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HELPING SECONDARY EL STUDENTS BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE WRITERS

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HELPING SECONDARY EL STUDENTS BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE WRITERS

by

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

Hamline University

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My job as a teacher is not to teach the curriculum or even to just teach the students; it is to seek to understand my kids as completely as possible so that I can purposefully bend curriculum to meet them.

-*Cornelius Minor, We Got This*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Grammar is boring.” “Our students need to practice writing in different genres, not get bogged down with grammar.” “Our students’ writing is just terrible.” “We don’t have enough time to teach writing, too.” These are comments that I hear often from my colleagues, and they are indicative of a problem that exists in our high schools and has not been adequately addressed. The ultimate consequence of these comments is that many students, especially our EL learners, are not adequately prepared for writing tasks in their content classes, not to mention how unprepared they feel when they begin to apply for jobs and post-secondary education. What about English Learners whose college application essays are glanced over and then tossed into the *NO* pile because they were filled with syntax errors, or because they simply did not communicate effectively?

As their teachers, we owe these students an equitable opportunity to learn to write successfully for academic tasks. While I disagree with the idea that grammar does not matter, I can relate to my colleagues’ dismay concerning students’ writing skills in our school. As I have worked one-on-one with many EL students over the last couple of years on writing tasks, I have felt vaguely unsettled about the kind of help I was giving them. Students were genuinely stressed over expressing themselves effectively for tasks that required academic writing. However, I began to feel like it was more of my voice coming through than their own. I wanted to provide a different kind of help, one that would empower students to use their own voice and their own linguistic knowledge, even if it was not in English. How can students show me what they know if they are limited to using English? These students deserve writing instruction that meets their language-learning needs, and at the same time, empowers them to utilize the vast linguistic knowledge they already possess. The question I will be addressing in this Capstone is *How can teachers of EL learners ensure that students utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to access the linguistic structures they need in order to communicate effectively for academic tasks?* In the rest of this chapter, I will be addressing the professional and personal significance of this project, important definitions and foci, as well as rationale for the project.

Professional and Personal Significance

I have just finished my third year teaching at a high school in a large metro district in Minnesota. My school has a total population of 1,900 students, of which about 34% are EL students. About 54% of students are Asian, 21% are African American, 15% are Hispanic or Latinx, 2% are Native American, 2% are Multiracial, and 6% are White. Seventy-three percent of students qualify for free/reduced-price lunches. The majority of my students are native Karen, Hmong, Thai, Somali, and Spanish speakers. Most of them come from Southeast Asia, East Africa, and Central America. Some students' families are from Burma, but grew up in refugee camps in Thailand. I provide EL services to about 100 students in grades 9-12. Most of this service is delivered in co-taught social studies classes: U.S. History, Economics, and Government. I also work with EL students in a sheltered Language Through Science class. Because our school is over one-third EL learners, all teachers work with these students. A number of our EL learners are also SLIFE, or Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). These students have already overcome many obstacles to be in the U.S., but they face many more when they arrive at school.

Since I began my student teaching in this same school, I noticed that English learners in Language Academy classes (levels 1, 1.5, and 2) were taught explicit English grammar and writing, while level 3, 4, and 5 students in mainstream and some co-taught EL classes were not. In the last two years, I have taught mainly in co-taught social studies classes, and students really struggle with the basic mechanics of writing that I was taught in elementary and middle school. In my own schooling experience, as a native speaker of English, I received nine years of explicit grammar and writing instruction. This instruction has helped me throughout my career as a student and professional, and has helped me to be taken seriously academically and advance to the next level. As a white, middle-class woman, I have not had to overcome language or other cultural barriers in order to experience academic and career success. However, in my personal international travel experiences, I have been thankful to have experienced first-hand what it is like to learn how to do everything in another language. I have also been incredibly grateful to teachers and other individuals who have given me explicit language instruction that I needed for various sociocultural contexts.

Many of my students are SLIFE. They are facing the challenge of writing using the complex academic language of social studies in a language that is new to them. One big problem that both mainstream and EL teachers who teach mainstream content classes face is how to teach the required content as well as explicit grammar and writing skills that our students need in order to be successful academically and beyond. I believe that all students can learn to high academic levels, and that all students bring with them skills, knowledge, and beliefs that are unique to their backgrounds and cultures and are an asset in the classroom.

Equity is a top priority for me as an EL teacher. Equity in our classrooms means that Long-Term EL students, SLIFE students, students with special needs, and mainstream students are all receiving the instruction they need to become successful writers. Since this explicit grammar and writing instruction is not consistently happening in the classes that I co-teach with other content teachers, I would like to address this issue by creating a curriculum that could be taught within the context of the content instruction that students are already receiving in my co-taught EL classrooms. I want to create a curriculum that both teaches students explicitly how to use linguistic forms they need in specific genres of writing for academic tasks as well as empowers them to utilize their vast linguistic knowledge, and their peers as resources. All teachers are writing teachers. If we are being equitable, then teachers across content areas will be teaching academic language that is specific to their content area; and furthermore, linguistic features that will enable their students to become writers with a successful command of academic language.

Important Definitions and Foci

According to DeCapua and Marshall (2011), SLIFE learners are Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (p. 2). These students are often refugees fleeing a violent and oppressive situation in their home countries who enter the school system usually at the secondary level. Their formal education in their home country has been interrupted for various reasons, and DeCapua and Marshall (2011) noted that these students are “among those at the highest risk for dropping out” (p. 2). In addition to the obstacles that SLIFE learners are already facing, they often feel great pressure to “graduate on time,” cramming many years’ worth of schooling into just a few years, and in a language that is completely new to them. Furthermore, these students also face cultural dissonance, or “the sense of confusion and dislocation that students coming from different cultural backgrounds and ways of learning experience when confronted with the expectations and demands of Western-style formal education” (Marshall & DeCapua, 2013, p. 9). I have chosen to place a focus on SLIFE learners because of the many challenges these students face, in addition to the pressure that is placed on them to graduate and learn a new language in just a few short years. Throughout the paper, I refer to “EL learners.” EL refers to *English Language*, and ELs refers to *English Learners.* Sometimes ELL is used also, and refers to *English Language Learning* and ELLs, referring to *English Language Learners.*

Chapter two highlights Systemic Functional Linguistics and translanguaging as tools that teachers can use to support and empower their multilingual EL learners in the classroom. Systemic Functional Linguistics, or SFL is a theory developed by Michael Halliday in the 1960s as a way to make the meaning of different linguistic forms more explicit. SFL theory also recognizes that we use specific linguistic forms for certain genres. For example, in order to complete an academic writing task in a science class, one would need to understand the specific language features that are used within the language of science, and *how* they are used. (Aguirre-Muñoz, Park, Amabisca, & Boscardin, 2009). SFL is recently gaining in popularity as a tool in the classroom to teach grammar and writing. Translanguaging is another tool that is becoming more widely-used in the classroom, and can help multilingual speakers to utilize all of their linguistic knowledge, and not just their knowledge of one language (usually English) to demonstrate their understanding in a certain content area (Stewart & Hansen-Thomas, 2016). Translanguaging is a more equitable way to provide writing instruction in the multilingual classroom because it does not put English in position as the most important language, but rather embraces all linguistic knowledge equally in order to make the best linguistic choices for academic tasks (Martin-Beltrán, 2014).

