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WHY IS THERE A GROWING NUMBER OF ELL STUDENTS WITH LEARNING
DELAYS, BEING DIAGNOSED WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER, OR
QUALIFYING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION?

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

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To my daughter for your continued patience during my many many years of schooling, and writing this paper. I'm finally done! Many thanks to my peer reviewer Jane Trusnisky, my second pair of eyes who helped to shape this Capstone and gave sound advice and encouragement. I have learned a great deal from you.

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ABSTRACT

Anderson, H. Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education? (2020)

The research question addressed in this project was why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education? The research focused on English language learner's social, emotional and academic needs. The research provides information on cultural and linguistic awareness, and the importance of how cultural and language needs to be recognized in the criteria for assessing or evaluating English language learners for Special Education. The research is grouped into four subtopics: English Language Learners, Cultural Awareness, Trauma, and English Language Learners and Special Education. The project created from the research are four professional development presentations each one providing information from the four subtopics. The professional developments will benefit anyone who works with English language learners. Teachers will be empowered to look more at how cultural and language affects learning and will gain knowledge on best practices on how to teach English language learners. The goal is to provide teachers with more background and knowledge so that they will understand how English language learners learn and not assume they have a learning delay, thus eliminating over-representing English language learners in special education. (220 words)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

An English Language Learner (ELL) is defined as a student who has a native language other than English. An ELL can speak two, three or more languages, because of the multiple languages an ELL could speak the term English as a Second Language or ESL has been renamed English Language Learners (ELLs). ELLs are a fast growing population all over the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2005), “There were nearly five million English language learners in U.S. public schools in fall of 2001. This represented 9.5% of U.S. public school enrollees, an increase from 8.1% in 2000” (Pew Research Center, 2018, p.1). In Minnesota there is an equal increase of the number of identified ELLs from “73,128 students with English learner status in the 2018-2019 school year, compared to an enrollment of 71,919 in the previous year (an increase of 1.7 percent)” (Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), 2018).

One thing that I have noticed is that there is a growing number of English language students who are dual identified with either learning delays, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or qualify for other special education services. My question is, *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?*

The district I work in has 4% of its population listed at English Language Learners (ELLs). The elementary school I work in has a total enrollment of 590 students and 60 students in kindergarten through 5th grade (K-5) are ELLs, which means that

more than 10% of the schools population are ELLs. Of those 60 ELLs, 12 students are receiving special education services or have been diagnosed with educational ASD (South Washington County Schools, 2020). In addition to the 12 dual identified K-5 students, there are seven preschool students identified with educational ASD, and all of them will be assessed for EL services in kindergarten, due to the home language survey that English is not their first language. In our preschool ASD program, all the children are from various cultural backgrounds and have English as their second or third language. All the ELLs are first, second, or third generation immigrants. First generation means the student is a newcomer and has immigrated or came to the United States. Second generation immigrants means their parents immigrated or came to the United States. Third generation means their grandparents were the ones who immigrated or came to the United States. From the United States immigrant population, according to The National Academy of Science (2017), “first- and second-generation youth and young adults of immigrant origin accounted for half of the population growth” (p. 1).

The reason why this topic is important to me is because in this school year alone I have seen more and more ELLs being requested by their classroom teachers to be evaluated, being placed in special education, or being diagnosed with ASD in preschool. This is not just happening in the school I teach in but across the district and in other states as well (Dennison, etal, 2019). Currently, there are three ELLs that I work with that are being referred to special education services by their general education teachers. As an EL teacher, I am concerned that these students do not require special education services, but their culture, their limited language proficiency, their background, or adverse childhood

experiences are the reasons they show signs of needing these services. The first student is a kindergartener that I will call Rosa, this is a pseudonym. She is from the Hmong culture, and she was born in America. Her parents say that she has only spoken English, but she hears Hmong and English languages spoken in her home and has since birth. She lives with her extended family and they all speak Hmong in the house. Her grandparents were refugees from Laos. Her teacher is recommending special education services, because she is behind other kindergarteners in reading, writing, letter recognition, and overall social emotional skills.

The second student is a first grader, I will call him Dan, this is a pseudonym. Dan is from China, he has been in America for five months. Dan is what is considered a satellite baby where he was raised by his grandparents in China yet his parents and older sibling lived in America (Wang, 2016). He has not been living with or raised by his parents for 5 years. His adjustment to the USA is not only related to language and school, but also to his parents and a sibling that he hasn't lived with since he was a baby. Dan has entered our school year with very limited English. Dan has not adjusted well to social interactions with his classmates. He does not understand classroom organization or classroom procedures. Dan will engage in some activities, yet often he is looking at books in a corner or by himself at a table. His language proficiency is improving a little bit as he understands and recognizes the letters, letter sounds, and he is beginning to recognize a few sight words. He is beginning to read Level A books. He can count, and knows his numbers up to one hundred. He is learning the names of food, colors, and basic classroom objects. His teacher is recommending evaluation for a learning delay or a

diagnosis of educational ASD, due to his lack of attention to classroom procedures, as he does not follow what his classmates do, nor does he engage in any academics.

This third student is a third grader from Kenya, I will call him Jon, this is a pseudonym. Jon has been in America for 11 months. His first languages were Kisii and British English. Jon is considered a student with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). He was placed in an orphanage at the age of five when his mother passed away. He came to America in the spring of second grade after he was adopted by his uncle and aunt. Jon speaks English and understands English for social and instructional purposes. Jon can orally communicate in content academics when given information orally. Jon is at least two years behind grade level in math, reading, and writing. He is progressing in reading and writing proficiency, yet is still behind his grade level peers.

In the ASD preschool class in my school, there are nine students who have been diagnosed with ASD. Out of those nine, seven of them are from a diverse culture, or have a language other than English as their first native language. Of this group of students, they are second or third generation immigrants. They come from both African and Asian descent. This is an alarming number of disproportionate students in one preschool class in a suburb in Minnesota. I often wonder what is causing these students to be diagnosed with ASD. A possible answer is that the criteria for diagnosing students is biased to a white, middle class student, or that cultural behaviors show similarities to ASD. Children from diverse cultures have a growing number of children with ASD. *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?*

These are just a few students out of many that may find themselves in special education or with an ASD diagnosis after being requested to be evaluated. Their limited language may result in them qualifying for additional services. My research will look at this growing number of dual identified students, and take a closer look at how language and culture awareness needs to be a part of the criteria in determining for identifying students with ASD or any other learning disabilities.

