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Multi-Tiered Support Systems for Multilingual Learners: Structures that Inform Reading Instruction and Intervention

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Multi-Tiered Support Systems for Multilingual Learners: Structures that Inform Reading Instruction and Intervention

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DEDICATION

To my family who provided time and support in an otherwise turbulent time.
To Deb who is and was a prominent first teacher-icon, mentor, friend, and replacement mother one could ever hope for. To my content reviewers who spent time and energy reading and helping me. To the students who were the motivation and inspiration for this capstone project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

In America today, Multilingual Learners (MLLs) are the fastest-growing population in our nation's schools (Albers & Martinez, 2015). Alongside this growth in MLLs, there is a significant need for educators to close an ever-widening academic gap in reading for students identified as minority students in this upper midwest state (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). The widening academic achievement gap for minority students has a future impact on their lives, and it is imperative schools have an organized plan to tackle this gap.

Demographics for my school include a significant percentage of MLLs and an economically divided population. Families are either newly arrived in the United States or first, second, and third-generation immigrants and multilingual speakers. This span of linguistic ability creates a range of academic needs for teachers to navigate. Students falling behind academically is a complex issue that must be addressed. In a quest to figure out how to address this academic gap, the question that directed this inquiry emerged: *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) to inform reading instruction?*

Rationale

Albers and Martinez (2015) shared data from the United States (U.S.) Department of Education from the 2010-2011 school year. The data showed there were about 4.4 million (about 8.8%) students within U.S. schools who received support in-school programs for MLLs. Albers and Martinez indicated that this enrollment estimation

excludes students who are categorized as speaking a language other than English, and they share an additional 13% could be categorized similarly raising this percentage to be approximately 22% speaking a language other than English in their homes.

Comparatively, in an online government report, data from the 2014-2015 school year showed that there were about 4.8 million (about 10%) of the entire student demographic group that represented MLLs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Between these two data sets, the numbers of students who are identified as MLL increased significantly in only four years. This ever-growing population of MLLs according to Grunewald and Nath (2019) are also being underserved in the progress they are making towards academic proficiency in reading in this upper midwest state. A majority of students that were identified as white students in this state outperformed other fourth grade students of color in reading by a margin of 17%-34% on the state standardized test measure (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). This means that students of color performed significantly lower than their white peers in reading. This makes one pause to consider, what is going on that students are not achieving at the same rate as their peers?

The state where I am located is considered to be a part of the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium consisting of 40 member states. According to WIDA (n.d.), as part of this membership, these states participate in measuring the progress of students' acquisition in learning English. This test's acronym ACCESS stands for Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State. Language is measured in these four areas of language development: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. An overall composite score is created based on these four domains. Students are identified within a continuum of language learning to

meet federal requirements to both identify students needing language support for funding purposes and to provide equal access to academic content. Scores are based on one being the lowest scoring to six being the highest and proficient score within each domain of language. Students that score as proficient are then monitored by English Language Development (ELD) teachers for two to three years to assure that they continue to make academic progress (WIDA, n.d.).

According to Echevarria et al. (2017), students learning an additional language acquire social language much faster than academic language. Academic language can take between seven to ten years to acquire (Echevarria et al., 2017). Students that are struggling to acquire academic English demonstrate this in their performance on the standardized tests and evaluations within the literacy curriculum. Students move through this school site literacy curriculum and become strong in their social language, but their struggles are seen in their acquisition of academic language. In third grade and up, students at this school struggle to score proficient or above on standardized tests in reading. Likewise, the data shows students stagnate within their English Language Proficiency (ELP) scores. In exploring how to close the achievement gap at this school, two things are evident: 1) There is a need for an organizational structure that explicitly outlines the support provided at each tier of support academically. 2) The staff is disheartened by the lack of academic progress and it fosters a deficit mindset (negative view towards the academic achievement gap), shifting the focus to the problem, rather than a solution.

