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Linguistic Identity Construction and Cultural Inclusivity

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LINGUISTIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND

CULTURAL INCLUSIVITY

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

For nearing a decade, I have been working in the field of teaching English learners (ELs) in rural high schools and throughout this time, my experiences have been very similar. As I learn more through both professional experience and development of what is best for students, it leaves me with more questions than answers. The students that arrive to the United States and begin their journey of U.S. formal education bring with them rich stories, histories, experiences, families, lives, strengths, and so much more. Despite all of the positive qualities they bring to us, high school educators are often forced to have the conversation of what credits they are missing, how much English they do not yet know, how they don't understand the systems in place here, what it is that they aren't yet able to do, and how their cultures and traditions are so dissimilar to those of white Western mainstream culture.

Even with the absolute best intentions, educators can fail to incorporate students' past strengths, their cultures, and their languages. If it is true that those things make up a large part of who a person considers themselves to be, educators may be unintentionally negatively affecting the construction of students' identities in their classrooms. Throughout my years of experience, I have seen many educators overlook these factors and they remain unchanged, which has led me to the overarching question: *How can I help high school staff in an increasingly diverse rural community foster a more culturally inclusive learning environment for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students?* The objective of this project is to create a Google site with various resources for educators to be implemented by peer coaches and the building

equity team. This project addresses the need for culturally inclusive resources and strategies for high school staff.

Throughout this chapter, the context for this research question will be discussed, including my personal and professional experiences and how they have led me to this subject of research. The significance of this topic will be discussed as well as the context and rationale for the project. A brief overview of the whole capstone will also be explained.

Personal and Professional Significance

As a child, I was fortunate enough to travel a bit with my family, which led to an interest in other languages and cultures. High school was my first opportunity to formally learn a second language and I was fascinated by this new knowledge's ability to unlock a whole new world of connections with people, cultures, and languages to which I did not previously have access. This fascination continued to grow in college as I continued learning this second language, and eventually moved onto a third, then a fourth, and so on. Each professor I encountered had an ability to relate the new language to the previous linguistic repertoire that I had. One specific professor had native English speakers use the strategic play on words "pot o' coffee, pot o' tea, pot o' coffee para mi" to teach us the correct pronunciation of the phrases "para ti/para mi" in Spanish. There are various experiences that I have had of professors connecting language and culture to my previous experiences and knowledge which made learning fun and comprehensible which helped create bridges from my nativel language to the target language. Each language professor I encountered, whether in the U.S. or abroad, had knowledge of both my native language and culture as well as my target language and culture. That knowledge allowed them to help me make connections between the two worlds even when teaching language implicitly

through content area courses such as history, literature, or composition.

Once I began working as a language teacher, I undoubtedly drew on my experiences as a language learner both within the United States and outside of it. Throughout my time, I have worked with students at WIDA (World-class Instructional Design and Assessment) levels 1-4, who have varying degrees of proficiency in their home languages of Somali or Spanish. My experience working with these populations has allowed me the ability to learn an ever-increasing amount about the language backgrounds from which my students have come. This has permitted me to continue to work toward creating connections from their first language and culture to their second just as the language professors I had had done for me. In recent years, I had worked as a teacher of the newest to country students and in that role I discovered a new importance for having knowledge of my students' first language (L1).

Throughout my years of teaching ESL, I have worked in greater Minnesota in a high-school setting. Although this time has been spent working with various levels of language acquisition and within different rural Minnesota high schools, one commonality all of these experiences share is a need for culturally responsive practices to support the diverse populations that attend these schools. All students, but specifically ELs, bring unique stories and backgrounds into their school buildings. The first few years in country EL students are undergoing an informative and transitional period of time. Learning a new language is not only a tool to learn to communicate but also an attribute of identity and empowerment (Clots-Figuera & Masella, 2013). Language learners are forming and adjusting their identity to include the new culture and language in adjunct to their existing identity. My experience aligns with this and has

shown me some of the specific needs of EL students need in order to feel supported, successful, and comfortable.

This leaves me with some questions. If staff working in rural Minnesota are overwhelmingly white and the student body is made up of students of all backgrounds, what are we doing to make sure that our buildings and our lessons are relevant to the students in our schools? Are we meeting students where they are academically, racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically? Over the years I have spent working in the field, I have continued to seek out many opportunities to learn more about how to answer these questions of language acquisition, language identity, cultural relevance, and the impact that these things have on a student's identity construction, ability to acquire language, and their overall academic success. This hunger for knowledge on these topics has led me to being a part of many groups both in and outside of my job who are dedicated to supporting and advocating for English learners. At the high school in which I am currently employed, I have had the fortune to be able to obtain roles that aim to support ELs and learners from all backgrounds, such as co-teaching in a core content area, becoming an ELM (English Learners in the Mainstream) coach, and becoming a member of the building equity team.

Culturally inclusive practices also seem to be a national trend within the last couple of years including supporting EL students in the mainstream. From the desire to support English learners in mainstream classes, the ELM (English Learners in the Mainstream) project was born. This model has provided a framework for EL teachers to work with mainstream teachers in a peer coaching model. At the building I work at, two other ELM Coaches and I work with a number of mainstream teachers in an ongoing partnership model. Each ELM Coach has 3-5

educators that they work with regularly to set goals, undergo informal observations from us, and meet with us individually and regularly to revisit goals and progress and also to discuss other EL related things that they may want to process or desire guidance. In addition to having the opportunity to work as an ELM Coach at the high school, I am also now working as a member of the site equity team. As of the 2019-2020 school year, this school district began following an equity initiative and focus for the district as a whole as well creating a site equity team for each building. Also, I have had the opportunity to co-teach in the content area of math, which has provided unique experience and insight. These experiences, paired with the teaching experience I have, have all led me to the pursuit of this topic.

Rationale

So often, in my experience, I have encountered students who have learned many things in their lives but never attended classes in a formal schooling system. While this is not to say that all English learning students in rural southern Minnesota are SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education), I personally have encountered this situation on many occasions. At times, students struggle to read and write basic words and phrases in their native languages, sometimes even their names. Because of their age and the lack of formal schooling that they have experienced, adolescent students are in a difficult position, leaving them with a small window of time in which to progress quickly through various levels of language and credit acquisition.

This project is of deep personal and professional significance to me because of the identity I have built as a lifelong language learner and advocate for equitable practices and also because of my role as an EL teacher, an ELM coach, and member of a building equity team.

