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Easing the Transition From Middle School to High School for Long-term English Learners

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EASING THE TRANSITION FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL FOR
LONG-TERM ENGLISH LEARNERS

by

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

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DEDICATION

To Women's Council for your relentless support and encouragement and for being the EL extraordinaires each of you are. You truly are some of the best educators I have had the honor of working with. To the Trivia Team for your check-ins and cheers as I pursued this program. To my parents who never quite knew when I was finished with this level of education, but always had ample encouragement and pride to dole out. To Tyler who created physical and emotional space for me to finish this project and whose calm demeanor tempered my stress. To my colleagues and students who inspire me every day to become a better educator and person. I am continually growing and learning from each of you and for that I am grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

I did not think much of it when I was told before winter break that the counselors from the high school would be coming to talk to our eighth graders in January. I had been through this process once before, as this was my second year in a middle school teaching English language learners. I knew that counselors came to inform our eighth grade students about how to register for their ninth grade classes. Last year, I worked with a group of my long-term English learner students in helping them register. However, this year I did not think much about it. That was until the day in January when counselors came to inform students of their next steps into high school.

Part of my schedule as an English Language teacher is to teach an eighth grade sheltered class of only English language learners. This class is made up of long-term English language learners, for the most part. By our district's definition, a long-term English learner is a student who has been receiving English language services for five years or more. What I had realized this year and last was that a large majority of these students did not seem prepared for this meeting with the high school counselors.

In my class that day, students were stressed out and entered class full of energy and questions. "What classes should I take?" "What classes do I need to take?" "What are credits?" "What is a prerequisite?" "What are extracurricular activities?" "Do teachers allow you to retake tests?" "Does it matter if I fail a class?" "What are AP classes? Can I

take one?” “Will I make friends?” “Can I take classes with my friends?” “What time is lunch?” “How long is the passing period?” The questions went on and on and ranged from academics, to vocabulary, to post-high school, to social-emotional, to relationships. I could not keep up with the myriad questions. I decided to pivot my original lesson for the day and work with the students to help them understand their registration guide and the classes they needed to register for. They were told at the end of their session with the counselors to “go home and talk it over with their parents.” It was then that I started to question how prepared these students actually were and if they felt they were ready for high school. The question for my research project was formed by this experience: *How do educational stakeholders help to create a successful transition from middle school to high school for our long-term English learners?* In this chapter, I will explain the background of long-term English learners (LTELs), as well as my own personal experience with my professional journey. In the second part, I will go into more detail about how my research question was developed and will conclude with my project.

Background

Long-term English learners (LTEL) have often been forgotten about in discussions surrounding English learners. The Minnesota Department of Education and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) do not even have a formal definition of who “qualifies” as an LTEL. However, under ESSA, school districts are required to report information about English learners who have not obtained proficiency after five years of being identified as an English learner (Minnesota Department of Education, 2016). WIDA, which produces English language students assessments and standards for 40

U.S. states, defined this population as not obtaining proficiency in six years (Sahakyan & Ryan, 2000). In my own professional background I did not learn much about the needs of LTELs. Most of my formal and on-the-job experience focused on students with interrupted or limited formal education (SLIFE). When I started in a new school district, I quickly realized this was not the population of English learners that I would be working with. Instead, LTELs were widely represented in our school population. LTELs are a population that is difficult to find information about, especially in regards to how to support them. They vary in age, background, language, and reasons why they are still receiving English language services. The fact that they do not have an official definition given by the state of Minnesota is telling in how we, as educators, are not entirely sure what their specific needs are and how to meet those needs.

Even though there is no formal working definition of LTELs, I realized that I was working with many students whose language proficiency had stagnated and they were not advancing in their language in both the ACCESS test and in content area classes. These students were clearly not SLIFE or recent immigrants and many of them were born in the US. I started to take a vested interest in how long they had been receiving English language services and found that many of the students qualified as LTELs based on the MDE definition of a student receiving EL services for more than five years. It was with this realization that I started to reach out to various stakeholders. I wanted to know what supports we had in place for these students and find out what our district was already doing. I was surprised to learn that there is very little information about this specific demographic in our school. I was told that it was difficult to even find a percentage of

how many students were considered LTELs. This largely was due to the fact that if a student transfers in from another district, it is not indicated how many years of language service that student received. At the secondary level, many students transfer in from other districts, therefore our district's percentage is not accurate. These "loopholes" were surprising to me as I felt so ill-prepared to give my students what they needed. It seemed like they were being forgotten about on many levels.

Graduation rates and other data on English learners is still relatively new, however it is incredibly important to look at this information to see how we as educational stakeholders are helping our EL students' progress. On a national level, it was reported that in the 2013-2014 school year only 62.6 percent of English-learners graduated from high school on a national level. This is in comparison to 82 percent of all students (Klein, 2016). The Minnesota Department of Education has a goal of no student group falling below 85% in graduation rates. In 2019, 67.2% of English language learners graduated within four years, 74.5% graduated in five years, and 77.2% graduated in six years (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). Whereas these numbers do not reflect LTELs only, it does show the importance of creating a system of support within the secondary levels. It is also important to note that this data shows if ELs have more time to develop their language proficiency and academics, they do better and therefore graduate at a higher rate compared to the four year rate. If educational stakeholders, primarily teachers and administrators, want to achieve MDE's goal of no student group falling below the 85% graduation mark, there needs to be further steps taken to ensure our EL students are graduating high school.

Research Question

On eighth grade registration day for the high school, my own ignorance about my students' needs showed through. I had previously worked in high schools for many years and my eighth graders' questions were the same types of questions my juniors and seniors would ask, not having much understanding or information about next steps for their lives. They were questions that many educators do not realize are not a natural part of the conversation in many multilingual families. It was the assumption of myself and other school staff on registration day that students' families know specific steps and information about high school and that if students have questions they can rely on their parents to help navigate the system. My question about if my students were prepared for high school led me to wonder if we, as a school and district, are doing our best to prepare our long-term English learners for the transition from middle school to high school. I then started inquiring with our middle school counselors about what has been done in the past and what is currently being done to ensure our eighth graders feel and are ready for this transition. When I found out it was very little and that most of it depended on conversations and information from their family, I developed my research question for this project: *How do educational stakeholders help to create a successful transition from middle school to high school for our long-term English learners?*

I wanted to find out how the stakeholders in these students' educations could be informed on how to best support them in their transition from middle school to high school. When I started to inquire about how many of my students' families knew about

the registration process I realized that many students' parents were trusting and relying on the school to guide their children down the right path for their high school education. Many of these students also come from families where they are the oldest child or among the oldest, therefore they are the pioneers of many first-generation families in this journey through high school and beyond.