In this literature review, I hope to examine what the research recommends for designing a framework of support for all students in each tier of support for MTSS. By

looking closely at the research by others, I hope to better understand the current reality and a pathway forward.

Significance to the Field of Education

This topic is of significant importance in the education field today. Even rural and remote schools are seeing increases in populations of MLLs. Administrative leaders, teachers, policymakers, and parent advocates need to have a plan to meet the learning needs of all students, including the MLLs in schools across the U.S. Helping students to acquire an additional language is no longer a skill left only to English Language Development teachers. Silos of support have to be broken down and collaboration is necessary to meet all academic needs in a class. All teachers need to be equipped to meet their students' needs in the regular education classroom or within the support services that schools provide. Instructional Specialists need to learn how to use the English Language Proficiency (ELP) data and the data from formative and summative reading assessments to influence and inform instructional placement and decision making. This question of how best to organize academic support for MLLs is of interest to several in the field of education. Research can provide schools with a better understanding of how to design an effective system of support for all students.

Personal Journey

My life as a reader and writer plays a particular role in the context of this study. I know all too well how hard it is to learn to read and the impact that it can have socially and emotionally. While in first grade, I recollect struggling to learn to read alongside the pace of my peers. Part of my struggle stemmed from my family life and socioeconomic challenges. My family had a one-wage-earner parent raising children without additional

support. My home life lacked stability both physically (we moved eight times before I graduated from high school), socioeconomically, and emotionally. The parent caregiving for my brother and I did not spend time helping us learn or practice reading with us. Instructional support was delegated to the school. These challenges created difficulty in academic achievement for me as a young child. I had an aunt who took an interest in me and recommended a book series to read. After I read through the series, I got hooked and my fiction reading took off. Eventually, I learned how to study. Teachers took an interest in me and helped me all along the way. A lack of motivation came to a head in high school when I chose to draw bubbles to decorate a standardized achievement test. The test got the attention of the administration and I was called into the school guidance office. Over a school year, I met with the guidance counselor weekly. After that year, the counselor suggested enrollment in the Postsecondary Enrollment Options program. Enrolling in this program helped me to take ownership of my learning. Later, when I began to attend college I found my niche in education, and my achievement blossomed into a career as a teacher.

Over sixteen years I served as an elementary educator working across the primary grade levels (kindergarten to third grade). My life circumstances fueled a desire for change, and this desire led me to teach for four years abroad in an international school in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The urban neighborhood in which I settled was located in the third-largest city in the world. The students in the international school were all multilingual. Some students spoke four or more languages. In this school, students rarely struggled academically despite the linguistic diversity.

Following living and working abroad, I eventually became situated in another urban school in the upper midwest. This school received a large influx of over 150 students that were Karen immigrant refugees entering the school from another local charter school. Many of these students had academic gaps that created a large spectrum of literacy and language needs at each grade level. The other majority of the school population spoke Hmong as a first or additional language.

It was here in this school I began working as a Title reading teacher. I experimented with different types of intervention to target support and came to see what worked and what did not for our MLLs. I found many of the students I worked with in Title were fluent readers and appeared to be at grade level in their reading, but they ended up not meeting the academic expectations on the standardized test in the state where my school is located. Many of these same students I observed were disengaged from reading and lacked the motivation to engage with literature. In addition, many of these struggling readers were identified as not making adequate language growth on their annual language test.

Many of the Karen students I worked with had arrived in the U.S. from war-torn countries between 2010-2015. Their story carried some similarities to the Hmong immigrant story. The Hmong came to the upper midwest from Thailand refugee camps in the 1970s. Their assistance in the Vietnam War caused them to be persecuted, and they had to escape through the jungles of Laos and cross the Mekong River to Thailand. Families escaped persecution for their involvement in fighting alongside American soldiers in the Vietnam War. The Karen families also fled persecution from Myanmar (formerly Burma) into Thailand refugee camps before arriving in the U.S.