After completing my Master's Degree, I aim to become an EL or Equity Coordinator and more widely implement equitable and culturally inclusive practices. I sincerely hope that these practices can slowly be implemented not only into many classrooms but also throughout many buildings in many different places.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted my personal and professional experiences that have led me to this topic. The experiences I have had in learning languages, developing other linguistic identities, and having teachers of those languages draw parallels to my own culture and language have made a large impact on me. All of this tied with the experiences that I have had applying this knowledge to my own students and working with other staff members is precisely why I feel the need answers to this research question: *How can I help high school staff in an increasingly diverse rural community foster a more culturally inclusive learning environment for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students?*

In Chapter Two, I will provide a literature review of the importance of linguistic identity construction and culturally inclusive strategies in education. In Chapter Three, I will describe in detail the project itself consisting of a website with resources for educators. Lastly, in Chapter Four, I will discuss my reflection on the entire process.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This capstone project explores the topic of: *How can I help high school staff in an increasingly diverse rural community foster a more culturally inclusive learning environment for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students?* This chapter lays a foundation for understanding the diverse needs of ELs, developing linguistic identity, culturally inclusive teaching practices, and how teachers can play a role in helping build equitable opportunities for success.

Overview of the chapter

The following chapter is a review of literature on the diverse needs of learners, developing a linguistic identity, culturally inclusive practices, and the role that teachers play in helping learners to construct positive linguistic identities both within their lessons and throughout the school. Being familiar with student backgrounds is the first step to knowing how to best serve them. The section on English learners by background discusses three main types of English learner which includes students with limited or interrupted formal education, highly skilled newcomers, and long-term English learners. Also in that section, cultural variables that affect learning are explored. The next section inspects the construction of a linguistic identity that occurs when learning a new language. Adolescent identity construction, independent from learning a second language, is explored so as to contrast it with the nuances of linguistic identity. The ways in which linguistic identity can be constructed are explored , as well as the topic of assimilation specifically in adolescents. Lastly, some of the complexities of living within the

society of the target language and culture will be discussed. The final section focuses on the

pedagogical strategies that educators can use to support diverse high school students. In that

section, the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®), culturally inclusive pedagogy,

and translanguaging will be discussed. Through this work, the types of ELs most familiar to rural

mid-western high schools, how they learn, what they need, and how to best move forward to

support them are presented and discussed.

English Learners by Background

There exists a variety of learner backgrounds among ELs in rural southern Minnesota

high schools that encompass characteristics related to the amount of prior formal schooling,

potential interruptions, as well as varying cultural values and beliefs. Understanding these factors

may help educators understand how to better guide students to the future they deserve. In order

to look at the construction of linguistic identity and the role that cultural inclusivity plays in

students' education, there needs to be an understanding of which students are being discussed

and the rich backgrounds from which they come, which is now addressed.

Highly Skilled Newcomers

A highly skilled newcomer is an English learner who has recently arrived to the country

but has a strong background in formal schooling and whose parents also tend to have a strong

educational background. Freeman et al. (2003) discuss that a highly skilled newcomer is literate

in their first language and has already developed content knowledge and academic language that

they can then transfer to the target language. To begin, this type of learner has limited

conversational skills in English but usually can quickly transfer their prior knowledge and

acquire social language in the new language. A highly skilled newcomer can often move quickly

through language levels and can be more quickly integrated into the mainstream, though achieving passing scores on standardized tests may still take time.

Amthor and Roxas (2016) explain that immigrant children often face many challenges along the way such as learning a new language, finding needed support both within and out of school, as well as experiencing discrimination and racism. Freeman et al. (2003) also mentioned that oftentimes, the families of highly skilled newcomers are voluntarily immigrating for a multitude of reasons, one example may be growing economic uncertainty.

Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

In 2014, the Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act was passed in Minnesota and along with it was an explanation of how to identify SLIFE. A SLIFE identification checklist and other resources were released in 2016 and most recently in 2019, identifying criteria have been updated (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018). According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2018), SLIFE can be identified if they meet three out of the five following requirements:

- coming from a home in which a language other than English is spoken most often
- entering the U.S. schooling system after grade six
- having at least two years less schooling than their English learner's peers
- functioning at least two years below the expected grade level in reading and mathematics.
- may be preliterate in their native language

According to Freeman et al. (2003), SLIFE come to school in the United States with limited experience with academic knowledge and the English language. Interrupted formal

schooling can have a large impact on EL experiences in the formal education setting offered to them in the United States (Amthor & Roxas, 2016). These students struggle with reading and writing or may not read and write at all in their native languages. Because of their limited exposure to academic content, there is a lack of basic concepts in different subject areas (Freeman et al., 2003). Because of these factors, SLIFE face the task of acquiring basic interpersonal communication skills, literacy in English, as well as the academic knowledge and skills necessary to compete academically with native English speakers. The organization and expectations of how to act in schools is one more piece of cultural information that SLIFE often lack.

Recent arrivals with limited formal schooling have often experienced forced departure and have not immigrated to the United States voluntarily (Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Freeman et al., 2003). Immigrating to a new place, whether that is by choice or because of other extenuating circumstances, is a difficult experience and forces people to redefine their identity and culture (Amthor & Roxas, 2016). Many students who have had limited experiences in formal school settings are also coping with social and emotional difficulties due to having experienced stress or trauma in their past, which can inhibit their academic performance in schools (Amthor & Roxas, 2016). It is the job of all teachers to understand the students as well as the backgrounds from which they have come and work to build a bridge between their prior experiences and the target content.

Long-Term English Learners

Long-term English learners (LTEL) are those who have attended school in the United States for many years; some have even begun kindergarten in this school system but most often

have attended at least seven years of schooling or more. They often have strong basic interpersonal communication skills, or social language (Freeman et al., 2003). For some educators, it may sometimes be confusing that an LTEL is able to communicate in English comfortably and confidently, yet struggles in classes with academic content. However, that is the very nature of this type of English learner.

Oftentimes, this type of EL has not experienced a bilingual program nor possibly been exposed to much literacy in their first language. It is possible that their family members have had limited schooling and may not have strong literacy or academic content knowledge to pass down to their child. Having a lack of strong literacy skills in their first language may inhibit the transfer to their target language and could mean that they have not acquired academic proficiency in either language (Freeman et al., 2003).