Capstone Project

With this project, I wanted to find out how all the stakeholders connected to our district's LTEL population can help support a meaningful transition for them in all areas: social, emotional, physical, and academic. I figured I could start with my small class of eighth graders. I created a survey to assess their understanding and their families' understandings of how the transition process works from middle school to high school. I then used that data to inform a unit I can teach to help prepare this group of students to both feel ready by their own understanding, as well as to actually be ready for the rigors, demands, and changes that happen in their 9th grade year.

Conclusion

It is important for all education staff to be aware of the various needs of long-term English learners.. Long-term English learners and their families often get overlooked in both EL and mainstream planning and preparation for school-to-school transition. It is for this reason that it is important to find strategies to help support both the students and their families during this time of transition.

In the following chapters I hope to clarify this need, while providing a possible path for my school district to go down. In chapter two, the literature related to long-term

English learners and their needs in the transition from middle school to high school will be reviewed. Chapter three will provide a detailed record of what the project will be. Chapter four will conclude with my significant learnings and future of the project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this capstone is to answer the question, *how do educational stakeholders help to create a successful transition from middle school to high school for our long-term English learners?* The broader purpose of this project is to share the information found with fellow educators in how we can aid in transitioning our LTELs from one school to another.

The literature review presented in this chapter will cover three main sections: The first section investigates who long-term English learners are and how educators can address their unique needs. The second section will focus on the general transition from middle school to high school and what educators need to consider in that process. The final section will discuss and review what success looks like for English language learners both academically and socially in middle school and high school.

Long-Term English Learners

The first part of this section will define who long-term English learners (LTELs) are. The second subsection will address what the unique needs of our LTEL students are and review what the literature says. In order to understand how best to serve our schools' LTEL students, it is imperative to have an overview of who the students are and what best practices are being utilized in current English learner programming. The final section will conclude with common systemic barriers.

Defining who is a long-term English learner (LTEL) varies from state to state. Many states do not have an official definition and therefore school districts create their own definitions, if they address this group at all. Olsen (2010) reported that in the state of California, only one in four school districts has an official definition for who is considered an LTEL and those definitions range from five to ten years for what would be considered “normal” to reach language proficiency in English. The Minnesota Department of Education (2016) defined an long-term English learner as a student who has not achieved English proficiency according to the ACCESS test after five years from initial identification. In an LTEL study carried out by WIDA, the organization defined long-term English learners as “those ELs who had not reached the minimum threshold of English language proficiency after six years” (Sahakyan & Ryan, 2019, p.1).

It is of vital importance to not only know how to identify LTELs, but also to know how to adequately serve them and help them succeed in our schools and beyond. Klein (2016) reported that in the 2013-2014 school year, only 62.6 percent of English-learners graduated from high school on a national level. This is in comparison to 82 percent of all students. However, it is difficult to directly identify if lack of English proficiency is the direct reason for the significant difference between the two groups because most states do not require a language proficiency exam in order to graduate.

Academic versus Social Language Needs for LTELs

Other than these varying definitions, there are other commonalities that make LTELs as a unique category of language-learner. The literature conflicts about how accurate these sometimes misidentified features of LTELs are. It is important to note that

making broad generalizations is not helpful and that each student is unique in their needs. However, the literature does identify some main themes throughout the LTEL population. The main commonality is that LTELs typically have strong social English language skills, but lack the academic language needed in order to be successful in their classes (Brooks, 2018; Klein, 2016; Olsen, 2010). Again, it is important to keep in mind that this is a sweeping generalization on the “macro level” that all LTELs have this struggle (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994, p.20). As Valdés and Figueroa (1994) pointed out, this is not looking at the individual student’s microlevel abilities of being multilingual and their strengths in speaking more than one language. Brooks (2018, p.3) warned that this way of thinking and generalizing the LTEL group can lead to believing these students are “linguistically deficient” instead of seeing their multilingualism as complex and helpful to their academic success. However, lacking adequate academic language is a common thread among the LTEL population. This is often because schools tend to lack adequate English language development classes or opportunities within their courses to develop academic language skills (Kim & Garcia, 2014).

It is easy for educators to believe that because many of these students sound like their native-English speaking peers that they do not have specific language needs. Long-term English learners’ social English is usually well-developed as they have had ample opportunity to use and develop it in various contexts. However, with academic language, both in form and function, students are often fossilized in their language (Olsen, 2010). Because of their lack of academic language skills, LTELs typically have low gains on standardized tests and struggle academically. Olsen (2010) pointed out that

on standardized math and language arts exams, long-term English learners are typically two to three years below grade level.

Systemic Barriers

Varying definitions, among other factors, make it difficult for educators to fully understand the needs of their LTEL population, especially once in secondary school. School districts tend to lack accurate data and there are often no systems in place to monitor long-term English learner's progress. Several schools are in the beginning phases of their obligation to change their tracking processes according to the Every Child Succeed Act (ESSA). This policy requires schools to report the percentage and how many EL-identified students have not reached English proficiency after five years (ESSA, 2016). Olsen (2010) also cited systemic issues, such as lack of data, as obstacles for educators to fully understand the breadth of LTEL needs. There are specific measures that schools could take, which have been proven to help long-term English learners on their educational journeys. Olsen (2010), for example, laid out several things that school districts and teachers can implement to help raise language proficiency. Key principles to take into consideration for educational stakeholders, such as teaching staff and administration, are to create programs designed for long-term English learners. Using newcomer programs and other programs that are not designed for their needs has not provided the desired results, therefore it is the responsibility of the district, school, and teachers to embed and implement direct language instruction as well as literacy development school-wide. According to Olsen (2010), having one English Language Development course has proven to not help propel students forward. Including rigor in

classes, as well as understanding that students no longer have ample time to develop these skills, is imperative in secondary school.

Brooks (2018) used a different approach to help understand solid long-term English learner programming. Brooks stated that educators should simply ask “who are the students in my classroom or school considered to be LTELs?” Using this question is a jumping-off point for educators to ask deeper questions about their students while also recognizing their linguistic histories and benefits to speaking more than one language.

Another systemic barrier within EL programming is experienced when classes are scheduled, especially at the secondary level. In Callahan’s 2005 study, it was found that English learners are often inadequately represented in advanced classes that will prepare them for college (as cited in Baker, 2019). Kanno and Kangas (2014) found that when students were required to participate in language services, this hindered their options to join advanced courses and inadvertently tracked them into a lower academic rigor (as cited in Baker, 2019). It is important to take this into consideration when helping students make the transition from middle school to high school.