Rationale for the Project

One enormous problem I see in my school and in education today is that EL students are not receiving the kind of grammar and writing instruction they need across the content areas that will help them to write successfully for academic tasks. Students need more explicit grammar and writing instruction to help them recognize and utilize the genre-specific linguistic features that will enable them to write clear and effective academic discourse. I want to develop a curriculum for my students and find out if providing explicit grammar instruction and encouraging students to use their entire linguistic repertoire (and not restricting their language use to English) can improve academic writing for my EL students from diverse cultural backgrounds and life circumstances. My motivation for creating this curriculum is to create more equitable writing instruction for the EL learners in my co-taught social studies classes. I also want to be able to share my findings with colleagues to increase equitable writing instruction at our school. Ultimately, I want to see my EL students feel successful in their writing ability by utilizing all of their linguistic knowledge, and to be able to use their writing skills as a key to unlock the next level of academic or career success.

Overview of Chapters and Guiding Question

In this chapter, I began by introducing my topic and main research question, *How can teachers of EL learners ensure that students utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to access the linguistic structures they need in order to communicate effectively for academic tasks?*

I also discussed the topic's professional and personal significance to me as a teacher who seeks to improve student learning and empower EL learners in the linguistic knowledge they already possess. I provided a topic overview followed by important definitions for this paper, and then finally, the rationale behind this capstone project.

In the next chapter, I will provide a review of the literature relevant to this topic, and discuss my most important findings: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a way to provide key academic language instruction, the importance of explicit writing and grammar instruction for EL learners, and providing equitable opportunities, including translanguaging as a strategy in the multilingual classroom. Chapter Three provides a description of my curriculum project, as well as grounding theory and examples that will inform the development of my curriculum. I will also discuss the educational setting, participants, and timeline for my proposed project. Chapter Four discusses the future implementation, evaluation, and learnings of this curriculum project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The purpose of this project is to create a curriculum that enables EL learners to access all of the linguistic knowledge they possess by creating a classroom environment that encourages multilingual students to utilize all of their languages in speaking, writing, and thinking tasks. Another goal is to empower students to gain command of the linguistic structures they need to communicate effectively in academic writing tasks. The question I want to answer in this Capstone is *How can teachers of EL learners ensure that students utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to access the linguistic structures they need in order to communicate effectively for academic tasks?*

A brief review of the literature has indicated that the following ideas are extremely relevant in academic language instruction and discourse competence for EL learners: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a part of explicit writing and grammar instruction, creating equitable learning opportunities, and translanguaging as a strategy in the multilingual classroom. This chapter begins with a discussion about the importance of academic language and how Systemic Functional Linguistics can be used to help students acquire academic language. The second part of the chapter is about the kind of writing and grammar instruction that is most effective in a multilingual classroom, followed by a section about how teachers can ensure that they are creating equitable learning opportunities for their EL learners and utilizing culturally responsive teaching. Finally, this chapter discusses how translanguaging can be an empowering strategy for students to access all of their linguistic knowledge in the classroom.

Academic Language and SFL

Academic language is quite different from social language. In the context of English-language learning, social language is the language that learners acquire as they are learning to navigate various social situations. Academic language, however, is the language that EL learners need to succeed in school and career settings. Academic language can be a challenge for EL learners to acquire because it is specific to different content areas and genres, such as writing an essay arguing the causes of the Civil War in a U.S. History class. Furthermore, if not made explicit to EL learners, they will not have the language they need to complete various academic tasks. Scarcella (2003) noted that "learning academic language is probably one of the surest, most reliable ways of attaining socio-economic success in the United States today. Learners cannot function in school settings without it" (p. 3). Huerta further stated that academic language is particularly important in the current school atmosphere of high-stakes testing (2013, p. 24). When looking at the achievement gap that exists today between students of color and white students, as well as between students of lower socio-economic status and students of higher socio-economic status, it has still not been narrowed nearly enough due in part to a lack of academic language (Huerta, 2013, p. 8). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have revamped academic standards to become more inclusive of EL learners. These changes carry the expectation that every teacher is simultaneously a content, language, and literacy teacher. The new standards also call for teacher collaboration, enabling EL learners to access these standards (Staehr Fenner, 2014, p. 28). According to Stewart and Hansen-Thomas (2016), EL learners are more likely to succeed academically when their “languages, cultures, and identities are valued and leveraged within the academic environment” (p. 451).

Unfortunately, current pedagogical practice in EL instruction does not necessarily prioritize ELs’ needs for understanding the linguistic structures that are necessary to acquire academic language. Furthermore, there is a worry among educational linguists that sheltered instruction, which is a strategy for teaching EL learners language as well as specific content, is inadequate for exposing students to the academic discourse they need to achieve higher levels of academic proficiency (Aguirre-Muñoz, Park, Amabisca, & Boscardin, 2009, pp. 298-299). EL learners need instruction that includes academic language development and exposure to various academic registers so that they can both advance to higher language proficiency levels and reach grade-level academic standards (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 316). According to Gibbons, the following are indicative of intellectually-challenging curriculum that encourage growth in academic language: higher-order thinking, deep knowledge and an ability to demonstrate it, and substantive conversation (2009, p. 14). Marshall and DeCapua (2013) identified three schemata that EL learners are negotiating during instruction: the language, the content, and the task. If one of these schemata is being introduced for the first time, the cognitive load can be reduced by keeping the other two schemata familiar. For example, if a new academic language structure is being introduced, the lesson will be more effective and more likely to result in academic language growth if the content and the task are already familiar to students (p. 117). Hammond (2009) posited that all students can learn academic language by talking through cognitive routines. This talk, which she called “dialogic talk,” has its roots in the oral cultural tradition, which is a familiar way of passing on knowledge to many non-Western parts of the world. She further explained that this talk can be used to build upon existing student knowledge to "add to or expand on...thinking" (p. 134).

Aguirre-Muñoz et al. (2009) have asserted that Systemic Functional Linguistics, or SFL, can be used in academic writing instruction across the content areas to help make meaning in linguistic forms explicit. SFL is a theory developed by Halliday (1961) that focuses on making meaning and noticing relationships between linguistic forms, thereby making academic language more explicit (p. 300). Macken-Horarik (2012) has called it a "powerful metalanguage" that can help students to focus on how various linguistic forms function within a sentence or in a paragraph or larger chunk of discourse (p. 181). According to SFL theory, linguistic features vary across genres of writing tasks, and students will become more astute at academic writing when they have an understanding of those linguistic features that are needed to read and write within that specific genre (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 299). Some of these linguistic features include cohesive devices that connect ideas within a section of text, as well as nominalization and nominal grouping.

Two key features in academic language that teachers need to make explicit to EL learners are nominalization and nominal grouping. Nominalization, or the "process of changing verbs into nouns," is a very important linguistic feature for students to recognize and utilize as they become readers and writers of more lexically and academically dense texts (Gibbons, 2009, p. 51). Academic language is often packaged in a long grouping of words that represent a single idea and yet carry a lot of information.

These long groups of words which refer to a noun are called “a noun group or a nominal group” (Gibbons, 2009, p. 54). Gibbons also emphasized the importance of teaching EL learners about register in a text. Register includes three components: field, tenor, and mode. According to Gibbons, field “refers to the topic of the text,” tenor “refers to the relationship between speaker and listener (or writer and reader),” and mode “refers to the channel of communication, whether it is spoken or written” (2009, pp. 47-48). Instruction on “generalized noun phrases, modal verbs, and third-person references” can help the tenor of students’ writing, so that it sounds more formal, like a newspaper, and better-suited for academic genres in a school setting (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 312). Furthermore, Patthey-Chávez et al. asserted that if teachers of EL learners are trained in SFL instruction, they will be able to give language feedback that will allow students to “develop their metalinguistic knowledge and in turn help them gain command of academic literacies” (as cited in Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 316). One of the challenges with SFL is that the terminology takes a concerted effort to learn. This could be a drawback to teachers who might want to use it in the classroom. Professional development is expensive and time-consuming, and many teachers are not willing to dedicate themselves to this type of training (Macken-Horarik, 2012, p. 192). On the other hand, Kerfoot and Simon-Vandenbergen (2014) offered that SFL is a great option for multilingual classrooms because it helps to even the playing field, “enabling all learners regardless of linguistic background to perform at the same high level” as well as “modify relations of power in the classroom through collaborative construction of knowledge” (pp. 178-179). How, then, should we approach writing instruction for ELs in a way that will support their academic language development?