Unfortunately, LTELs often have been in and out of EL and other support classes with little or no consistency. The academic support they have had has been intermittent and this has a tangible effect as shown by below grade level performance in areas of reading, writing, and sometimes math as well. Sometimes, LTELs can pass their content classes with average grades but when it comes to standardized testing, they perform quite poorly. This contrast can be confusing to a student who turns in all of their work and receives a C in the class but is told they do not achieve median scores in important areas (Freeman et al., 2003).

The family of an LTEL may have a number of commonalities with that of a SLIFE from reasons for immigrating, familial relationships with formal schooling, and more. However, the most important distinction is the amount of time they have spent in the new country. As mentioned, LTELs have been attending formal school in the U.S. for at least seven years and in

some cases many more. Some may experience a certain cultural dissonance at school as they can endure bullying related to accent or struggles learning English. This may cause a student to strike back or act out and may lose motivation in school (Freeman et al., 2003).

Cultural Variables that Affect Learning

Beyond each EL carrying a unique relationship with formal education, there are other cultural factors that need to be considered that can also have a notable impact on learning. The vast majority of the ELs encountered in rural southern Minnesota high schools have been of Latinx or Somali descent, but as DeCapua and Marshall (2013) suggest, each individual learner brings a complex set of lived experiences that need to be considered.

The relationship that students have had with formal schooling is an important factor to consider. Undoubtedly, high school aged students have learned many things prior to joining the formal education system in the United States. However, the method from which they have acquired the knowledge can have an impact on the relationship they develop with their new school system. Coming from a culture that favors literacy and individualistic hierarchies will undoubtedly put you at an advantage when immigrating to a Western society such as the United States (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013). So, if a student comes from a culture that places high importance on collectivism and oral communication and traditions, one might assume that could potentially place this student at a disadvantage. It might be assumed that the more differences between cultural tendencies, the more difficulties may be presented in the case of operating within the new culture.

Western formal education as found in the U.S. relies heavily on formal assessments and examinations that place heavy importance on literacy through written media and print resources.

This type of learning centers around abstract concepts removed from daily life and experience and implicitly emphasizes future relevance. Informal education, however, tends not to occur within a formal school building with trained professionals but rather regularly through natural daily experiences and ties closely to the sociocultural practices found within a community. Informal education has a feel of immediate relevance due to the direct application of skills in daily life and has very little, if any, emphasis on literacy (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013).

Outside of unique relationships with acquiring knowledge, there are other cultural variables to consider such as collectivism and individualism. In a collectivist culture, there is a lot of importance placed on relationships, shared responsibility, and moving forward as a whole group. While an individualistic orientation still may place high importance on family, the focus is much more on what one person alone can achieve. Any given culture can range along the continuum of more or less collectivist or individualistic (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013).

Different educational traditions do not only shape a learner's success in a new academic environment but can also shape the relationship with different literacy practices. Some maybe never have been exposed to literacy in any form as their native language may not have a written form or has one that was recently created. Others may see literacy as only necessary for certain tasks such as obtaining official documents or reading a menu or a medicine label, for example, but do not gain and transfer information with written word but rather by communicating with members of their communities. Even though some cultures operate with little to no literacy skills, they are still successful, active members in social and sociocultural contexts within their culture (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013).

As evidenced by the research in this section, each student has extremely unique past experiences that have led them to where they are today. It is one's experiences that make up one's sense of self and these experiences, as well as students' identities, show up in the classrooms and need to be acknowledged. As educators learn more about each individual student and what their background is, the more they can build unique bridges for each student to access the intended content.

Linguistic Identity

In order to create an optimal environment for the many different types of English learners encountered in rural southern Minnesota high schools, many factors of acquiring a new language need to be considered. One may assume that people learn new languages to be able to communicate with speakers of that language. However, language is more than just a communication tool; it is also an attribute of empowerment, as well as cultural and linguistic identity (Clots-Figueras & Masella, 2013). Linguistic identity may be defined as having any aspect of one's identity tied to the language or languages one speaks. Central to supporting diverse learner populations in rural Minnesota schools is recognizing the centrality of linguistic identity as it relates to language acquisition. It is important to note, however, that there are elements of linguistic identity construction related to normal adolescent development.

Adolescent Identity

One of the challenges adolescents and young adults face is seeing themselves as the same person over time. Constructing one's identity is a complex process that can be defined as integrating past events to current understanding of oneself and connecting that to emerging

future aspirations. The ways in which the present is constructed by past experiences can potentially shape the future (Pasupathi & Weeks, 2010).

A study by Pasupathi and Weeks (2010) discussed the role of dialogue with others, specifically adults, as a particularly important tool of self-event relations related to adolescent identity construction. A responsive listener pays attention, asks questions, and supports the telling of a story, even if not the specific content. This type of listener is motivated to help adolescents build their experiences and thus a sense of identity as it pertains to the events of their lives (Pasupathi & Weeks, 2010). In relation to education, this may mean that educators are able to challenge student assumptions while still aiding in a positive construction of adolescent identity if they are portraying qualities of a responsive listener. One source for the development and exploration of a rich and complex identity may be related to the disparities between the different types of listeners and their motivations.

Adolescence and early adulthood are notable periods of time in one's life marked by rapid developmental and social-contextual change which present challenges to one who is constructing a sense of identity (Pasupathi & Weeks, 2010). If adolescence and early adulthood are so impactful, then what effect does a major life change, such as immigrating to a country with an unfamiliar language and culture, have in the identity construction of a high school student?

Linguistic Identity Construction

Current thinking in the field is that every teacher is a language teacher as all educators are expected to teach academic language in order to teach students to access the target content (Benegas & Stolpestad, 2020). Academic language entails an understanding of "the set of

words, grammar, and organizational strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher order

thinking processes, and abstract concepts" (Zwiers, 2014, p. 22). If this is true, then all teachers

that come into contact with English learners, not just EL teachers, are playing a role in language

acquisition in addition to the construction of each student's linguistic identity. Tied to linguistic

identity construction is what Norton (2018) referred to as investment, which is determined by the

ways in which learners see that their contributions in a given context are being valued. The

personal histories that ELs bring to school impact their investment in language learning (Norton

& De Costa, 2018). A lack of investment in their learning may contribute to a slower pace of

language acquisition. Through classroom interactions, building relationships, and the selected

classroom content, educators may play a role in the identity that is constructed by each

adolescent. So, it is therefore even more important to understand how to positively influence this

construction in a supportive and accepting environment.

Acculturation for Adolescents

Berry (2001) discussed the idea of acculturation as a process of which there are four

different strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration is

defined as maintaining one's own cultural identity while also becoming a participant in the host

culture. Assimilation is the act of absorbing the host culture and giving up their own cultural

identity. Separation maintains cultural identity and rejects involvement with the host culture.