Unlike the Karen, the Hmong families in the school are more diverse in the generational spread of arrival to the U.S. Some families are well established and speak limited to no Hmong in the home. They desire to preserve and pass down their heritage language, cultural identity, and customs while their children get a quality education. Some families speak solely Hmong in the home, and the last category is families that speak a mixture of Hmong and English in the home. All of the families value education and have high hopes for their children's future.

During the school's groundbreaking ceremony on January 21, 2021, Joe Nathan (a charter school advocate) shared the story of this upper midwest charter school's beginning. In 1999, parents within the Hmong community of this upper midwest state approached the administration at a local public school. One-third of the school population were Hmong, and they had learned that a local school district was going to receive funding specific for students who did not speak English as their first language. The families shared with the administrator at the time that there was no individual in the school who was able to speak Hmong to help communicate with the families if they called the school. They requested a small portion of the funding the district would receive to go towards the provision of a bilingual English and Hmong interpreter who could provide support for parents. They also asked for an even smaller amount to be used towards after-school instruction for the parents in English so they would be able to communicate with school personnel. The administrator turned down these two requests, and as a result, this midwest charter school was born (Vang, 2021).

The influx of Karen students in 2015 raised to the forefront the organizational need for a multi-tiered system of support that would help all of the students. This began a

new structural layout within the school. The school restructured with a central leadership team with representation out in each area of the school. This shuffling of the systems in the school and the way the structure ran involved strategic changes at the school leadership level for finding issues within the school. Physical resources in the form of supplemental curriculums and tools were gathered in one location. A system of communication to the Executive Director took place where root issues could be explored more thoroughly.

The restructuring also involved the addition of staff in every grade level team. Every team from kindergarten to fifth grade included a General Education (Gen Ed), English Language Development (ELD), and Title Reading (Title) teacher. In addition, each grade level had two Cultural Specialists (CS) who might be considered "paraprofessionals" in other school districts, functioning as language experts for the two predominant languages in the school. The grade-level teams were placed together without a lot of guidance in how support would occur. There were several years of underqualified assistant directors that differed in their visions for the school from the executive director. The rollout of this structure came amid staff turnover at the administrative level.

Amidst these complexities, the school also faced staffing changes every year in the teaching staff. These changes impacted the dynamics of the school and affected all grade levels. Only 16 out of 64 staff members have remained at the school since 2015. Of those, only 11 are teachers. This staffing turnover has had wide implications on students and the education that they receive in their grade-level classrooms. Newer teachers do not always come with the expertise or knowledge to meet the academic demands, and the

teachers that remain have complacency towards the ability to meet the academic needs when each year has been an uphill journey.

The staff naturally went through differing levels of collaboration as teams were recreated and people left. This roll-over in staff created pockets of new teachers on grade level teams which created a need to onboard, train, and prepare the new staff to tackle the learning needs each year. Initiatives begun by those who left fell by the wayside, byproducts of fragmentation and change. The Executive Director expected the leadership team as well as other staff to carry out all the initiatives in the school. This level of responsibility placed high amounts of pressure and burden on already stressed and strained teachers.

In addition to these challenges, the school is considered a schoolwide title school. To qualify for this classification, a majority of the student body must receive free and reduced lunch due to economic constraints. This means that a majority of the student population is living below the median income for families in the state where the school is located. To be considered a schoolwide Title program, “at least 40% of students need to be receiving free or reduced-price lunch” (Minnesota Department of Education MDE, n.d.). Our school is classified as an urban school with high poverty. Students often lack the funding for meeting medical care and personal needs like clothing appropriate for winter weather.

In 2019-2020, a new administrator was found who was fully credentialed and had many years of expertise as a school principal. He was hired and began the process of exploring the structures already in place within the school as well as the core beliefs among the staff. He held an open-door policy and held high standards for professionalism

and expertise by the grade-level teachers to carry out the curricular responsibilities within the school. He began the long-needed foundational work among the staff and leaders within the school to alter a compliance-based structure to make it more collaborative.