Professional and Educational Background

I am a licensed English Language teacher. I received my Bachelors of Arts in English Language Learner Studies in 2015 from Ashford University. I received my English Language Learner (formally ESL) teacher's license through Hamline University's Masters of Teaching Program, in 2017. I have been working as an English language teacher for three years in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota. Prior to my EL teaching, I worked with Somali refugees with Arrive Ministries, from 2000-2004 and 2008-2010, as an English language instructor, and supported their transition to life in Minnesota. From 2004 - 2008, I was a relief and development aid worker, and an English language teacher in Nairobi, Kenya. During my time working with refugees and living abroad, I became aware of culture and linguistic awareness and how it impacts all areas of life, especially education.

Cultural and Linguistic Awareness

One area that I will be focusing my research on is how culture and language affects learning compared to mainstream learning. It is important to understand cultural and linguistic behaviors and take them into consideration when not only teaching students

but also identifying if they have a delay or need special education services. Often cultural differences and language proficiency can indicate that a student is not learning or progressing academically as well as the majority culture, or the culture of the teacher.

The term culture and linguistics refer to integrated patterns of human behavior that include language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or other groups (e.g., gender identity/gender expression, age, national origin, sexual orientation, disability) (Fong, 2016). These cultural differences students bring to the schools have had and will continue to have an impact on how they learn. It does not mean they need special education services, but they need to be taught in a different way than what has been done in the past in prevalent white, middle class schools.

Generational Trauma

The next area that my research will be focusing on is trauma, specifically generational trauma. Generational trauma is a psychological theory which suggests that trauma can be transferred from generation to generation (Xiong, 2015). In recent years, mental health has been one of the leading focus areas in education. Additionally, this focus has uncovered that trauma is relevant and is a factor in learning and in education. Generational trauma is being looked at in second and third generation immigrants that were refugees or immigrants of countries who have been part of civil wars, civil unrest, or lack basic needs like food, water, shelter. (Xiong, 2015) These second and third generations may be suffering from trauma that their parents or grandparents experienced,

this trauma is now a part of the next generation's DNA and it may be a factor in their learning, learning styles, or understanding of academic content (Vang, 2005).

Summary

As you can see, my personal experiences, current situations with ELLs, and cultural awareness are guiding my thesis. I have seen students questioned about their learning, evaluated for services they didn't need, and have observed teachers unknowingly disregard a student's culture, language, and background in an attempt to make a one size fits all classroom. I have seen teachers place a special education label on students, because they were not learning the way others learn or they were not learning from teachers teaching.

In the next chapter, I will be reviewing articles, books, journals, and statistics to take a deeper look and answer my question, *why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?* I will research how culture, language, and family background add to the complexities of why ELL students are not meeting benchmarks, or not learning productively alongside their peers. I will gather data on the statistics on the growing number of dual identified ELLs. My hope is that this thesis will bring awareness and insight for educators and administrators as the number of ELL students increases in schools.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This will be a review of literature looking at the dual identified English language learners (ELLs). The purpose will be to answer my research question, *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?* My goal is to build awareness of the vast educational differences an ELL student has due to culture, language, and trauma. These differences can affect how they learn and how teachers need to use these differences to create equitable lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of ELL students. This literature review will also be looking at similarities to ELL s performances and those needing special education services. In addition, I will be reviewing the criteria of identification and qualifications for ELL service, Special Education services, and diagnosis of ASD.

English Language Learners

An English Language Learner (ELL) is defined as a student whose native or home language is not English. An ELL may be learning English as a second, third or fourth language. For this reason, the term English as a Second Language or ESL has been changed to English Language Learner. An ELL may be a newcomer to this country or maybe a second or third generation immigrant who was born in the US but whose home language is something other than English.

According to Cummings (as cited in Khatib & Taie, 2016), language acquisition is learned in two ways, one being social language and the other academic language (p. 1).

Social language or Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) consists of day to day language or more common language that a student would have with peers or family members. Academic language or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is the language that is needed to have success and be an active participant within the classroom. Academic language is not just learning vocabulary but learning concepts of language such as higher order thinking, inferring, comparing and contrasting, sequencing, or how to state an opinion. The amount of time it takes an ELL to become proficient in English varies from 4-7 years.

The State of Minnesota uses the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) state standards and language proficiency levels to determine students' growth towards English language proficiency (MDE, 2020). WIDA is a “consortium made up of 40 U.S. states, territories and federal agencies dedicated to the research, design and implementation of a high-quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate system to support English language learners in K-12 contexts” (WIDA, 2020, p.1).

An ELL's additional language is developed in stages. Di Vesta and Palermos' (1974), states in their language development research, children who are learning to talk go through stages or a process of developing language—first understanding, then one-word utterances, then two-word phrases, and so on. Students learning an additional language move through five predictable stages: Pre Production, Early Production, Speech Emergence, Intermediate Fluency, and Advanced Fluency (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

How quickly students progress through the stages depends on many factors, including level of formal education, family background, and length of time spent in the country.

The amount of time it takes an ELL to learn and use English in the classroom may seem like a long time. For classroom teachers, it may seem as if an ELL is not progressing at the rate expected based on their peers. Classroom teachers may also be using an ELL's social language proficiency development as an indicator to how a student should be performing in academic areas in the classroom.

The image below, based on the work of the West Virginia Department of Education and the book *Balancing Reading & Language Learning* by Mary Cappellini, shows the relationship between the social and academic languages and how they differ.