Writing and Grammar Instruction for English Learners

There are differing views of what constitutes the most effective writing instruction for ELLs. Gibbons (2009) and Aguirre-Muñoz et al. (2009) purported that students need to be taught to identify different genres of text that are found in a given content area, as well as the linguistic and grammatical features that characterize them. As Gibbons (2009) stated, “the fact that language, by its nature, varies according to context… is one of the most powerful arguments to teach EL learners through a program that integrates content and language learning” (p. 48). According to Gibbons (2009), each content area has genres, or speaking/writing situations that are specific to that particular content area. For example, in science, students need to know how to write lab reports, which are written with a specific type of organization and linguistic features, such as passive voice, or speaking about actions being done without referring to the people doing them (p. 108). Gibbons (2009) further stated that:

> Genres are cultural in nature and differ in terms of their social purpose, overall organization, and special language features. Written genres that are valued in school need to be explicitly taught, since they are central to learning and to successful student outcomes. (p. 128)

Gibbons (2009) gave an example of an EL teacher working together with a science teacher to explicitly teach their EL students how to identify and use the passive voice in a text. The teachers had students locate and underline passive verbs in a practice activity, and then discuss why science reports are written formally, without reference to the people carrying out the actions in the experiments. The use of passive voice allowed the class to talk about experiments without referring to the people, and thus maintain a formal style of writing (p. 37). This example shows how focusing on a particular grammatical feature (and even doing practice exercises), such as passive voice, within a broader context (science lab reports) can give a clear purpose to the grammar activity (Gibbons, 2009, p. 37). This also underscores the idea that all content-area teachers are writing teachers.

In the study conducted by Aguirre-Muñoz et al. (2009), a group of California teachers who had EL students in their classes received training on how to teach Systemic Functional Linguistics to their EL learners. Prior to receiving this training, these teachers often made writing feedback suggestions to students that centered on "spelling, mechanical errors, punctuation, and grammatical errors," but not on improving overall meaning (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 307). The trainings in the study emphasized that teachers should provide writing instruction that guides their EL learners to not only identify important details that should be included, but also gives them strategies to help them decide when and where to add more details, and how to do this in a way that achieves coherent writing (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 308).

According to this study, writing instruction focusing on the function of linguistic structures was most likely to result in increased overall student writing performance (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 311). The trainings enabled teachers to present the functions of linguistic structures such as "embedded clauses, adverbial expressions (including prepositional phrases), and participial and subordinate clauses," as well as using theme/rheme charts to improve overall flow (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 311). Furthermore, the study found that instruction focusing on structure and function of conjunctions and transitional phrases helped students to understand that these "words create different types of relationships between ideas such as additive, contrasting, cause and effect, order of importance, and time order" (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 310). A strategy presented to help teach these types of relationships was to generate "word lists with students categorized by their function within a given text and following with meaningful activities to help them apply these ideas to their own writing" (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 311). Finally, the study also found that teaching students about specific verb types, or processes, allowed students to "create more interesting, varied text and differentiate the function of sections of text" (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 311). Teachers in this study were encouraged to utilize small group activities and individual conferencing with their students, which were found to be "key features of the genre-based approach" to writing instruction for EL learners (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 307). An important advantage of the genre-based approach is a shared metalanguage for talking about languages and linguistic choices, which is especially helpful in a multilingual classroom setting. Martin-Beltrán pointed out that this metalanguage can be useful in analyzing texts in different languages and can serve as a "two-way language bridge" (as cited in Kerfoot & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2014, p. 182).

According to a study done by Toth (2004), grammar instruction "may be undermined when it is based only on structures in utterances rather than on broader, transparent discourse goals" (p. 27). Macken-Horarik (2012) also posited that the majority of educators believe that grammar “has a limited role to play” in writing instruction (p. 184). Swain et al. asked an important question: “Is the communication goal at a particular moment primarily one of making meaning or one of speaking accurately?” (as cited in Steinman, 2013, p. 48). This is a question that must be answered for writing teachers of EL learners. If teachers believe that making meaning should be the primary goal, then writing feedback needs to be provided differently. As Webster (2013) stated, time is better spent helping EL writers to make their writing more “understandable and interesting” than to try to remove all traces of their “accent” in their writing (p. 8). Toth (2004) also concluded that instructors of grammar should ensure that the “sequence and content” of the lesson should make transparent the “purpose of classroom discourse” (p. 27). Celce-Murcia (1992) also emphasized that instruction in grammar should be “discourse-based and context-based,” rather than only at the sentence-level and without context (p. 406). Daniel and Eley (2017) further stated that if writing instruction for EL learners only focuses on grammar and vocabulary, then they are “being denied equitable opportunities to develop literacy skills that align with expectations of secondary school graduates” (p. 430).

However, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers have purported that older children and adults need explicit instruction on forms in the target language. Celce-Murcia (1992) and Steinman (2013) have asserted that without this focus on form, they are more likely to experience “negative transfer from their native language” (Celce-Murcia, 1992, p. 407). Celce-Murcia (1992) also stated that grammar instruction is necessary for higher levels of language proficiency and can take EL learners “up to seven years to acquire second-language literacy skills needed to achieve academic parity with native speakers" (p. 407). Marshall and DeCapua (2013) agreed that EL learners need explicit grammar instruction in their writing classes. They found that "construction of sentences, particularly those with multiple clauses and with transitional words and phrases common to complex written discourse is particularly challenging for these learners" (p. 52). Webster (2013) reasoned that,

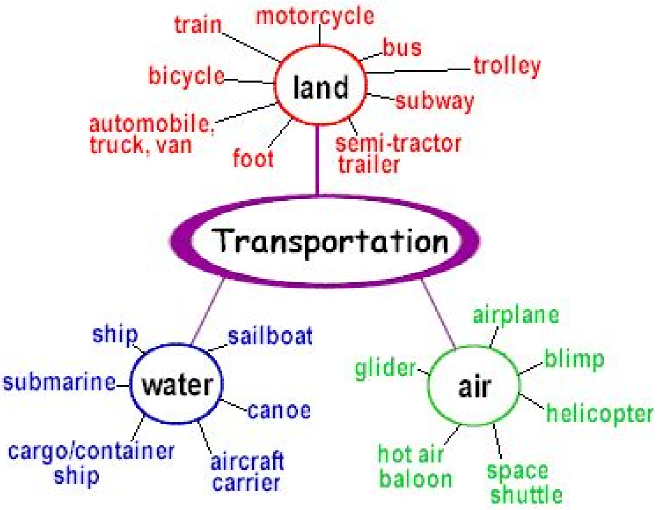
> [M]uch error arises in ELL papers not from laziness or poor editing skills, or even lack of time studying English. Rather, it is from the enormous difficulty ELLs face in mastering a language that in many respects differs structurally as well as phonologically from English. (p. 7)