By the 2020-2021 school year, the school now had ample personnel and curricular resources. However, the mixture of so many levels of expertise and vast stores of curricular, supplementary, and personnel resources makes the navigation of these resources complex. Although we have the personnel capacity and adequate resources, the impact on student academic achievement has still been minimal due to the lack of structure to carry out a unified effort within the school. The flat-line growth pre-pandemic from COVID-19 (spring 2020 into the 2021 school year) raised questions for me on how a school should structure supports to make the most academic gains for students.

In the spring of 2020, I was asked to take the position of Instructional Coach for the following school year. This new role allowed me to work with the new incoming teachers as well as the kindergarten to third-grade level teams in their weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). A big part of my role in the 2020-2021 school year was to explore a more systemized approach to our intervention support starting first in the Gen Ed classroom to organize materials and personnel resources into a framework of support.

The purpose of this project is to research Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) frameworks specific for MLL populations in an urban charter school located in a metropolitan area in the upper midwest. MTSS is defined as what we (educators and specialists) do to support the behavioral and academic needs of students by building on

student strengths and following the data with increasing precision of data analysis and instructional match to personalize learning for each student. The research question to explore in this project is: *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework for MLLs that can inform reading instruction?*

Summary

The state of how educators, administrators, and professionals work to close the achievement gap between minority and nonminority students is essential moving forward as a nation. The world is more globalized than it has ever been. Language is an asset for students to bring into their future profession as well as a strong cultural heritage. My past links me to the students I serve and I desire the very best for them. There has been so much change and transition for our students to endure, now is the time to build stability and engage in addressing this academic issue that has remained active in the school. The question: *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) in order to inform reading instruction?* will be explored through the research in the next chapter.

In Chapter Two, I explore the theoretical framework from which I approached this research from both the literacy lens and the educational theory. Next, I define MTSS at each tier of support and a synthesis of the support models in research. The literature review also explores cultural responsiveness within a support framework. In addition, the review of the literature examines what has been shared about assessment practices, teacher professional preparation, the importance of quality core instruction, and the role each plays in MTSS. Finally, Chapter Two concludes with what the literature recommended from early intervention studies in foundational skills.

In Chapter Three, I outline the project created in response to the research. The project consists of three large-group professional development sessions, the research paradigm from adult learning theory, and I provide a project overview. The overview includes a description of the project, the setting, and participants for the project, timeline, and how assessment of the project will take place.

In the conclusion, Chapter Four, I share a reflection of the project process. I start by sharing the major learnings. Then, I revisit the literature review highlighting sections that were critical to the project development. I outline the policy implications, limitations to the project, future recommendations, and suggestions for further research. After that, I share the professional impact of the project. In the end, I provide a summarizing conclusion to the paper.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are defined as what teachers do to support the behavioral and academic needs of students. It involves the use of student data to both target and match instruction for each student. Thus, customizing instruction to each group of students to either close learning gaps or extend learning. Hannigan and Hannigan (2021) shared that MTSS is a framework of support with the purpose to align academic and social well-being resources in a school. Response to Intervention (RTI) and MTSS are synonymous with each other (Hannigan & Hannigan, 2021). In both, schools are providing interventions or extensions to address the academic or social-emotional needs of the students (Buffum et al., 2018; Hannigan & Hannigan, 2021).

The model of RTI does what its name indicates, as it ***R****esponds* ***t****o* the assessment data provided by the universal screeners given to all students within the general education classroom, by informing the ***I****nterventions* the teacher will implement. The teacher then customizes high-quality instruction and behavioral routines which now incorporate the specific learning and behavioral supports that their students need. Another description of RTI by Williams and Hierck, (2015) were the teacher's activities like delivery of content, decisions based on assessment data, and behavioral routines that influence the education students receive. Williams and Hierck (2015) also described RTI as the day in and day out processes that teachers take part in, such as how a teacher plans the academic day, collaboration amongst a grade-level team, and ways of communicating. These tasks and processes do not work in isolation from the primary goals within the classroom. Rather,

they are intricately connected to the work that takes place in a professional learning community (Buffum et al., 2018; Williams & Hierck, 2015).

