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## Teaching and Learning About Linguistic Landscapes in Schools: A Student-Involved Research and Analysis Curriculum for English Language Learners in Middle School

Suzanne Regina Buresh Bullock

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TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES IN SCHOOLS:  
A STUDENT-INVOLVED RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS CURRICULUM FOR  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

by

Suzanne Regina Buresh Bullock

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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## DEDICATION

This Capstone project is dedicated first and foremost to my parents, Robert and Regina Buresh, who have always been champions of education and who have supported me in all of my endeavors. Dad, I wish you were here to see this! This is also dedicated to my amazing husband, Anthony Bullock, and to our children, Trenton and Kayden Bullock, who are my greatest blessings in life. I couldn't have done this without all of you!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### One Student's Story

Amira walks through the halls of her new school on her first day. She is nervous, as she is starting the school year a few weeks late due to her family moving from Maine and taking some time to get settled in the Twin Cities. Her family lived in Maine for one year after arriving from a Somali refugee camp in Kenya. She attended sixth grade at a school in Maine and this was her first experience at a school in the U.S. In September, her mom decided to move to Minnesota to be closer to her aunts, uncles, and cousins, so the family had to pack up and move once again. Amira liked the school in Maine, but she felt like an outsider because she was one of only a handful of immigrant students, and one of only four students of Somali origin. Now, she lacks confidence in her English proficiency skills due to only having one year of EL instruction in Maine.

Amira's situation is common among students of Somali origin in the Twin Cities. Many students come directly from Somalia or from a refugee camp, and others come from various places in the U.S. where they have lived for a short time before settling in the Twin Cities. At schools in the Twin Cities, we see Somali students arriving with many different levels of English proficiency, from little to no prior English skills to native-like fluency in English.

Amira's new school in the Twin Cities is a charter school that serves the Somali community. Her aunt recommended this school because lots of the Somali kids in her

new neighborhood go here. Almost all of the students and many of the staff members at this school are Somali. She can hear Somali being spoken in the hallways and classrooms, along with English. But wait...as she walks through the halls on that first morning while being given a tour of the school by the administrative assistant with her mom and older sister, she looks around and sees...almost nothing. The walls are almost bare, with only a few signs in English displayed here and there, indicating what is behind closed doors such as “Bathroom”, “Nurse”, and “Room 120”. The tour guide opens a couple of classroom doors to show Amira where her math and science classes will be. Again, almost nothing. The walls are very uninviting: only a few personal photographs belonging to the teachers on the walls around their desks, a couple of bell schedules posted near the doorways, and a poster randomly placed here or there, again all in English. The school begins to have a “cold” feel, and Amira shivers as she realizes that her mom and older sister probably cannot read any of the signs at all. Her mom speaks only Somali and cannot read or write in Somali. Her older sister attended the school in Maine very sporadically last year because she had to help her mom care for the girls’ seven younger siblings, so she only speaks a few words of English. Maybe this school is not very welcoming after all.

What Amira is keenly aware of is the school’s linguistic landscape, or lack thereof, even though she cannot put a name to what she is observing as she tours the school. The linguistic landscape of a place is “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on governmental buildings...of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration”



(Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). The linguistic landscape inside a school is often referred to as a linguistic schoolscape. Amira may not be able to pinpoint exactly why she is feeling “cold” and “not welcome” as she tours the school with her mom and sister, but the lack of signage in her native language of Somali and the lack of decor on the walls of the hallways and classrooms in general may well be the cause. “I thought this school was a Somali school,” Amira thinks to herself. “How is my sister going to feel when she starts her classes later today? Does my mom feel welcome at this school as a parent?”

As an EL teacher at a Minneapolis charter school serving the Somali community, I see students like Amira every day. Whether these students enter a regular public school or a charter school, whether these students’ native language is Somali, Spanish, Chinese, or another language, how can we as educators make sure that the linguistic schoolscapes that surround our students every day at school accurately reflect the languages and cultures that our students speak while still displaying signage in English as well? If schools claim to support certain languages and cultures and want to make both students and families as well as community members feel more welcome, how can schools change their linguistic schoolscapes to match these ideologies of multilingualism and equity? Ultimately, how can we teach our students to be involved in these changes at their school?

This capstone aims to answer the research question: *How can students learn to research and think critically about the linguistic landscape in and around their school and come up with ideas to create changes in the linguistic landscape of their school?*

This chapter will explain my personal background as an educator, how I developed an interest in linguistic landscape research, why I decided to create a linguistic landscape curricular unit as my capstone project, and how this curricular unit benefits students, educators, families, and community members.

### **My Background and My Journey With Linguistic Landscapes**

I began my journey into the world of teaching as a young girl. We had a giant chalkboard on a wall inside our garage, so my house was always a magnet for the girls in the neighborhood who wanted to play school. All the girls wanted to be the teacher, but since it was my house, I was the teacher most often. I remember even in this pretend world of school, I made sure to decorate the walls of the garage with homemade signs, maps, pictures, and the work and art of my “students”: my friends from the neighborhood. Growing up in the 80s, we did not have any students at the elementary school that I attended who spoke another language, and so at my pretend school, English was the only language represented as well. But nevertheless, I always took special care to make sure that the surroundings in my “school” were vibrant, welcoming, and representative of what I wanted to teach.

Perhaps I am more sensitive to my physical surroundings than the average person, or maybe everyone is like me. Who knows? But I distinctly remember throughout my years in elementary, middle, and high school, always being keenly aware of which classrooms “felt” more welcoming than others, which teachers did a better job at creating beautiful decor for their walls, and which hallways I preferred to walk down as I headed to my classes. Once I began taking foreign language classes in middle school, I remember

being disappointed that the only Spanish and German language and cultural signage that I saw were in the Spanish and German classrooms themselves, not out in the hallways or main areas of the school.

I attended the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire and graduated with a double major in Spanish and German, receiving two teaching licenses for grades 6-12. I taught Spanish and German at the high school level for three years here in the Twin Cities, and I remember always being complimented on how my classroom “felt” and how it was decorated. I was always sure to have plenty of signage in both languages in my classroom, but was not allowed to put anything in the hallway or in any other part of the school, even though the school I worked at claimed to be a big supporter of foreign language learning.

Like many young teachers, I was overwhelmed and overworked. I took a break from teaching after my third year and met my husband. We traveled and decided to have a family, so I stayed at home for a few years when my kids were young, and then worked part-time and did some substitute teaching so that I could be home with my kids as much as possible. Now I am in my 40s and a few years ago, I realized that I missed teaching and that I wanted to get back into it. But my, how things have changed since I first was a teacher. Schools are so much more diverse now, and there is a huge demand for EL teachers to work with students in our schools who arrive from all parts of the world. I completed my ESL K-12 license last fall, and decided to finish my Master’s degree in TESOL. I wanted to get some teaching experience that was different from what I had done previously, so for the past two years I have been teaching EL at a charter school in

Minneapolis that serves the Somali community. I work primarily with grades 5-8 and I love what I do!

### **Development of my Research Interest**

In the spring of 2019, I was taking a class at Hamline called Language and Society. The textbook that we were using was called *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). There is one very small section in the book that discusses a “new” area of research in sociolinguistics called “linguistic landscapes” (pp. 86-88). Even though we barely touched on the topic in our class, this topic fascinated me and I wanted to learn more. My professor encouraged me to use linguistic landscapes as the research topic for my final paper in the class, and I realized that I could expand on my interests even more and turn it into a topic for my capstone.

This capstone will culminate in a curricular unit project aimed at involving students in linguistic landscape research at their own schools in order to motivate them to initiate positive changes to those linguistic landscapes. There have only been a couple of studies published that look at ways to involve students in the research of linguistic landscapes around them. In Chapter Two, I discuss the studies that show how student participants gained many benefits when they were involved in the research, along with the positive changes that they were able to make to the linguistic landscapes at their schools. The aim of my capstone project is to help students learn to analyze their linguistic surroundings more closely so that they can realize inequities that may exist and make changes to those surroundings that will benefit themselves, their fellow students, family members, and even community members who visit their school.