EL learners, in particular SLIFE learners, often face challenges unseen by their teachers. Marshall and DeCapua (2013) explained that these learners are experiencing *cultural dissonance*, or "the sense of confusion and dislocation that students coming from different cultural backgrounds and ways of learning experience when confronted with the expectations and demands of Western-style formal education" (p. 9). These cultural experiences and backgrounds must be taken into account when planning effective writing instruction for EL learners. The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm, or MALP, is an instruction framework developed by DeCapua and Marshall (2011). This framework can be used in writing instruction, and is particularly effective for SLIFE learners. In MALP classrooms, "instruction begins with the oral component and then moves to the written," because many non-Western cultures utilize oral transmission for communication, rather than the written word (Marshall & DeCapua, 2013, p. 51). These two ways of communication, oral and written, can be bridged for SLIFE learners by first having these students practice discussion skills in the classroom, which can then result in students being able to understand and communicate about relationships between ideas. Once students have a firm grasp in articulating these relationships, they can move to writing about them. Marshall and DeCapua (2013) suggested one method for helping EL learners to bridge the oral tradition with the written one is to have students audio-record class discussion, and then report on the discussion in writing. The teacher can provide feedback to help students "refine their choices with respect to formalistic styles of written discourse as a new genre" and then move on to "more difficult tasks requiring academic ways of thinking, such as summarizing or synthesizing the discussion" (p. 52).

Daniel and Eley (2017) conducted a study involving a group of refugee high school students in a writing workshop with the purpose of gaining knowledge and skills needed to write successful college application essays and preparing for job interviews (p. 422). Because each student's background was different, their approach to writing was different. Daniel and Eley, teacher-researchers, helped students to be able to express themselves with the strategy of "flexible openness." Rather than strictly adhering to writing about one specific topic, students were allowed to use the semantic map they created to develop their writing (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 424). As they facilitated the writing program, teachers first taught students to see "how ideas are connected in texts" they are reading, and to use semantic maps to connect ideas in their own writing (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 421). The semantic map handout helped students to identify ways the authors in the texts were exhibiting their identities, and they were able to use this to suggest edits and further writing ideas in peer-editing (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 424). Having students analyze exemplar texts was a helpful beginning strategy which enabled them to identify important ideas that students could transfer to their semantic maps, which served as a launch point to writing about their own identities, and could then be applied to their college application essays and job interview preparation (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 422). Semantic maps were also an important tool for students to visualize how to structure their writing (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 423). Peery (2009) has also encouraged the use of semantic mapping and graphic organizers because of the specific types of thinking they enable students to do, as well as the enhancement of learning that takes place when EL learners are able to process information in both linguistic and visual form (p. 63, 77). Figure 1 below illustrates one way that semantic mapping could be used to help EL learners to understand different kinds of transportation.

Figure 1.

Example of a Semantic Map on Transportation (Voight, M. Retrieved from http://mavoigt.weebly.com/semantic-maps.html)


train
motorcycle
bus
trolley
bicycle
land
subway
automobile, truck, van
foot
semi-tractor trailer
Transportation
ship
sailboat
submarine
water
canoe
cargo/container ship
aircraft carrier
airplane
glider
air
blimp
helicopter
hot air baloon
space shuttle

The *connective press* was another strategy, like semantic mapping, that helped students to make connections in exemplar texts and in their own writing. The teachers asked students for “evidence, clarification, and elaboration” in their writing, and were given ample time to be able to make these connections in their writing on their own. By using the connective press, students were aided in doing some “heavy thinking” as they wrote. This higher-level processing is an important type of thinking to be able to do in order to write for higher-level tasks As they facilitated the writing program, teachers first taught students to see “how ideas are connected in texts” they are reading, and to use semantic maps to connect ideas in their own writing (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 426). The connective press was an idea that emerged from the students’ writing process. Student drafts indicated “a need for emphasizing, noticing, and practicing cohesion in their reading and writing” (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 426). In retrospect, Daniel and Eley noted that the connective press was “informed by theories of communicative competence in second language acquisition” (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 426). The teacher-researchers emphasized the importance of developing sociocultural competence, or understanding how to behave and interact based on the context of the situation; strategic competence, or being able to access strategies in order to solve problems arising from second-language learning; and discourse competence, or the ability to effectively use linguistic structures to create a coherent message (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 426). According to this study, three effective ways a teacher can support EL learners are “modeling the use of connective presses, providing...multiple copies of the semantic map handout as a thinking tool, and prompting [students] to ask one another questions about their writing" (Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 430).

Macken-Horarik (2012) asserted that EL learners need writing instruction that both allows students to "play" and develop their writing creatively as well as write sentences that make sense. Too often grammar becomes a measuring stick "by which diverse students' linguistic behavior is judged and (often) found wanting." It also leads to a "preoccupation with error," which is a deficit view of teaching writing to EL learners (p. 180). She further posited that an enormous problem with writing instruction is that schools are not doing enough to help students who come from linguistically diverse backgrounds or are living in poverty. Macken-Horarik (2012) maintained that there is a delicate balance in teaching grammar in writing instruction. Without giving students the grammar they need to create meaningful sentences and paragraphs, these students will continue to be disadvantaged and marginalized in the classroom. This is evidence that teachers cannot sit idly by, hoping their EL learners will acquire grammar implicitly as they go (p. 184).

According to Ismail, Elias, Safinas Mohd Ariff Albakri, Dhayapari Perumal, and Muthusamy (2010), EL learners' anxiety toward writing also affects their ability to write, and this can have a damaging effect on their "academic and career advancement" (pp. 476-477). One writing instructor at the university level commented, "basically, many of them have problems with grammar and structure" (Ismail et al., 2010, p. 480). Another instructor stated, "not only grammar but also the lack of ideas as well as critical thinking, and these are what they should be able to do at this level" (Ismail et al., 2010, p. 480).

Although these comments represent a deficit-view of EL learners, they also display the reality that our students face when it comes to post-secondary education: academic writing proficiency matters. EL learners deserve an equitable opportunity to attend college and achieve their career goals. However, according to Staehr Fenner (2014), “language ability, education, and socioeconomic factors are all possible barriers that can prevent ELs from reaching their career aspirations” (p. 205). How can teachers ensure they are prepared to provide effective, equitable instruction so that ELs can acquire the academic language they need to be successful?

Equity and Culturally Responsive Teaching

An equitable educational setting is one in which each learner has the supports they need to overcome individual challenges they face. An equitable classroom is one in which the standards are high, and students are given scaffolding that allows them to succeed. According to Staehr Fenner (2014), when teachers and schools view the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students as assets, they tend to create learning environments that encourage EL learners’ academic success (p. 141). In order to create an equitable space for learning, teachers first need to understand who their learners are, and what challenges they face. Every individual learner has a unique story that affects how they will perform in school and what they will achieve beyond their schooling. Because of this, teachers of EL learners should familiarize themselves with the backgrounds of their students in order to be effective advocates (Staehr Fenner, 2014, p. 142). EL learners do not necessarily understand how valuable the skills and life experiences they bring with them are, and how these could contribute to their educational or career communities, let alone how to communicate this in their writing. DeCapua and Marshall (2011) asserted that although secondary SLIFE learners arrive with valuable "real-world knowledge based on their life experiences" and ability to "interpret and organize new knowledge from a pragmatic perspective," the fact that they are unfamiliar with Western-style formal education and academic ways of thinking puts them at a disadvantage in the classroom (p. 20). McBrien stated that refugee students "may have difficulty expressing how their lives spent speaking different languages, navigating multiple cultures, and resettling in the United States are remarkable assets in English-speaking contexts due to systematic marginalization in schools" (as cited in Daniel & Eley, 2017, p. 421). Gibbons (2009) pointed out that,

> When students are treated as capable learners, when they are actively engaged in challenging tasks and in literacy learning, and when they are given opportunities to use knowledge in meaningful ways with others, EL learners not only achieve at higher levels, but also expand their academic and personal identities, and their own beliefs about what is possible. (p. 167)

Anxiety in the classroom only becomes a larger problem when students feel "marginalized or unsupported because of their race, gender, or language." It should be the goal of the teacher to enable their students of linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds to relax in the classroom, which will help their brains to "reach a state of relaxed alertness" and be ready to learn (Hammond, 2015, p. 50).