Chapter Two synthesizes current research to answer the question: *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) to inform reading instruction?* In this chapter, the literature was reviewed for themes in the research tied to building a framework of support for MLLs specifically tied to literacy. First, the theory that impacted this research specific to the diverse learning needs represented across this nation will be reviewed. An overview of MTSS at each tier of support follows along with current models that are recommended in the research for MLLs. Then, the literature reviewed cultural responsiveness. Next, the assessment practices that laid the foundation to supporting MTSS are explored. From there, the literature reviewed explored themes within teacher professional development, quality core instruction, and early intervention studies specific to foundational literacy skills.

Theoretical Underpinnings

First, as a white, urban teacher, I understand that students of other racial backgrounds and cultural experiences than my own shape them uniquely and differently than my experiences in education. Having grown up in the same urban community as these youth and having some similar socio-economic hardships as a child provides me with a shared perspective in certain aspects. It is recognized that these shared experiences are limited due to not being biliterate nor having to experience the same challenges that students have faced. My racial, cultural and linguistic background differs and is aligned with the majority population within this midwest state. Although I come from a different

cultural background, diverse perspectives are valued. I attempt to position myself with humble respect towards others in the predominant cultures within the school community where I serve.

The theory that impacted this research is established in two frames of reference. The first being the way reading is viewed. My views are aligned to the intricate development of reading in the Cognitive Model of reading development (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). The second frame of reference is the view towards language and literacy learning, specifically when working with students that have multilingual backgrounds.

Cognitive Model for Reading

One way to interpret the pathway a learner takes to comprehend while reading is through the Cognitive Model for reading (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). In this model, the act of reading is divided into three main pathways Figure 1: automatic word recognition, oral language comprehension, and strategic knowledge. These three main pathways combine to aid in students' ability to comprehend the written word. Within each main pathway, there are subcategories of skills that are necessary for development to read (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). This model has similarities to the Simple View of Reading (Farrell et al., 2019). In the Simple View of Reading model Farrell et al. (2019) explained how a formula is used to show the two main reading components: word recognition and language comprehension to produce the product reading comprehension (word recognition WR x language comprehension LC = reading comprehension RC). This model of reading is summarized in Figure 2 below adapted from Farrell et al. (2019). The model centered around if reading breaks down in one of these pathways, it affects the ability to access comprehension (Farrell et al., 2019).

