinguals and questions the conception of the perfect bilingual speaker who can demonstrate proficiency in both languages at the level of an educated native speaker. Second or third generation students attending American schools do not necessarily speak or understand the native language their parents or grandparents grew up speaking, or might speak a more informal, casual variation of the language that they use only in social settings. They are as such learners of the language, and the language instruction that they receive in a school setting needs to take into account their particular linguistic experience

while acknowledging their cultural and personal connections to that language. Carreira and Hitchins Chik (2018) describe the complex dimensions of a heritage speaker. They show that all heritage speakers are learners, yet not all learners are speakers of the target language and state that, "[t]heir identity as members of the target language community should never be doubted just because they don't speak the language" (p. 27). In the context of teaching, educators can build on the skills these students bring to the classroom. For example, educators can use strengths in listening skills to scaffold and build reading and speaking skills. I support a definition of heritage language learners that includes their complex experience as language learners. An effective teacher should recognize how these factors affect their students' learning and adapt their instruction to meet their needs.

As we develop a better understanding of our students and their needs, we also need to think about the linguistic demands made upon them while in school and have a clear vision that we are working to build academic language competence, or the language of text, academic discussions and writing.

Understanding Language

Van Lier and Walqui (2010) assert that "language is part and parcel of every human endeavor, whether everyday and practical, or academic and scholarly" (p.5). As educators, we need to address the language demands of school and build our understanding of the research that defines the development of the academic language skills that students need to be successful in an educational setting no matter what the language of instruction is.

Academic language. Cummins popularized the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in the context of English language learning of immigrant students. He describes the two terms as such: “BICS refers to the conversational fluency in a language while CALP refers to student’s ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school" (Cummins, 2008, p. 3). He also establishes that language learners tend to develop conversational skills in another language typically within two years. However, acquiring academic language skills in a second language might take between five and seven years. More recently, distinguished linguist, Lily Wong Fillmore stated that consistent attention to language could reduce this timeframe and accelerate language development (Urrutia, Elliott, Fillmore & Calderón, 2013). There are implications for teachers. Cummins (2008) revealed critical gaps in academic language instruction. Students who have acquired social skills in English need language development to access academic language or the language of school and purposeful language planning and instruction impact the language experience and achievement of students and accelerate acquisition. Other ideas and research have emerged about academic language development since Cummins developed the BICS and CALPS theory.

Van Lier and Walqui (2010) aim to increase educator awareness of the vital role that language plays in the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). They highlight that CCSS encompass cognitively and linguistically complex skills. They iterate that CCSS provide us with an opportunity to recast our approach to language development

and provide scaffolding to allow students to learn and practice academic language in the broader context of creating meaning and developing content understanding. According to the authors, teachers need to develop a new awareness of language as embodied in the context to carry on actions, rather than perceiving language learning as a separate, autonomous system. However, they also acknowledge that it has been difficult to create a more consistent focus on language across the curriculum and that more effort and research are needed to develop this opportunity to integrate language, cognition, and action effectively. Their work focuses on the specific needs of ELs but takes into account that this approach benefits everyone and that developing academic language is imperative for all students.

Zwiers et al. (2014) also highlight the role that academic language plays in meeting the new standards. The authors focus their work on developing language at the discourse level and fortifying complex output, or students' ability to speak and write more complex ideas in a coherent and connected way to create a learning culture where students are valued as thinkers and engage in meaningful and realistic tasks to prepare them for college, careers and life. They provide research-based theories and essential practices for teachers to develop what they identify as "pedagogical language knowledge" (p. 12), or a better understanding of complex language demands and features and strategic use of essential language development practices. They call for a shift of practices that apply to the teaching of all students, but highlight a need for deeper instructional shifts that are necessary for "academic language learners" (AELs) who struggle most specifically with school's language and literacy demands.

Dutro and Moran (2003), are among the many researchers who call for a more rigorous approach to academic language development, which they claim is necessary to develop the language competency to the level required for college admission, job interviews, and achieve long-term success in school. The authors present a framework with three components that they deem essential to rigorous language instruction and describe the teacher as the "architect" (p. 231) of this framework who, as such, must understand the features of quality language instruction. According to the authors, to create a solid language foundation, instruction should include a systematic attention to the development of language and front-loading of vocabulary, forms and structures that make up the language. Teachers should also take advantages of any opportunities that present themselves throughout the day to expand and develop language skills. Teachers must anticipate the linguistic demands of the task at hand, or function, the language forms needed to perform this task, and opportunities for practice, or fluency. Examples of functions needed in school include relating information, summarizing, explaining cause and effect, justifying, or drawing conclusions, described by the authors as "the cognitive tasks that connect thoughts and language" (p. 233). They remind us that students should be supported to demonstrate these functions at different levels of language proficiency in order to fully participate in content instruction.