## **Conclusion**

The school in Amira's story is my school and it is every school. Amira is my student and she is everyone's student. Positive changes made to the linguistic landscapes in our schools can help students, families, and community members feel more welcome in our schools while accurately reflecting not only the languages and cultures that our students represent, but also the ideologies of multilingualism and equity that our schools claim to support. By involving students themselves in the research, documentation, and analysis of the existing linguistic landscape in and around their school, students can be motivated to initiate positive changes to the linguistic landscape that will have a lasting impact for years to come.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced a student of mine, Amira, who has a story that is very common amongst EL students in the U.S. today. I then explored my personal background as an educator, and discussed how I developed an interest in linguistic landscape research. Finally, I explained why I decided to create a linguistic landscape curricular unit as my capstone project, and how this curricular unit will benefit students, educators, families, and community members. My goal is to answer this research question: *How can students learn to research and think critically about the linguistic landscape in and around their school and come up with ideas to create changes in the linguistic landscape of their school?*

Chapter Two reviews literature published in the field of linguistic landscape research, including studies that have been published on student-led research of linguistic

landscapes. Chapter Two also includes a review of studies that have identified ways that students can make changes to the linguistic landscape of their school. Chapter Three outlines my project in detail, including a rationale and framework for the project. This framework consists of the timeline, setting, audience, and curriculum goals. Finally, Chapter Four reflects on the completion of the project and discusses implications for future projects including suggested improvements and changes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

We live in a world where we are surrounded by information 24 hours a day. That information comes in many forms including television, radio, streaming on individual devices, social media, advertisements, and what we can see instantly on smartphones and computers. In order to transmit all of this information, language is used. Language is the way we communicate, and the way that different languages are used in our surroundings is a key component in the complex relationships between different languages and cultures. The linguistic landscape (LL) of a neighborhood, of a village, or of an entire city is what we see when we interact with the world: this includes signage such as billboards, signs, advertisements, even the menu scrawled on a chalkboard at the local coffee shop. The languages that are present (or not present) on the signage of an area, how those languages are represented, and who the different types of signage are meant to appeal to are all factors that make up the LL of a certain neighborhood, village, or city.

Each generation's children grow up in a world that is vastly different from the world of their parents, especially when it comes to language and communication. Students go to school each day and enter into the LL in and around their school, once again surrounded by language and information present on the signage of the walls, in the hallways, in the classrooms, even in the bathrooms. What can students and educators learn from the LL in and around their school?

This capstone project addresses the following question: *How can students learn to research and think critically about the linguistic landscape in and around their school and come up with ideas to create changes in the linguistic landscape of their school?*

Highlighting key research in the field of LL studies, this chapter will look at the literature of the field of LL research in general; how LL research can be paired with linguistic schoolscape (LS) research; studies that have been published on student-led research of LLs and LSs; inequities in a school's LS and the impact of those inequities on students' linguistic and cultural identities; and ideas for how students can make changes to the LS of their school. The curricular unit project that follows this research addresses the need for educators to help students become more aware of their surroundings in terms of the languages and cultures represented or not represented in the LL in and around their school, how to analyze the LL and what it represents, and what they can do to change the LL of their school to be a more accurate reflection of the cultures and languages present in the school.

### **Chapter Overview**

Chapter Two is a review of relevant literature published in the field of linguistic landscape research. It is critical to understand the history of LL research in addition to the new developments in the field. Teachers can learn how to involve their students in their own LL research in order to incorporate lessons on what LLs represent, inequities in LLs, how students' cultural identities are shaped by the LL around them, and how students can make changes to the LL to their school in order to more accurately represent the



languages and cultures of the students at the school. Four major sections will be included in this literature review.

First, LL research will be discussed. A definition of the term *linguistic landscape* will be provided along with how the definition has evolved over time. Key focuses of researchers in the field of LLs will be discussed, including the significance of languages used in a LL, power structures revealed in LL research, and future areas of study for LL research. These key focuses are critical to the understanding of what exactly should be looked for when conducting LL research.

Second, LS research will be discussed. The field of LL research is broad, and this capstone project will focus specifically on LSs in and around schools. A definition of the term *linguistic schoolscape* will be provided, followed by a discussion of majority languages versus minority languages in LSs. Finally, in this section, research on the impact of LSs on multilingual students will be presented. Educators need to be aware of the implications of what is represented in the LS of a school and the influence that positive or negative messages within the LS can have on students in a multilingual setting. The aim of the curricular unit for this capstone is to teach students how to evaluate the LS at their school and how to make changes to it to more accurately reflect the languages and cultures of the students attending the school.

Third, students engaging in LL research will be discussed. Once educators know what to look for in the LS of a school and what the different implications of the LS might be, they need to be able to teach their students how to engage in LL research themselves. This research can be done in the school, in the community, or in a broader area such as a

city or a section of a city. Examples of how students can engage in LL research will be presented, followed by what students can learn from participating in LL research.

Fourth, ideas for students to make changes in the LL of their school will be presented. This section connects directly to the curricular unit project for this capstone because the goal of the curricular unit is for educators to teach students how to initiate changes in the LL of their school. This section will include examples of changes made to LSs around the world, followed by some examples of positive effects resulting from changes made to LSs. Finally, I will conclude by drawing connections across the different sections of the literature review to support my research question: *How can students learn to research and think critically about the linguistic landscape in and around their school and come up with ideas to create changes in the linguistic landscape of their school?*

This capstone project will be followed by a curricular unit that teachers can use with their students to document and analyze the LLs around them in order to be more aware of their linguistic surroundings and what they represent, so that the students can ultimately create changes to the LL at their school.

### **Linguistic Landscape Research**

This section will give an overview of LL research. A definition of the term *linguistic landscape* will be provided, along with how that definition has evolved over the years. This will be followed by a discussion of common components of LL research including settings for LL research and documenting data, languages used in a LL, and

power structures revealed in LL research. Finally, suggestions from LL researchers for future study will be given.

### ***Definition of Linguistic Landscape***

Landry and Bourhis (1997) defined linguistic landscape (LL) as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on governmental buildings...of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (p. 25). That definition has been built upon as the field of LL research has expanded. LL studies can take place in both rural and urban settings, in areas that are monolingual or multilingual, in large areas such as an entire city, or in smaller areas such as an individual neighborhood or a building such as a school. Analyzing the LL of an area can reveal many insights, especially in regards to the field of sociolinguistics and in the areas of language policy and planning. Early research in the field of LL studies looked at how languages were displayed in public areas where more than one language was spoken by the people who inhabited those areas (Van Mensel, Vandenbroucke & Blackwood, 2016). Areas chosen for these studies usually had undergone some kind of legislation to regulate how different languages were used and displayed on signs in public areas.

LL research has evolved to look at multilingual LLs that may reveal underlying ideologies about the power relationships between people who speak one language versus people who speak other languages when the different languages are displayed (or not displayed) in the LL of a community or certain area. Wardhaugh and Fuller pointed out that “how languages appear in public space provides evidence about underlying

ideologies concerning particular codes and their speakers” (2015, p. 86). Gorter (2015) further simplified the definition of linguistic landscape to “any display of visible written language” (p. 190). Thus, it can be said that LLs are present in our everyday lives and surround us wherever we go.

The next subsection will look at the settings that have been used in linguistic landscape research and the ways in which LL data is documented.

### ***Settings for Linguistic Landscape Research and Documentation of Data***

Research in the field of LLs has grown immensely over the last couple of decades, evolving into a field that has received increased attention in this hyper-information world that we live in. Multilingualism in urban settings is a main focus for many researchers (Backhaus, 2006; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Gorter, 2013; Hult, 2014). Researchers document and analyze the signage displayed in a given public area and can glean many interesting observations from the ways signs are displayed. Common public areas studied include roadways, commercial shopping areas, and industrial areas in a city (Backhaus, 2006; Belles-Calvera, 2019; Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Hult, 2014).

Documentation of the LL of an area is most commonly done by taking photographs or videos of the signage and language displays. Qualitative data is also commonly collected in LL research by interviewing people who regularly inhabit the area being studied, to record their feelings towards the LL displays, find out who created and put up the LL displays, and whether they feel that the LL accurately reflects the linguistic and cultural identity of the area (Amara, 2018; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018). Multilingualism in rural settings has also been studied, taking into consideration a

larger area with a population that is more sparse in comparison to a densely populated urban area (Blackwood, 2011). Whether an urban or a rural setting, LL documentation and analysis collect data that can be used in a variety of ways.