Teachers enter the classroom with their own set of ideals and assumptions about education. Marshall and DeCapua (2013) found that when teachers of EL learners acknowledge these assumptions and question how they are different from their students' perspectives, they can use their new understanding of their students' differences in learning to promote academic success (p. 10). Hammond (2015) stated the importance for teachers to acknowledge their implicit bias. Implicit bias "refers to the unconscious attitudes and stereotypes that shape our responses to certain groups. Implicit bias operates involuntarily, often without one's awareness or intentional control" (p. 29). Acknowledging one's own implicit bias and at the same time, understanding and embracing the values, cultures, beliefs, and languages our students bring with them into the classroom are essential elements of Culturally Responsive Teaching, or CRT, a pedagogy developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) to address the achievement gap. Hammond (2015) has defined CRT as

> An educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning. (p. 15)

In addition, CRT empowers students by interrupting power structures and ways of teaching that continue to keep learners dependent upon the existing broken system that fails to meet these learners' needs to become independent learners (Hammond, 2015, p. 49).

However, cultural dissonance, or the differences in ways of learning between home and school, can also be a barrier and lead to lower academic performance and higher dropout rates (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011, pp. 23-25). When learning activities are based on students' language, communities, and culture, students are more receptive of instruction. Furthermore, establishing two-way communication between teachers and students and their families is a critical component to reducing cultural dissonance (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011, p. 45). Physical space matters, too. When the classroom feels like a "home for a learning community," students are more comfortable and motivated to learn (Marshall & DeCapua, 2013, p. 107). For example, using comfortable seating, natural lighting, displaying student work and other visuals on the wall, and representing languages spoken in the classroom in the decor of the classroom are important ways to create a more home-like and welcoming environment.

SLIFE learners, many of whom are refugee students, not only have to learn the same new content that their native-speaking peers are being taught, but they also have to learn it in a new language. Furthermore, as secondary students, SLIFE learners are also placed in the challenging position of having to earn enough credits for graduation as well as acquiring sufficient academic English to be able to participate in and pass their core content classes. As Staehr Fenner pointed out, these newcomer secondary EL learners "must learn core content through a language in which they are not yet proficient and [are] held to the same accountability measures as their native-speaking peers" (p. 203). EL teachers and content-area teachers must understand these needs as they develop curriculum and create lessons for these students. It is also imperative that teachers advocate for their EL learners by ensuring that they are assessed equitably and utilizing the data to deliver more effective instruction (Staher Fenner, 2014, p. 169). Daniel and Eley (2017) stated the importance of providing this population of students with opportunities to “engage in high-level thinking, reading, and writing” (p. 430). According to Staehr Fenner (2014), these types of rigorous academic tasks, along with needed support and assistance provided in navigating standardized assessments, applications, and financial aid can also pave the way for equitable opportunities for these students to attend college (p. 205). Staehr Fenner (2014) also emphasized the importance of a “college-going culture” within a district so that EL learners and their families “will receive the message that college is indeed within their grasp and that their schools and teachers believe in them” (p. 205). Furthermore, teachers can set academic goals with each student that will help them to reflect on how they are going to reach those goals. In order to have more realistic ideas and expectations, students can research careers that interest them, including salaries and educational program requirements. Teachers can also share their own stories and educational goals, and how they chose a college (Staehr Fenner, 2014, p. 221). How, then, should teachers of EL learners promote higher-level thinking in the classroom as well as ensure that these same students have command of the linguistic structures they need to communicate effectively for the types of academic tasks they will encounter in high school and college?

According to a study on the relationship between text characteristics and teacher judgments on EL students’ writing by Vogelin, Jansen, Keller, Machts, and Möller (2018), EL learners whose “formal language skills” were lacking tended to be marked lower in other areas of their writing, such as argument and overall organization and structure (p. 52). Daniel and Eley (2017) noted that writing essays for college requires that EL learners can make connections between significant life experiences and future goals (p. 421). These studies point to a need for EL writing instruction that includes higher-level thinking, such as making connections between the past, present, and future, as well as skills in writing organization and linguistic features that are needed for academic writing tasks, such as writing a college application essay. In a study conducted by McGirt, long-term EL learners (LTELs) at the college level were rated by their instructors in their academic writing ability (as cited in Celce-Murcia, 1992, p. 407). Sixty percent of the LTELs produced academic writing that was "acceptable" in the areas of organization and logic, twenty percent of these students' writing samples were "overall acceptable," and "faulty grammar made the writing of the other 40% unacceptable to the composition faculty" (Celce-Murcia, 1992, p. 407). According to Celce-Murcia (1992), the "grammar needed for acceptable academic writing is not well acquired in the total absence of any feedback or formal grammar instruction" (pp. 407-408). This presents a challenge for the teachers of EL learners. The studies presented here reveal an inequitable system in place in higher education. Our EL learners have a very real obstacle ahead of them in that they must be able to do rigorous academic thinking, but also be able to communicate this thinking to readers who are likely going to fault the L1 transfer errors or "accent," as Webster (2013) called it, in their writing. Celce-Murcia (1992) purported that effective language teachers of EL learners will use teachable moments to help them to use their language and literacy skills for "purposeful communication," in particular, written communication. If EL learners are expected to “achieve a high level of proficiency for professional or academic purposes,” then grammar needs to be taught explicitly and in context. Furthermore, “grammatical accuracy is important because it marks a [multilingual] language learner as competent; it helps open academic, social, and economic doors for them” (p. 408). Therefore, it is the job of every EL teacher to ensure that these learners of diverse backgrounds and life experiences are prepared to produce academic writing that communicates clearly and accurately, but also authentically, in their own unique voice.

How can we help EL learners write in a way that is clear and accurate, and also allows them to access the multilingual language skills they bring with them to the classroom? Gibbons (2009) asserted that

> An effective English language program does not close off options for the use of other languages in the classroom, nor should it lead to a one-way journey away from family and community. The use of the students’ mother tongue in the classroom, in addition to the kind of English language teaching described in this book, supports the academic and intellectual development of EL learners by providing contexts in which learners are better able to participate in curriculum activities using the full range of their available linguistic resources. In addition, the use of the mother tongue helps to provide a more positive affective classroom environment, one where students’ cultural and linguistic identities are acknowledged and strengthened. (p. 135)

EL learners bring with them a wealth of knowledge in their first language (and other languages) that they can draw from as they develop an effective command of academic English (Aguierre-Muñoz et al., 2009, p. 317). Staehr Fenner (2014) warned that if teachers of EL learners do not believe in their students' ability to achieve with the support they need, teachers will not be as likely to tap into effective strategies for teaching their EL learners (pp. 6-7). Educators and researchers alike have promoted an asset-based approach to teaching EL learners. Tapping into these students' "funds of knowledge" during classroom discussions and other learning activities can help students "make sense of abstract, theoretical concepts taught in school" (Staehr Fenner, 2014, p. 15). Rather than limit EL learners to monolingual communication, it behooves teachers of these students to enable them to access the vast linguistic knowledge they already possess and communicate in a richer, multilingual style that allows them to speak and write in their own authentic voice. How can we teach writing in a way that encourages EL learners to utilize all of their linguistic knowledge?