Lastly, marginalization is defined as when an individual does not identify with or participate in

either their own culture or the host culture (Berry, 2001). One study finds that when young

adolescents are in an immersion setting, these children tend to form identities as speakers of their

target language in order to acculturate with the majority language community both in and out of school (Besser & Chik, 2014).

Mainstream teachers may assume that the goal for ELs is assimilation, but if educators are trying to support the process of constructing a healthy adolescent linguistic identity, it is important that educators not invalidate a part of their identity. This includes not only recognizing their background but also validating and celebrating the culture from which they come.

Pedagogical Strategies for Diverse Adolescents

Since it is of the utmost importance to understand each student's personal stories, I have provided a brief background on the types of ELs that are most often seen in rural southern Minnesota. Through exploring linguistic identity, educators can begin to understand a bit about the importance of the work that is done with ELs and the impact that instruction can have on them at an adolescent age. With an understanding that educators play an important role in the linguistic identity construction, this section turns to some specific pedagogical strategies that can be used in order to support ELs in reaching their true potential. Knowledge is nothing without action and it is imperative that a plan of how to put this information into practice be in place.

The idea of scaffolding is a type of temporary help or support provided to learners to assist them to move toward new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding until they are able to gain independence (Gibbons, 2015). Scaffolding may be viewed as a sort of bridge from what a learner already knows to the content being taught and once a learner is on the other side, they no longer need the metaphorical bridge. This would be to imply that learners have prior knowledge to be built upon even despite perhaps not having ever had formal education. The concept of funds of knowledge addresses this topic and discusses that people are competent and have

knowledge that they have gained from life experiences. This concept aims to alter perceptions of working-class or poor communities to be seen for their strengths and resources (González et al, 2009).

In the next section, I will look closely at the topics of Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm®, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and translanguaging, which all embrace the notions of scaffolding and building on the existing funds of knowledge, which all in turn embody the principles of creating a more inclusive environment for all students.

Culturally Inclusive Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a term that was first used in 1995 by Ladson-Billings but Paris and Alim (2017) discuss the idea of culturally sustaining pedagogy and how it takes this idea a step further by explicitly calling for schools to sustain the cultural ways of communities of color. The work of making teaching and learning relevant to the languages, literacies, and cultural practices of the students within communities is inspiring to many educators and researchers however, the notion of sustainability takes this a step further to "honor, value, and center the rich and varied practices of communities of color, and is a necessary pedagogy for helping shape access to power in a changing nation" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 6).

Nero (2000) states that teacher education programs should address sociolinguistics so as to familiarize future educators with the history, culture, and teaching and learning styles of language minorities. Few programs for mainstream teachers require coursework on serving diverse populations of English learners (Benegas & Stolpestad, 2020). It is difficult to identify something if one is unaware of what to look for and providing professional development on dispositional strategies may sensitize educators to the experiences that many RCELD students

bring to schools, which is the goal of this project. The following sections explore the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm ®, knowing your students, and translanguaging which are all practices that would serve ELs, and potentially all students, in any setting.

Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm®. The theory behind the research that led to the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm® (MALP®) is that students classified as SLIFE can experience a certain dissonance when acclimating to U.S. educational systems (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013). English learners have a lot of work in front of them to adapt not only to the language, but also to the customs, culture, and community in which they now live and operate. It is important that educators not only expect students to adjust to the ways of their new environment but also mutually adapt to the needs of students. MALP® outlines exactly this idea. This work by DeCapua and Marshall (2013) details the need for educators to also learn and adapt to the cultures and customs of the students found in their schools and classrooms. In order to reach mutual adaptability, educators need to understand who students are and about the backgrounds from which they have come. To achieve that deeper understanding, it is important to establish and maintain open communication with students and parents, identify the priorities of both the student and the teacher, and create connections from what is familiar to the intended academic knowledge (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013).

As mentioned previously, a portion of ELs may have had limited experience with western-style formal education. Also as previously stated, MALP®'s primary focus is mutual adaptability, however it is important to note that this does not mean that teachers must completely adapt their ways to those of the students nor that students should replace what is familiar to them with westernized practices. In a western-style formal education approach, the

required tasks are often decontextualized (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013). In addition, students are

expected to work independently to gain knowledge for something they may need in the future, to

produce their work, both formative and summative, in written form and hold themselves

accountable for handing in work on time. In contrast, struggling ELs need to feel like they are a

part of an interconnected group of learners and teachers and believe that what they are learning

will be relevant to their lives outside of school. In addition, the ability to share knowledge, skills,

and understanding within the classroom community and support each other as they learn, oral

interactions with each other and the teacher , as well as utilitarian tasks, as opposed to

decontextualized ones, will ultimately support ELs' mastery of the given lesson (DeCapua &

Marshall, 2013). In order to interconnect these two learning paradigms, there must exist a

balance between the two styles. DeCapua and Marshall (2013) suggest that learner conditions

must be of immediate relevance and interconnectedness. They also suggest the processes of

learners be a combination incorporating shared responsibility and individual accountability

together using oral transmission and written word. Lastly, using the western-style learning

activities of decontextualized tasks while scaffolding them with familiar language and content

(DeCapua & Marshall, 2013). When planning a lesson, an educator may want to ask themselves

the following questions:

- ❏ I am making this lesson immediately relevant to students.
- ❏ I am helping students develop and maintain interconnectedness.
- ❏ I am incorporating both shared responsibility and individual accountability.
- ❏ I am scaffolding the written word through oral interaction.
- ❏ I am focusing on tasks requiring academic ways of thinking.

❏ I am making these tasks accessible with familiar language and content.

(DeCapua & Marshall, 2013, p. 37)

MALP® is specifically aimed at struggling language learners, particularly SLIFE, and is by nature a culturally responsive teaching practice. In order to teach with a culturally responsive approach, educators need to know and understand who their students are which will be discussed in the next section.

Know your students. In a study by Chen and Yang (2017), three proactive culturally responsive teaching strategies were recommended in order to/with the goal of improving active classroom participation of ELs. The first is achieving cultural competency through knowing who your students are, which has been described as understanding the behaviors, attitudes, and policies that intersect across cultures. The second strategy is summarized to say that in order to employ culturally relevant teaching strategies, one must challenge student learning beyond the lesson and their own culture. Third, and likely most familiar to many, is being active in developing professionally so as to enhance the application of this approach to teaching.