The next section will discuss one focus of researchers, which is to discover what languages are used (or not used) in the LL of an area and how those languages are represented in the LL.

### ***Languages Used in a Linguistic Landscape***

A key component of LL research looks at the languages that are used in the LL of an area and how those languages are represented in relation to each other. For example, Belles-Calvera (2019) studied the LLs of three specific municipalities in the bilingual Valencian community in Spain. Although this is a bilingual region with the national language (Spanish) and the regional language (Catalan) included in the study, English is also included as the language of international communication, in addition to Valencian and other languages also being included as regional languages (Belles-Calvera, 2019). Similarly, Cenoz and Gorter presented findings from a 2006 study in which the minority languages of Basque and Frisian along with their state language counterparts of Spanish and Dutch were studied in the LLs of two multilingual cities in Spain and the Netherlands, in addition to the use of English as an international language of communication in the LLs. Interestingly, the prevalence of English on display in public spaces around many parts of the world is sometimes equated to an “intrusion”, as English is seen alongside many regions’ national and regional languages, increasingly in a dominant position (Bolton, 2012).

Nevertheless, the fact is that public displays of language are evolving all the time, with some languages pushing others to the side and becoming more dominant in the LL of an area. Many regional languages are the victims of such dominance by national languages and by English, as power structures come into play in an increasingly multilingual world (Biro, 2016; Bolton, 2012; Cenoz & Gorter, 2018).

The next section will present examples of power structures that can be revealed when looking closely at LLs.

### ***Power Structures Revealed in Linguistic Landscape Research***

The ways that languages are represented in the LL can have an effect on the people who interact within the LL of an area. For example, in parts of Canada where French and English are both spoken and displayed in the LL, “[t]he linguistic landscape, at least in the Canadian context, may indeed constitute the most visible and most salient marker of perceived in-group versus out-group ethnolinguistic vitality” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 45). Ethnolinguistic groups that are trying to promote their own language (French, in this case) have a very strong interest in making sure their language is prominently displayed and used in their everyday lives.

The use of a specific language can have an affect on the positive social identity of minority-language groups (Cenoz & Gorter, 2018, p. 78) in the same way that if a language is not represented in the LL, it can have a negative effect on the social identity of minority-language groups (Blackwood, 2011; Brown, 2005; Brown, 2010). In Blackwood’s study of the LL of Brittany and Corsica, where the people are very proud of their regional languages, these regional languages take a back seat on signage where

French dominates the LL. Even English, which is slowly creeping to higher prominence in many of the world's LLs, is kept at bay in the LLs of Brittany and Corsica (Blackwood, 2011, p. 128). Similarly, the regional languages of the Valencian areas studied by Belles-Calvera have public displays of language dominated by Spanish, with English only showing up on signage in areas that attract a high number of tourists. The regional languages of these areas are kept at bay, only displayed on private signs that are not meant for official display (Belles-Calvera, 2019).

Overall, it can be concluded that the ways in which languages of a multilingual region are displayed in the LL can show which languages are considered most important, which languages are prominent, and which groups have power by the way they choose to make and display the signage in a given area.

The next section will discuss suggestions for future areas of study by LL researchers in order to expand on this growing field.

### ***Future Areas of Study for Linguistic Landscape Research***

Bolton (2012) introduced a symposium of articles titled "World Englishes and Linguistic Landscapes" by making the observation that the daily lives of young people today are becoming increasingly diverse, especially when it comes to their linguistic interactions: "...their linguistic worlds are not simply defined through physical space, but also through electronic space, educational travel and migration, global travel, media awareness and usage, popular culture, and the virtual space of the Internet" (p. 3). Other researchers have also suggested that we need to redefine the idea of the LL to include the vast amount of images and nonverbal communication that surrounds us through social

media, smartphones, the Internet, and pop culture venues such as YouTube, Twitter, and Tik Tok. (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Gorter, 2017). LL research can be used over time to draw insights into the changes made in the LL of an area and how those changes reflect the changing linguistic population and the languages used (Brown, 2018; Laihonon & Todor, 2017; Van Mensel et al., 2016). Future research is also called upon in regions where research has already been done to see how the LL has changed over time (Brown, 2018). Finally, pertaining to schools specifically, further research is needed to look at how the LL displays in schools connect to language policies, programming, and pedagogy practices (Menken, Perez Rosario & Guzman Valerio, 2018).

As more specific types of places are explored in LL research, linguistic landscapes in and around schools, referred to as linguistic schoolscape (LS), emerge as one area that interests researchers. This is important when considering the impact that the LS of a school can have on students and their growing linguistic and cultural identities. The next section will look at different aspects of LS research.

### **Linguistic Schoolscape Research**

Narrowing down the broad scope of LL research to look specifically at LS research is relevant to this capstone project which aims to develop a curricular unit for teachers to use to teach students about documenting, analyzing, and making positive changes to the LSs of their schools. This section provides an overview of LS research. A definition of the term *linguistic schoolscape* will be provided. A discussion of majority languages versus minority languages in linguistic schoolscape will be presented,



followed by an examination of how LSs impact students who are multilingual or who are learning additional languages in a school.

### ***Definition of Linguistic Schoolscape***

In simple terms, a linguistic schoolscape (LS), sometimes referred to using just the word schoolscape, is the LL within a school. Brown (2012) defined schoolscape as “the school-based environment where place and text, both written (graphic) and oral, constitute, reproduce, and transform language ideologies” (p. 282). Schoolscape studies offer a myriad of areas to look at within educational settings, oftentimes including the “hidden” and underlying ideologies of a particular set of language policy-makers in a school (Amara, 2018; Biro, 2016; Gorter, 2013; Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018). By paying attention to the LL in a school, students can be taught about literacy practices and language awareness (Gorter, 2013).

### ***Majority Languages Versus Minority Languages in Linguistic Schoolscapes***

One major area of interest to LS researchers is the presence or lack of presence of majority and minority languages. Looking at the LS of a school can reveal which language is considered most important, and which language or languages are considered less so.

Most often, the leaders of a school or even the government play a part in deciding which language is to be displayed prominently in the LS (Brown, 2005; Brown, 2010; Brown, 2018; Laihonon & Todor, 2017; Przymus & Kohler, 2018). These types of signs in a LL are called “top-down” displays because they are created by an institution and are considered “official”. As Amara (2018) explained, “...schoolscapes can be employed in

order to legitimize certain language ideologies...and provide visual clues as to the hidden curriculum of language ideologies and linguistic policy-makers in education” (p. 2), especially when looking at the top-down displays in a LS. On the other hand, “bottom-up” displays in a LS are signs made by individuals or made privately and are not considered to be “official” signs in a LS. Amara (2018) found the Hebrew language to dominate the top-down signs in the LSs of six Palestinian schools in Israel whereas the Arabic language was more prevalent in the bottom-up signs in the schools, showing support for the Hebrew language by the policy-makers of the school instead of the Arabic language which is a language spoken by most of the Palestinian students attending the schools. Similarly, Brown (2005) has studied the LSs of several schools in southeastern Estonia whose students speak a regional language called Voro. Despite attempts by Voro-language activists to promote the use and display of Voro in schools, the Estonian language dominates the LSs, supported by a government that promotes Estonian and European national identities, rather than supporting the local Voro language and culture (Brown, 2012). Likewise, in Swedish immersion schools in Finland where students not only have a national language(Finnish), the immersion language (Swedish), but also a third and fourth language (regional languages or foreign languages such as French, German, or English), Swedish and Finnish dominated the LS of the school with the third and fourth languages almost non-existent in the signage, even though students were being taught those languages and the school claimed to want to promote them equally (Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018).

All of the subtleties at play when it comes to the LS of a school share an important role in the development of the linguistic and cultural identities of students, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

### ***Impact of Linguistic Schoolscapes on Multilingual Students***

As teachers, it is important to be aware of the positive and negative impacts that the LS in a school can have on our students. Whether they are consciously aware of it or not, what is present, or not present, on the signage of a school says a lot about which language is valued most, which culture is deemed most important, and what types of linguistic identities are being supported - or not supported - by the school and in some cases by the government.