The Academic features of language (WIDA, 2012) presented in Appendix B help visualize how language operates beyond the word level view to include sentence and discourse levels. These individual facets of the language are weaved together to create meaningful communication. Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit (2014) reiterate that academic

language or academic English is a register, that is, a variety of a language used for a specific purpose and audience in a particular context. Students must learn the specificity of that language and its features across different language domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and content areas (language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies/history, among others). The authors claim that "being a competent user of academic language means knowing what to say, when to say it, and how to say it within the different oral and written disciplinary contexts" (p.5). In this paper, the words I use make up sentences that shape the arguments that build this particular piece of academic writing. Specialized words, a certain level of sentence complexity, degree of formality, and format are expected of me as I am writing for a specific purpose and audience in the context of an academic degree. Writing units in schools are also created around particular tasks such as developing a personal narrative, writing a realistic fiction story, a book review, a research report, or poetry. Each piece of writing has its own sets of conventions that students have to acquire. The features of language overlap with each other and represent different levels of complexity, sophistication, and accuracy that best fit the purpose and quality of the work expected of our students. These skills build upon each other, and are also developmental in nature. Teachers do not expect a kindergarten student to write the same kind of stories that 5th graders might write. Tasks increase in complexity with each grade level. Teachers need to be aware of the language components needed to accomplish these tasks and provide ample opportunities to practice, revisit and expand upon so students can develop increasingly more complex communication skills.

This body of research highlights the complexity of teaching language with the

overall goal of improving the academic communication skills of our students. Dutro and Moran (2003) state that most teachers do not possess the linguistic knowledge to effectively support language development in the classroom and must acquire the skills to implement a well-designed approach to language instruction. Differentiating for language proficiency and ability is a skill teachers need to develop as well.

Language proficiencies. For ELs and bilingual students, academic language has an additional developmental dimension, increasing from one language proficiency level to the next. The field of second language acquisition offers resources for defining and assessing learning progress and outcomes in language development. Both WIDA and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) have identified language proficiency levels for English and Foreign Language Learners. There are six WIDA levels (WIDA, 2012) used to determine an overall proficiency level and ability across the four language modalities-listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These levels impact EL eligibility and exit criteria from EL services in so-called WIDA states (states that have adopted the WIDA standards). WIDA Levels also inform instruction and service frequency. Teachers of foreign languages or DL teachers are most familiar with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2012) which establish language proficiency levels ranging from beginner to proficient. The ACTFL levels have been used to create language assessments for bilingual and multilingual seals, which aim to identify the language proficiency of both foreign language learners and heritage language learners as defined by LEAPS, 2014. Both proficiency standards include the four modalities of language — speaking, writing (also known as productive skills), listening and reading

(receptive skills). Classroom teachers can use the performance descriptors for each described level as a resource to inform teaching, differentiate and develop their learners' language competency.

Standardized testing provides us with some information but in order to plan for daily instruction and build stronger learners' profiles, educators need to use additional assessment methods to gather valuable language information and develop engaging and enduring learning of both language and content. Zwiers (2011) reminds that we must come up with a wide range of ways to observe learning and language use in the classroom to gain insight into the language and thinking of our students and help them bridge their thinking and learning outside and inside the classroom. We must take a close look at what is happening in our classrooms when students are talking, writing, reading, and thinking about content.

Developing best practices, strategies and tools to design instruction, model, assess and guide academic language development is at the core of creating a language-rich environment that benefit the linguistic growth of all students.

Language Development Strategies

As educators, we have the responsibility to create a welcoming culture conducive to long-term learning and ensure that our students acquire the skills that they need in all subject areas. The purpose of this section is to identify a set of essential practices to address the needs of our learners and accelerate their academic language growth. One essential practice is to plan meaningfully to integrate language and content instruction to foster both academic and linguistic growth.

Planning for language. As educators, we need to ask ourselves what academic language our students need in order to access specific content and what language features we can scaffold for our students to be able to understand, discuss or write about the material presented. We can consider different research that provide ways to strategically design lessons with clear language objectives.

Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit (2014) provide a rigorous framework to help teachers attend to language development. They not only highlight the role of language in learning and its connection with content, but also offer practical ideas to teach content in language-rich classrooms. Though they pay special attention to linguistically and culturally diverse students, the framework is intended for use with all students. They highlight that students are the starting point and central focus for curricular planning and educational decision making. They list questions that educators should ask themselves while planning for a unit or lesson. Such questions include:

- What is the overall content expectation for the unit?
- How is academic language represented in the standards?
- To what extent are language expectations differentiated by the students' levels of language proficiency?
- How can we ensure that all students are exposed to and have opportunities to interact with grade-level language?

They reinforce the understanding that language objectives support the linguistic development of students and that differentiated language objectives more specifically provide ELs the means for accessing and achieving grade-level content for their given

level of language proficiency. In this framework, language and content teachers are working together for the benefit of all students.

Ward Singer and Kinsella (2011) also provide linguistic scaffolds for writing language objectives. This framework includes:

- Stems from the linguistic demands of a standards-based lesson task
- Focuses on high-leverage language that will serve students in other contexts
- Uses active verbs to name functions/purposes for using language in a specific student task
- Specifies target language necessary to complete the task
- Emphasizes development of expressive language skills, speaking and writing, without neglecting listening and reading.

A sample language objective following this framework is as follows: I can articulate the main idea and details using target vocabulary: topic, main idea, detail.

Tomlinson points us (as cited in Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014) that differentiation allows for fit and success for today's diverse learners. Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit add that differentiated language objectives provide ELs the means for accessing and achieving grade-level content for their given levels of language proficiency

Zwiers et al. (2014) warns against "overstuffing" a lesson with language activities, which could end up reducing the level of student engagement. According to the authors, teachers need to find the right balance between too little emphasis on language development and upping the amount and quality of linguistic support to ensure depth and

clarity of communication in performing the task at hand. As they emphasize, “yes rocket scientists have it easy” (p. 19).