There are many ways to strive toward cultural sustainability, Chen and Yang's (2017) study has identified a few. For example, when having students introduce themselves, they may be allowed more freedom for self expression through a self-introduction essay, writing a poem, or even drawing a picture. As the year progresses, there should exist various opportunities for students to share their own beliefs and traditions through classroom discussions or activities. Educators should also strive to incorporate stories, concepts, and vocabulary that relate to the students' cultures, lives, and experiences from the past, present, or potential future.

Prior to approaching the topic of cultural inclusivity in schools, an important discussion regarding the ethnic content that circulates in the media is essential. The information released through the media can sometimes be unintentionally misrepresented and has the potential to be even more damaging than the alternative of not disseminating and analyzing the information carefully (Ndemanu & Jordan, 2017). If the society in which students live reflects a world that feels unwelcoming, educators must deliberately counteract this in the classroom to ensure students feel accepted and welcomed. As Amthor and Roxas (2016) state, "when wider social discourses are imbued with anti-immigrant sentiment, schools need to still provide the space where educators have an important and powerful reach to impact the adaptation and well-being of students of color" (p. 171). Amthor and Roxas (2016) discuss that culturally relevant pedagogy is a strong and positive approach to curriculum especially when students experience a certain internal dissonance between the ideals of democracy and equity taught in schools and their life experiences as often marginalized youth. Incorporating culturally inclusive practices can provide important counter contexts for diverse youth.

Implementing strategies to incorporate the cultures of the students can help educators support students from all backgrounds in ways they may not have been before. When thinking about cultural inclusion in schools, it might be assumed that these strategies need to be put in place to help students of color be more academically successful. While that is a crucial piece to remember, this approach can also serve as a way to explicitly and implicitly neutralize ethnic and racial stereotypes that teachers and nonimmigrant students may have of those who are new to the country (Ndemanu & Jordan, 2017).

One study by Amthor and Roxas (2016) focused on acknowledging the resiliency and agency in the ways that newcomer youth define who they are while recognizing the unequal power relations that pose a concern in multicultural education. Rather than seek a concrete checklist of ways to create an inclusive environment, this study proposes that educators thoroughly consider the implications of narrow conceptualizations and to consider alternative possibilities.

Translanguaging. Translanguaging is a process that bilingual people employ in which they think about and act on their language practices. In relation to the classroom, it can be defined as the natural flow of a student's [emerging] bilingualism through the classroom (Garcia, 2017). Williams (1996) was first to coin the term translanguaging and defines it as a bilingual pedagogy that alternates language modes. Translanguaging can mean many things to many people but regardless of the varying definitions, they all incorporate the target language and a student's L1. The idea is that the acquisition of the target language can be strengthened and a student may be able to work at a higher cognitive level by allowing them to employ their full linguistic repertoire (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003).

The idea of incorporating a translanguaging approach into the classroom may seem daunting to an educator who is not bilingual or does not share a common language with their students. Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) discuss that many educators are not bilingual and may quickly think that it would be impossible for them to achieve a translanguaging approach to teaching.

Garcia et al. (2017) provide an example of two different teachers who do not speak the languages of their students and how they had incorporated translanguaging practices into their

classrooms. Between the two of them, there are a variety of strategies that they employ in their classrooms. One teacher organizes students into groups that have mixed strengths and common languages and can encourage translanguaging interactions to allow all students to engage with the content. She also works with bilingual staff members and student volunteers to translate or create multilingual materials, seeks out native language resources, and makes use of bilingual dictionaries, iPads, native language versions of textbooks, and apps such as Google Translate. Another teacher obtains supplemental material in the native language of his students and incorporates that into his class. He uses Google Translate to write worksheet instructions into their first language, encourages students to use the app as well to look up words and translate passages, and uses it to make himself understood in students' languages (Garcia et al., 2017). There may be a multitude of possibilities of how to allow and support translanguaging in each classroom despite a teacher not having knowledge of their student's languages, and reflecting on your current translanguaging practices may be a great first step.

Garcia et al. (2017) ask some important reflection questions in order for all educators to reflect and plan for a translanguaging pedagogy. Educators are recommended to rate themselves on a scale of one to three, one meaning none, two meaning some, and three meaning a lot, showing if the following criteria are reflected in their teaching. After self-evaluating, there is a space to reflect on how one might be able to adapt their current pedagogical practices to make space for translanguaging.

To what degree do I:

- Think of students' languages and cultural practices as equally valuable and interrelated?

- Value and include students' families and communities in their education?

- Challenge traditional hierarchies (e.g., teacher/student, English/additional language, native/non-native speaker) and work toward a more just classroom (and society)?

- Design the physical space of the classroom for collaboration; design a multilingual and multimodal ecology?

- Design instruction so that all learning promotes translanguaging (e.g., in unit planning, classroom activities, strategies)/

- Design assessments that include different constituents?

- Design assessments that differentiate between general linguistic and language-specific performances?

- Design assessments so that they can be performed with or without assistance?

- Allow for flexibility and changes to design that are responsive to students' needs, interests, and language practices?

(Modified from Garcia et al., 2017, p. 182)

Conclusion

This literature serves as an attempt to answer the question: *How can I help high school staff in an increasingly diverse rural community foster a more culturally inclusive learning environment for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students?* Throughout this review of the literature, the research suggests that the best way to address the needs for diverse students is through understanding the backgrounds from which these students come, how one forms an identity as an adolescent contrasted by how an adolescent forms a linguistic identity while learning a second language, as well as the role that acculturation plays in the

construction of identity, and lastly the various pedagogical strategies for diverse adolescents that educators can employ within their school buildings and classroom interactions. This information provides the background needed to construct a guide for mainstream teachers with a number of culturally sustaining resources that teachers can choose to employ which is the culminating project for this capstone.

The following chapter will detail the capstone project and its development. It will incorporate the research highlighted here in designing the website for high school staff and all related materials as well as a description of that process. Chapter Three includes descriptions of an overview and a timeline of the project itself, the theories and framework that shaped this project will be detailed, as well as the setting, participants, and the materials used to support the completion and execution of the project.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Methodology

Introduction and Rationale

In an effort to bridge the gap between mainstream midwestern culture and the cultures that students are bringing to this area, I will be preparing a website with resources that high school staff will be able to easily implement within their spaces, lessons, and throughout the whole building. This website will include a variety of ways to create inclusive spaces and employ culturally inclusive teaching strategies, as well as some EL related basics.