One positive effect of a multilingual LS is that it can be used as a source of input to help develop competence in second language acquisition and in the area of pragmatics for students learning an additional language (Aladjem & Jou, 2016; Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Chern & Dooley, 2014; Clemente, Andrade & Martins, 2012; Sayer, 2009). In Pakarinen and Bjorklund's study of the Swedish immersion school in Finland, students reported overall positive attitudes towards both Swedish and Finnish and considered themselves to be multilingual (2018). In Oaxaca, Mexico, the LL of the city was used to teach students to analyze the social meanings of English on signage in the area by giving the students roles as "language detectives" as they collected examples for their project in their EFL class (Sayer, 2009). A further example of the LS being used in a positive way for second language acquisition comes from Portugal, where primary school students

were tasked with “reading” the LS in and around their school in order to engage with minority languages in their community (Clemente et al., 2012).

However, there can be negative effects of a school’s LS on students’ linguistic and cultural identities as well, especially in cases where a minority language is hindered and not encouraged by teachers and staff, and is therefore not present in the official signage of the school, as Brown found in her study of the Voro minority language in Estonia (2005). The promotion of Estonian and the non-presence of Voro in the LS of the schools studied gave the message to students and families that Voro was not important and that it didn’t matter if it was preserved as a language or not (Brown, 2005). Likewise, urban Canadian students who researched the LL of the neighborhood surrounding their school found that even the condition of the LS can have an impact on a person’s cultural identity (Burwell & Lenters, 2015). For example, the students documented the signage in their neighborhood and found that much of it was run-down, graffiti-laden, broken, or otherwise dilapidated. This contributed to the students feeling that their multicultural neighborhood was somehow less valued and they reported feelings of living in a “ghetto” neighborhood (Burwell & Lenters, 2015). Through such discovery, teachers and students can learn to become aware of the LL around them, whether it is in their school or their neighborhood, which “provides a promising way to teach about language awareness and literacy practices” (Gorter, 2013, p. 203).

The following section looks at ways that students can research and analyze the LLs in their lives, including at school, in their neighborhood, and in their city. The

reviewed literature provides ideas and strategies for student-involved research in LLs that will be used to help develop the curricular unit for my capstone project.

### **Students Engaging in Linguistic Landscape Research**

Students from elementary-aged to university-aged can participate in documenting and analyzing the LLs in their lives. They can use what they learn to discover underlying meanings related to relationships between languages and groups. Their discoveries can help motivate them to advocate for and make changes to the LLs in their school and community, which is a key focus of this capstone project.

This section will look at ways that students have learned to engage in researching and analyzing the LLs that surround them in their daily lives at school, in their neighborhood, and in their city. Ideas for how students can engage in research of LLs will be presented, followed by examples of what students have learned from doing this research and how it has led to greater awareness of the meanings behind the LLs in their lives.

### ***How Students Can Engage in Linguistic Landscape Research***

What is striking when comparing different articles reporting research of LLs in and around schools is that many articles discuss research that was partly carried out by students themselves, and in some cases teachers as well, in their own schools or in their own communities. In these studies, students and teachers were asked to partake in the documentation and gathering of data used to observe and record the LLs present in their everyday lives (Biro, 2016; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Chern & Dooley, 2014; Clemente et al., 2012; Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2017; Sayer, 2009).

In Romania, where a large portion of the population is Hungarian-speaking, Biro (2016) visited 8 different schools in order to gather her data, and she used a “walking tour technique” which means that she acted as a tourist within the school while she walked around with teachers and students as her “tour guides”. Throughout her tours of the schools, she photographed and documented all of the language displays within the schools which included official signage (e.g. calendars, evacuation plans, directional and room identification signage) put up by school officials and administrators, holiday displays and other seasonal displays put up by teachers, classroom signage (e.g. grammar rules, teaching aids, classroom rules) put up by teachers, and displays of students’ work in classrooms and in hallways. By conducting her research using the walking tour technique, she was able to interview the teachers and students during the walking tours to find out who the agents of the language displays were, or in other words, who actually put up which language displays: school administrators, teachers, or students. Similarly, Pakarinen and Bjorklund (2017) also used the walking tour technique with students as their “tour guides” in their study of Swedish immersion schools in Finland. They photographed over 450 displays of language within the school and then conducted the walking tours while simultaneously interviewing the students throughout the tours about the placement of the various linguistic displays, who the agents were in placing the linguistic displays, and the students’ awareness of the various languages used in the schoolscape.

Students can participate in research of LLs outside of their schools as well. Burwell and Lenters’ “Word on the Street” project (2015), which took place in an urban

Canadian neighborhood called Brockton in a suburb of Calgary, was conducted using students as researchers and used the walking tour method. After documenting the linguistic landscape of their urban neighborhood with photographs and videos, the students brought their findings back to school for analysis and discussion. Considering their age (10th graders) and the fact that much of their identity as students and community members was still being shaped, their awareness of surrounding LLs was enhanced and their research also made them more aware of the LL in their school environment (Burwell & Lenters, 2015).

Gorter (2017) saw value in students being involved in this type of research, noting that “the linguistic landscape can be used for language learning, but even more as a powerful pedagogical tool to answer questions about language awareness, multilingual literacy, multimodality, identities, ideologies, or the functions of signs” (p. 82).

In addition to performing the walking tour technique in groups, students can conduct similar data-gathering on their own, as in Aladjem and Jou’s 2016 study involving students at Tel Aviv University who were learning Spanish as a foreign language. The students were asked to notice signage in Spanish in the LLs of their lives, using their mobile devices to capture photographs and videos of what they chose to document. Students then shared their examples on a private Facebook group and used Spanish, the target language, to post where they found the examples, descriptions of them, and the context of the area in which the examples were found. Students then had to use Spanish to comment on each other’s posts and reply to others’ comments (Aladjem & Jou, 2016). This type of student interaction in LL research benefits students in a number

of ways, including being able to use the target language both as input (finding examples of signage in Spanish) and output (using Spanish to describe the examples and comment on others' examples).

### ***What Students Can Learn from Participating in Linguistic Landscape Research***

Students who participate in research of the LLs in their lives can learn many valuable lessons, including the development of a greater awareness of their linguistic surroundings and what those surroundings represent (Amara, 2018; Biro, 2016; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Chesnut, Lee & Schulte, 2013; Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018). For example, the results of a study involving Korean students learning English who conducted LL research in their community reported multiple benefits, including “...greater understanding of language and communication, specifically when considering how culture and language shape language perception, and increased awareness of how different people view different aspects of language” (Chesnut et al., 2013, p. 118).

One example of language perception revealed comes from the results of Pakarinen and Bjorklund's 2018 LL study at a Swedish immersion school in Finland, which claimed to be a “multilingual” school, supporting students in their L1 (Finnish), their L2 (Swedish), and their L3 and L4 (German, French, or English). Through research conducted by students at the school and subsequent interviews with those students, the results found that power structures between the languages were present in the LL because of the fact that the L3 and L4 languages were only present in signage within the foreign language classrooms and not anywhere else in the school, even though the school claimed to fully support and encourage those languages (Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018). This



shows how as students become more aware of which languages are represented or underrepresented in the linguistic displays that surround them in their everyday lives, they begin to realize whether or not their particular native language is valued, what kind of linguistic hierarchy might be present within the school, who is determining which languages are valued and put into power positions, and ultimately, how they might advocate for changes to make their own linguistic identities more present and valued at their school.

There is a lot to be learned from the LL outside of school as well, as in the example of Canadian students' feelings about their own neighborhood after conducting research on the LL there (Burwell & Lenters, 2015). They were disappointed in the image that was projected by the LL of their neighborhood, Brockton, and felt that the run-down image was not accurate of how their neighborhood really was. One group of students in the study struggled with this image of Brockton, because what they saw when they looked closely at their photographs was "multiculturalism that shows the residents' pride" (Burwell & Lenters, 2015, p. 214).

Sometimes students find that their cultural identity is highly regarded within the school, even if it is not so highly regarded outside of the school, as in the case of Palestinian schools in Israel, where Hebrew is the national language but a concerted effort to promote and preserve Arabic is found within the Palestinian schools (Amara, 2018). Principals of these schools were asked about the prevalence of Arabic in the LS, and they felt that a very essential part of the school environment was to enhance the

Arabic language in order to encourage it as part of students' cultural and national identities (Amara, 2018).