Enriching quality and quantity of talk. Another way of promoting language development is to strengthen oral language and understand its connection to literacy. The Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence and the National Literacy Panel (as cited in Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2013) have both demonstrated that oral proficiency in English contributes to English literacy development. Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit (2013) conclude that teachers must intentionally build in instructional time for pair and small group work, so that students can collaborate, interact with each other, and engage in academic conversations in English and their home languages. Zwiers and Crawford (as cited in Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2013) support that academic conversations not only fortify oral language and communication skills, but these language exchanges tend to build vocabulary, academic language, and literacy, all the while fostering critical thinking and content understanding.

Fisher et al. (2008) also support that more time should be given to talking in the classroom. They define talking as meaningful interactions that have an academic purpose and support learning. They acknowledge that more often than not, teachers counter-intuitively do the most talking in the class. They provide rubrics and sample questions to allow teachers to reflect on their lessons and learn to incorporate more talking opportunities. They encourage teachers to explicitly teach students why talk is important, how it contributes to learning, and the procedures and routine for productive talk. They add that teacher questions can either stimulate or inhibit student talk.

Questions that have right/wrong answers or yes/no answers do not lend themselves to discussions. Consequently thoughtful planning of key questions to ask during a lesson can ensure the discussion is elevated to the level of meaningful academic discourse.

As educators, we must consider how we plan and guide students in their ability to communicate with different interlocutors about a variety of academic topics. If our goal is to increase the quality and quantity of language output, we must think about the language we want our students to produce and support their ability to communicate their ideas clearly into words, sentences, and longer discourse.

Developing vocabulary. Research shows that attention to vocabulary development is needed for students to be successful academically and communicatively. Dutro and Moran (2003) state that knowledge of word usage and a rich and varied vocabulary are critical aspects of language proficiency and essential to academic success. There are many strategies that teachers can use to develop vocabulary in their classrooms and ensure that students practice their newly learned words. However, there needs to be a common understanding of the elements that define quality vocabulary instruction.

Blachowicz and Fisher (as cited in Fisher & Frey, 2008) cite identify four principles of effective vocabulary instruction. According to the authors, students should:

- Be active in developing their understanding of words and ways to learn them.
- Personalize word learning
- Be immersed in words
- Build on multiple sources of information to learn words through repeated exposure (p.504).

Hollie (2018) state that "The ultimate goal in culturally responsive vocabulary instruction is to lead students to the dimension of availability-the level at which students own the word" (p.124-125). In order to attain an understanding of vocabulary that can truly impact students' achievement, Flynt and Brozo (2008) recommend that teachers be highly selective about the words they chose to teach, so they can be tools for meaningful communication in the classroom, and provide direct instruction in how to infer word meaning in an authentic context. They reiterate the importance of providing students with multiple encounters with words and add that students should hear, write, read and say the words, that is practice them in the context of all language modalities.

Dutro and Moran (2003) illustrate the importance of addressing what they call the " brick and mortar" vocabulary, words that are specific to content and words that are required for constructing sentences. Examples of "brick" words we teach in school include words such as government, metaphor, habitat, and climate. "Mortar" words hold the language together and include words like because, therefore, is and however. The authors also include general academic vocabulary such as notice, think, plan and compare in this category. With high language demands in a given lesson, intentional modeling is an effective practice to implement when exposing students to new and complex language and ensure that they produce higher quality output.

Providing modeling. Modeling is one way educators can effectively expose their students to new concepts and language. Most teachers are familiar with The *I Do WE Do YOU Do* model. This model allows teachers to gradually release responsibility and prepare students for independent work. In the *I Do* phase, the teacher provides direct

instruction and establishes a clear purpose for the lesson. *We Do* is done collaboratively with the teacher. *You Do* allows students to practice targeted skills by themselves. Fisher and Frey (2013) add another phase to the model, *You Do Together*, to give students an opportunity to work collaboratively before they attempt the task alone. They support this phase with research that highlights the effectiveness of peer collaboration in the learning process. They add that this peer collaboration phase is a great time for students to engage in accountable talk, a framework originally developed by Lauren Resnick, to teach students techniques and sentence frames to deepen conversations and encourage interactions. Teachers who ask students to complete tasks without providing them with time to model and practice collaboratively are not providing the necessary scaffold to optimize learning. Educators often witness discouragement, anxiety and various disruptive behaviors when students perceive the work to be too hard for them to do. Exemplar language performances are powerful ways to explicitly communicate levels of expectation and provide multiple exposures to language and content while building a supportive and collaborative classroom environment. Showing students what they are expected to do is an effective scaffolding technique.

Fisher and Frey (2013) establish that modeling is not simply showing, but also explaining to students what they are expected to do, how to do it, and how to assess if they have completed the task successfully. They frame this understanding in the idea that students need opportunities to see how tasks are being executed and how their teachers are processing the information too. Thinking aloud is an instructional move that allows teachers to explicitly show their students how they engage with complex ideas and tasks.

According to the authors, it also engages students in their own learning process and supports them when they need to express their own thinking in words. Hollie (2008) adds that we can also use this process to increase a student's ability and awareness to recognize the differences between the language of home and the language of school in a culturally responsive classroom.

Zwiers et al. (2014) add that modeling might come from observing our students' use of language and that we must model what students need to push their knowledge and skills further. The authors state that interactions and communication at the message or discourse level needs the most modeling of all and add that modeling needs to be thorough and consistent for students not only to gain access but have ownership of the language. We must hold ourselves and our students to higher standards when it comes to language development and use in the classroom to achieve greater academic success.