Many of these barriers are such that they cannot and will not be changed for several years and without the support of many in the school system and community, however these barriers informed my capstone in certain areas. For example, Callahan’s 2005 study inspired me to go deeper into explaining what advanced class options are available in high school and how to get into them. This is incorporated into my curriculum. Additionally, including rigor within the curriculum that will be taught is also preparing students for the rigor in high school as Olsen suggests (2010).

Transition from Middle School to High School

There are many factors at play when students transition from one school to another. Hertzog and Morgan (1997) posited that the transition from middle to high school is not one single event, but rather several events throughout a time period. There are many ways to reduce the stress and apprehension of this transition that schools, parents, teachers, and students can implement. The first part of this section will explain the research as to why a successful transition is helpful for students. The second section will give action steps to implement among the stakeholders in the transition process.

Transitioning from one school to the next can be a stressful and anxiety-ridden process for both the student and the parents. Oftentimes elementary school is very supportive and the transition from elementary to middle school is more of an ease. Middle schools typically have a teaming mentality, which can help students feel like they are part of a greater community. However, in years past, the transition from middle school to high school goes largely unsupported (as cited in Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013; Hertzog & Morgan, 1997).

Vasquez-Salgado and Chavira (2014) identified that from students' eighth grade to ninth grade years, their grades decline. Furthermore, Williamston (2010) stated that because of high drop-out rates of ninth graders and the amount of classes failed in ninth grade, the transition process has become even more imperative for all of those involved. However, Vasquez-Salgado and Chavira (2014) cited several different studies that show varying accounts of students' grades from middle school to high school. One such study by Benner and Graham showed that students had steady grades throughout middle

school, but declined in high school after the transition (as cited by Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014). Additionally, Allensworth and Easton (2005) also indicated that grades do decline from middle school to high school (as cited in Williamston, 2010).

Vasquez-Salgado and Chavira found in their 2010 study of Latino youth, that those students who had higher grades in eighth grade had a quicker decline of ninth grade grades compared to those who had lower grades in eighth grade. Therefore, this study involving Latino students showed that students with higher achievement levels are actually at the highest disadvantage in the transition from middle school to high school. Whereas this study does not assume the transition is the only reason for the grade decline, it does imply that educators and parents should be aware that the stress of the transition can directly correlate with students' grades and academic achievement.

Action Steps for a Successful Transition

In order to help students transition gracefully into a successful high school experience, there are four main action steps schools and families can do, the first being clear communication to the students and families. Linver and Silverberg (1997) found that when parents are involved in their child's education, the child achieves more academically (as cited in Williamston, 2010). Therefore, Williamston suggested schools should communicate with families about various topics related to the transition in a clear manner. This could come in the form of a parent information night or something more celebratory and specific to the high school curriculum. Hertzog and Morgan (1997) suggested a curriculum fair where there could be booths for clubs and other activities, as well as information regarding classes and content. Connecting middle school parents to

parents of a high school student is also recommended in order to start bridging the two schools (Williamston, 2010).

Another helpful action step is to provide students at the various levels with social support. Barone and Trickett (1991) found that when students transition to high school, they spend a great deal of energy and time trying to find where they feel most comfortable, which therefore can hinder academic success. A benefit of middle schools is that they are often focused on teaming, where staff works together across content areas to support a group of students. This can foster community and safety for students. Jackson and Davis (2000) found that this could also help students find a peer group that they are comfortable with (as cited in Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Additionally, this support helps create deeper connections with peers and classmates, according to George and Alexander (2003) (as cited in Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). When students leave middle school and go into high school, they often lose these teaming benefits. Therefore, Williamston proposed that high schools prepare many different types of programs and opportunities for students to feel connected to their new school and ease into their transition socially. Some of these opportunities could be connecting every new ninth grade student with an adult mentor or have eighth graders shadow ninth graders (Hertzog & Morgan, 1997; Williamston, 2010). Providing transitioning students with direct social support will help them navigate through the process smoother.

A third strategy for implementation is to help prepare transitioning students academically as they enter high school. The Southern Regional Education Board (2002 & 2008) stated that there are strategies that “are designed to accelerate achievement and

minimize the disruption to student learning” as they transition from middle school to high school (as cited in Williamston, 2010, p.4). Some of the aforementioned strategies include helping students hold a future-focus in high school, creating instruction that is challenging, meaningful, and focused on real-world issues, and maintaining high expectations for all students (Williamston, 2010, p.4).

The final step, and possibly the most supported throughout the literature, is that of working together. It is imperative that both the middle school and high school staff, including administration, work alongside students and their families throughout the bridging process. Crosnoe’s 2009 study of English Language Learner (ELL) students and low-income youth found that the information sent home was more difficult for immigrant families to understand, mainly because of the language barrier and not being exposed or coming up through the American school system. These families found it very helpful to have middle school staff involved with their student’s education and future, rather than the high school staff. This is because the high school staff did not know the students, whereas the middle school staff understood the students and the high school’s structure and policies more than the families. This is especially important to keep in mind when it comes to looking at the transition from middle school to high school with an English Learner (EL) lens. When all of these parts work together and provide academic and social support and accurate information, students benefit greatly in the transition. Williamston (2010, p.5) suggests creating a “transition team” built of both schools’ administrators, teachers, parents and students. This group can help find the specific needs of students and

create plans for helping them succeed. Additionally, this team could analyze data in order to best understand student needs.

In Cushman's 2006 study, it was found that the interviewed ninth grade students wanted a small, close community, have classes close to each other or with the same students, have "personally meaningful classroom activities," and have a mentor (as cited in Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013, p.174). This shows that students yearn for meaningful connections with staff and peers as they transition into a new chapter of their life. It also supports Hertzog's claim that the transition is a process and does not just happen once, but it is continually happening throughout the course of the year.

Academic and Social Success

The definitions of general academic success vary among sources. In relation to English learners, those definitions varied even more. Within the literature, some teachers defined success for their English learners as a "just try" method, meaning if they did their work and did their best, they would have achieved academic success (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000). However, as one might imagine, this creates negative outcomes and lower standards for the student. This first subsection will address the varying definitions of academic success within an EL framework, as well as, best practices to use when aiming for academic success for all English learners. The second subsection will focus on the importance of social success and strategies for educators to use in order to give English learning students equitable opportunities to showcase their diverse linguistic repertoire.

Academic success within an EL framework

Academic success is a major piece of what many educators, students, and families strive for. In Sharkey and Layzer's 2000 study of high school EL students, the academic success definition they were working with was "achievement of or progress toward the students' desired career goals" (p.354). Throughout the literature this definition in some form is one that is utilized time after time. In Baker's 2019 study, it was found that schools often define academic success for English learners when they exit language programs and thereby are "proficient" in English. That definition also includes English learners enrolling in advanced classes. However, this study showed that by using this definition of success, a handful of students did not meet the requirements as stated by this definition and thereby could not ensure future success in school (Baker, 2019).