Another insight that students can learn when researching their LS involves looking at the agents of the linguistic displays, or in other words, finding out who put up which signs around the school. Students in three studies (Canada, Romania, and Finland) analyzed the placement of the linguistic displays and who had put which types of displays in which areas of the school or neighborhood (Biro, 2016; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018). At the Swedish immersion school in Finland, the LS was dominated by displays of signs in Finnish and Swedish, but there was a lack of signage in other foreign languages which are the students' L3 and L4 and are claimed by the school to be of equal importance. This claim was not supported when taking the LS into account, along with the fact that the administration had been the main agent of the displays in the LS. The underlying ideology of the school staff and administration is revealed here in the sense that the power relations between the languages are clearly shown (Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018). Likewise in Romania, a clear indication of the power relationship between Romanian, the dominant language in the country itself, and Hungarian, the L1 for many students at the immersion school where the study took place, is revealed (Biro, 2016). The main language displays in the school were exclusively in Romanian and the agents of these displays were the school administration and staff. Any displays in Hungarian were confined mainly to classrooms or in back hallways near classrooms and were not highlighted as having much importance. The agents of the Hungarian displays

were the students themselves (with displays consisting of their school work or artwork) and the displays were not kept up for very long (Biro, 2016).

The students who carried out the research in their own schools both in Finland and Romania were made more aware of what was going on with these displays and can use this knowledge to advocate for changes and more multilingual equality (Biro, 2016; Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018). Similarly in Canada, the study revealed to the students that others' perceptions about their community differ from their real experiences in ways that the run-down signage and other language displays show (Burwell & Lenters, 2015). They live in Brockton, a low-economic neighborhood, and they see the lack of care and cleanliness with signage in their area as revealing the ideologies of the larger community. Although the agents of the displays in Brockton are mainly the people who live there, the students realized that the lack of displays from government or city officials, and the lack of care to the displays in their community, meant that their neighborhood was not very highly regarded. On the other hand, the students also argued that "the lack of expensive signage is indicative of a strong sense of community" (Burwell & Lenters, 2015, p. 217) and that they feel more connected to each other and the people of the community.

The next section will explore ways that students can make changes to the LS at their school to promote more equity in what is represented and to accurately reflect the languages and cultures of the students who attend the school. The reviewed literature provides ideas for how LLs can be improved along with the positive effects such improvements can have, which is the ultimate goal of the curricular unit of my capstone project.

## **Ideas for Students to Make Changes in the Linguistic Landscape of their School**

This section will discuss ways that students and teachers in different parts of the world have made positive changes to the LLs of their schools. Examples of positive effects resulting from those changes will follow.

### ***Changes Made to Linguistic Schoolscapes Around the World***

Perhaps the best example of changes made to the LLs of schools comes from a study done in New York City by Menken et al., published in 2018. In this study, 23 schools in New York City were asked to participate in making changes to the LLs in their schools in order to reflect the languages spoken by the students attending the schools and to promote a more multilingual curriculum. Many positive changes were seen in these schools. New multilingual displays such as welcome signs in multiple languages were created by students, staff, and community members in several schools (Menken et al., 2018) as well as welcome signs that also included a list of “Frequently Asked Questions” commonly posed by parents and then translated into multiple languages along with the answers to those questions. Multilingual word walls were created in many classrooms with the help of students, staff, and family members (Menken et al., 2018) to display vocabulary words. Labels in multiple languages were put around some schools, with students and staff helping out as a “labeling team” (Menken et al., 2018).

Other studies have highlighted positive changes to the LSs of schools around the world, similar to the New York City schools’ changes. In southeastern Estonia, Brown (2018) revealed changes made to the LSs of several schools including maps of historic Vorumaa (the regional minority culture) posted around schools, calendars in Voro,

hallway labels in Voro, and Voro language awards in a trophy case at the front of one school. Likewise, in Romania, changes to the LSs in regional schools involved re-introducing Hungarian into the LS in forms of additional signage being displayed, local Szekler traditions displayed on signs, and symbols of the Szekler culture such as emblems, the flag, and folk crafts on display (Laihonen & Todor, 2017). Adding the local culture and language to a school's LS can transform the way a school is presented to parents and to the community in a positive way (Szabo, 2015).

Other ways that schools changed their LSs focused on information available to parents and the community. Examples include the production of kindergarten parent-information sheets in the Voro language (Brown, 2018), multilingual welcome packets and informational resources for families enrolling in U.S. schools for the first time (Menken et al., 2018), and maps of schools labeled in multiple languages which also incorporated a tour from a currently enrolled student who spoke the new student's language (Menken et al., 2018). In addition, schools in New York City also reported a shift in the types of materials that were available to students to use for research and for reading (Menken et al., 2018). Home language resources were added to many schools both in their school libraries and in their classroom libraries (Menken et al., 2018), allowing students to read literature in their home languages and to do research for other content-area classes in their home languages.

### ***Positive Effects of Changes to Linguistic Schoolscapes***

Many examples of the ways in which changes to LSs can be made have been presented. Research from schools where these changes have been made shows that there

are many benefits to such changes (Brown, 2018; Laihonen & Todor, 2017; Menken et al., 2018; Szabo, 2015). Examples of such benefits include shaping childrens' ideas of what it means to be a Romanian citizen while at the same time being a Szekler and a Hungarian speaker through the transformed LSs at schools (Laihonen & Todor, 2017). Similarly, students and staff at schools in southeastern Estonia reported more confidence in using their regional Voro language, pride in the creation of Voro-language contests and a Voro-language week, and a general motivation amongst staff to incorporate more Voro-language resources into their classroom instruction (Brown, 2018).

Perhaps the most significant shifts in ideology and language policy amongst staff and school leaders can be seen in the New York City schools that participated in the schoolscape change study (Menken et al., 2018). Many schools moved from "...monolingual approaches to multilingual ones that recognize and build on students' bi/multiculturalism...Greater value was placed on children's bilingualism, their cultures, and what they have to contribute" (Menken et al., 2018, p. 114). Teachers in these schools reported a great increase in student participation during class because the students were encouraged to use their home languages to read, write, research, and discuss. Parental involvement also increased when materials sent home to parents were translated into multiple languages and translators were brought in to help during school functions. Finally, some of the schools in New York City began offering a new class called "native language arts", or NLA, which allowed students to explore language arts in their native language, increasing their ability to learn how to explore English language arts as well (Menken et al., 2018).

Students and staff can make positive changes to the LS of their school in a variety of ways. These changes can lead to many positive effects on the students, the staff, and the school community. This ties into the goal of this capstone project which is to create a curricular unit that addresses the research question: *How can students learn to research and think critically about the linguistic landscape in and around their school and come up with ideas to create changes in the linguistic landscape of their school?*

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature on the topic of linguistic landscape (LL) research, linguistic schoolscape (LS) research, and how teachers can involve students in such research at their own school in order to realize inequities in what is represented in the LLs around them so that they can make positive changes to those LLs in and around their school. The chapter began with an overview of LL research, including a definition of the term *linguistic landscape* and how it has evolved over time. This section then discussed key focuses of researchers in the field of LL research, including the significance of languages used in a LL, power structures revealed in LL research, and future areas of study for LL research. The second section of the chapter narrowed down LL research to look at LS research specifically. It began with a definition of the term *linguistic schoolscape*, followed by a discussion of majority languages versus minority languages in LSs, concluding with a look at research on the impact of LSs on multilingual students. The third section of the chapter discussed students engaging in LL research and included examples of how students can engage in LL research along with what students can learn from participating in LL research. Finally, the last section of this chapter presented ideas

for students to make changes in the LL of their school. Examples of changes made to LSs around the world were given, along with a discussion of positive effects resulting from changes made to LSs.