Setting rigorous expectations. As educators, we are professionals dedicated to continuous improvement of our craft. Our expertise and interactions with students contribute to how effective we are in working in diverse classrooms. As language is the medium through which content knowledge is constructed, we should plan content and language objectives to promote learning. Gottlieb and Ernst-Slavit (2014) remind us that when teachers collaborate with the goals of setting and meeting high academic expectations, students benefit. They add that teachers' reflection should entail examining evidence for learning, sharing what they discover with students and team members, and making instructional adjustments based on that information. Wong Fillmore and Snow state that (as cited in Dutro & Moran, 2014) learning the range of academic skills should

not be “left to chance encounters” (p. 231) but needs to be taught systematically and explicitly through various content areas. Zwiers et al. (2014) compare teachers to “coaches” (p. 56) who provides specific feedback to their players. As coaches do, we must increase our feedback and support when students struggle to use a skill and reduce our guidance when they are applying and learning.

Both students and teachers need to be held accountable for their language use and practices. Zwiers et al. (2014) claim that it is tempting for both learners and teachers to default to basic, non-complex language, but we should make the language visible and usable and remember to prompt for its use. They encourage teachers to have students themselves prompt their partners to use the language they are learning. Marzano states (as cited in Dutro & Moran, 2014) that feedback is “one of the most powerful techniques a teacher can employ” (p. 245). Dutro and Moran (2014) add that teachers have the responsibility to provide students with clear goals and explicit feedback so they can improve their performance and internalize correct language usage.

In the process of identifying effective practices to develop language in the classroom, we are reminded that best content teaching strategies and practices are also powerful tools to develop the linguistic skills of our students.

Summary

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature that can support a better understanding of our learners and the process of language development required for students to engage in an academic context. An asset-based approach to education and research-based views of language use and development in the context of school are the two pillars of this

project. There are many frameworks, models, and theories that guide the learning and teaching of academic language. Guiding the learning and teaching of language in a diverse environment can be overwhelming for teachers who have no language teaching experience or relevant training. I have highlighted how important it is for teachers to develop their own linguistic knowledge and understanding of how to support the linguistic skills of their learners. As a result I established that our students need a safe, welcoming environment that encourages learning and places an emphasis on language growth, clear language goals, and opportunities for practice and feedback. I also provided tools and resources that can help teachers plan more meaningfully and intentionally for language development and create a language-rich environment for their learners. I have brought up the idea that EL teachers have the expertise to engage teachers in language discussions that can impact instruction and achievement in schools, and support language awareness and understanding in their school building. In Chapter Three, I will describe how a website can centralize the resources and tools that teachers can use to develop their knowledge and expend language use at school while grounding their work in best practices and allow me to share with my peers the expertise gained both in my career and in the course of this research.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The central question of this project is, *How can a professional development resource help classroom teachers create a language-rich environment that can support the development of academic language for all learners?* My goal is to create a website that can provide resources and tools to develop academic language use in school and create a language-rich environment for all students. This website is specifically aimed to support classroom teachers in the specific context of our school environment as it has been previously defined.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the website and explain the framework of web-design that informed its content and layout. I also state my rationale for choosing a website and describe its intended audience. Finally, I provide a detailed description of this project.

Project Overview

Teaching the teachers. In a summary of relevant research by Gulamhusseim, The Center for Public Education (2013) points out that ninety percent of teachers receive professional development through a workshop model despite limited proven effects on practices and achievement. One reason mentioned for this ineffectiveness is the lack of support during the implementation stage. If the goal is for teachers to hone a new skill,

they found that it is crucial to build a significant amount of support during the implementation phase which can be frustrating for teachers. They also highlight that effective professional learning communities (PLCs) can provide the support teachers need to grow and develop in the practice that they need to help the students in front of them. Meaningful learning experiences for teachers that can improve practice can include readings, role-playing techniques, discussions, live modeling, and visits to classrooms to observe and discuss the teaching methodology.

Hamline University's School of Education in Minnesota was awarded a grant from the United States Department of Education in 2016 to address the needs of English learners through intentional training of mainstream classroom teachers. The ELM Project has two strategic branches: pre-service and in-service. The in-service branch provides trainings and tools for EL teachers (ELM coaches) to observe and coach their mainstream teacher colleagues. EL teachers coach in and out of the classroom and offer PDs in their schools. This program supports the LEAPS Act (2014) and ensures that mainstream teachers and administrators receive continued professional development to support multilingual learners. Based on research, this is a practical approach to change teacher practice and impact achievement. It supports the notion that schools can successfully tap into the experts in their building to differentiate learning for the specific needs of their teaching staff.

Website goal. In the process of joining ELM and researching for this project, I have developed a new understanding of how to work with teachers in a coaching role, but I have also developed more expertise in language development strategies aligned with our

school needs. A website can effectively contribute to share that expertise by centralizing the information and providing a space to co-construct and support teachers' learning in the area of academic language development. The website presents the theory that is at the core of this project and focuses on sharing essential language practices and strategies that teachers can use in their classroom to expose their students to a language-rich environment that support their linguistic and academic growth. This is a reference tool that will be used during professional development (PDs) and individualized coaching sessions. It can also be used for self-directed learning. Its framework, organization, and content support the core values, beliefs and foundational research exposed in Chapter 2.