Figure 1

The Cognitive Model of Reading Development

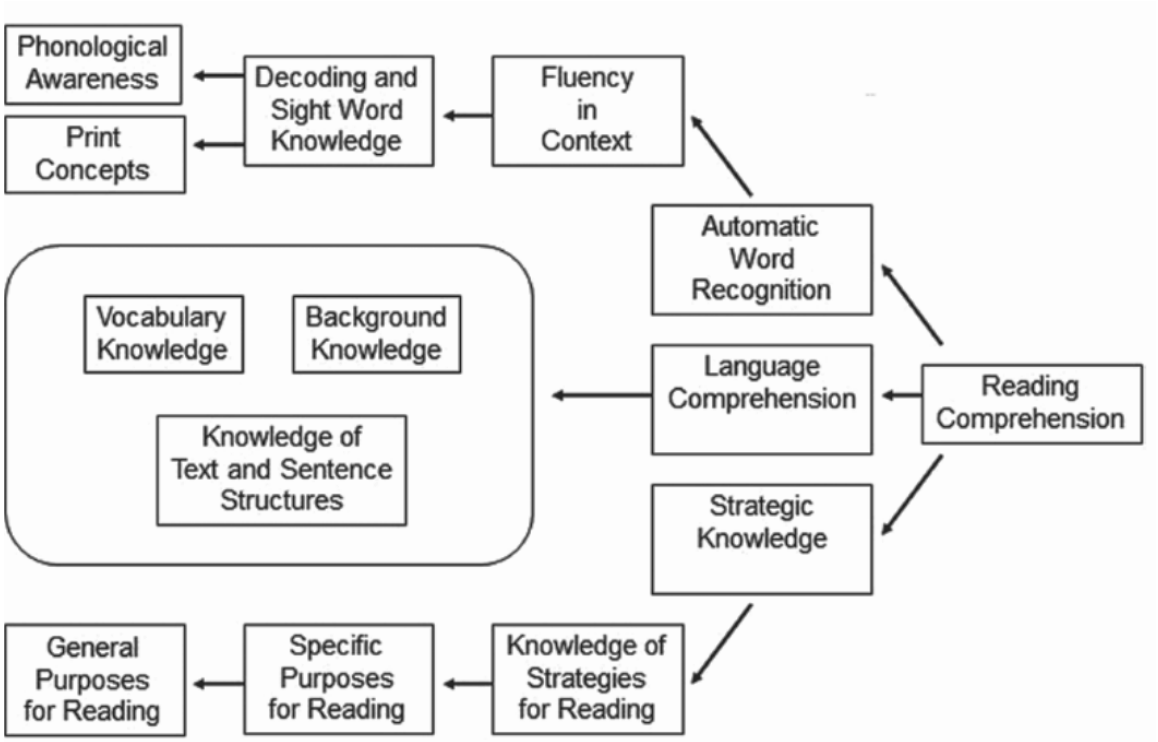
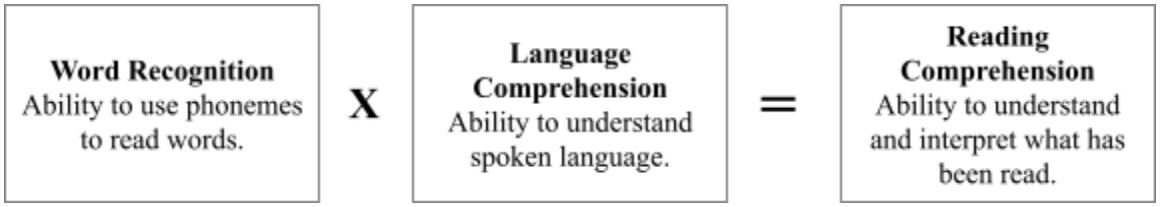


Figure 2

The Simple View of Reading Model



Automatic Word Recognition. McKenna and Stahl (2015) described within the first pathway, word recognition, there are several complex tasks that students have to develop in order to read. Print concepts, phonological awareness, decoding, sight word development, and fluency are all a part of this process of automatic word recognition (McKenna & Stahl, 2015; Farrell et al., 2019; Achieve the Core, n.d.). Print concepts

include the location of the front or back of a book, that there are letters that group together to make words, and that words are different from pictures, as well as reading left to right. In the area of phonological awareness, these are the sounds of reading. Being aware that a letter makes a sound and being able to manipulate the sounds. Decoding encompasses the ability to take the individual letters and associate them with sounds to produce a word. Sight words are also known as high-frequency words and include both words that can be sounded out and words that do not follow the typical sounds in English. Last, all of these combine to produce fluent word, sentence, and text reading (Achieve the Core, n.d.; Farrell et al., 2019; McKenna & Stahl, 2015; Stahl, 1990).

Oral Language Comprehension. Beyond the intricate process of reading mentioned above is the second pathway, oral language comprehension. This path encompasses the areas of vocabulary, background knowledge, grammar, and understanding of text structure (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). Farrell et al. (2019) described this pathway as Language Comprehension in the Simple View of Reading.