Project Overview

The objective of this project is to provide staff with the information that will guide them to begin to incorporate strategies with the goal of the building and the classes better representing the students that spend time inside every day. One hope is that the resources on this website can help gently push the building and staff forward so that the students may feel seen and heard in order to move forward into whichever future they decide to pursue.

The website was created using Google Sites and will be released through my platform as an ELM coach. We will use this as a platform for releasing professional development in an asynchronous model as well as a guide when actively coaching mainstream teaching peers. Eventually this website will be shared with our district's Multilingual and Equity Coordinator, building administration, as well as the building and possibly even district equity teams. This website is created with the goal of representing all students throughout the building, as well as linguistically and academically supporting the students in skill and content within their classes. It also aims to support students relationally by bringing awareness to concepts such as

micro-aggressions and implicit bias, and offer ways to incorporate students' cultures and backgrounds into each day so that they are able to feel safe, seen, and welcomed.

The website consists of four main categories of resources. On the home page, there will be a small explanation of the website being a resource for high school staff who work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. On this page, there will also be four buttons that are links that will lead you to one of the main pages. These buttons will be *Getting Started*, *Creating Inclusive Spaces*, *Culturally Inclusive Teaching Strategies*, and *Personal Development*. On each of those pages, there will be a number of subcategories to explore and each subcategory will have a resource or two.

ELM Coaches will work with their ELM Educators to access the professional development in order to receive a CEU. Ideally, the school district will also present this as an option for asynchronous professional development during the number of curriculum days that exist. There also exists a district and a site equity team within this school district. This resource will exist under the platform of ELM Coaching but will be shared with the site equity team to discuss which ways we could best begin to integrate some of the ideas listed, as well as continue to grow the website. We will discuss how best to incorporate them into our school and our own classrooms and collaborate on how to continue to influence our staff to use the resources available to them. I will also be contacting the district Multilingual and Equity Coordinator to meet with him to discuss this resource in hopes of having it incorporated district wide.

Project Timeline

This resource and the ideas adapted from the research I have compiled will be incorporated into the hours of professional development provided through the platform of

English Learners in the Mainstream (ELM) coaching. These are voluntary PD sessions and not all staff are required to attend. ELM Coaches will use this site as a resource in their discussions with the ELM Educators with whom they have partnered. This website will also be incorporated into district professional development days as an asynchronous option for all staff district wide. The hope is that little by little, some staff in this building, and others, will begin incorporating some of these strategies, have success with them, and spread the word to their colleagues. Perhaps influence these colleagues to work with an ELM coach, work to incorporate cultural inclusive strategies into their daily classrooms, or at the very least feel more open and comfortable with having difficult conversations .

In addition to using this website with ELM Educators, it will also be presented to the site equity team and the leader of the district equity team upon completion, toward the end of December 2020 or the beginning of January 2021. Because the equity team is still rather new to the district, during this interaction, the idea of developing an equity site will also be discussed. From there, I will discuss with the team what they believe to be feasible pieces to begin incorporating with other staff in the hopes of implementing some strategies building wide.

Research Theories and Project Framework

Given that the ideas presented in the website outlined above are for educators, I have followed Knowles' (1984) principles of andragogy in creating my project's layout and content. These principles include adult learners' need for involvement in planning and evaluation, the need to build on experience, the need for relevance, and the focus on problem-centered learning.

As mentioned previously, the guide will address the relevance and importance of integrating culturally and linguistically inclusive practices. By addressing the importance, it

makes the research relevant and applicable to the daily lives of educators and brings attention to an issue being experienced at building that needs a solution. There are opportunities for interaction and involvement as many resources are guiding staff on how to find necessary information about the students in their classes as well as strategies and thought provoking information to guide them in creating a more inclusive environment within their own lessons, classrooms, and hallways. The need to build on experience is addressed with the section titled *Getting Started* and because of the ongoing conversations surrounding equity, cultural relevance, and closing the gap, the topics available on the website are of the utmost relevance to the staff at this building.

It should also be noted that the information contained in the website is deeply rooted in research on the general topic of cultural inclusivity which was summarized in Chapter Two. Sharroky Hollie (2017) defines Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness as "metaphorically diving into the pool and getting into the water with your students," as meeting them where they are (Hollie 2017, p. 58). While this website does not solely focus on the topic of Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness but rather a general approach to cultural inclusivity overall, the project resources and website were all compiled and created with the concept of putting ourselves as educators in our students' metaphorical shoes and creating spaces and content that reflects their lived experiences. Thus, they aim at providing a culturally inclusive learning environment that aligns with Hollie's description.

Project Setting and Participants

This project has been created with the teaching staff from a rural Minnesota high school in mind. This specific high school has quite a diverse student population and the staff in this

building are a very homogenous group. Over my time working in these rural Minnesota schools, I have observed a discrepancy between student and staff demographics. Throughout my observation, it seems as though this can sometimes cause misunderstandings. As discussed briefly in the first chapter, this is a large part of the motivation for this project. Now, we will take a look at the current demographics of students and staff of this particular high school.

As of October 2019, the students at this high school are quite diverse, as noted in the recently updated Minnesota Report Card (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). In regards to racial diversity, there are 21.6% Hispanic or Latino students, 20.2% Black or African-American, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.9% Asian, 1.3% who identify as two or more races. The remaining makeup of the student body is 54.9% white. The racial makeup found in this school is not the only way in which this school is diverse. There also exists a 14.2% English learner population, 11.8% special education, 0.8% homeless, and nearly half of the population qualifies for free or reduced price meals as demonstrated by the 48.1% listed in this Report Card.

At this particular high school, just in the core four content areas, there are nine math teachers, nine science teachers, eight language arts teachers, and seven social studies teachers. Beyond those four areas, there are six career and technical education teachers, 12 special education teachers, five English language (EL) teachers, three teachers of music, four physical education or health teachers, and five teachers of world languages. Of all of these teachers, they range in years of experience; some have had an entire career and are nearing retirement and others are just beginning. Overall, the teaching staff at this building are young educators having less than 10 years of experience. In addition to the teaching staff, there are three main

administrators, two EL paraprofessionals, a number of special education paraprofessionals, six

counseling staff, and other positions in this building that make up its entire staff (custodial staff,

food service staff, and others). By a quick estimate, approximately 95% of the staff at this high

school are of Caucasian descent; only about seven staff may identify as a person of color. Of

those three people, none of them are teaching staff and they do not always have direct and

consistent contact with students.