Framework

User experience. I am a novice website designer. Designing a website can be quite complex and daunting. Based on accessibility, quality of templates, and cost, I have chosen Wix as a website development platform. The Wix website builder offers a simplified way to build a website. In addition, Wix offers tips and sends informational emails to support the creation of a professional and functional tool. It does not require any specific skills to build a website with Wix. However, there is still much to think about when creating a website outside of the technical skills that web development requires. One recurring element in the literature is the user experience, or how the user interacts with the content. Understanding who the user is and how he or she will use your site allows the opportunity to design a platform that can be more functional, intuitive, and meets the needs of the targeted audience.

Krug (2014) provides a common sense approach to web usability, a how-to that is

very accessible to the non-expert. His approach is based on the simple concept that websites must require minimum thinking from the user as most users tend to scan, or skim content. Therefore, in order to optimize website usability, one needs to keep its design simple and self-explanatory. If we are faced with the fact that website users rush through content, we need to ensure that we adapt our design to this reality and allow our users to quickly assess what the website has to offer and avoid providing too many choices in an overcrowded and busy format.

The home page is where the user experience starts. The navigation bar is at the top level of the site and clearly identifies links to the main sections. Following standardized conventions, such as where and how web sections, logos... can be found, provides consistency and ensures that users do not get lost and end up giving up looking for what they need. Though the main page reveals content and tells where the various sections are - Krug (2014) calls it “the North Star”(p.62) - it is important to give the lower level navigation the same level of attention. It should be clear to users where they are at all times, what their options are at each level, and make sure they can backtrack in their research at any time. Conventions, organization, and consistency drive the creation of websites according to Krug, and can improve its navigability.

Layout considerations. I have been mostly concerned with how to efficiently and thoughtfully share a significant amount of content in the subpages linked to the home page. It is important that these pages flow visually and yet provide all the necessary information that the site aims to deliver. A good layout avoids frustrations and determine the time users will stay on the site and how much they will interact with its content. Wix

offers template and designing tools that allow the distribution of elegant texts and other materials in an organized and simplified manner to ensure alignment and consistency, giving a clean and more professional look to the site.

Other considerations. I realize that consideration of best practices in website design goes beyond user experience. Many of these considerations, relayed by Krug (2014), bring about concepts of accessibility, branding, trackability, integrating social media platforms, traffic… These practices do not apply to the goal of this project which remains non-commercial and does not aim at attracting users outside of a small audience that will benefit from this site in particular environments such as workshops, meetings, and professional development settings. There is a need for engagement, but no need for persuasive or traffic enhancement techniques.

Content. This website includes 4 main sections available from the *Home Page* (called level 1). The navigation bar also provides access to a *Resource Page* and *Project Rationale* (similar in purpose to an About Page). The 4 main sections, or topics are: *Academic Language*, *Creating a Language-Rich Classroom, Dual Language Learners*, and *English Language Learners*. These sections are also accessible from the drop-down list in the navigation bar. Each of these sections is identified with a symbol, a blurb, and a link to *Read More* (level 2). The *Read More* links open the third level of information which I call the subtopic pages (level 3). The subtopic pages follow the same layout for consistency and are linked to more specific content and information (level 4). A visual map of the site is presented in Appendix C.

Based on conclusions drawn from the research highlighted in Chapter 2, I chose to focus on the specifics of academic language as the language of school. In this section, teachers can find information, strategies and tools to impact students' development of academic language. In *Creating a Language-Rich Classroom,* teachers can identify essential research and practices to support students' use of academic language and build capacity within their community of learners. These two sections present both research and practical tools in two very distinct areas separated with headings titled *What does the research say?* and *What does it look like?*. These two areas are essential if the site is to be used for training and learning. Teachers need to be build both background knowledge and be exposed to examples and practical tools they can reflect upon and implement. The headings allow for the user to scan the page more easily. A 'thought-starter' in a form of a question is also placed at the top of each content page to engage the user with the information presented. As I thought about increasing engagement, I also added some 'Pause to Ponder' and 'Try it out!' elements to subpages with some reflective questions teachers can ask themselves to interact with the content provided and look at practical ways to implement in their classroom. The main goal is to be informative, but remaining engaging and useful for busy teachers who are looking to improve their practices. *Dual Language Learners*, and *English Language Learners* are two sections that present foundational knowledge that teachers must acquire to address the specific needs of these learners in the context of developing academic language.

Creating a sitemap allowed me to determine the overall architecture of the site and take into consideration how the information I had gathered would need to be

organized and how visitors would navigate their way from one page to the other. It is also a way to gain perspective on the user experience as they click through the different options.

We can evaluate a potential experience one user might have with this site to ensure that the path they take remains clear and concise. If a teacher wants to know more about EL students, he/she will click on the *English Learners* button formatted to be easily recognized as "clickable" by website conventions and available on the home page. Our user will be then taken to another layer of our website where he/she will receive more in-depth information about English Language Learners to support a more comprehensive understanding of ELs. The navigation bar at the top allows this user to go back to the home page or click on any other pages available on the site. If he/she remains on the *English Language Learners* page, he/she can choose from four different options. One of these options is *Strategies to Support ELs.* If that option is what he/she is looking for, the user can click on *Read More* to get more in-depth information about the research and tools he/she can draw from and use to support language learners in the mainstream classroom. In a few clicks, our user has found useful information on how to improve the learning experience of the EL students he/she is working with. The information provided offers insight into the theory as well as practical tools and strategies. On the same page, the user is reminded that ELM coaching is available onsite to support implementation of these strategies. He/she can reflect on the support and strategies that he/she currently uses and further learning that might be needed. Links offer cross-connections between different areas of the website to allow access to a topic from different sections of the site.