Additionally, the literature shows another common theme in relation to academic success and English language learners: the lack of advanced classes within the population. Callahan (2005) found that ELs are largely underrepresented in advanced classes (as cited in Baker, 2019). This is largely due to EL students being tracked into lower level classes (Baker, 2019; Sharkey & Layzer, 2000). Sharkey and Layzer (2000) found that while teachers placed EL students in lower track settings, their rationale of trying to offer the students a more supportive environment failed. They found that the students were isolated in their classes, as well as unable to grasp the content knowledge and hindered their language learning caused by the lack of meaningful language instruction. The teachers interviewed had varied definitions of success for their students; however, most of them indicated that success for their EL students is getting work done,

whether that work was accurate or not. They also indicated that students are successful when they “know how to take notes” (p.360) and other various soft skills that teachers were not prepared to teach. The theme in this specific case study was that teachers found EL students successful when they exhibited qualities like motivation and working hard, instead of full mastering of content. I, personally, do not believe mastery of content and soft-skills are weighted equally. I believe both must be taught in tandem to provide maximum overall success for EL students. This study shows that it is important for teachers to provide both rigorous academic content, meaningful language instruction, and an emotionally supportive atmosphere for EL students to succeed.

For EL students to succeed academically with rigorous academic content, they must be provided different supports. These supports can be online tools or help from people, such as family members, teachers, and peers. In Baker’s 2014 study, the EL middle schoolers used a lot of peer support when struggling with academic content. Having opportunities to discuss and ask questions to fellow classmates aided in students’ understanding of the content. This also helped in their social learning and negotiation. Individual support can come from tools online, such as YouTube and message boards. Baker found that students were able to gain both academic and social support through the internet via message boards.

In addition to providing EL students with various types of support to access rigorous content, it is important to consider the EL programming of the school. It has been found that language services can interfere with and prevent English learners from taking advanced or college preparatory classes (Baker, 2019). However, Callahan’s 2005

study found that English language learners who took advanced classes were more academically successful and predicted their academic success, more so than their English proficiency level (as cited in Baker, 2019). The study also found that English learners were underrepresented in the advanced classes. Allowing students more access to higher level content should be taken into serious consideration when determining which classes EL students should take in order to be academically successful.

English language learners are a diverse group of students that the “one size fits all” mentality rarely supports. In order to meet the academic rigor EL students need to succeed academically in both middle school and high school, it is recommended to look beyond merely their language proficiency level and academic needs. It is common practice within EL programs to group students based on their proficiency level, and more specifically in Minnesota, their WIDA level. Baker (2014) warned against this and instead suggested grouping students based on their varying abilities, areas of outside support, like family and peers, and personality. It is also suggested that within these groups, educators go beyond strategies that are general EL strategies and instead start looking for similarities in the EL groupings based on the above characteristics. From there, educators can find and create best practices for that grouping of specific EL students in order to help them achieve further academic success (Baker, 2014).

These groupings are important to consider for the transition from middle school to high school. If students can start over in high school within a different system not based on their proficiency level, it may help them feel more at ease and successful at school. It also could diminish the feeling of being “tracked,” especially for long-term English

learners. Instead of students going from an eighth grade EL class with the same peers, students would enter into ninth grade with new peers that have other similarities to them, besides their English proficiency level.

A further suggestion for academic success is to follow EL students, including those recently exited, through graduation. Baker (2014) found that exited EL students were not automatically successful in high school if they had advanced classes in middle school. The middle school advanced classes certainly laid the groundwork for possible success in high school and beyond; however, there were many other things that could possibly distract the students from that success, and therefore college and college completion is not guaranteed. Baker suggested implementing individualized support for all EL and exited EL students. This could come in the form of guidance counselors developing relationships and following these students throughout their academic career. This type of support would certainly be difficult, especially considering the hundreds of students school staff serve on a daily basis; however, it would encourage deeper relationships with students who need the most support, both academically and socially. Having these deeper relationships would hopefully provide insight into the students' lives and their non-school supports, like family and peers. With greater understanding of the multifaceted parts of EL students' lives, teachers and other school staff could come together to find specific, and sometimes individualized, supports to help students succeed academically throughout high school and post-secondary.

Academic success within an EL framework also requires educators to view the students' linguistic abilities as a positive and not a deficit in their academics. Helping

students come to this understanding is equally critical in their development (Baker, 2019). Providing students with opportunities to showcase their background, culture, and language helps them to value their diverse background. This includes incorporating culturally relevant curriculum for students and content that reflects their background and experience, as well as culturally responsive routines, and providing a safe classroom where taking risks is encouraged. These practices should be used both in school and out of school in extracurricular opportunities (Baker, 2019, Ortiz & Frankquiz, 2012).

Additionally, leading students to identifying where they use their multilingualism and how it is helpful to them and their community can lead to a deeper appreciation of their linguistic abilities for the student. For example, Baker (2019) had a struggling student explain how she used Spanish to help her father's colleagues in a professional setting. Having the student talk about this experience helped her realize that her language abilities can span more than a traditional academic setting and helped her see the value of her bilingualism. These opportunities could be in the form of heritage language classes or tests like the Multilingual Seal, where students are given the opportunity to formally test their language other than English and then receive post-secondary credit.

When analyzing these studies, a common theme that appears is that of success being multifaceted and individualized (Baker, 2019 and 2014; Buteau and True, 2009; Brooks, 2018) . Each student will have their own definition for success and it is up to the educators and other stakeholders to help them attain that definition. Allowing students equitable opportunities for learning both academic language and challenging content is key to encouraging students to move forward in their academic careers. These

opportunities should start at the middle school level and be nurtured and developed throughout the transition into the high school and onto post-secondary options. Not only is academic success important for English learners, but social success is another indicator of their overall educational success.

Social Success and Support Within an EL Framework

Social and academic success typically go hand-in-hand. Throughout the literature this seems especially true in terms of English language learners. If students are given opportunities to be social both inside and outside of the classroom, they also succeed in their language development and other academic areas. It was found in both of Baker's studies (2014, 2019) that EL students cannot succeed simply on having academic qualities, but that they need support from other people, including family members, teachers, and peers.