Figure 1

BICS vs CALP

BICS vs. CALP	
BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS	COGNITIVE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
Informal	Formal
Concrete	Abstract
Language of the Playground, Dinner Table, and Bus	Language of the Classroom, Text Books, and Assessments
Predominantly Oral	Oral and Written
Tier 1 Words	Tier 2 & 3 Words
3,000 Words or Less	100,000+ Words
Short and Simple	Long and Complex
Commonly Contextualized	Commonly Decontextualized
Can Be "Picked Up" Through Social Interactions	Must Be Explicitly Taught
1-3 Years to Develop	5-10 Years to Develop

Adapted from the West Virginia Department of Education and *Balancing Reading & Language Learning* by Mary Cappellini by 2017

A student who can carry on a conversation in the classroom, talk with peers, be able to ask and answer informal questions, or be able to complete some academic content will be using their BICS (Cummings, 2008). This can be confusing to teachers, as they feel their English is acceptable and should be able to complete academic assignments with ease, just as their English speaking peers. The problem lies in the fact that CALP takes much longer to develop, the English is more complex, and the language concepts need more exposure and practice for acquisition. Baumann and Graves (2010) define academic vocabulary as “content-specific words used in disciplines like biology, geometry, civics, and geography; or all-purpose terms that appear across content areas but that may vary in meaning because of the discipline itself” (p. 6). Students' academic language needs time to develop, and more importantly it needs to be taught.

My topic of this capstone asks the question, *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?* Before an ELL student should be assessed for a learning or developmental delay, we as educators need to look first at a student's years of language development and language proficiency. Teachers need to take into consideration that BICS is not the same language as CALP. In the next section, I will look at how culture affects learning and language development.

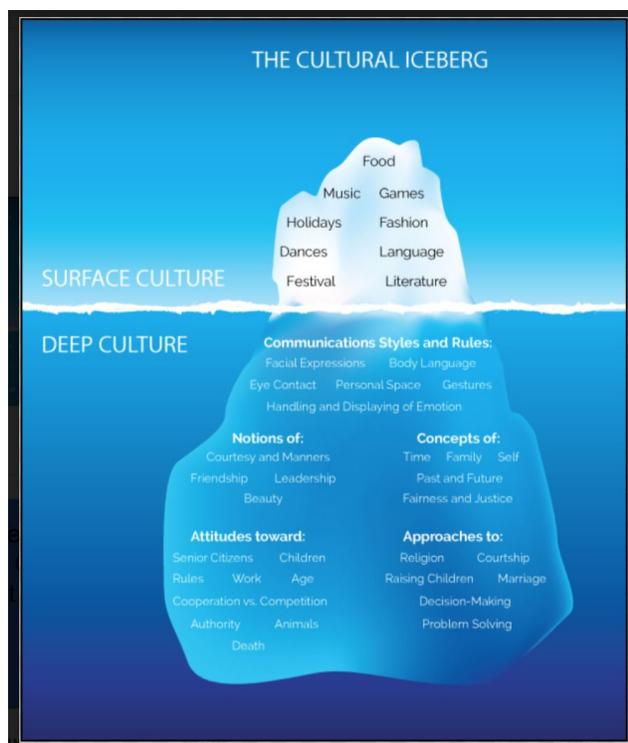
Cultural Awareness

Before I discuss the effects culture may have on learning and language. I want to talk about what culture is and how it plays a part in all aspects of life. What is culture? Some look at culture as what somebody wears, what they look like, what food they eat, or

what music they listen to. However, culture is deeper than that. Culture goes beyond outward appearances. Merriam Webster (2020) dictionary defines culture as:

The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group, the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time. It also says that culture is a shared attitude, values, goals, and practices. Also the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic.

The definition states that culture is a set of beliefs, values, and attitudes. The cultural iceberg was introduced in the book *Beyond Culture* written, in 1989, by Edward Hall. Picture an iceberg on the top or above the water; you see only a small portion of how grand the iceberg really is. Under the water is this enormous piece. You can't see how big it is from above the water, but you know it is there. That is an example of culture. We don't realize how much culture impacts our lives. There is above the surface water in which you see, hear, and taste culture, but it is what is below the surface that really identifies who you are and how you act, or for students how they learn and behave in the classroom. These culture attributes may be how you communicate, your interactions, your values, religion, attitudes, or roles (Hall, 1989). The image below shows what a cultural iceberg looks like both above and below the surface.

Figure 2*The Cultural Iceberg*

As educators who teach diverse cultures, we can't look at one's outward appearance to define culture. As educators of ELLs, we need to look past what we can see and learn about our students' beliefs, values, and attitudes before we can place them in special education, diagnose them with ASD, or have a learning delay. According to Willis, Irvine & Landa (2019), as educators, it's our job to stimulate the intellectual development of children, and, in this era, it's simply not enough to operate on the axis of color-blindness. What this means is that in order to truly understand students' needs, educators need to understand the students' culture. According to Rueda and Stillman (2012), all teachers need to learn how to “teach culturally” rather than teaching “about” culture—even in classes where there are no students who are diverse or who are ELLs.

When looking for learning challenges or delays, one consideration needs to be the student's culture. Teachers need to look at how they were raised, what they value, how they communicate, or how they interact with peers or adults. According to Futterman (2015), in her article *Beyond the Classroom*, students with diverse cultures learn in diverse ways. Not all students learn the same way, and not all students behave the same way in the classroom. Normal school behavior can be based upon individualist and collectivist cultures. Teachers who lack knowledge about a culture might misinterpret the behavior of a child and inaccurately judge students as poorly behaved, disrespectful, or not academically competent. This cultural unawareness can cause teachers to assume students are not achieving academically, prompting them to seek assessments or testing for learning disabilities.

Culture does have an impact in the classroom. It impacts how students learn, how they behave and how they interact. Culture as well as language can affect how quickly students gain academic achievements (Futteman, 2015). The role of the teacher is not to gauge the achievements or lack of achievements without understanding each student's culture and cultural behaviors. Until a teacher has cultural awareness, they may inadvertently mistake a student's learning style for needing special education services (Cummings, 1984). This can answer my topic question of, *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?*

In my next section, I will be reviewing literature that discusses trauma, generational trauma, and how first, second, and third generation immigrants can be

affected by trauma. This trauma can be a hindrance in academic settings, that may in turn lead to teachers questioning a student's cognitive abilities.

Trauma

According to Webster's Dictionary (2020), trauma is defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. According to Xiong (2015), generational trauma or intergenerational trauma refers to the ways in which trauma experienced in one generation affects the health and well-being of descendants of future generations. Negative effects can include a range of psychiatric symptoms as well as greater vulnerability to stress. When it comes to immigration, especially in America, generational trauma is very common.