Project description

Choice of method. My goal is to create a tool that can assist and engage classroom teachers to support more effectively academic language development in their classrooms and develop tools and resources to support language growth and create a language-rich environment for their learners. To do so, I needed a platform where I could post articles, research, videos, graphics... that could easily be accessible by all and grow over time. The website format meets this goal. It is flexible, can hold all the information in one place, and has the potential to grow as information can be added to support future needs.

Audience. The primary audience for this site is classroom teachers in a specific school building. The site audience is limited in number. Yet it is a public site and a link will be added to our school website to allow potential interested parties to visit and interact with the information provided. In developing this website for this specific audience, I thought about how they could be engaged in meaningful discussions about language development in our school while acknowledging the needs and concerns that arise from the context in which we teach. I also took into account platforms that were available to me to promote this website and encourage its use for professional development.

Timeline. I am scheduled to introduce the site to our teachers during a PD scheduled during the month of May. I shared the website with our building coaches, mainstream and dual language, as well as EL TOSAs (Teachers on Special Assignment) at the district level to get their input before the site is up and running and ensure

alignment with district initiatives. My short-term goal is to use the information provided as a foundation to support currently planned EL PDs, EL PD planning for the school year 2019-2020 and goal setting discussions with the school leadership team. Long-term goals include a thorough presentation of the website to our team on opening week, and making the site more operational for academic language development modeling as it relates more specifically to defined content areas such as the language of math, the language of social studies or science for the school year 2019-2020. I also hope to be able to gather more data and examples of academic language development from classroom teachers in my building with the purpose of sharing them on the website to promote language data-based discussions and increase engagement during PDs. This is a long-term goal that I would like to explore starting next year to improve on the quality and potential of the project.

Summary

Chapter Three provided a description of the basic principles of website designing that impacted the creation of this project. The organization of the site remained a constant concern during the course of this project. Creating a site map and using the features offered by Wix helped create the main layout of the website. In this chapter, I also reiterated the goal of the website, its intended purpose, and audience. Having a clear purpose in mind and knowing who the intended audience was helped shape the site in a way that supported that purpose. In Chapter Four, I will reflect on the process of creating this tool for our school community and the learning that ensued.

CHAPTER FOUR

REFLECTION

The central question of this project is, *How can a professional development resource help classroom teachers create a language-rich environment that can support the development of academic language for all learners?* My ultimate goal was to create a website for the general education teachers in my school building so that they could easily find tools and resources to help create a language-rich environment that supports the linguistic and academic growth of our students.

In Chapter One: Introduction, I provided the rationale and context that led me to this research question. Through my personal and professional experiences, I developed the understanding that there are many layers to creating a language-rich environment for children and that in school, language is key to student achievement and engagement.

In Chapter Two: Literature Review, I examined and presented the research that highlighted the importance of exposing students from different backgrounds to high-quality language in a deliberate and purposeful way and provided research-based tools and strategies for implementation. In the course of the research, I became more aware of the importance of framing this discussion within a strength-based approach to teaching and learning to build on student's strengths and cultural and linguistic backgrounds to create the best language learning opportunities.

In Chapter Three: Project Description, I provided an overall description of the website I created and the professional recommendations and considerations I took into account as I was designing this product.

In this chapter, Chapter Four: Reflection, I discuss the learning that occured through the research process and the creation of this culminating project and will highlight the research that most impacted its development. I also describe the implications and limitations of the project, how I will communicate the results of this work to my peers and the benefits I believe this project could have on our school community and profession.

Major Learning

Research. There is a general agreement in education that the linguistic demands of the curriculum have greatly increased and that academic language plays a central role in student achievement. Broadly speaking academic language is the language students need in order to access increasingly complex texts, perform formal writing tasks and engage in content-related discussions that show grade-level understanding of the material presented. Academic language development is imperative for all students, but it is especially crucial to ELs who face their own obstacles in achieving grade level content standards. Classroom teachers need to develop the skills to ensure purposeful, meaningful and consistent academic language instruction. They need to understand the language demands of the curriculum and how to effectively address them in order to help students attain higher levels of learning and language fluency. It can be daunting for teachers who have had limited or no preparation in this area. Support from colleagues who have

expertise in language development can certainly guide them in these efforts to develop linguistic knowledge and effective language practices. The research that most impacted this understanding presents the language discussion in an equitable framework, providing students with opportunities to learn and the support they need to be successful (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009; Gorsky, 2008; Hollie, 2008; Ladson-Billing, 1995). Also, research that emphasizes the importance of academic language as a key factor in the achievement of students and highlights the academic language demands of today's classrooms supports the need to focus on instructional strategies that support academic language development (Dutro & Moran, 2003; Van Lier & Walqui, 2010; Zwiers et al., 2014). Finally, research that presents frameworks and practices to effectively support linguistic growth with an understanding that it is challenging and complex to teach academic language without an understanding of its key components and how it operates in the classroom support the notion that educators need to be better supported in order to make the needed instructional shifts (Dutro & Moran, 2003; Fisher et al., 2008; Fisher & Frey, 2013; Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014; Zwiers et al., 2014). The research process solidified the understanding that classroom teachers in my school would benefit from having a tool that would centralize this information and promote more language discussions and awareness.