I am studying ways that middle school students can be involved in researching and becoming aware of the linguistic landscapes (LLs) of their own schools because I want to find out how inequities in what is represented in their own schools' LLs can be revealed to students through analysis in order to motivate students to initiate changes in the LLs of their schools. This review of literature has provided support for the goal of this capstone project that will address the research question: *How can students learn to research and think critically about the linguistic landscape in and around their school and come up with ideas to create changes in the linguistic landscape of their school?*

Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the capstone project. The capstone project is a three-week curricular unit intended for use with middle school EL students. The findings from the literature review in Chapter Two provide a basis for this curricular unit which will get students involved in hands-on research of the LL in and around their school so that they can document it, analyze it, come up with ideas to make changes to it, and implement those changes in order to create a more equitable LL for all the students who attend their school.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

#### Introduction

As an EL educator, I want to promote equity and appreciation of cultural diversity in order to help ensure that my students, their families, and community members have positive linguistic and cultural identities. In Chapter One, I discussed my road to becoming an EL educator and how my interest in the linguistic landscapes that surround us in our daily lives was piqued. In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature in the field of linguistic landscape studies. When I began looking at the research that has been done on linguistic landscapes (LLs) and more specifically, linguistic schoolsapes (LSs), it became clear to me that students themselves could be involved in examining the LLs in their lives. Students can be taught how to look critically at the LLs around them and in turn, they can learn how to analyze what is represented in those LLs in order to figure out what possible underlying ideologies are present in their surroundings. The ultimate goal of my capstone project is to motivate students to make changes to the LLs in their lives so that they represent more equitably the languages that are spoken by the people that live, work, and visit the places where those LLs are present.

Focusing specifically on schools and the LLs of those schools is a good starting point for students to learn how to do this. I want to be able to teach students like Amira, whom I introduced in Chapter One, to be involved in hands-on research of the LL in and around their school so that they can document it, analyze it, come up with ideas to make

changes to it, and implement those changes in order to create a more equitable LL for all the students who attend their school. My aim is to provide a three-week curricular unit for teachers to use that will answer my research question: *How can students learn to research and think critically about the linguistic landscape in and around their school and come up with ideas to create changes in the linguistic landscape of their school?*

In this chapter, I begin by giving an overview of the project and the framework upon which the project will be based. This includes details about each week of the three-week curricular unit, a description of how the curricular unit supports English language acquisition, and how the curricular unit will be assessed. Next, I outline the audience and the setting for which the project is intended. Finally, I describe a timeline for completing the project.

### **Overview of the Project and Project Framework**

This capstone project is a three-week curricular unit intended for use at the middle school level. This unit can be used for any middle school-aged student whether they are receiving EL services or not. The intention of this project is to involve middle school students in the research and analysis of the LL at their school and for them to then make positive changes to the LL in order to more accurately reflect the languages spoken by the students attending the school and their families and communities. As discussed in Chapter Two, there have been previous studies done in which students have been involved in the research of LLs either in their schools or in their communities (Aladjem & Jou, 2016; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Chesnut et al., 2013; Gorter, 2017; Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018; Sayer, 2009). There have also been some studies done in which changes

were made to the LLs of schools to more accurately reflect the multilingualism present in those schools (Brown, 2018; Laihonon & Todor, 2017; Menken et al., 2018). This project aims to weave these ideas together so that not only can the students be involved in the research and analysis of the LL at their school, but they can also create real-world changes resulting from what they discover.

The framework for this capstone project is a unit of curriculum that is based on Understanding by Design (UbD) as described by Wiggins and McTighe (2011). UbD is a method of writing a curriculum that looks at the end-goal first. The UbD framework is made up of three planning stages: identifying desired results, determining acceptable assessment evidence, and planning instruction and learning experiences leading up to the desired results. For this capstone project, the ultimate goal is for students to understand the benefits of having a LL in a school that accurately represents the multilingualism that is present within the student body of the school, including the families and communities of the students. At the end of the three-week unit, students will implement changes to the existing LL of their school and will be able to present the reasons why these changes are beneficial and important to maintain going forward.

Working backward from this end-goal, this curricular unit consists of three weeks of daily 45-minute lessons that are presented in a Google Slides format. The lessons are intended to be taught in classes consisting of 15-18 students. Supplemental materials including graphic organizer worksheets and a final presentation rubric are attached. Learning activities in each lesson include some or all of the language domains of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. I chose a Google Slides format because it is

easy to share and it is easily adaptable if teachers want to make changes to any of the slides to suit their own unique needs. Currently, I plan all of my lessons using Google Slides. Students and teachers at my school are familiar with using Google Slides for classroom activities. In addition, the Google Slides format with worksheets in Google Docs provides the option for students to complete the materials in a digital format instead of on paper if desired. Finally, for teachers who use Google Classroom, all of these platforms are connected and therefore can be easily assigned to students via Google Classroom in a digital learning environment.

The curricular unit for this project begins with a lesson on the definition of linguistic landscapes and where we can find LLs in our daily lives. For example, LLs in our daily lives can include billboards, menus posted at restaurants, street signs, directional signs, and flyers posted on public bulletin boards. Subsequent lessons during the first week will include examples of LLs from the community in which the charter school is located, shown in the form of photographs. Students will record their observations about these LLs in their community and there will be a class discussion about what those observations signal and the students' feelings about them. At the end of the first week of the unit, students will have the opportunity to conduct their own research of the LL of their school by using the "walking tour technique" (Biro, 2016; Burwell & Lenters, 2015). During their walking tour, students will record the features of the LL in and around their school using photographs and videos, and will also take notes on where in the school the LL items were found. Devices used will be Chromebooks with cameras from the students' classrooms. Specifically, students will look at and document signage

all around the school, both inside and out, in classrooms, hallways, entryways, the cafeteria, the gym, and in other common areas of the school.

During the second week of the curricular unit, students will share and reflect upon what they found when they documented the LL in and around their school. Students will have the opportunity to upload photographs and videos of the LL to a shared group Google Slides presentation. The class will discuss as a whole what is represented in the LL of their school and what it means. The LL of a space and “the presence (or absence) of language displays in the public space communicates a message, intentional or not, conscious or not, that affects, manipulates or imposes de facto language policy and practice” (Shohamy, 2006, p. 213). Students will determine what they believe to be the messages that are being expressed by what is shown (or not shown) in the LL of their school. At the end of the second week, students will gather data and reflect upon the multilingualism that is present in their school: What languages other than English are spoken at this school? What languages other than English are spoken by family members or community members who visit this school? Do you see an equitable representation of those languages within the LL of the school? Further discussion will include how the LL of the school might make members of different language communities feel and how their linguistic identities might be affected by these feelings, consciously or subconsciously. The benefit of these analyses and discussions is that if students learn how to become attuned to the LLs around them and what they mean, they themselves can become more culturally sensitive to the different linguistic groups around them (Gorter, 2017).

During the third week of the curricular unit, students will first work on deciding what types of changes can be made to the LL of their school in order to meet their goals of creating a more welcoming and linguistically equitable space for all students, families, and community members. Some ideas for students to make changes will include writing letters with LL change proposals to the administration and school board, creating and laminating new signage for classrooms, hallways, entryways, and other common areas to include all languages represented at the school, finding staff members or family members who can translate words correctly for the new signage, and coming up with ideas for securing funds for printing of new signage. Students will make sure that the order in which the different languages appear on school signage is varied, so as to be equitable to all linguistic groups. Finally, at the end of the third week, in order to evaluate student learning, students will work in groups of 3-4 to create a presentation about the LLs that they researched, analyzed, and improved. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of how improving LLs to be more equitable can make a big difference in students' linguistic and cultural identities.

This curricular unit supports English language acquisition because the students will use English as they analyze and discuss the LL of their school. They will work together in groups, give presentations on their research findings, and share their ideas. Although students will ultimately be creating new ideas for LL items using the L1s (first languages) of students attending the school, all of the activities leading up to the ultimate goal of implementing positive changes to the LL of the school will be conducted in

English with the use of their own L1 as needed. The final group presentation will also be in English as students demonstrate what they have learned throughout the curricular unit.

### ***Assessment***

I will know this curricular unit is successful when student learning is taking place as demonstrated by their final group presentations. Assessment of their final presentations will be based on the inclusion of written observations of at least ten LL examples, how those ten examples are either equitable or inequitable, and how they can be improved. Students will then show and explain the improvements that they made to five of the ten LL examples.