Teachers and other school staff have a large part to play in the social development and success of English learners, especially in the transition from middle school to high school. In one case study of two EL teachers, one positioned herself as more of an advocate. She would track students from middle school into high school, knowing that high school is a time where students can get lost. If her former students were struggling, she took it upon herself to call meetings with families and teachers to help implement strategies in order to allow that student to make academic success (McGriff & Protacio, 2015). Whereas there are some teachers and other school staff that will position themselves in these roles, it is worth noting that it does not matter who is the person supporting students both academically and socially, just that they receive support in the

specific way they need it (Baker, 2014). It was found that students benefit most from social support, including academic advising, content support, and general emotional support, as they go deeper into their academic career. Baker (2014) found that these supports were helpful to students regardless of who the person was that gave it to them.

Social success also goes beyond adult support for English learners. As shown through previously mentioned studies for best practices, English learners need peer-to-peer interaction not only to improve their language proficiency, but also to receive the social acceptance that all students need. There are many ways to implement social interactions while conquering content in the classroom and in the broader arena of a school. It is essential for all teachers, both EL and content-area, to incorporate several opportunities in a lesson for students to interact with one another and with the content (Ortiz & Franquiz, 2012). In order to do this successfully, these interactions need to be structured and cooperative with a focus on a task and language.

Another strategy that focuses on student-to-student social interactions is student-led academic teams, a concept along the lines of project-based learning. This practice is a complete shift from the daily norm of a traditional classroom. Student-led academic teaming involves the teacher stepping back from direct instruction during classroom time and instead focuses on creating academically rigorous projects and giving mini-lessons to support the key skills students need to complete the tasks (Toth, 2019). When students are a part of an academic team, they are employing key higher-level thinking while using peer support and fellow experience. This has proven to not only create a deeper level of engagement, but a closing of the achievement gap between

general education students and English learners (Toth, 2019). Sharing students' thinking is key to this strategy. Once taught around the skills of negotiation, disagreement, and suggestion, students are able to confidently and academically challenge their peers and thereby create a higher level of learning and thought process. This gives English learners opportunities to participate and experience authentic learning and communication.

According to Toth (2019), in an academic-teaming setting students are fully immersed in academic language and must use it in order to negotiate meaning and context with the content. Their peer-to-peer conversations can flow in a seemingly normal and authentic way. This type of social interaction has been found to create a supportive classroom environment where students say they feel more confident and comfortable interacting with their peers, who can sometimes explain and describe concepts in an easier and more comprehensible way.

Additionally, with this strategy, Toth (2019) found that English learning students thrive in the supportive and engaging classroom environment. As found in Baker's studies, students need to find their voice, as well as feel like their experience and perspective is valued. Within a student-led teaming environment, students are given equitable opportunities to use and apply those experiences and perspectives. This helps in developing their social and emotional learning (Toth, 2019). In conclusion, academic and social success for English learners are intricately tied, as seen throughout the literature. These strategies and practices are ones that teachers and other school staff can use to support students as they continue their educational journey.

Summary

In sum, there are many diverse areas of research that are related to long-term English learner success within the transition process into high school. I have seen all of them at play in my own professional experience working with transitioning middle schoolers into high school. Long-term English learners have very specific needs that often go unnoticed and unaddressed. In my own district, I asked for the data on how many long-term English learners we have in the school district. I was told that they do not have numbers because there is no official record or definition within our district of who a long-term English learner is. When a student leaves one district and comes into ours, we do not indicate in our records how long they were receiving language services from the previous district. I have seen these systemic barriers firsthand and how they can influence EL programming.

Research indicates there are a lot of factors to consider when students are transitioning from one school to another. This is true for all students; however, long-term English learners' needs can be forgotten in this move. In order for students to feel comfortable, confident, and successful, certain supports need to be in place for a smooth transition. Families need to be well-informed with accurate information, social and academic supports need to be in place, and authentic collaboration with all stakeholders needs to happen. If these aspects of school are intentionally employed, students will have a higher chance of transitioning from one school and life stage to another with success.

Finally, providing long-term English learners with ample opportunities to practice academic language and discourse will help them find both academic and social success.

Providing them with opportunities to take rigorous and advanced level classes has proven to be more beneficial for their future beyond high school than their language proficiency. Therefore, educators need to be aware of how English learning students are being tracked. Seeing them as individuals with specific needs and addressing those needs will lead to all forms of success. Additionally, giving students autonomy in their own learning, while using their individual assets and strengths, to not only help themselves but to help their peers, will give English learners an important and significant role in the learning community. This creates a positive social and emotional connection to school. It is the hope of many educators to be able to use this positivity to help create a richer and more meaningful learning environment for all students.

Conclusion

Based upon the literature review presented above, there seems to be a research gap in relation to the transition from middle school to high school specifically for long-term English language learners. Throughout the duration of this paper, I explore different strategies, practices, ideas, and possible implementation of new processes both on a school and district level that will hopefully help smooth the transition for my school district's LTEL eighth graders becoming ninth graders. These practices will be based upon the research and literature, as well as personal discussions and observations by myself, other teachers, administrators, and students. The question of focus is: *How do educational stakeholders help to create a successful transition from middle school to high school for our long-term English learners?*

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

For this project I created a unit curriculum for outgoing eighth grade LTEL students that also incorporates ways school staff can support middle school long-term English language learning students (LTELs) in their transition into high school. It is important for all students to find success in high school, but it is very important for LTELs to achieve success. The state of Minnesota has a state-wide goal for 2020 that no group of seniors fall below 85% of the graduation rate. In 2019, English learners had a 67.2% graduation rate (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). This alarming disparity has educators concerned. In my conversations with students and EL teachers at both the middle school and high school level, many of them attribute a rocky transition from middle school to high school as part of the problem of low graduation rates for English learners. It is for this reason I developed the research question: *How do educational stakeholders help to create a successful transition from middle school to high school for our long-term English learners?*

Chapter Overview

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the literature surrounding long-term English learners, transitioning from middle school to high school, and various forms of success found in education for English learners. In this chapter, I present a unit of curricula I created aimed for eighth grade LTEL students in their last trimester of middle school.

In the first part of this chapter, I present the overview of the project and the intended audience and setting and the description of the project. The chapter concludes with the framework the project is based on and the projected timeline.

Project Overview

The purpose of this project is to create a unit of curricula for my school's eighth grade LTEL students. As stated in Chapter Two, it is suggested to create a "transition team" for students making the bridge from middle school to high school (Williamston, 2010). This unit will be the beginning of the students' "transition team." Additionally, other researchers have found that immigrant and low-income families found it very helpful that middle school staff was involved in their child's transition more so than high school staff because of the depth of understanding middle-school staff had of that individual student (Crosnoe, 2009). It is for these reasons that educating students as early as possible for this transition is useful for them emotionally and academically. The information they learn through this unit can be disseminated to their families earlier than they normally would be educating students directly about what to expect in high school and how to find various forms of success will help give them and their families confidence as students move forward in their education. Additionally, a unit that is directed toward their needs and concerns will increase their academic engagement as they learn how it is preparing them directly for the future.