There have been groups of immigrants arriving in America for many years. Looking back over the last 50 years, more and more refugees have been arriving in America due to civil unrest, drought, famine, war, or genocide. All of these people have endured some sort of trauma. In Minnesota, these groups of refugees consist of Hmong from Laos, Somali, Sudanese, and most recently Karen from Thailand. The Hmong population of refugees entered America shortly after the Vietnam War. There are multiple generations of Hmong families living in Minnesota; most children in school now are the third generation of Hmong immigrants. Research is now looking at the trauma that first generation immigrants from Laos endured during their time as refugees, during their civil war. In the extensive research done by Sangalang and Vang (2017), they found that trauma is transmitted from parents to their children:

The literature was fairly consistent in describing parenting and family interactions as playing significant roles in the ways in which parental trauma is processed within families. Quantitative studies identified family and parent–child relationships as potential mediators in the link between the experiences of traumatized refugee parents and the emotional and behavioral health of their children (p. 10)

This trauma may now be affecting the second and third generation in their family, which may be playing out in the school setting. Similarly, the trauma can have an effect on a student’s emotional, social, and mental health. Research has shown, Hmong children in schools today are getting left behind due to their culture of quietness and lack of engagement in the classroom (Vang, 2015). More and more often these students are being recommended or assessed for special education due to their poor test scores and lack of academic progress (Vang, 2015). It is important to look at this culture, as well as generational trauma or trauma of any kind when evaluating academic progress.

For example, a student may be quiet or does not speak unless spoken too. These students can be considered quiet learners, and the Hmong culture fits into this category. In a recent article put out by National Public Radio author Shockmann (2019) quotes teacher Yang saying that, “Sometimes our Hmong students are so quiet in the classroom, they're often forgotten. There's a lot that's going on under the iceberg that teachers may not see” (p. 11). First and second generation Hmong students also suffered in the education system when they first arrived from Laos in the 1980s and in the 1990s. These children were placed in English-only classrooms and expected to perform as their

American, English speaking peers. In the research titled *Hmong-American Students Still Face Multiple Challenges in Public Schools*, author Vang (2005), states how first generation Hmong students were not given proper education due to the schools' lack of preparedness to teach them English. The students were often not spoken to and discredited, only being put in classes they needed for graduation, but not for college. The combination of the Hmong culture being quiet learners and the difference in American classrooms, where active participation is expected, can contribute to not having a successful learning experience. The Hmong culture is very unique and it does have an impact on how Hmong students learn. Vang (2005), goes on to say that,

Generally, parents' educational backgrounds are related to their children's academic success. Students whose parents are illiterate in English or in their primary language are more likely to be underachievers in school. For Hmong immigrants, they found that parents' educational backgrounds, their pre-arrival education from refugee camps or native countries, and their perceptions of the American educational system played roles in their children's academic achievement. A large number of Hmong parents are unable to provide necessary academic support at home. Vang asserted that some Hmong children are left to fend for themselves in school since there is no support system at home (p.27).

This information needs to be taken into consideration before educators can jump to the conclusion that Hmong students are just not able to do the work. We as educators need to redesign our lessons and approaches to make sure all students can learn. If we are able to

make these changes in our classrooms, then the number of Hmong students being assessed and qualifying for special education will be reduced.

In the next section of my literature review, I will review the criteria and qualifications for placement in English language services, special education services, and ASD programs. I will compare the similarities to ELL's needs and those with learning delays. This information will explain more of how and why overidentification of ELL students being placed in special education can occur.

English Language Learner, Special Education, and ASD Criteria For Qualification

The criteria for qualifying for English language services starts with a home language questionnaire that MDE requires all families to fill out during the enrollment process.

The questionnaire asks four questions:

1. What is the student's first language?
2. What other language or languages other than English does the student speak?
3. What language or languages other than English does the student understand?
4. What language or languages does the student have consistent interaction in hearing? (MDE, 2020).

If any of these questions are answered with a different language other than English, then the student will be assessed using the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, WIDA MODEL for kindergarteners. The assessment is given by a trained EL teacher or the WIDA Screener for grades 1-12, and it is either given online or in certain situations with a paper assessment MDE. A student is assessed on language proficiency in four

domains: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. If a student receives an overall score less than 4.5 then they are considered not proficient in the English language, which then qualifies them for English language services (WIDA, 2020).

The criteria for diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) include “three deficits in social communication and social interactions and at least two restricted and repetitive behavior, interests, or activities”, clinicians must be sure that these characteristics are not due to developmental delay alone (Grzadzinski, Huerta, & Lord, 2013).

Minnesota Department of Education (2020) criteria for special education services is divided into 13 categorical disability areas. A team of qualified professionals, including parents, determine whether a student meets criteria in one of the 13 areas and is in need of special education services.

Special education identification and placement rest upon a complex system of referrals, individualized assessments, and identification practices that are based on statewide eligibility criteria. This takes place within the context of the public education system, which is staffed by individuals who are trained in institutions of higher education (MDE, 2020). All assessments, inventories, questionnaires, and data is collected by teachers, parents, doctors (in some cases), school psychologists, and any other qualifying educators. All of the criteria has a legal basis and has been compiled by a team of professionals (MDE, 2020). The criteria is often based on a specific test or assessment and could be subjective by the person giving assessment. In the research obtained by Collier (1985), the author discusses how cultural factors impact education and behaviors

in the classroom. These cultural factors can look similar to indications of a disability. When a child enters school, they bring with them their own culture. When students from diverse cultures enter school, acculturation may occur. According to Collier (1985), when the students' home culture and the school culture collide, negative behaviors can occur, including: confusion in locus of control, withdrawal, silence or unresponsiveness, codeswitching, distractibility, resistance to change, or disorientation. If the student is not successful in school, teachers may be uncertain as to whether the student's lack of success is related to a cultural difference or difficulty with acculturation. This research gives insight as to why teachers who are unaware of a student's cultural or linguistic background, may often conclude that a student can not perform academically due to a disability, rather than cultural differences.