As mentioned above, this raises questions about educators' ability to make the content

accessible and comprehensible to all students, as well as the ability to make sure that all students

feel represented, accepted, and supported. All of the people mentioned play a direct role in the

experiences that students have at school and thus a direct role in the construction of linguistic

and adolescent identity that students are undergoing. While the main audience for this project

will be teachers and administrators, the resources and strategies included can be beneficial for all

of the people and places that play a role in the experiences that students have while at school.

This project has been created in a way that is very simple, straight-forward, and easy to follow

along so that all staff throughout the building will not feel overwhelmed by this resource and feel

comfortable and confident reaching for it.

Support Materials

In order to create the guide that will be presented for staff, I have used Google Sites to

create a website that will then be easily accessible to all staff at this high school. Since all staff at

this building have an iPad or a mobile device, a website is a very realistic way for staff to interact

with professional development content. The website will be referenced in ELM Coaches

interactions with their ELM Educators, as well as available to all staff asynchronously during the

professional development days available per the district calendar. Additionally, the website will

be brought to the building equity team to brainstorm additional uses for the broader teaching

staff outside of the ELM platform. The purpose of this resource is to expand their minds,

challenge their current comfort levels, and get them thinking about different ways of reaching

their students.

The website has been created with Google Sites as this district is comfortable and

familiar with Google Suites products. The website format has been chosen as the audience is

accustomed to interacting with this type of resource at a district level.

Assessment

As I alluded to in the overview and timeline, there will be many ways and opportunities

to integrate these strategies and the resources I have created, and to assess effectiveness. The

formative assessment will include informal observation of ELM Educators during regularly

scheduled meetings, in addition to simple observation of all staff over time. Toward the end of

the school year, the ELM Coaches and I plan to informally discuss with our ELM Educators the

ways in which the website was helpful to them. We will discuss the different types of ways that

they have incorporated, or attempted to incorporate these strategies into their spaces and content.

Results from this survey will constitute the formative assessment. As this is an ongoing process

of building and maintaining an active website, we will continue to develop it as best suits the

needs of the staff at this building. Throughout the school year, there will be many informal

conversations had with educators and other staff throughout the building. Through the platform

of the ELM PD sessions, ELM coaching, the equity teams, regular staff meetings, and standard

interactions with staff throughout the year, casual discussions regarding how to support the diverse population of this high school will take place regularly.

Through the conversations and interactions with the equity teams, and the PD sessions led with the other ELM coaches, it is possible that the contents of the website may be modified and revised to fit the needs of the people who will be using it at that time.

Conclusion

This chapter serves as a summary of my capstone project which was born of the research question: *How can I help high school staff in an increasingly diverse rural community foster a more culturally inclusive learning environment for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students?* The details of the project have been outlined including the participants, setting, rational, timeline, and explanation of the frameworks that guided this project. The final outcome of the project is a website for educators which provides resources that high school staff can use to create more inclusive spaces, lessons, and interactions.

The upcoming and final chapter of this capstone paper will discuss the literature that influenced the creation of this project, the details of the project itself, as well as a reflection on that process as a whole. The implications of this project will be addressed as well as the limitations this capstone poses. Lastly, recommendations for future use and further research will be conveyed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

With the goal of creating an environment in which students feel supported and seen, I set out to answer my research question: *How can I help high school staff in an increasingly diverse rural community foster a more culturally inclusive learning environment for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students?* In pursuit of answers to this question, current literature was reviewed to discuss various types of ELs and the impacts different circumstances have on them, the role that educators play on a students' linguistic identity construction and the impacts of acculturation, as well as a number of approaches to building a culturally inclusive environment. Using this information, I designed a website with a variety of resources available to help high school staff working with diverse students create a more culturally and linguistically diverse environment.

In Chapter One: Introduction, I discussed the context, rationale, and experiences that have led me to this topic of research. Through my experiences as a language learner and an EL teacher, I have learned that incorporating a learner's background and employing their full linguistic repertoire leads to a successful acquisition of language and integration into a society.

In Chapter Two: Literature Review, I presented research that reflects how incorporating methods to create a culturally inclusive school environment will support the construction of

adolescent and linguistic identity. This research strengthened my personal and professional beliefs of seeing each student as a whole human rather than a vessel of content knowledge.

In Chapter Three: Project Description, I detailed the process of creating a website as my capstone project, the timeline and avenues through which it will be released to staff, as well as the considerations of how to best create resources for engagement of adult professionals.

Lastly, in this chapter, I will first provide a reflection on the process of researching and designing this capstone project. Then, a detailed explanation of the project will be outlined followed by the connections to the literature review and the research that helped shape it. Implications and limitations will be discussed followed by recommendations for future use and further research.

Reflection on the Capstone Process

Through researching, sifting through resources, and deeming them appropriate for this project, I found myself doing a lot of introspective work. This experience has helped me grow as an educator, as a coach, and as a person. I have also grown in confidence in many ways as a writer and a researcher as a result of this capstone. From the time I began the capstone process until now, I have had a lot of self reflection and evaluating of the type of educator I am for my students down to the way my classroom looks and if it fits the standards I am asking others to hold themselves to. I have evaluated the lack of culturally inclusive posters on my walls and the insufficient representation in my classroom. I have pondered my specific approach to translanguaging in the classroom and searched for areas of growth. I have reflected on the stories we read, the interactions we have, and the ways that my students feel supported as a whole

person. If I am asking my ELM Educators to do this work, I too must take a long hard look in the mirror and work to integrate these practices more now than ever.

Additionally, I have developed a love for research and the unbiased way in which information and data is presented. There are times in which one must pick a side and stand firmly for what they believe in but learning more about research has helped me also see the importance in representing information in a more neutral way and allowing others to make their choices based on what works best for their situations. This is a lesson I will take with me when interacting with ELM Educators, all teaching staff, administration, and all other staff. One of the many lessons I've learned through this process is that what works for me, may not be a great fit for someone else. If we are all working toward the same goal of cultural inclusivity and inclusivity of the whole student, this does not mean that the execution of this goal will always look the same as each student and each classroom is widely different and how educators reach their students should constantly be re-evaluated each year.

My Project

The final result of my project is a Google site created via my platform as an ELM Coach which contains various resources touching on the broad topics of getting started, creating inclusive spaces, culturally inclusive teaching strategies, and personal development. The section getting started explores the topics of understanding English learners, ACCESS, and Can Do Descriptors. From there, the section of creating inclusive spaces dives into visual representation throughout a school building, cultural representation in and out of the classroom, as well as a section for building background which touches on some basic holidays. The section on culturally inclusive teaching strategies is broken down into social emotional, translanguaging, language

acquisition, and EL Strategies for the classroom. Lastly, the section on personal development provides a variety of ways for high school staff to explore some expanding topics outside of the work day. There are books, podcasts, social media accounts to follow, and other resources ranging from relevant websites to research.