The unit will contain a unit objective based on grade-level standards, a word-level language objective, a sentence-level language objective, and a discourse-level language objective. Each objective will be taught explicitly and embedded within the transition to

high school content. The unit will also involve formative and summative assessments in order to gauge students' learning and possible areas of need to reteach. The unit will culminate in a final project where students will create a project of their choosing based on the informative text genre comparing and contrasting two elements of the transition from middle school to high school. The final project, as well as each language objective, will be assessed on a rubric.

Project Audience and Setting

This project targets current eighth grade students that are also identified as long-term English language learners in a Saint Paul-Minneapolis suburban public middle school. The unit will be taught directly to them and based on their needs as a class. This unit will be taught in a sheltered English language development class that has nine students. All students will be taught this unit; however, seven out of the nine are classified as LTELs by the state of Minnesota.

The project is intended to be used and modified, as needed, each year for a new group of eighth graders. It is also hoped that the unit will be able to be incorporated into other classes or content areas of students who may need direct teaching in order to successfully transition from middle school to high school.

Project Description: Details

The unit designed has eighteen lessons that is intended to take four to six weeks, depending on the various formative assessments and student needs with pacing. Every day opens with the learning target, what success for the day will look like (success

criteria), and a “do now”, which typically has students revise what they have learned in the previous lesson or gets them to start thinking about what the lesson will cover.

Upon completion of the literature review (summarized in Chapter Two), I came to the conclusion that there were four main areas that can help students transition into high school successfully. The first area is for families to be involved in their student’s academic careers, including the move into high school (Linver & Silverberg, 1997 as cited in Williamston, 2010). The second part of this transition needs to be various levels of social support for students. Barone et al. (1991) cited that when students transition to high school, they spend a great deal of energy and time trying to find where they feel most comfortable and therefore can hinder academic success (as cited in Williamston, 2010). The third area is for students to be prepared academically by creating meaningful and rigorous material (Williamston, 2010). The final phase of a successful transition is working together with all of the stakeholders in the student’s education, including families, teachers, support staff, and the student (Crosnoe, 2009). All of these areas look different for all students, but especially students identified as LTELs. The curriculum unit included in this project plans to address each of these areas focused on the specific needs of my LTEL students and their families.

There are four objectives of this unit. Each objective is taught in tandem with one another. There is an overall objective that is the final project students are graded on as their summative assessment with a rubric. The summative assessment is a project of the student’s choosing to show their learning. The other three objectives follow a language focus. Students are given an ungraded pre-assessment to help me gauge what they already

know and which students need more scaffolding and which need extension activities. An ungraded post-assessment is given, which is exactly the same as the pre-assessment. This is primarily for a tangible way for students to see their own learning and progress throughout the unit. This will help them in their self-assessment. The self-assessment is a reflective activity where students reflect on what they have learned and how they were able to learn those things. It is my hope that this creates more intrinsic motivation for students to learn in the present and in the future. Additionally, this promotes a reflective process necessary for all students for the future. These forms of reflection can also bolster students' self esteem, especially if they compare their progress using the pre- and post-assessments.

Using the Understanding by Design framework, there is an overall unit objective. This objective is the final outcome I want my students to be able to do. The student-friendly unit objective is, "I can create an informational poster/brochure/project comparing and contrasting two key elements for the future." This overall objective is based on the Minnesota Department of Education eighth grade ELA standard, 8.7.2.2. This project focuses on the SFL genre of informative text. I believe that students creating their own project lends to student interest and student voice. As Williamston (2010) stated, material students learn must be meaningful to them. I believe that allowing students to choose two topics they are interested in and apply them in meaningful contexts will help them develop a deeper sense of learning. Additionally, because it is important to have clear communication with families, students are assigned to present their final project to their parents (Linver & Silverberg, 1997 as cited in Williamston,

2010). This part of their final evaluation is intended to help parents learn more about their student's future through their student presenting it to their families promotes the fourth area of a successful transition where all stakeholders work together. It also serves to alleviate some of the gaps our LTEL families may have, for example language barriers and misunderstandings or miscommunication about the American public school system.

Everything that is taught in this unit, is intended for the development of this final project. Students are also able to choose who their audience is and which format of presentation they will use. This allows students who may not have strong technology skills to choose a more traditional pencil and paper method. Additionally, it gives students choice and provides equitable outcomes for students who do not have equal access to materials and technology resources.

The word-level objective for this unit in student-friendly terms is, "I can use unit vocabulary in context." This is based on MDE ELA 8th grade standard, 8.11.6.6. The vocabulary taught and applied is academic and content-specific to high school. There are ten words or phrases that have been pulled out of various texts that are used throughout the unit. Students are given a project where they each present a vocabulary word to the class. This is the first part of the unit, as students need a firm understanding of these concepts in order to understand further information. These words are continually used in various contexts throughout the unit, so that students develop a deeper understanding of their meaning and usage.

The sentence-level objective in student friendly language is, "I can write compare and contrast sentences using sentence frames and compare and contrast language." This

is aligned with MDE ELA standard, 8.11.3.3. Students are first introduced to various signal words that show comparison or contrasting aspects within a certain context. There are six sentence frames taught explicitly--three comparison sentence frames and three contrasting. They are taught initially by using a Venn diagram graphic organizer to aid students in organizing their thoughts. Areas of high student interest are also used initially in order to practice the compare and contrast language in a meaningful context. Students use these sentence frames in various contexts, including other content areas.

The final objective for this unit is the discourse-level objective, based on MDE's ELA 8th grade standards, 8.11.2.2, "I can write two compare and contrast paragraphs using appropriate structure, punctuation, and conventions". This is taught in a more traditional way; however, following an SFL framework. Students are given two mentor texts which use compare and contrast format and conventions in two different ways--grouping similarities and differences and feature by feature. With the mentor texts, the class deconstructs the format and language. After, the class co-constructs a text together using the previously found conventions and language. This co-constructed text is then another mentor text for students to use when they write their discourse-level paragraphs. The final step is for students to use this previous learning and the mentor texts to write their own compare and contrast paragraphs. It is encouraged that the two elements of high school the students write about are also the two elements they will use in their final project. They use this to inform their final project.