Another area of review is Early Childhood screening and how some students are diagnosed prior to school with autism or a learning delay. Every school district is required to have all children screened for Kindergarten Readiness between the ages of 3 and 5 (MDE, 2020). During this assessment, assessors are looking for criteria that meets developmental milestones that shows a child is developing cognitively, emotionally, and physically so they are ready to enter kindergarten. *Help Me Grow* is an interagency initiative of the State of Minnesota partnering with all local service agencies (Department of Education, Department of Health and Department of Human Services). They provide resources for the state of Minnesota with child developmental milestones. Looking at these developmental milestones, one can question whether they are biased to a certain culture and language. For instance, one of the developmental milestones is that a child is

able to eat with a spoon and fork. This is culturally biased as some cultures don't use a spoon or a fork to eat. Some cultures use their hands, some use chopsticks, and some cultures may use other utensils. This research has shown that this criteria is put in place for a majority of children being screened in early childhood, and may unintentionally assess or diagnose a student with developmental delays.

In the school I teach, there are seven preschool ASD students. Of those seven, six are from a diverse culture. All of them are first or second generation immigrants and they all speak another language at home. When I look at these statistics, as an educator, I have to question how these children are being screened for placement in these services, and if there is a chance that the screening process is culturally and linguistically biased.

According to Flores, Lopez & DeLeon (2000), the assessment of students with cultural and linguistic differences has become a major issue. These students are disproportionately represented in special education, a fact that leads us to examine an assessment process that is difficult at best. Flores, Lopez & DeLeon (2000) go on to say that there is a shortage of personnel qualified to assess culturally and linguistically diverse students and the assessment tools are inadequate.

In the next section, I will compare and contrast ELL needs and Special Education students' needs. I will show how these similarities are indeed confusing and look like the same needs.

English Language Learner and Special Education Similarities

I was asked the other day about ELLs and their specific academic needs. This person asked me if I am the only teacher that is giving explicit language instruction. I

informed them that sometimes ELLs get evaluated for special education due to their academic needs. This person said, “Great, the more help they get the better,” and the conversation made me think about the actual needs of ELL students. Most of this literature review talks about cultural and linguistic awareness. Yet, when educators assess and evaluate the needs of ELLs, there is an achievement gap. In my own educational settings I have noticed, ELLs are behind in grade level reading, they are behind in grade level writing, they are behind in grade level speaking, and they don't have the language capability to understand instruction. Therefore, they don't have the capability to effectively do their assignments. These are also some of the same needs of special education students. They are behind in grade level reading, they are behind in grade level writing, and they don't linguistically understand how to complete assignments without language support. Sometimes, there are academic needs students have such as, cognitive delay, or learning disabilities, and ELLs do need more services to help those needs in Special Education services.

ELLs that do have a learning disability will benefit from targeted, individualized, and specialized special education services. ELLs who are not language proficient will not benefit from special education services (Robertson, Sánchez-López, & Breiseth 2019). Think of a student learning French, they talk slower, they think slower, and their grammar and writing is below their cognitive abilities. Educators would never put them in special education services, and the same should hold true for English language learners. As Ortiz and Artiles (2010) explain, ELLs who receive special education services commonly have access to fewer language support services than other ELLs (p.

5). The meaning is that time is spent instructing students in areas that they don't need. They need language support, and they need to learn academic language and vocabulary. As a teacher I have learned that ELLs know how to learn, but they just don't have the language to learn until it is taught to them.

In the next section of the literature review, I will be referring back to the students introduced in Chapter 1. I will analyze their current academic levels and compare their needs with the research in this paper. The focus of this section will be to give culture, language, or trauma as a possible reason for their behaviors in the classroom, their rate of learning, and their level of academic abilities.

Conclusion

Let's take a look back at the three students that were introduced to you in Chapter 1. First we have Jon. Does Jon need to be assessed for a learning delay? Jon has a high English language proficiency (ELP) level in BICS. He can communicate with you in everyday conversations. He has a lower proficiency in CALP language development. He is a first generation immigrant and has been in the country just over 1 year. He has had trauma in his life with the death of a parent, and he has had interrupted education. If we take into consideration John's language proficiency, cultural background, the significant trauma he has endured in the three out of the eight years of his life, and his current progress with language and academics, I believe we can see academic growth. Additionally, with the research provided, it would seem that he should not be assessed for a learning disability.

Next we have Rosa. Does Rosa need to be placed in special education? Rosa is a kindergarten student, and she has heard the Hmong language since birth in her home. She does not speak Hmong, yet it is considered her first language. She lives with her grandparents, an aunt and uncle, her mother and father, and two siblings, and everyone speaks Hmong in her house except for the children on a daily basis. Her grandparents were refugees from Laos and could have experienced trauma during their immigration to America. Could generational trauma be affecting her in her education? Does she need to be assessed for special education or could culture, language, and/or trauma be a reason for her to be learning at a different rate than her peers?

Lastly, we have Dan. Does Dan have Autism Spectrum Disorder? Dan is in first grade and has lived with his grandparents in China separated from his parents and his sister for the last five years of his life. He was reunited with his family and three weeks later started first grade in an American school setting. Dan's behaviors may have similarities to those with Autism. However, are his behaviors due to cultural acculturation, his limited language proficiency and/or trauma?

There are many scholars, educators and researchers who have designed criteria and qualification inventories that are important and necessary in education. My thoughts are: The education system is not 100% certain that criterias and qualification inventories are not culturally biased by the person or persons that created them, or by the culture that in which they were intended for use. Language development needs to be taken into consideration when given these questionnaires, or looking at test scores Trauma does affect immigrant students and families and their immigration story and trauma needs to

be understood. Then students can be effectively assessed and educators can truly understand their academic or more importantly their social emotional needs.

In the last section of my literature review, I will review and summarize how it is crucial to be aware of a student's language proficiency, culture, and family history. This awareness will help teachers in understanding students' learning styles, learning needs, and how to make effective instruction. My summary will conclude with an suggested answer to the question: *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?*

Summary

This research is not to question the importance of assessments, questionnaire, criteria, or guidelines. However, it is to answer the question on *Why there is a growing number of English language learners being qualified or identified as having ASD, or being placed into special education.* The goals of this research is to bring awareness that culture and language is a major factor in how and what rate students learn.