### **Project Audience and Setting**

This project will take place at an urban charter school in Minnesota. This charter school has a total student population of approximately 350 in grades 5-12 of which approximately 80% qualify as English Learners. The students overwhelmingly come from a Somali L1, or native language, background and most are bilingual though may possess limited literacy skills in their L1. Among that population, roughly 10% are WIDA level 1, and students at WIDA levels 2, 3, and 4 comprise roughly equal percentages of the remaining EL population. In addition to the students with a Somali L1 background, there are also a small number of students with Spanish and Hmong L1 backgrounds, all of whom are enrolled in the EL program at the school. Mainstream classes have approximately an 18:1 student to teacher ratio, omitting other classroom professionals. There are currently four full-time EL teachers working with roughly 275 students in grades 5-12 at this school.

I have designed a three-week curricular unit for use in a middle school setting at the charter school which serves students in grades 5-12. The target audience for my project is students enrolled in grades 7 and 8. The charter school has separate areas of the building for elementary, middle, and high school classrooms. Grades 7 and 8 are comprised of roughly 85 students total, and they are divided into two sections per grade level. 85% of the students in grades 7 and 8 receive EL services, and there are 3 EL teachers who work with these grades.

Most of the students at this charter school come from large families. We see a lot of families with multiple children enrolled at the school, and many of the students have anywhere from five to ten or more siblings. As a staff, we have noticed that many of the parents and grandparents of our students have very limited English skills, and need interpretation services at parent-teacher conferences or at other school events. One of the goals of my capstone project is to increase the equity of what is represented in the LL of the school so that the LL not only more accurately reflects the multilingualism of the students attending the school, but also the multilingualism of the families of the students who attend the school and the L1s of the communities that we serve.

### **Project Timeline**

The curricular unit for this capstone project was created during the spring and summer of 2020 and will be implemented in the fall of the 2020-2021 school year. In order to reach the goal of completing the capstone project by the end of summer 2020, I followed a timeline of monthly goals. In May, I revised Chapters One through Three and updated the reference list. In May, I also completed the first phase of UbD by identifying



the ELD standards and learning objectives for the lessons in the curricular unit. At the beginning of June, I worked on phase two of UbD in order to outline the goals for the final group presentation that will assess student learning at the end of the curricular unit. During the second half of June, I finished with phase three of UbD by creating the fifteen lessons on Google Slides along with supplemental materials. At the beginning of July, I submitted my project to my content reviewer and capstone project facilitator and received feedback. At the end of July, I revised the project as per the suggestions of my content reviewer and my capstone project facilitator. I then drafted and revised Chapter Four of the capstone paper by the middle of August and submitted the project for final assessment by the deadline at the end of August 2020.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I began by giving an overview of the project and the framework upon which the project will be based. This included a description of how the curricular unit supports English language acquisition and how the curricular unit will be assessed. Next, I outlined the audience and the setting for which the project is intended. Finally, I described a timeline for completing the project. In Chapter Four, I reflect upon what I learned and what was challenging during the creation of the capstone project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Reflection

#### Introduction

This capstone project is the culmination of my examination into how students can be involved in the research, documentation, and analysis of the linguistic landscape (LL) at their own school. I developed a three-week curricular unit that turns students into language detectives and puts them into the shoes of LL researchers. By the end of the unit, students will have taken their findings and created changes to the LL of their school to make it more equitable and welcoming for all students, families, and community members who attend the school.

Chapter Four discusses the principal learnings I have gained from my project, reviews and makes new connections to my literature review, presents implications and limitations of my project, and presents ideas for potential future projects. Chapter Four concludes with a summary and final reflection on my project.

#### What I Have Learned

As I look back, I have learned so much while on my journey to answer the research question: *How can students learn to research and think critically about the linguistic landscape in and around their school and come up with ideas to create changes in the linguistic landscape of their school?* I began this journey by focusing on how a student of mine, Amira, whom I introduced in Chapter One, felt when she first entered our school with her mother and sister. I know that a welcoming and equitable

environment is key to helping students feel important, included, and comfortable in school so that they can maximize their learning potential throughout the school day. As educators, we all have students like Amira who come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These students need to be able to see their native language(s) represented in the linguistic landscape (LL) of their school in a positive and fair way. It is one thing to just go ahead and make those changes to the LL of our schools as educators ourselves. But I wanted to take it a step further and actually involve the students themselves in the research, documentation, and analysis of the LL of their own school so that they could be the ones to make positive improvements to the LL of their school.

I learned that students can definitely participate in LL research at their own school. Writing the curriculum lesson plans for the three-week unit taught me that I can indeed create a fun and engaging curriculum that can be implemented with my own students this upcoming fall. I really enjoyed coming up with different activities for the students to complete and I am looking forward to the discussions that will result from my students becoming critical observers of the LLs around them. I myself have learned so much about LL studies that I find that I am more keenly aware of the LLs around me as I go about my daily life in my own neighborhood, community, and city. My hope is that my students will see the inequities that are often present in the LLs around them and that they will be motivated to help change those inequities for the better.

By making changes to the LL of a school, positive outcomes are plentiful. The 2018 study by Menken et al. reported the impact that improvements to the LL of schools had on students, families, and school community members. “Our findings show how

changes to a school's visual LL often served as a pathway from monolingual to multilingual education policies" (Menken et al., 2018, p. 103). A shift in school culture resulted, showing more inclusion and a sense of belonging in bilingual students. Ultimately, by increasing the inclusion of a multilingual LL in schools, educational policy can change over time to include more acceptance of students' home languages, the recognition of the value of multilingualism in classrooms, and the richness that all students' native languages and cultures bring to our schools. This in turn will affect students' linguistic and cultural identities in positive ways (Menken et al., 2018; Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018; Sayer, 2009).

Finally, throughout this capstone process, I have learned that I can synthesize findings from many different pieces of published literature and that I can write about it in a way that makes sense. I now know that I can take ideas from many different sources and use them to come up with my own ideas of how to teach students what I envision as the end goal. The idea to have my students become language detectives and to work in small groups called 'detective agencies' just came to me out of the blue one day as I was working on my lesson plans, and it took off from there. Because my curriculum is aimed at middle school-aged students, I believe that they are still young enough to have a little fun and imagine that they are researchers called language detectives as they work through the lessons in the three-week unit. I am excited to see my creation in action at my school this upcoming fall.

## **Connections to Literature Review**

For this project, I poured over literature written about linguistic landscape studies, linguistic schoolscape studies, students becoming involved in research, and how to conduct a ‘walking tour’ of a LL in a city, neighborhood, or a school. LL studies is often referred to as a “new” area of research, so I was worried about not finding enough literature to support my learning. But I found plenty after some digging, and I became very familiar with certain authors and articles that I found myself going back to again and again. I have a large stack of the printed articles on my desk. This stack has been there for the past year or so and the articles are dog-eared, full of different-colored highlights, post-it notes stuck all over, colored tabs sticking out of the sides to alert me to something important, and many worn pages and corners. I have to say, in a certain way, I will miss this stack when it is gone.

To learn about LL studies in general, I found several very informative articles that give a good history of the development of LL research (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Cenoz & Gorter, 2018; Gorter, 2013; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Van Mensel et al., 2016). Landry and Bourhis were the first to come up with a solid definition of “linguistic landscape”: “The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a give territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (1997, p. 25). Gorter (2013) is also one of the original ‘fathers’ of LL research and has a nice cache of studies published in the field.

The article in my stack that proved to be the most interesting and useful is called “Word on the street: Investigating linguistic landscapes with urban Canadian youth” by Burwell and Lenters (2015). Out of all the research I looked at, this study was the one that gave me the idea of involving students in the research of the LLs in their lives. The study involves 10th grade students and they conduct research of the LL in their area of the city that they live in. I knew that it wasn’t feasible to take my middle school students out into the city itself, but I love the process that was involved in Burwell and Lenters’ research and it was very helpful to look at as I was designing my own curriculum unit.

#### Other

Other helpful articles looked at LL studies in urban and rural settings (Backhaus, 2006; Belles-Calvera, 2019; Blackwood, 2011; Hult, 2014). Although these articles did not involve schools nor use students as researchers, they provided a glimpse into what is involved in the analysis of LLs and what some of the underlying ideologies present in the LLs around us might be.