Connections to Literature Review

Incorporated into my project are many of the themes explored in the literature review. In the section titled Pedagogical Strategies for Diverse Adolescents, there are sections about MALP® (DeCapua & Marshall, 2013), knowing your students, and translanguaging. All of these are very prominent pieces of the website and also influence other sections and resources on the website, as well. The different types of ELs (Freeman et al., 2003) are addressed in the website as well as strategies to support them and tools to know how to access the necessary information. The section of Linguistic Identity Construction (Norton & De Costa, 2018) is rather an abstract concept and is more of an argument for the importance of cultural inclusivity. I would argue that elements of supporting ELs linguistic identity are present throughout a lot of the website as the goal is to support the whole student from their background and language to their daily practices and traditions.

The process of compiling research and resources has reinforced many strong elements present throughout my education and my experience as an EL teacher. Many strategies such as getting to know your students, supporting their social emotional well being, and building on prior background knowledge are discussed and recycled in professional development but sifting through this research and diving deeper into the theories and practices of the people who have developed support systems, strategies and laws that support ELs was impactful. I now more fully

understand the depth and importance of representation, social emotional health, mutual adaptability, and scaffolding and differentiation.

Implications

For the last six years of my teaching career, there has been a growing push for culturally relevant teaching practices, support for EL students, and goals for how to close the achievement gap and raise graduation rates. Within the last few years, the building in which I work has placed more focus on social emotional learning, making sure students feel cared for and connected, as well as discussions around equity. There is now an equity team which is in its second year and is having great discussions and working toward change. I highlight all of this to explain that I believe the timing of the creation of this website has been perfect and I believe this will grow to be a very valuable resource in working toward inclusion, well-being, and equity for all students. The hope is that this will serve as a catalyst for change in the larger desire to serve learners and help them create their own definitions of success. This website will be available to educators and all school staff beginning in the 2021 calendar year and from there, I hope to make its availability known to a much wider audience. It will be incorporated district wide as an asynchronous option for professional development on district curriculum days as well as used as a resource for ELM Coaches to facilitate discussions with ELM Educators. The intention of this website is to be a dynamic resource that continues to evolve based on the needs of the society and the educators and staff who it is intended for. I have discussed its contents with colleagues in other districts who are also interested in this resource and I think that this website has the potential to evolve into a very valuable resource to many.

Limitations

The website developed for this capstone project is intended for the specific needs of one rural Minnesota high school. While many resources found in this website may be useful for teachers of students of many backgrounds and ages, its main focus is building a supportive and culturally inclusive high school environment at this specific school building. As the website grows, more wide ranging resources may be incorporated however, there will need to be a number of modifications or adaptations made in order to be truly beneficial for other schools.

The research presented in this paper on the topic of linguistic identity and acculturation has only scratched the surface and does not sufficiently portray the magnitude of the impact this plays on the immigrant student. I believe this to be a limitation of this capstone because there exists a large pool of research on this topic. However, because the goal of this capstone was to create a project that would be directly and immediately useful for the implementation of strategies that propel change, the focus was placed on cultural inclusivity for all students. I believe linguistic identity construction and acculturation are important pieces to the cultural inclusivity whole but was not able to do this topic justice while also highlighting the importance of the website as a resource for educators.

A further limitation is that this website and paper have been based on current research but as time goes on, more research will need to be considered as thinking and practices evolve. This website will serve as a jumping off point and will grow to be a more vast resource. Many sections within the website need to be more thoroughly developed. For example, having a minimum of 10 resources in each category would provide more flexibility for each reader to gravitate toward what most piques their curiosity. As time goes on, the ELM Coaches at this building will continue to develop professional development resources that directly address the

needs of the building. As resources are added to this website, research will need to continue to ensure that the suggested information is reflective of up to date information and practices.

Recommendation for Future Use and Further Research

Moving forward, the ELM Coaches and I, making up a total of three ELM Coaches at the high school, will continue to expand this website by continually adding resources to the existing topics. We feel that it currently scratches the surface of the most important information that we want the ELM educators, and all school staff, to know. Soon after publishing the website, it will be brought to a broader audience of the building equity team. Their input will be requested and the idea of building an equity website will be proposed. The goal of this resource is to be as applicable and relevant to our building staff as possible and for this reason will be seeking input from other members of the staff. For the 2020-2021 school year, the website will be implemented as an asynchronous method of professional development during the district curriculum days that are built into the academic calendar. From there, the ELM Coaches plan to incorporate many of the resources on the website into their discussions with their ELM Educators. Additionally, this website will be shown to the district Multilingual and Equity Coordinator, as well as acquaintances in other school districts. By sharing this website with the equity team, colleagues from other districts, and other professionals, I believe this opens the website up to change in order to incorporate additional perspectives and viewpoints and ultimately strengthen the website as a whole.

The focus of this paper has primarily been an argument for the consistent use of cultural inclusive practices throughout a school building but the reason for its importance, I believe, lies in the desire to recognize the whole student from their background and language to their whole

identity. For this reason, as stated in the section on Limitations, I recommend that further research be done on the topic of linguistic identity construction and acculturation. With the same concern, I also recommend further research on the adverse effects of all aspects of a student's identity not being incorporated consistently into their school experience.

Summary

The goal of my capstone project was to create a resource that educators can use to build a more inclusive atmosphere, find useful information, and challenge themselves on an individual and systemic level. I sought to answer the research question: *How can I help high school staff in an increasingly diverse rural community foster a more culturally inclusive learning environment for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students?* In an attempt to answer that question, I researched the types of EL students and the effects of the different types of backgrounds from which they may come, how adolescents and language learners build identity and the acculturation process that occurs when one emigrates to a new country, as well as a variety of pedagogical strategies that will serve diverse adolescents.

Ten years ago when I began working in the field of EL, I was charmed by the connections I made with students but did not know how to help them feel safe and supported. There is plenty more to learn but the strides I have made as an educator and a professional over the last decade are what I can only hope to aim for within the next. I plan to continue advocating for equity and inclusion, learning more about perspectives of other voices and more about being an equitable educator, and to continue striving for an environment and a society in which all students feel seen, heard, and empowered.

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