In this literature review, I looked at language, culture, trauma, generational trauma and criterias and how to qualify students for additional services in the school system. It is obvious that ELLs have language needs, as that is the reason why they are in English language classes. My suggestion is that teachers use a student's social language versus academic language in order to eliminate hidden biases and hidden expectations on students' academic success. At the beginning of each school year, teachers do not have a lot of information on each student's abilities or needs, as it takes time to fully understand

each student. With this mindframe, it also takes time for an ELL to learn. An ELL may not be able to access content or be able to comprehend language as their peers. They need time to develop skills that will help them in the classroom.

According to Krashen (1988), teachers need to build relationships to help lower the affective filter of students, so that they will be able to have lower anxiety in the classroom. Also, teachers need to look at more than just academic or language needs. We need to go beyond the lesson, and the classwork, we need to look at culture, and we need to go below the surface to identify specific cultural behaviors that each student, not just ELLs, bring to the classroom. Educators need to look at trauma and generational trauma, and we need to understand a student's immigration story and their families immigration story. This will allow educators to look at how students learn and/or what may hinder them from being able to emotionally engage in academic classroom work.

Assessing ELLs for special education is a difficult process. In his research, George (2016) states that the differences between an ELL with a learning disability and an ELL without a learning disability are difficult to distinguish. There are similarities such as, "poor comprehension, difficulty following directions, syntactic and grammatical errors, and difficulty completing tasks" (Chu & Flores, 2011, p. 244). Since it is difficult to identify an ELL with a learning disability, Chu and Flores (2011) emphasize that teachers must know the characteristics of each individual ELL to determine if they require special education services (p. 244). Educators need to understand that all students, especially ELLs, may learn slower or may be unable to learn in a traditional one-size-fits-all mindset, and they need to be culturally and linguistically aware.

It is my hope that this research and literature review opens the eyes to moving beyond academics, and will give teachers more information before they request an assessment for learning delays, placement in ASD programs, or placement in Special Education programs. It is a teacher's job to educate students at their level and meet their needs. My hope is that teachers begin to be more informed of language proficiency levels, look at culture, learn students' stories, their families stories, and look at what they can do in the classroom before they give up and request additional services. When this is done, the question of *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education* may no longer be a question or a concern, but until then it needs to be answered.

In Chapter Three of my capstone, I will explain my rationale and methods used in literature review. I will give a detailed explanation and description of the project for my capstone. The chapter will also include a rationale for choosing the specific type of project I will be doing for my capstone.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Chapter Overview

The purpose of Chapter Three is to explain my rationale and methods used in literature review. I will give a description and explanation of my professional development (PD) project. The goal of this project is to explore the research question, *why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, students being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?* This chapter includes four major sections. The first section provides an overview of the chosen project, including its description, the setting, audience, and timeline. The second section elaborates on why this project was developed and the research paradigm chosen to ground this project in. The third section explains the research and methodology to support the capstone project. Finally, the conclusion will summarize key points of this chapter and introduce Chapter Four. The next section which I am calling the context, describes the purpose for my capstone project.

Context

The purpose of my capstone project is to empower mainstream educators in supporting and understanding English Language Learner's learning styles, cultural behaviors and academic needs within the classroom in order to limit the amount of ELLs getting unnecessarily referred onto Special Education Services. This project idea was developed from my personal experience of ELLs being brought up at student support

meetings, and often being requested for evaluations for having learning delays. The next section will discuss the rationale for my literature review in Chapter Two.

Rationale

Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education? More and more ELLs are being identified to be assessed for special education services.

Graduation rates for ELLs are lower than their peers. According to Sanchez (2017), as a whole, English language learners still lag behind in terms of academic achievement. According to MDE in 2019, 83.7% of all students in Minnesota graduated, and the percentage of ELLs graduates was 67.2%. ELLs across the state are not making grade level benchmarks or are not proficient in reading and math in standardized tests such as the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). This is a growing concern for our marginalized students. The rationale for my literature review and for my capstone project is to provide information on English language learners' needs, and to gain knowledge to help educators of English language learners to be more culturally and linguistically aware which will prevent unnecessary referrals to special education. This will help ensure that ELLs are getting their social, emotional and academic needs met in the classroom. There is a cultural barrier in providing equitable instruction to ELLs in a mainstream classroom (Compton, 2018). This by no means is to say mainstream classrooms teachers aren't doing the best they can. The rationale for the professional development I am creating is to provide an opportunity for mainstream teachers to gain knowledge and awareness on meeting the needs of English language learners. I also want to point out that I am aware

that some ELLs do need special education services, and do possibly have learning disabilities. However, by teachers learning the tools to work with ELL's my hope is that all resources are exhausted before the referral process is put in place. My goal with this capstone is to look at the emotional, social, cultural, linguistic and academic areas of the student rather than just the academic benchmarks that indicate what they should be able to do compared to peers. Education is not one size fits all, and in the next section, I will give a project overview and description of the capstone project.

Project Overview and Description

The project that I created as a result of my own classroom experiences and from the research done in the Chapter 2, is four one-hour professional development presentations. The goal of each professional development is to build on the knowledge and awareness on how cultural and language affects learning in each presentation. I designed them to be stand alone professional developments as well, but for overall effectiveness, participants should attend all four PDs in order. The first professional development presentation consists of a background of English language learners, how L1 and L2 are learned, an overview of WIDA language proficiency levels, and an explanation of how to use *WIDA Can Do* descriptors in the classroom. The outcome will be to build more awareness of the resources that can be used to scaffold lesson objectives.

The second professional development presentation will build cultural awareness and introduce Rings of Culture and the Cultural Iceberg. This PD will build awareness on how to define culture, and introduce the Rings of Culture and how they strongly influence how we think, believe, and behave, and in turn affects how we learn. I will

provide teachers time to reflect on their own identity to help build awareness that their own identity can affect how they teach. The third PD gives an overview on how culture affects learning. The outcome will be to provide ways to ensure that all students have a safe learning environment where they feel respected, valued and understood.

The third professional development presentation will be on trauma that ELL students may experience, including generational trauma. It starts with information on students' relation to Maslow's hierarchy before they can access Bloom's taxonomy. I provided an explanation of what the difference is between first, second and third generation immigrants. I provided information on different types of trauma. I explained the different types of immigrants, and provided background on how their immigration stories may have caused trauma or adverse traumatic experiences, such as experiences of refugees. The outcome will be to provide strategies to help build relations with students, and to reflect on what they as teachers are already doing and what they still need to do.