Translanguaging

Ofelia García purported that translanguaging is "more than going across languages; it is going beyond named languages and taking the internal view of the speaker's language use" (as cited in Grosjean, 2016). García further explained that translanguaging is a process that takes place inside a speaker's mind, where they store their "mental grammar," developed by interacting socially with others. Translanguaging is often confused with code-switching, which García called an "external view of language," or when multilingual speakers "go across these named language categories" as they communicate (as cited in Grosjean, 2016). This idea of named language categories, García stated, has been constructed "by a process of standardization" that marginalizes the languaging practices of some communities (as cited in Grosjean, 2016).

Even though SLA researchers have said that literacy skills in the home language are directly related to stronger literacy skills in the second language, families of EL learners do not always encourage speaking and reading in their native language at home. Sometimes, EL parents espouse the false idea that speaking the native language at home will hinder their student's progress in learning English. This misconception calls on educators to "actively encourage EL families to use their [native language] at home to develop their children's rich language experiences that will transfer to their development of English" (Staehr Fenner, 2014, p. 124).

Kerfoot and Simon-Vandenbergen (2014) have called for a systemic change in education in the ways that we deal with linguistic diversity (p. 178). They posited that multilingualism is a resource, not a problem. Therefore, the linguistic repertoires that EL learners bring with them into the classroom should be viewed as an asset on which to construct more linguistic development in academic genres (Kerfoot & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2014, p. 179). Martin- Beltrán (2014) imagined a more equitable learning environment in which students can be "recognized as legitimate participants in academic literacy practices" (p. 226). Using translanguaging, EL learners can use their entire linguistic repertoire to construct a deeper understanding of what they are reading and writing.

In her study, Martin-Beltrán (2014) set the goal for learning a second language as "multicompetence - which recognizes the knowledge of two or more languages as resources for learning and thus moves away from the monolingual, native speaker as target" (p. 211). She noted that students were expanding their linguistic knowledge by assisting their peers using multiple languages, their own and the target language. In a system that "privileges the use of English," Martin-Beltrán's Language Ambassadors program reversed the marginalization of multilingual learners by training them as "experts" in their languages and encouraging them to draw upon all of their linguistic knowledge, not only their knowledge of English (p. 225). Students were given writing prompts about their experiences in language-learning that they used in creating an autobiographical essay. They wrote using Google Docs, which was a shared platform turning the writing process into a social one in which they could "read, revise, and co-compose simultaneously" (Martin-Beltrán, 2014, p. 213). Students were able to draw upon the tool of translanguaging to compare and think about their word choice (Martin-Beltrán, 2014, p. 224). It was also a reciprocal learning opportunity since paired learners had difficulty expressing ideas in only one language. This allowed each student to be the "expert" in their home language and meet "halfway by using translanguaging" (Martin-Beltrán, 2014, p. 220). Martin-Beltrán (2014) and her colleagues,

> ...found that students' linguistic funds of knowledge were mobilized and linguistic repertoires were expanded as they engaged in translanguaging practices with their linguistically diverse peers and teachers. We found high levels of participation among bilingual and language-minority students whose funds of knowledge were

> central to the creation of academic texts. In student interviews reflecting on their literacy practices at school and the LA context, we found that students expressed increased investment when their translanguaging expertise was recognized in the LA context. We observed students contesting monolingual perceptions of their own linguistic repertoire when they used translanguaging to challenge questions directed at them in one language. (p. 225)

The Language Ambassadors group created for Martin-Beltrán's study (2014) is a great example of the learning opportunities and models called for by Stewart and Hansen-Thomas (2016) so that EL learners can "systematically and pragmatically use their multiple languages" (p. 467). Students are already utilizing translanguaging practices in their own personal applications, and it only makes sense to find additional ways students can use translanguaging in the classroom. According to Stewart and Hansen-Thomas, creating a space for translanguaging will allow them to "engage in greater creativity," and facilitate their "use of higher-order thinking to make decisions and evaluate all linguistic options available to them in writing" (p. 467). Other researchers have pointed to the need for more studies to analyze the benefits of using translanguaging in academic writing (Canagarajah, 2011).

Other uses for translanguaging in the classroom have been suggested by Anderson (2017), who argued that rather than a monolingual communicative competence, a translingual competence should be promoted and encouraged in the multilingual EL classroom, so that "code choice may be negotiable and fluid" (p. 30). One idea could be for learners to look up information online in their home language, and then share their findings in English, “thereby developing learners’ abilities to work with a text and dialogue in multiple languages simultaneously” (p. 32). An idea particularly useful for a classroom in which students shared a home language is that students could be presented with translingual texts involving English (or another target language), and students could then discuss and interpret the meaning of these texts (p. 32). In contrast, Anderson (2017) stated that although EL teachers of multilingual classrooms should encourage the use of students’ home languages for academic purposes, many of these EL learners will be interacting in monolingual communities for their postsecondary and career paths, and the “ability to conform more closely to the entrenched norms of (English) monolingual communities will be relevant” (p. 31).

Translanguaging in the classroom is important for multilingual students. Because they have a more expansive linguistic repertoire than monolinguals, they need to be in academic spaces that will allow them use language without being categorized as “belonging to one national group or another to which they may not belong” (García, as cited in Grosjean, 2016). When multilingual EL learners are asked to perform certain academic tasks, such as finding the main idea in a text or to state how they solved a math problem, they may not be able to show what they know if they are only allowed to use English. García’s point is that only when these students are allowed to access all of their linguistic knowledge will they be able to demonstrate their knowledge in a subject, as well as “what they can do with language” (as cited in Grosjean, 2016). Creating a classroom where translanguaging is a regular academic practice requires a special type of teacher: “a co-learner.” Rather than hold teachers responsible for the unrealistic goal of knowing all of their students' languages, there are ways that García suggested teachers can construct a classroom where translanguaging is encouraged, such as ensuring there are signs and books in students' languages, grouping students according to home languages so that students can collaborate as they develop a deeper understanding of a text, allowing students to write and speak in whatever languages they feel most comfortable, ensuring that "all students' language practices are included so as to work against the linguistic hierarchies that exist in schools," and including "families with different language practices" (as cited in Grosjean, 2016). She also emphasized that even a monolingual teacher can empower their multilingual students by utilizing their home language practices to make deeper meaning of the content they are reading, writing, and thinking about (García, as cited in Grosjean, 2016). The Seal of Biliteracy program allows students to demonstrate their proficiency in other languages they speak. This is another practical way that teachers can advocate for their multilingual students and show that we value the languages they speak and the rich linguistic background they bring with them (Staehr Fenner, 2014, pp. 124-125).

Summary

In review, chapter two has covered an overview of the importance of academic language for an EL learner, as well as how SFL can be used to help EL learners acquire academic language. This chapter also provided a discussion about what types of writing and grammar instruction might be the most effective for EL learners in multilingual classrooms, and emphasized the issue of equity in order to enable teachers of EL learners to provide the most equitable academic language-learning opportunities through culturally responsive teaching. Finally, chapter two ended with a discussion about how translanguaging is an essential tool for multilingual students to be able to use so that they can access their entire linguistic repertoire as they make important choices about linguistic features to include in their academic writing tasks.