According to Echevarria et al. (2017), there are two kinds of vocabulary that children develop. One is used for social language while the other is academic vocabulary or the words used specifically in school. Echevarria et al. (2017) described three main types of academic vocabulary: content vocabulary, general academic vocabulary, and word parts. Content vocabulary includes words that are specific to a particular subject. General academic vocabulary is words that could be used across subjects like the word value in math, language arts, or art class would have varying meanings attached to it. The last academic vocabulary type, word parts, includes base words (roots) and affixes (prefixes/suffixes). It is this category of academic vocabulary that helps MLLs learn new

words through understanding what the parts of the words mean (Echevarria et al., 2017).

Echevarria et al. (2017) described background knowledge as the information that children bring with them to the learning at hand. It could include experiences in their personal lives or their academic lives. It also includes prior knowledge where they have experience with a specific topic to tie into the learning (Echevarria et al., 2017). McKenna and Stahl (2015) referenced grammar as part of this pathway and it includes the way language is structured and organized. The last part of this pathway is understanding text structure; this is how the reader tracks the format of the text being read (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). As readers, the way one approaches a nonfiction text would be different from a fiction text. Likewise, the way one reads this research paper versus a recipe book is different as well.

Strategic Knowledge. In the last pathway described by McKenna and Stahl (2015), strategic knowledge, students develop general and specific purposes for reading. This element of reading also deals with knowledge and the application of strategies to use while reading (McKenna & Stahl, 2015). The orchestration of these three complex pathways synthesizes to provide the ability to comprehend a passage a student is reading. Within the Simple View of Reading, this last pathway is the solution to the reading equation of decoding and language comprehension working together to aid a student to comprehend what they are reading (Farrell et al., 2019).

Alongside this understanding of reading development, there are two main theories that frame the lens of language and reading. According to Tracey and Morrow (2017), the two theories fall under the umbrella of constructivism and align with Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development and Lev Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism. These

theories specifically fall within the way learning is socially constructed specific to literacy. Tracey and Morrow (2017) shared, “Instructional practices based on Constructivism are highly appropriate to use with students for whom English is a second language” (p. 78).

Sociolinguistic and Socio-Cultural Theory

According to Tracey and Morrow (2017), Sociolinguistics covers many theories that include social interaction at the core of learning. Another theoretical lens that impacts this research is Socio-Cultural Theory. Similar to Sociolinguistic theory, Tracey and Morrow (2017) described Socio-Cultural theory centering around the way language is socially created. This theory highlights how the culture in which one lives influences the people, and they, in turn, impact the culture (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). With regards to literacy and education, Tracey and Morrow (2017) shared that Socio-Cultural theory examines the link to conditions within the contexts of social and institutional places.

Socio-Cultural theory explores the application of social networks in learning. Moll (2014) described this social nature of learning comparatively to using others' knowledge and skills within your social network to make a repair on your home. When one has a need or lack in their own knowledge, they find someone with the skills to contribute to where they lack (Moll, 2014). For example, if your washing machine were to quit working and you had a neighbor who happened to have the knowledge and skill to help fix it, you would call upon your social network for the repair versus paying a stranger. The specialized skill is the funds of knowledge being used. When applied to education, Moll (2014) described the knowledge that students bring from their contexts as an avenue to expand the classroom toolkit by knowing the students better and the

assets they bring to their education from their home communities. Ultimately, Moll (2014) shared it encourages a tighter bond between the students' home context and their school context so the student is not needing to switch their cultural understanding and values between an environment that is centered around a more American way of interrelating versus their way of interrelating.