The fourth professional development presentation will educate educators on the criteria used for assessments, the qualifications that are required to receive special education services, or ASD diagnosis. I gave information on how these assessments show bias. The PD will also look at the similarities in ELL academic needs and SPED academic needs. This will shed light on why there needs to be better increased awareness on what ELLs need socially, emotionally, and academically in order to have success in the classroom. This final PD provided participants with a checklist supported by the Minnesota Department of Education on assessing ELLs for learning delays. The next section will be the project description including the setting, participants and timeline.

Setting and Participants

I work in a suburban, middle class school district. 65% of students enrolled are white, and 35% are classified as another race or ethnicity. 5% of the enrolled students are receiving English language services (Minnesota Report Card, 2020). The ELLs in the district I work in have a variety of cultures and languages. The prominent cultures are Hispanic, Hmong, Ethiopian, Vietnamese, and Somali.

A majority of the educators are white, middle class women. These professional developments will be beneficial for any educator that teaches English language learners, and can benefit any school where English language learners are present. My goal is to present the professional development in an elementary K-12 school setting, specifically at the elementary school where I work.

Timeline

As stated before this is a four part professional development presentation. The timeline for the professional development presentations will be given in one school year. The goal is to present one professional development each quarter. Starting with the first one in October, the next in January, the third March, and the last in May. The next section is the framework and methodology that I will be using to present my professional development presentations.

Framework and Methodology - Adult Learning

The professional development presentation is centered around Malcolm Knowles' Theory of Andragogy. Andragogy, as defined by Knowles, is the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1984). Children and adults differ in their ways of learning

and have different needs. My goal in the PD is to use the knowledge of the participants and use collaboration. I have been to many professional developments and within 15 minutes, you notice the yawns starting and the heads bobbing. I know I did not want to give a “sit and get” presentation. My intention is to design a PD that not only gives information, but allows participants to use the new knowledge effectively in their classroom.

Knowles (1984), suggests four principles that are applied to adult learning. First, adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction. Second, experience provides the basis for the learning activities. Third, adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life. Fourth, adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented. (Kearsley, 2010). My professional development presentations will provide resources for the participants to plan new lessons given the new concepts and ideas. These lessons will provide relevance and meaning that they can bring back to their classrooms. The professional development presentations focus on solutions, ideas, concepts, new ways of thinking that provide educators opportunities to understand English language learners needs and learning styles that look through the lens of cultural awareness and linguistic awareness.

The other framework that I will use is culturally responsive protocols and practices (Hollie, 2012). In the teaching profession, it is important that educators understand who they are teaching, and provide a curriculum that meets students where they are at, both linguistically and academically. In order to have a safe and effective

learning environment, educators need to be culturally and linguistically aware (Hollie, 2012). In order to do so, educators need the tools that will help them more effectively work with ELLs, understand their experiences and linguistic background, and be aware of their social, emotional and cultural needs in the classroom. The protocols and practices I will be using are classroom best practices that include a variety of movement and response protocols such as collaboration, turn and talk, and think-pair-share (Hollie, 2012). I will also start each presentation with ice breakers that will provide participants more awareness of what they will be learning. My goal is to create an environment where the teachers are active participants in the PDs. Teachers will come with a lot of knowledge that is valuable, and their collective input will help with their learning.

As an English language teacher, I find it extremely valuable to create opportunities for educators to experience what it feels like to have limited language. My professional development will give teachers these experiences, by creating activities that simulate having limited language. The next section will give a summary of this chapter and will introduce Chapter Four.

Conclusion

The project that I outlined above is a four day - one hour professional development presentation. The goal is to empower educators who teach English language learners. The empowerment will come from new or continued knowledge on the needs of ELLs in all areas: social, emotional and academical, cultural and linguistic. The goal of the professional development project is to bring awareness to educators that ELLs do indeed learn differently, have different needs, and need different teaching strategies.

These differences may look like a student has a learning delay, can't academically keep up, or may need special education services. The professional development project is meant to give teachers a better understanding, so that they don't assume additional services are needed. Instead it will give them awareness to evaluate their outlook, and find other opportunities to gauge academic success. These professional developments will help empower teachers to try a new way of teaching, instead of a new way of learning.

Chapter Four will provide a reflection on the development of the capstone project. I will revisit the big question: *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?* The reflection will look at what I learned throughout the project development capstone process.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

As an educator I am always learning, my goal as an educator is to reflect on my teaching and my own limitations, which leads to developmental insight. This chapter is a reflection on my capstone process, and will include what I have learned as a researcher, writer, and learner. I will also revisit some important key points from my literature review which provided the background to my capstone project. I will discuss the limitations of my project, with the idea that there are certainly limitations to almost any research. As a result, I will explain some limitations of my project as well as present what future recommendations, and teacher training to be able to have other teachers present my professional development project. The chapter will end with a summary to emphasize the key points and learning of this chapter, and where my research and information will go next.

For my capstone project, I designed and created four professional development presentations based on the information gathered in my research, my own educational experiences, and classroom situations. The first two presentations are focused on English language learners and culture. The background of the information was more classroom situations, and my own educational and teaching experiences. The third and fourth professional development presentations are focused on trauma and English Language Learners (ELLs) in Special Education. The background of the information of these presentations were more based on the research within my capstone.

The reason why I chose this topic as my capstone was because of the experiences I have had as an EL teacher. This year alone I had three ELLs be recommended for special education service. As I sat in all three of those meetings my heart sank as I was the only EL teacher and only voice of one to advocate for the students social, emotional, cultural, and linguistic needs. The meetings were based on the students academic needs. As I sat there trying my best to advise the team that the students do not have a disability my voice was weak. In the beginning of this capstone I gave three scenarios of the students, and as I finish this paper, I am happy to report that none of them are in special education!

Literature Review Revisited

The literature review and research in Chapter Two looked at the dual identified ELLs (students that are both English language learners and also in special education services). The purpose of my research was to answer the question, *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?* My goal was to build awareness of the vast educational differences an ELL has due to culture, language, and trauma.