In chapter three, I will provide a description of my intended curriculum project. My description includes explanations of two critical components, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and translanguaging. There will also be a discussion of grounding theories and curriculum models that support my project, followed by a description of the setting, participants, and timeline of the curriculum implementation.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

The purpose of this curriculum project is to answer the question, *How can teachers of EL learners ensure that students utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to access the linguistic structures they need in order to communicate effectively for academic tasks?* I want to know if a curriculum that integrates SFL and translanguaging can enable my EL students to utilize all of their linguistic knowledge in order to communicate more effectively in academic language. In this chapter, I will provide grounding theories and models, setting and participants, a description of the curriculum, followed by a chapter summary.

Grounding Theories and Models

Aguirre-Muñoz, Park, Amabisca, and Boscardin (2009) have asserted that Systemic Functional Linguistics, or SFL, can be used in academic writing instruction across the content areas to help make meaning in linguistic forms explicit. SFL is a theory developed by Halliday that focuses on making meaning and noticing relationships between linguistic forms, thereby making academic language more explicit (p. 300). Kerfoot and Simon-Vandebergen (2014) have called SFL a “socially responsible theory of language” that can level the playing field for all students, “enabling all learners regardless of linguistic background to perform at the same high level and to modify relations of power in the classroom through collaborative construction of knowledge” (pp. 178-179). Martin-Beltrán (2014) imagined a more equitable learning environment in which students can be “recognized as legitimate participants in academic literacy practices" (p. 226). Using translanguaging, EL learners can use their entire linguistic repertoire to construct a deeper understanding of what they are reading and writing. García (2009) explained that translanguaging is a part of a "multilingual awareness pedagogy," and Stewart and Hansen-Thomas (2016) stated that "translanguaging facilitates students' use of higher order thinking to make decisions and evaluate all linguistic options available to them in their writing. When all choices are available to them for in-class writing, they can begin to understand the results and consequences of using certain words or languages in specific situations" (p. 467). The curriculum model that Martin-Beltrán (2014) used for her Language Ambassadors project is one where students were able to use translanguaging and peer editing. They wrote using Google Docs, which was a shared platform turning the writing process into a social one in which they could "read, revise, and co-compose simultaneously" (p. 213). Students were able to draw upon the tool of translanguaging to compare and think about their word choice (Martin-Beltrán, 2014, p. 224). It was also a reciprocal learning opportunity since paired learners had difficulty expressing ideas in only one language. This allowed each student to be the "expert" in their home language and meet "halfway by using translanguaging" (Martin-Beltrán, 2014, p. 220).

Setting

The setting of my project is the IB-MYP (International Baccalaureate- Middle Years Program) metro high school where I teach in Minnesota. The total population of the school is about 1,900 students, of which about 34% are EL students. Seventy-three percent of students qualify for free/reduced price lunches. The size of the class in which I implemented the SFL and translanguaging curriculum is approximately 35 students. The staff includes myself (EL teacher), my social studies co-teacher, and an educational assistant. This took place in my co-taught U.S. History class during Quarter two, when students composed their History Day projects. In these projects, students are allowed a lot of choice, which enables them to take ownership of their own writing and voice throughout the process. Students choose the historical topic (not within the last 20 years) they are most interested in learning and writing about, and they also choose the format: paper, website, display board, documentary, or performance. Students have the choice of working individually, with a partner, or with a group of two others. Students have the opportunity to make revisions and advance to regional, state, and national History Day competitions.

Participants

The majority of the students are EL learners, with some native speakers of English. Most of my students are native Karen, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish speakers, although many other languages are represented at our school. This is a co-taught U.S. History class. The intended audience of my project is a multilingual co-taught social studies classroom, grades 11 and 12. Based on their choice of working individually, with a partner, or with a group of two, students will be grouped into “flexible groups”: both same home-language and different home-language groups. During the writing process, students will meet with same home-language groups in order to create deeper meaning in what they are reading and writing. Students may also be grouped in different home-language groups in order to push them to be “language experts” and encourage them to utilize all of the linguistic knowledge they possess, not only English. Students will utilize Google docs so that they can read, compose, and edit linguistic choices together. Peer editing will be happening throughout the writing process, not just at the end.

Description of Curriculum

I designed and implemented a curriculum for my co-taught EL social studies classes that includes systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and translanguaging. SFL can help my students notice and utilize linguistic forms they need for academic writing tasks (Bartlett & O'Grady, 2017). I focused on linguistic forms that are used frequently in social studies texts, such as nominalization and long, complex sentences. I also focused on developing cohesion in writing, and the linguistic forms that allow writers to develop cohesive texts (Spycher, 2017). These are linguistic features that will also be useful in other genres of academic writing that students can use to improve the overall quality of their writing and communicate more effectively. Translanguaging can help my students access all of the linguistic knowledge they possess as they are making choices about linguistic forms to use in their academic writing. Students share Google Docs with one another in order to utilize other students' linguistic knowledge to make the best linguistic choices in their writing (Martin-Beltrán, 2014). I assessed students during and after curriculum implementation, in order to find out if the curriculum aided them in meeting language and content objectives. I also plan to evaluate the curriculum in order to determine what should be modified in order to best meet the linguistic needs of the students (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

I utilized Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) Understanding by Design curriculum guide to help me synthesize the best curriculum for my students. Wiggins and McTighe (2011) suggested that an effective curriculum is developed in three stages: first, determining long-term and short-term goals for student learning; second, developing criteria by which to measure the success of students in reaching the goals determined in stage one; and third, creating learning events that will give the students the knowledge and skills they need to reach the goals of the curriculum as well as be successful on the assessments (p. 43).

Assessment

Both pre- and post-assessment are important for determining students' prior knowledge as well as their success in the goals of the curriculum. Pre-assessment is done by asking students to write paragraphs incorporating text connectives, attribution, and patterns of attitude and analysis to determine what students already know about writing like a historian and overall flow that makes it easier for readers to follow and understand their writing. Post-assessment is done in the form of a rubric to determine which elements of SFL and translanguaging that were taught were most helpful to students and utilized in their writing of their History Day projects. I will know that my students have reached the goals of this curriculum if I see elements of SFL correctly used in their History Day project writing, and if I hear and see students using translanguaging strategies to write in their small groups and utilizing the co-created translanguaging chart to access important linguistic features in their home languages.

Timeline

My tentative timeline is as follows: 8/1/19-11/1/19: develop curriculum, 11/11/19-1/23/20: implement curriculum and assess students formally and summatively, and 2/1/20-7/12/20: evaluate and modify curriculum. During the development of the curriculum, I wanted to gather information from students and colleagues about the best ways to implement and utilize this curriculum. Once all of the input from students and colleagues is gathered and sorted, I will use this information to make modifications for the future. I implemented the curriculum during Quarter two, History Day project writing. During this time, my co-teacher and I pre-assessed and post-assessed students in order to determine whether this curriculum enabled students to improve their overall writing. After curriculum implementation, my co-teacher and students would ideally evaluate the curriculum, in order to determine its effectiveness, and what types of modifications might be necessary.