Personal growth. One of the most important lessons I learned in the process of creating this tool is how important it is to continue to learn and to grow. Through the research process and the website creation, I developed my own expertise both as an EL teacher and as an ELM coach and remained engaged in the deep work and discussions

that are needed in education to reverse achievement trends and provide the learning environment that all students deserve. This website goes beyond describing strategies to develop language in the classroom; it conveys teaching values, beliefs, and goals that can truly shift the learning and culture in our school building. In some ways, this website has become a statement of my teaching philosophy. As I developed this project and identified what and how to share with my peers, I also reflected about what was mattered to me as a language teacher and a public school educator.

Reinventing how we teach entails reinventing how we see ourselves as educators. We must build teams that learn together and collectively commit to "leave no child behind". Schools need to provide a great educational experience for all students, so good teaching practices can not remain in isolation. We need to find ways to share information and be willing to adopt new practices. This website presents a shared goal to create a language-rich environment for all of our learners and provides research and evidence-based instructional practices to achieve this goal. Through the creation of this website, I expanded upon my own expertise and gained a better understanding of how academic language impacts learning in our school setting. Consequently, I feel more confident to support my peers in their journey to develop their own understanding of language use and development in our school. I embrace the idea of a truly collaborative team, focused on improving practices together and sharing the responsibility of ensuring success for all our students. Sharing this learning has become a new goal that grew out of doing research and creating a learning platform designed to be used by our teaching

community. In other words, I have become a better advocate for our learners and teachers.

Designing a website can be a daunting process not only because of the skills that it requires but also because of the volume of information that needs to be added and organized in a way that makes it easy for visitors to find content. I found that it was helpful to first create a sitemap to visualize the overall structure of the site. It provided an outline of the content I wanted to present on the site and helped me streamline and simplify the overall look of the site. The sitemap also gave me a better idea of how each page would reinforce the main goal of the site which ultimately is to show how to work with language in the various settings we encounter in our school building. I am confident that the overall structure of the site is simple and easy to navigate. However, it became a bit more difficult to organize the subtopic pages. It was easier for me to visualize the overall structure or the top level of the site, but I became more frustrated with organizing the content at the page level. In the process of creating a project that would meet the specific needs of the targeted audience, feedback was key. The benefits of receiving constructive feedback outweighed the frustrations of having to tweak, adapt, and make changes to the site. It ultimately improved the quality of the final product and helped organize the information better for the intended audience and the goal of the website. I must admit that there is a certain level of vulnerability involved in the process. The simple step of sharing my website address with my peers created anxiety. I remember waiting anxiously to hear what they had to say. However, I see vulnerability as essential in our profession to create a culture of trust that values a wide range of perspectives and

encourages growth through taking professional risks and engaging in honest conversations.

Implications and Limitations

When looking to create change, the hope is that new learning will occur and existing practices will deepen. I hope to see classroom teachers implement the strategies shared on the website, linking the theory with the practice in a way that is deliberate and purposeful, and becoming confident in developing the language skills of their students. Ideally, teachers would create a learning plan that fits their needs and the needs of their learners. They would initially explore the site and revisit it as needed. The information provided would trigger questions and teachers would lean on each other to provide support and feedback. It could eventually lead to creating more coaching opportunities through the ELM initiative with teachers requesting coaching support. Teachers could also learn to be more vulnerable and ask for help because of our collective commitment to be more language aware for the sake of student learning. How do we ensure that certain conditions are in place, so the website is being used to its full potential and truly supports teachers to make a shift to commit to creating an environment that supports the language development of all students? As a school teacher, I do not have the power to make school-wide decisions, but as a member of the leadership team, I participate in the writing of the School Continuous Improvement Plan (SCIP), a strategic document that schools use to identify annual improvement priorities at each school. As an ELM coach, I am responsible for leading PD sessions. I can ensure that these PDs are aligned with our SCIP goals, entail reflection, analysis, and strategic thinking around the material

presented on the website. In other words, I can invest time and commit to promote and use this tool in my school community. I feel that it depends on me to be the cheerleader for this project. I also know that I have administrative support onsite and that both our principal and coach support teacher-led initiatives and see language development goals as essential to growth and achievement in our school.

There are limitations in providing an overview of language needs in the context of our diverse environment. There are sections and areas of the website that need to be more thoroughly developed. For example, more research is needed on dual language education to ensure that the website offers more practical information and data that align with research and the need of our staff. I have talked to our DL coach and we are planning to work collaboratively to expand upon our understanding of the needs of our DL teachers and co-develop some PDs and resources that can strengthen our linguistic knowledge in the context of supporting bilingualism and biliteracy.

Communicating Results

As previously mentioned, I have a time, space, and tool to communicate and share the final product. Within the ELM framework, I also have time set aside to observe other teachers and provide feedback on language development strategies they use in their classroom, which offers a fabulous advantage to push forward this work in multiple settings. The website also presents the benefit of extending the learning beyond the PD sessions.

Communicating results also poses questions about our school culture and teacher leadership and brings about concerns that need to be addressed. Teachers play an active

role in their own learning. How do I communicate this information in a way that engages teachers and creates a culture of trust and feedback that can support implementation and a true commitment to creating a language-rich environment? I came to the conclusion that I needed to rethink the PD presentations that I had created. These presentations need to be better models of what I believe is essential in order to create true change in a community. I can ensure that I provide teachers a way to offer and receive feedback, acknowledge and value existing practices and offer more opportunities to dialogue and share with their peers. I will admit that I have developed more empathy for classroom teachers throughout this process. It can be challenging in many ways to understand language, its many components and implement good language teaching practices. There is hope that this website will provide the information that can get classroom teachers in our building started in this journey.