Framework and Assessment

The framework I used to create the unit is Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding by Design (UBD) (2011) with a Social Constructivism theory lens. I chose the UBD framework based on how curriculum is best designed for all students in this framework, but especially for English learners. As an English Learner teacher, it is important to look through content and pull out the language needed for students in order to accomplish the learning objectives. It is through this practice that UBD makes the most sense to design and create any type of curriculum.

Understanding by Design has three main phases. The first phase is to understand and know what the end results of a student's learning will be (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). In order to do this, teachers must look at a variety of components including standards, long-term performance goals, and previous understandings. For this unit, I analyzed the Minnesota eighth grade academic standards. I then focused on a specific genre using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory. Focusing on a genre helps narrow down a specific language focus. Genre theory states that when focused on a specific context, students can create meaning through language (Troyan, 2014). As Troyan suggested, students also follow the SFL teaching and learning cycle of deconstructing a text, co-constructing a text, and then independent construction of the text. The genre I used for this unit is informative, sometimes called expository or explanatory. For the sake of the project, I used the term "informative genre". Within the UBD framework, it is suggested to create an essential question. I incorporated this suggestion to write an essential question based on the standards and final outcome.

The second phase of UBD is to determine what evidence will be used as assessments, both formative and summative (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Throughout the unit, I have various forms of formative assessments built into the curriculum, but also informal ways to assess if students are understanding and mastering the content. I also created a pre-assessment and post-assessment. Using a pre-assessment helps me understand what students already know and to what depth they may or may not have learned that specific objective. It informs the direction I go with the content and language focuses. It also helps me to determine which students may need extra scaffolding or extension activities. Additionally, I used a formal post-assessment. This is not intended to be used for a grade; however, it will be part of the students' self-reflection. Students are given the pre- and post-assessments in order to analyze their own learning. Oftentimes, students get to the end of a unit or period of learning and have a hard time remembering what they did not know before. I have found that having a pre-assessment given before the unit starts helps students have a more genuine and deeper reflection at the end of a learning period.

The official assessment evidence will be their final project, based on the UBD framework. The final project uses a specific rubric that assesses their learning based on the learning outcomes and standards.

The final stage of the UBD framework is to plan the learning, instruction, and experiences for students (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Wiggins and McTighe say that students must apply the knowledge learned in a variety of contexts in order to make meaning. They also say that students need meaningful and timely feedback. I

incorporated this in many ways throughout the unit through various days of learning activities. Students work in a variety of ways to master the content that provides an equitable learning experience. Some days students work in pairs and groups, other days lessons require students to work independently, and all days incorporate listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Project Timeline

The implementation of this project is projected to take four to six weeks. There are eighteen days of lessons. It will depend on the ongoing formal and informal formative assessments throughout the lessons. If students need more time or if reteaching needs to be done, it is accounted for in this general timeline. Students have class for 55 minutes five days a week. Each day is a lesson created for this unit. Some days are independent work days on various assignments and projects.

Conclusion

There are many ways to support students to make a healthy transition from middle school to high school. The literature shows that clear communication with families, various levels of social support, academic preparation, and working together with all the stakeholders are the four best ways to help students make this transition. Through this unit that I have created, I hope to utilize all of these aspects and their strengths in order to help my eighth grade students feel ready and confident for their transition, as well as their families. Additionally, I hope to find the answer to my question: *How do educational stakeholders help to create a successful transition from middle school to high school for our long-term English learners?*

In this chapter, I summarized the key aspects of how students transition well into high school and gave examples of how this project will address each of those aspects. Additionally, the chapter summarizes the frameworks that the curriculum is based on and the specifics of the project itself including all four objectives students will attain. The project audience and timeline were also included. In chapter four, I will reflect on my learnings from this project and explain implications, limitations, and future work related to this unit.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

In this project and paper, my goal was to set out to find strategies to help our long-term English learners find more success and ease in their transition from middle school to high school. The main focus question I used was: *How do educational stakeholders help to create a successful transition from middle school to high school for our long-term English learners?* The purpose of this question was driven by my personal experience working with transitioning eighth grade long-term English learners. It was in my own classroom that I realized many of my students were feeling very uncomfortable and ill-equipped to go into high school. I found that long-term English learners are a group that many educational stakeholders do not know how to adequately serve. I set out to create a curriculum unit that helped prepare eighth-grade long-term English learners (LTELs) into their big move into high school. This unit incorporated many different activities and lessons based around the main areas of successful transition from middle school to high school based on Williamston's work (2010). These areas were giving students and families helpful information, allowing social support, academic preparation, and having all stakeholders involved (Williamston, 2010).

In this chapter, I will reflect on major learnings I acquired throughout the Capstone and project process. I will then refer back to the literature review from chapter two and discuss what parts were the most influential in the development of the project. I

will then go into implications and limitations of my research and unit and how it is a benefit to the profession. I will then draw major conclusions of the process and project.

Significant Learnings

There were several pieces of learning that I experienced as I journeyed through the Capstone project and writing process. Perhaps the most significant learning was how difficult it is to create a cohesive curriculum that encompasses elements that help students and their families feel prepared for high school. I suppose I took this for granted with my own middle school to high school experience. Having been raised in a household with an older sibling who had already gone through the process, as well as having had parents who were part of the US school system themselves and were native-English speakers, my transition from middle school to high school was not very difficult. There were many aspects of the transition that I took for granted knowing. One of the most difficult parts of creating this curriculum was to get outside that knowledge and deconstruct what the most important things are for LTEL students and their families to know about, especially what the things will help them feel secure and ready to move forward in their educational journeys, such as understanding how high school course registration works, calculating GPAs, and knowing which school staff to go to for certain questions. Using Williamston's (2010) work was helpful to frame the curriculum and give it a structure. Using the unit objectives and three language objectives helped me keep the curriculum focused on language development, which is also a bridge into further education, as well as helping me keep a focus.

A second major learning I had during this process was how few opportunities there are for educational stakeholders, such as school staff, families, and students, to collaborate with one another in the secondary school setting. Williamston (2010) suggested all stakeholders work together in order to create a more seamless transition. Whereas this is true for all students, it seemed even more important for our English learners and their families. In my district, there are no current programs that seem to have staff, students, and families communicate and work together in the middle school to high school transition. I found that this would be a useful practice for all students, not just LTELs. However, I found that families of long-term English learners often need more information and a deeper knowledge of issues facing the transition. I learned this as I actually was starting to incorporate this curriculum into my classroom of eighth-graders last year. Compared to their non-LTEL peers, it was clear that information that would help students be successful in high school could not be assumed, but it had to be explicitly taught.