Summary

In this chapter, I have covered the description of a curriculum project that utilizes both SFL and translanguaging for my co-taught U.S. History class. SFL has been described as a more equitable way to explicitly teach academic language in genre-specific settings to EL learners (Aguirre-Muñoz et al., 2009; Kerfoot & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2014). Translanguaging is a tool that enables multilingual EL learners to access all of their linguistic knowledge in order to make the best linguistic choices for academic writing tasks (Martin-Beltrán, 2014; García, 2009; Stewart & Hansen-Thomas, 2016). I believe a curriculum that combines both SFL and translanguaging can be a powerful way to enable learners to utilize specific linguistic forms for specific genres of academic writing, as well as empower learners to access all of the linguistic knowledge they possess in order to make linguistic choices that help them to communicate effectively together as they co-compose and revise writing. I have also described the setting, participants, and timeline pertaining to my curriculum project. Chapter Four will be a discussion of the implementation, evaluation, and learnings of this curriculum project.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Context

The purpose of this capstone was to answer the question, *How can teachers of EL learners ensure that students utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to access the linguistic structures they need in order to communicate effectively for academic tasks?* In answer to this question, I have created a writing curriculum for EL learners that focuses on two features: Systemic Functional Linguistics and Translanguaging. I chose to incorporate SFL because it makes academic writing features explicit to students so that they can understand the meaning as well as know how to utilize these features in their own academic writing. SFL encourages students to notice these features as they are reading mentor texts, and then begin to practice using them in their own writing once they understand the meaning and how they are used in academic writing.

Translanguaging is a key component of this curriculum because EL learners bring valuable linguistic knowledge with them to the classroom. Rather than focus on what students can communicate in English, translanguaging encourages students to use *all* of their linguistic knowledge, whether that is in a language in which they possess literacy, or orality, to make language choices in their writing. When students are grouped together with other students who speak their home language, they can help each other to create deeper meaning in texts they are reading and in specific linguistic features the class is focusing on. Students can help each other to translate and understand the meaning of specific features in English, and compare them in their home language. Once students have translated specific language features or determined a similar language function in their home language, they use all of this linguistic knowledge to make the best language choices to communicate their meaning in writing.

Key Research

One important overarching idea in my project came from Ladson-Billings' (1994) Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT). CRT pedagogy states that teachers need to acknowledge their implicit bias so that they can truly value and embrace their students' backgrounds, beliefs, and languages. Hammond (2015) further developed this pedagogy and emphasized that utilizing students' cultural knowledge and ways of learning can allow teachers to more effectively connect with students, build relationships, and create a safe space where high levels of learning can happen for *every* student. When teachers acknowledge their implicit bias and celebrate students' cultural backgrounds and ways of learning, CRT interrupts power structures that keep learners dependent on a broken system that fails to meet students' needs, which keeps them from becoming independent learners and thinkers (Hammond, 2015).

Another important overarching idea comes from Staehr Fenner (2014). She asserted that when teachers view students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as *assets*, they can create an environment that sets up EL learners for success. Teachers can only advocate effectively for their EL learners when they reject the idea that students' cultural and linguistic knowledge is a deficit in the classroom, and instead, embrace this knowledge as the asset that it actually is.

I learned a great deal of important information about Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) from several researchers. SFL was originally developed by Halliday (1961), who theorized that language learning focuses on making meaning as well as noticing relationships between linguistic forms. Macken-Horarik (2012) called it a *metalanguage* which helps students to notice how certain linguistic forms function within a sentence or longer discourse. Aguirre-Muñoz, Park, Amabisca, and Boscardin (2009) emphasized the importance of academic language development using SFL because it makes the language explicit to learners. Their research has indicated that SFL writing instruction is most likely to result in increased overall writing performance. Kerfoot and Simon-Vandebergen (2014) asserted that SFL evens the playing field for EL learners by providing explicit academic language instruction to *all* students.

The classroom strategy of using translanguaging comes from García (2009), who asserted that students can truly demonstrate what they are able to do when they are encouraged to use all of their linguistic knowledge. She further stated that translanguaging allows students to collaborate and develop a deeper understanding of a text. Martin-Beltrán (2014) explained that translanguaging asks students to draw on *all* of their linguistic knowledge, and not only English. This strategy enables students to be the language experts in the classroom, which allows them to work against "linguistic hierarchies" that have been established (García, as cited in Grosjean, 2016). Stewart and Hansen-Thomas (2016) purported that translanguaging allows EL learners' languages and cultural identities to be valued, thereby increasing the likelihood of their academic success.

Limitations

One limitation of this project is that I have not been formally trained in SFL. I have read extensively on this pedagogy, but I believe that my ability to create a successful writing curriculum for EL learners would have been enhanced by formal training, such as a multi-day professional development. Another limitation is that my knowledge of translanguaging is relatively new and limited. I believe that because of this, students were reluctant to fully participate in contributing to our large group translanguaging chart that could theoretically help all students in our class use their home languages to make more informed language choices in their History Day projects. This led to an adjustment in my curriculum in which I asked students to complete translanguaging charts first within their small groups, and then to share with the large group and contribute to our whole-class translanguaging chart. Finally, due to a teacher strike in our district and subsequent transition to 100% distance learning in early March, History Day competitions were canceled and I was not able to collect the feedback from teachers and students that I would have liked.

Implications

I believe that both Systemic Functional Linguistics and translanguaging helped my students to become more proficient at writing like historians for their History Day projects. I noticed students correctly using the target language features such as text connectives, attribution, and analysis in their writing, which implies that the SFL and translanguaging lessons were effective in helping students to both use academic language specific to the content area as well as make more informed language choices drawn from their linguistic repertoire. A professional development opportunity for educators to become formally trained in using SFL and translanguaging would be beneficial when working with EL learners. All teachers use academic language in their subject matter, therefore all teachers would benefit from training that could help them to more effectively teach their students to write for academic tasks in their content areas.

Translanguaging is a practice that enables students to feel empowered to use all of their linguistic knowledge, and diminishes language hierarchies by valuing and accessing all languages in the classroom. When all students feel that their language is valued in the classroom, this allows them to feel more connected to their learning environment which in turn, increases opportunities for academic success. A professional development opportunity for teachers to become trained in both of these areas would create equity by leveling the playing field for students when it comes to academic writing. All students need to be taught language explicitly so that they can gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and function of language in specific contexts.

Secondary EL learners, including SLIFE students, have the added challenge of learning the content and the language of that content area simultaneously. SLIFE students are often rushed through high school to reach the goal of graduation before they truly have a good grasp of the language of school. These students need to be given more time in explicit language instruction so that they will be ready for careers and post-secondary opportunities after they graduate high school. Language instruction for SLIFE students needs to be more specialized to meet their needs, tailored to their language backgrounds and abilities. Furthermore, teachers of these students need specialized training to be able to deliver effective literacy and language instruction.

Sharing Results

I plan to share what I've learned from implementing this curriculum project with my school EL team because I know that this will benefit our whole team, and I know they will have valuable feedback. I want to share with them what I've learned about SFL and translanguaging, because I believe it could help all of our EL students to become more skilled academic writers. I also plan to share my research and project with a group of social studies teachers at my school as we work to align teaching academic language and literacy skills in social studies classes across grades 9-12. I will also plan a presentation of my research and curriculum with all teachers in my school, either in the form of sharing at a staff meeting, or in a professional development.

Future Research

A valuable research endeavor would be to conduct a study on students who have received writing instruction based in SFL, and record how receiving SFL-based writing instruction affected their academic writing performance. It would also be worthwhile to study how translanguaging affects students' academic writing performance. After isolating these two writing instruction strategies, it would be interesting to combine them and conduct a similar study, to see how using them together compares with using only one of them alone. This type of research could be very useful in helping school districts to provide more equitable writing instruction for EL learners, and furthermore, to eliminate the opportunity gap between white students and students of color.

Summary

In Chapter Four, I have re-visited my research question and research that has been pivotal to completing this project. I have also discussed implications and limitations of the project, as well as how I plan to share results and areas of future research. In Chapter One, I state that I wanted to create a more equitable writing curriculum that would enable all of my students to receive explicit academic language instruction as well as empower them to utilize all of their spoken languages, not only English. I believe this curriculum provides a more equitable opportunity for EL learners to learn to write using academic language that will help them to succeed academically.

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