Benefits to Profession

The website is a resource that will help teachers foster gains in students' language development and build classrooms that are engaging and welcoming. The framework in which the website operates offers the opportunity to transform the way schools envision professional learning developments. I hope that individual schools can consider building more time for teacher-led initiatives and creating more opportunities for teachers to observe each other and collaborate. Upon completion of this project, a new question arose: How do we create a culture where we celebrate our vulnerabilities as teachers, develop as leaders and lean more on each other for learning? Teachers can be resource providers and catalysts for change. They can pose the questions and offer solutions to

create change in instructional practices to improve student engagement and achievement. They should show commitment to learning and use what they learn to help all students achieve and influence practice among their peers. Teachers can shape the culture of a school with the support and encouragement of their administrator. There are many ways to assume the role of a leader in a school and one can chose a way to lead that fits his/her style. I hope that initiatives that empower teachers to share their expertise, develop as professionals, and provide opportunities to facilitate professional learning among staff members will become more common practice in the future in our district. I came to the conclusion that a strength-based approach to teacher learning can encourage staff engagement too.

The content of this website is intended to support the work of a very specific community, but can also meet the needs of different school settings. There is an ever-increasing need for educators to focus on language and mastering academic language is a challenge for all students. Our new standards have high linguistic and academic demands and require effective teaching of academic language skills alongside content expertise. Students who are equipped with academic language are better equipped to meet the challenges of school. It is necessary to take into account the linguistic demands of our curriculum and engage the education community in that discussion to provide a more equitable access to education and the most effective teaching.

Summary

The goal of my capstone project was to design a website to answer the research question: *How can a professional development resource help classroom teachers create a*

language-rich environment that can support the development of academic language for all learners? To answer this question I researched how to create a learning environment rich in opportunities for students to be immersed in high-quality language. I also reviewed the research and best practices that guide the teaching of ELs and DL students to optimize instruction and address the specific needs of students who are learning English and/or attend our Dual Language program. I focused the research on academic language as it is the language needed for students to do their best work in school. I reviewed the essential components of academic language development, and provided research-based scaffolding strategies to help students effectively use academic language in the classroom. My goal was to respond to needs and questions that arise in our school environment and clearly state that language is central to the learning of the students we teach. It became clear quickly that this goal was grounded in a need for a more equitable access to education, being able to recognize barriers to equity, and the importance of dispelling biases and appreciating the assets of all student groups. In the process of collecting and organizing information that could support the general education teachers in my building, I developed a stronger sense of purpose as a teacher. More often than not, teachers might feel that they don't have a voice. There is no doubt that more can be done to increase pathways and opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership. The ELM initiative is a great example of how teachers expertise can be used to support and lead learning in their building. I have been energized since joining this initiative and as a result I am completing a master's degree I have been attempting to finish for years. It is my hope that we can expand upon these existing efforts and models and elevate teacher

voice to steer more systemic improvements to benefit student learning. Creating a website is time-consuming and can be frustrating when you do not have experience in the matter. However, I chose to set aside all frustrations and brush off this constant negative voice that kept telling me how daunting the task was. What mattered in the end was that I was willing to take a risk, try something new, and tackle this challenge. In doing so, the assumption was that it was going to be difficult and it was indeed, but the learning and confidence I gained in the process far outweighs the challenges. In some ways, I hope that I can be a model for my peers, show them the importance of leading change, and motivate them through sharing ideas and knowledge, but more importantly the passion I have for what I do and what I believe.

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Appendix A: Examples of Sensory, Graphic, and Interactive Supports.

Sensory Supports	Graphic Supports	Interactive Supports
Real-life objects (realia)	Charts	In pairs or partners
Manipulatives	Graphic organizers	In triads or small groups
Pictures & photographs	Tables	In a whole group
Illustrations, diagrams, & drawings	Graphs	Using cooperative group
Magazines & newspapers	Timelines	structures
Physical activities	Number lines	With the Internet (websites) or software programs
Videos & films		In the home language
Broadcasts		With mentors
Models & figures		

Appendix B: Features of Academic language in the Wida Standards.

The Features of Academic Language operate within sociocultural contexts for language use.

Dimension	Performance Criteria	Features
Discourse	**Linguistic Complexity** *(Quantity and variety of oral and written text in communication)*	• Amount of speech/written text • Structure of speech/written text • Density of speech/written text • Coherence and cohesion of ideas • Variety of sentence types to form organized text
Sentence	**Language Forms and Conventions** *(Types, array, and use of language structures in communication)*	• Types and variety of grammatical constructions • Mechanics of sentence types • Fluency of expression • Match language forms to purposes/perspectives • Formulaic and idiomatic expressions
Word/Phrase	**Vocabulary Usage** *(Specificity of word or phrase choice in communication)*	• General, specific, and technical language • Multiple meanings of words and phrases • Nuances and shades of meaning • Collocations and idioms

The sociocultural contexts for language use involve the interaction between the student and the language environment, encompassing the…

- Register
- Genre/Text type
- Topic
- Task/Situation
- Participants' identities and social roles

Appendix C: Visual Site Map