Narrowing my focus to look at LL studies done specifically in schools, but not necessarily involving students as researchers, I found a range of research that took place in Israel (Amara, 2018), Estonia (Brown, 2005; Brown, 2010; Brown, 2018), Portugal (Clemente, et al., 2012), Romania (Laihonen & Todor, 2017) and Hungary (Szabo, 2015). The research presented in these articles focused on the way that the LLs in schools are set up and what some of the underlying messages can be seen because of the lack of equity in these LLs.

Once my project was underway, I needed to figure out what the final goals would be for my students. I realized that not only did I want them to become critical observers of the LL in our school, but that I want them to actually change the LL in our school to make it more equitable and welcoming to all of the students, families, and school community members who attend our school. Inspiration for ideas on how to make positive changes to the LL of a school came from my favorite sub-stack of articles within the main stack of articles on my desk (Aladjem & Jou, 2016; Biro, 2016; Burwell & Lenters, 2015; Chesnut et al., 2013; Gorter, 2017; Menken, et al., 2018; Pakarinen & Bjorklund, 2018; Sayer, 2009).

I appreciate the research done that paved the way for me to be able to create a student-involved LL research curriculum that I believe will benefit my students in many ways. Because of what I have learned, I know I am a more critical observer of the LLs around me in my daily life and I am looking forward to passing this knowledge along to my students.

### **Project Implications**

There are a number of positive implications that I hope to see come to fruition after the implementation of this curricular unit with my students this upcoming fall. I would like my students to become more aware of their linguistic surroundings in their lives. Perhaps they can implement some changes to LLs in their neighborhoods or communities. Even if they do not make changes to LLs, I am hopeful that they will be able to understand some of the underlying issues surrounding LLs and that they can recognize inequities when they are present. Learning to understand these inequities can

have an effect on my students' linguistic and cultural identities, and they will also be able to share their learnings with others around them. Ultimately, if students learn to be more attuned to their linguistic surroundings, they themselves will develop more cultural sensitivity to other people around them.

Implications of this project within my school will create more awareness amongst the staff and administration about how we are presenting the LL of our school. Keeping in mind that we have students, families, and school community members who speak Somali, Spanish, English, and Hmong, what can we do as a school to make sure that those languages are all represented equally in the signage of our school building? Although my students will be making improvements to the LL of the school during this curricular unit, I am hopeful that the administration will be willing to invest some money into some more permanent signage changes for our building going forward.

### **Project Limitations**

The main limitation of my project is that I have not taught it yet. I plan on implementing this curricular unit during the fall of 2020 with my students in grades seven and eight. One hurdle that is very possible is that we will be doing distance learning this fall due to the Covid-19 pandemic. If this is the case, I will have to delay this curricular unit because it definitely needs to be taught in-person. My plan will be to implement the unit as soon as we return to in-person learning. No matter when I teach the unit, there will be minor adjustments and perhaps small changes that I make along the way, as there always are with any new material being taught. But I feel that this will only further strengthen the quality of the curriculum.



### **Potential Future Projects**

I envision this type of LL student-involved research and analysis curriculum being used with students of all ages. I wrote this curriculum for students in grades seven and eight, but it could easily be adapted for other ages. Younger students could perhaps focus solely on the LL of their classroom, or in one area of the school only. Older students or even adult students could do a broader LL study in a certain area of their community or in parts of the city, for example. Older students could also focus on the agents of the LL of an area, or in other words, who made the choices about which languages are more prominently displayed in certain areas and why. The relationship between the use of languages and linguistic identity could be explored. Another way for students to get involved in LL improvements could be for the students to write letters to the school administration asking for funding to make more permanent changes to the signage of their school. Finally, instead of just documenting, analyzing, and making changes to the LL around them, students could delve more deeply into asking questions of each other surrounding their feelings towards how a certain area of the city is viewed by outsiders and whether the LL and the condition (i.e. run-down and messy or well-kept) of the LL plays a part in forming those views.

### **Summary and Final Reflection**

This chapter discussed the principal learnings I have gained from my project, reviewed and made new connections to my literature review, presented implications and limitations of my project, and presented ideas for potential future projects.

Throughout the entire process of researching, reading literature, choosing my topic, writing my capstone paper, and creating my curriculum project, I have realized that I can indeed accomplish something I never thought I could. Completing what I feel to be a real and important contribution to the field of EL teaching while being a full-time teacher, a wife, and a mother to two children, and doing this in my 40s no less, has been very eye-opening and has given me a renewed sense of pride in myself. I couldn't have done this without the support of my husband, my mother, and my children, and I know my late father is very proud of me as well. I hope other teachers can take ideas from my project and use them in their own teaching to make positive improvements to the LLs of many schools and communities.

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## APPENDIX A

### Curriculum Unit Overview

**Unit name:**

Investigating Linguistic Landscapes in Middle School

**Unit Preview:**

This is a three-week unit for students in grades seven and eight at an urban middle school. Students will learn how to investigate, document, and analyze the linguistic landscapes in and around their school. Students will use their knowledge to make positive changes to the linguistic landscape of their school so that it is more equitable and welcoming to all students, families, and community members who attend the school.

**Unit Objectives:**

Students will be able to...

...document and analyze signage in the school that makes up the linguistic landscape.

...create new signage that accurately represents the multilingual population of the school.

...explain how having an equitable linguistic landscape at school is beneficial.

**Unit outline:**

Week 1:

Day 1: Introduction to Linguistic Landscapes



Day 2: Becoming Language Detectives

Day 3: Observing Linguistic Landscapes

Day 4: Walking Tour (Whole Class Activity)

Day 5: Analyzing Linguistic Landscapes

Week 2:

Day 1: Walking Tour (Small Group Activity)

Day 2: Walking Tour (Small Group Activity)

Day 3: Preparation for Final Presentation

Day 4: Analyzing our Findings

Day 5: Work on Final Presentations

Week 3:

Day 1: Equity in Linguistic Landscapes

Day 2: Improving Linguistic Landscapes

Day 3: Displaying and Presenting our Improvements

Day 4: Final Presentations

Day 5: Critical Reflection and Discussion

## APPENDIX B

### Assessment Rubric: Linguistic Landscapes

#### Google Slides Presentation

Score	Analysis	Explanation	Improvements
<b>Exemplary</b>  4	Presentation includes an excellent analysis of the 10 LL images, addressing all 11 questions on the LL analysis sheet.	Presentation explains thoroughly why the LL is acceptable or unacceptable, and why it should be improved to be more equitable.	Presentation shows how 5 of the 10 LL examples were improved to be more equitable along with a thorough explanation. Improvements are high-quality.
<b>Strong</b>  3	Presentation includes a good analysis of the 10 LL images, addressing all 11 questions on the LL analysis sheet.	Presentation explains why the LL is acceptable or unacceptable, and why it should be improved to be more equitable.	Presentation shows how 5 of the 10 LL examples were improved to be more equitable along with a basic explanation. Improvements are good.
<b>Adequate</b>  2	Presentation includes an adequate analysis of the 10 LL images, addressing all 11 questions on the LL analysis sheet.	Presentation explains somewhat why the LL is acceptable or unacceptable, and why it should be improved to be more equitable.	Presentation shows how less than 5 of the 10 LL examples were improved to be more equitable. Improvements are low-quality.
<b>Attempted</b>  1	Presentation is not complete and does not include all 10 LL images. Presentation does not address all 11 questions on the LL analysis sheet.	Presentation does not explain why the LL is acceptable or unacceptable, nor why it should be improved to be more equitable.	Presentation shows how less than 5 of the 10 LL examples were changed, but equity is not clear. Improvements are low-quality.
<b>No points</b>  0	Work is incomplete.	Work is incomplete.	Work is incomplete.

## APPENDIX C

### MN K-12 Academic Standards in English Language Arts

This unit addresses the following Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in English Language Arts:

#### 7.7.2.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

A. Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g., headings, graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

B. Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

C. Use appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.

D. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

E. Establish and maintain a formal style.

F. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

#### 7.9.1.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

A. Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

B. Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

C. Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.

D. Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.

E. Cooperate, mediate, and problem solve to make decisions as appropriate for productive group discussion.

**7.9.4.4**

Present claims and findings, respect intellectual properties, emphasize salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

**7.9.5.5**

Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.

Retrieved from Minnesota Department of Education (2010).