In the same vein as having all stakeholders a part of the transition process, the importance of families being involved in this process was reinforced for me. I started this project before the Covid-19 pandemic had hit the U.S. I started to teach it to my eighth graders weeks before we got our stay-at-home orders and the entirety of the school landscape changed. It was during the Spring of 2020 and Fall of 2020 that I started communicating more with families than I ever had before. Many of them expressed how they were usually left out of conversations about their students' academics and futures once they had hit middle school. In these conversations, it was reinforced that families

not only need to be a part of the transition process but that they want to be. Moving forward with this unit, I will incorporate more parent and family involvement and feedback.

Another significant piece of learning I realized was how important it is for middle school and high school staff to communicate and have some level of connectedness with one another and what they are doing at each education level. Something that was repeated in the literature was how important it was for all educational stakeholders to work together (Crosnoe, 2009; Ellerbrook & Kiefer, 2013; Williamston, 2010). The reality in my district is that it is more difficult to do that than to say that. Teachers and other staff members are constantly busy and oftentimes there leaves little to no time to consider what other levels are doing, much less collaborate with other levels of education. This project showed me that there is a lot of information and questions I cannot answer or prepare students for because I am not in the high school. These are areas that would be very helpful for high school teaching staff and students to be incorporated into the curriculum. One major component I would like to add for the future of this unit is to utilize the high school teachers and high school students more in order to give the transitioning eighth-graders a more genuine perspective.

Literature Review Revisited

For this project, I relied heavily on the literature that contained information and suggestions for how to help students ease the transition from middle school to high school. Throughout the literature it was repeated that students are most successful when their families are involved in their education and the transition from middle school.

Linver and Silverberg (1997, as cited in Williamston, 2010) suggested the children of parents who are involved in their child's education find more academic success. In terms of a successful transition from middle school to high school, Williamston suggested that schools communicate with families in a clear manner and host celebratory events for families like a parent information night (2010). Additionally, Hertzog and Morgan (1997) also suggested a curriculum fair for parents where they can come and ask questions. I took these ideas and weaved them into my curriculum project. The final project for the unit is the student creating an informational presentation for their families. This both allows the student to showcase what they have learned, but also be the advocate for their own transition into high school. Additionally, it allows the family to be informed about one key aspect of the move from middle school to high school. In the future, I would like to take this several steps further and have the students host a parent-information night based around their learning and projects.

Another key element from the literature that was used in the project was the importance of making connections between middle school students and the high school staff and students. Williamston (2010) suggested a team of educational stakeholders, such as middle school and high school staff, create various programs of support for incoming students. It is also suggested that incoming students receive some type of adult mentor and shadow ninth graders. This was a key element for my decision to have a day where students went to their future high school. The intention is that they would be connected to a current student as well as start to connect with high school staff.

As I worked through the creation of the curriculum, I realized that I focused on some elements in the literature far more than others. I relied heavily on Williamston 2010's work, as well as other authors who had practical suggestions for transitioning students from middle school to high school. Additionally, I gravitated towards the work that stressed the importance of parent involvement such as Hertzog and Morgan (1997), Crosnoe (2009), and Williamston (2010).

Implications and Limitations

This curriculum will provide broader implications for all content area teachers in both middle school and high school. Even though this was designed specifically for long-term English language learners, I believe that ideally the direct teaching of useful skills for high school and important elements to transition into high school would permeate throughout all of the content areas in middle school. Additionally, high school staff, specifically ninth-grade teachers, could revisit what elements are of interest to students and what areas they may need to cover with their ninth graders during the first semester.

There are not many limitations to this project. Perhaps the only significant limitation is when it was designed and carried out. I was beginning to teach this curriculum with my eighth graders at the end of trimester two in 2020. As we started this unit, the Covid-19 pandemic swept the globe. This stalled the unit significantly and much had to be changed and modified in order to allow the flexibility of learning in 2020.

Future Projects

This project can continually grow and change depending on students' needs. Every year in my sheltered class the group of students has specific differences in needs. For example, some years students have needed more direct teaching in areas like organization, having academic discussions, or writing in certain styles. This curriculum has room to expand or decrease in the amount of information, as needed. Additionally, the curriculum can be taught to all eighth grade students and not necessarily only LTELs. In the same way, content can be added. In the future, I would like to add a post-secondary element to this unit in hopes of preparing students for the next two levels of education they will be journeying on.

In the coming years, I would like to take this curriculum unit a couple steps further. I would like to incorporate a parent information night as suggested by Hertzog and Morgan (1997) and Williamston (2010). I would also like to take Williamston's suggestion (2010) and create a program connecting middle school parents to current high school parents. I believe this would create a community-focused bond between families and create a level of support that many families are not currently receiving.

I also would like to incorporate post-secondary content within the unit or as a follow-up unit. As I was starting to teach this to students, I found that it is difficult to talk about the importance of high school without also talking about post-secondary options. I believe that this curriculum is flexible enough to incorporate college vocabulary and begin to introduce elements of post-secondary education.

Communicating Results and Benefit to Profession

This curriculum unit will be shared to my fellow English learner teacher colleagues across middle schools. I will be sharing this in our shared PLC work in hopes that our EL team could incorporate this unit and therefore create more horizontal alignment with one another. In the future, I would also like to present it to the high school EL team with the intention of creating vertical alignment across schools, as well.

One of the first activities in the unit is a pre-assessment that students take. The post-assessment is the same exact assessment. Students will then take a self-assessment based upon their results of both the pre and post assessments. I believe sharing these results are also important to share with both the students and my EL colleagues. I hope that by looking at the data between the assessments, we can analyze if the unit adequately presents information that is necessary for students to know before they go to high school.

This project could benefit both EL teachers and content teachers. The topics and activities used throughout the project can be used across content areas. The language objectives are useful to all students in all content areas, as well. Those activities and academic language objectives can be used and implemented in all classrooms. Furthermore, using the material of learning skills useful for high school and the pertinent information presented in the unit can be incorporated into various types of classroom settings to create a positive transition for all students from middle school to high school.

Summary

This chapter has described my learnings from the Capstone process as well as the next steps in the question of, *How do educational stakeholders help to create a successful*

transition from middle school to high school for our long-term English learners? I have grown as a curriculum unit writer, researcher, and writer. Key literature authored by Williamston (2010) and Herzog and Morgan (1997) was the basis of my project. While there were few limitations to my project, there are several ideas of how to continue to move forward with the unit. Those ideas can be implemented and shared with both EL colleagues and non-EL teachers.

Overall, this project and process taught me a lot about the curriculum writing process, the importance of incorporating families and other support into students' academic lives, and making connections to high school staff in order to help our students succeed in the future. I am looking forward to incorporating this unit into my classroom and using my learnings to create an even stronger and relevant unit for LTEL students.

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