The literature review was divided into four focus areas or subtopics, English Language Learners, Cultural Awareness, Trauma, and ELLs in Special Education. I started my literature review by giving a background to who ELLs are, and what their academic needs are. I focused the research on how ELLs learn, the stages of language acquisition, and the difference between social language and academic language. I also introduced the WIDA Consortium. WIDA provides English language teachers with

teaching standards, assessments, language proficiency levels, research for best teaching practices, and a culturally and linguistically appropriate system to support ELLs in K-12 contexts (WIDA, 2020). For an EL teacher, WIDA provides us the background for our assessments, instruction, and resources for our students.

The second section talked about cultural awareness. The area I focused on with this research was on what culture is and how it plays a part in the classroom. I defined what culture is, introduced the Cultural IceBerg, and incorporated research that focused on how teachers need to be culturally aware and understand a student culture. According to Cumming (1984), until a teacher has cultural awareness, they may inadvertently mistake a student's learning style for needing special education services.

The third subtopic dealt with trauma. The research was based on how students, especially ELLs may be experiencing some sort of trauma from their immigration, or their parents' immigration. I researched the different types of trauma that ELLs may be experiencing, specifically trauma associated with satellite babies, refugees, and generational trauma.

The fourth subtopic discussed the similarities to ELLs and Special Education needs of students, as well as the criteria used to assess students for both services. The information and data was obtained mainly from the Minnesota Department of Education, WIDA, and other articles that focused on dual identified ELLs.

Reflection on Research

In the beginning of my research I had many subtopics, yet as I did my research and began writing the literature review I was able to compile all the data into these four

areas. When I finalized the first three chapters, I felt the information gathered, and the flow of the paper helped the reader gain knowledge in each section. There could have been more information and research added, but I felt it would begin to be redundant or veer off into too many subtopics. The goal of the research was for me to continue to gain knowledge in the area, and also be able to provide a professional development project that would be meaningful to all teachers not just those working with ELLs. The area that was most relevant as I was doing my research was on generational trauma. I have been learning about this and doing my own research prior to this capstone, mainly with Hmong students. It was in the article by Vang (2015), that said generational trauma may now be affecting the second and third generation in their family, which may be playing out in the school setting. Similarly, the trauma can have an effect on a student's emotional, social, and mental health. Research has shown, Hmong children in schools today are getting left behind due to their culture of quietness and lack of engagement in the classroom (Vang, 2015). More and more often these students are being recommended or assessed for special education due to their poor test scores and lack of academic progress (Vang, 2015). It is my goal to bring awareness to educators on the cultural differences, and needs of diverse students. We can't keep teaching all students as if they're white and from middle class homes. There are cultural differences among diverse students with first, second or third generation immigrants. As educators, we have to empower ourselves to become more culturally aware so that our students can have the best education that meets their needs as individuals. This is the goal of the extensive research done in my capstone. I feel that in the end my paper has provided a great deal of information that could be a

starting point for some educators, or a refresher for others to continually grow to become more culturally aware.

Reflection on the Professional Development Project

The project that I created as a result of my own classroom experiences and from the research done in Chapter Two, is four one-hour professional development presentations of each subtopic. The goal of each professional development is to build on the knowledge and awareness on how cultural and language affects learning. I designed them to be stand alone professional developments as well, but for overall effectiveness, participants should attend all four PDs in order.

When I began the project for this capstone, I took each subtopic from the literature review and created professional development presentations for each topic. Ideally I thought I could have it all in one professional development, but as I started I realized the information in each topic was too much to be crammed into one PD. This is why there are four PDs, each with its own goals and objectives, but the underlying goal is to build cultural awareness to meet the needs of ELLs. The presentations would be given over one school year. They need to be given consecutively to be able to build on the knowledge gained from each PD.

Overall, all four PDs provide a great deal of information for the participants. One limitation is that with all the information being provided I hope that teachers don't feel overwhelmed, bogged down, and won't know where to begin. This is another reason I choose to break the project into four PDs. I do provide handouts and documentation in each PD that teachers can use in their classrooms, but there is no step by step format. In

this I fear that teachers need to be encouraged enough to utilize this information and continue their own growth on each topic. By spreading out the PDs over a school year, it will allow teachers to use the knowledge learned, and hopefully utilize this new knowledge in their classrooms. Again, this is a limitation, because without a directive from administration or the district, some teachers may not have their own initiative to become more culturally aware. As we know, classroom teachers are overwhelmed with large class sizes, lack of resources, and the pressure to meet state standards and benchmarks. This project is not to create more work for educators, but to help them in their classrooms by building awareness that will make their teaching more effective.

Future Research

Each subtopic in Chapter Two could be its own research project. Some of the information was gathered from my own experiences, but the areas that are most new to me and most educators are trauma and mental health. This has been an area that is becoming more and more of a need in schools. This year alone our school and district had many PDs on trauma. The goal for future research is to look at all areas of trauma a student could have: students with lower socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, immigration, death, depression, bullying, or gender. These areas can relate back to one's Rings of Culture. In a society that looks on freedoms and individuality, being different is a barrier one has to overcome. For myself, or for a future researcher, this is an area that needs to be researched more and information needs to be provided to educators. If educators can understand more about a student on a personal level, they will be better able to choose strategies that fit well with students' backgrounds.

Summary

In this chapter, I reflected on my literature review and my capstone project. This capstone started with the question *Why is there a growing number of ELL students with learning delays, being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or qualifying for Special Education?* This process has given me a few answers to this question. All students have a unique background, which makes their academic needs different. Teachers need to take the time to make sure they get to know each student on a personal level, and to understand the language and academic needs of ELLs. They have a rich background and culture, even if their language is limited they can still learn with effective guidance. Students may be suffering with trauma emotionally, physically or socially which all affects learning. There are similarities to the needs of ELLs and those with learning delays or cognitive disabilities. This does not mean that ELLs need special education. It means they need to have teachers that are aware of their cultural, academic and language needs. A school and its district can have the best curriculum, resources, and staff, but if we are not meeting the needs of the whole child, even the best curriculum and school staff does not ensure these children succeed in school. Teachers have to advocate for their students, they have to focus more on what a student CAN DO, instead of all the things they can't do. The overall goal is to build awareness to evaluate educators outlook of teaching, and find other opportunities to gauge academic success. This research and project helps empower teachers to try a new way of teaching, instead of a new way of learning.

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