How an educator positions themself toward language acquisition impacts the learner through the perspectives the educator took (consciously or unconsciously). Haas and Brown (2019) shared,

> All individuals hold implicit biases, and a key to acting as a culturally sustaining educator is understanding one's own biases with the idea that recognizing these biases in one's self allows us to reduce the impact of these biases on the children and families we serve. (p. 43)

An asset-based perspective views the child as bringing social, cultural, and linguistic resources into the classroom to build upon within the context of learning (Haas & Brown, 2019). A deficit mindset positions the teacher as seeing the student as low or lacking the ability to carry out the task at hand (Flores et al., 2015). Rather than view the child in this deficit mindset, teachers need to reverse their thinking and consider an asset mindset to what the student brings to their learning, navigating two languages or more at once (Flores et al., 2015; Haas & Brown, 2019). The development of secondary language proficiency is highly complex and requires awareness of the individuality of the student including their personality and interests (Haas & Brown, 2019).

Haas and Brown (2019) challenged that when addressing academic needs teachers need to examine the biases and assumptions that they hold and bring into the classroom

that forms assumptions of the students they serve. Flores et al. (2015) shared that students that are emergent bilingual learners, struggling to move beyond the middle ranges of English Language Proficiency (ELP), may appear to be relatively unchanging in their growth, but they are accessing a multifaceted linguistic approach to their lives that can be missed by educators with a deficit mindset. Flores et al. (2015) shared that this negative position the educator has about language and viewing a student as a long-term English learner (LTEL) can have a highly negative impact on the learner. Their study explored how students labeled in this way viewed themselves, and how the LTEL label affected their ethnic identity. The authors Flores et al. (2015) also explored how the posturing towards language in this label is in effect racially aggressive or biased behavior towards those that are multilingual because it does not take into consideration the way students flexibly use language. The authors expressed that changing the mindset from viewing students as lacking language, to viewing the myriad ways the students use language in complex manner postures an acceptance of the student's full linguistic ability to demonstrate understanding (Flores et al, 2015).

Freire (2000), a Brazilian educator and philosopher who advocated for critical pedagogy, wrote of this deficit mindset as essentially racial aggression in the form of cultural invasion by the dominant culture. Friere (2000) stated, "the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression" (p. 152). Connecting this back to what was shared by Flores et al. (2015) the expectation of the linguistic demonstration of knowledge being in only English and not in the linguistic languages of the student makes

demonstrated understanding limited to the language of the dominant culture. The authors Flores et al. (2015) argued that "the label [LTEL] can be understood as a racial project that serves to perpetuate white supremacy through the marginalization of the language practices of communities of color" (p. 113).

Brown and DooLittle (2008) shared that teachers that view language and MLLs with a deficit lens reference students in a way that misses the many cultural and linguistic diverse ways that they engage in literacy in their world. The theoretical view of both reading and the way students who are MLLs learn aids in creating a lens through which teachers view the needs of MLLs in designing supports. The position one takes towards language and literacy impacts the way the teacher perceives the differentiated needs within a system of support. In this next section, the literature revealed clearer definitions of MTSS at each tier and the support models needed to provide MLLs equitable opportunities for support.

Multi-Tiered System of Support

According to Sugai and Horner (2009), the history of RTI (also known as MTSS) is set in 2004 when President Bush signed a law for safeguards for students with disabilities. These safeguards allowed for access to Special Education (SPED) services to meet the unique educational needs of students. The goal according to Sugai & Horner (2009) was to improve alignment between No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). The authors shared that the term RTI was not used in IDEA, but it was closely linked to the initiatives set forth by this law (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

Albers and Martinez (2015) shared that MTSS is supportive of the academic

intervention needs that students with limited English proficiency might have. The goal of a system of support is to both identify and meet the needs of students to ensure all students receive equitable access to high-quality inclusive learning opportunities. Similarly, Haas and Brown (2019) shared, "When an entire group of students with similar instructional needs is not meeting grade-level benchmarks, it is not an individual student problem, but rather an instructional problem" (p. 28). They shared that schools should be aware of the instructional quality for MLLs and compare them to "true peers" or students that have similar cultural and linguistic experiences and backgrounds (Haas & Brown, 2019).

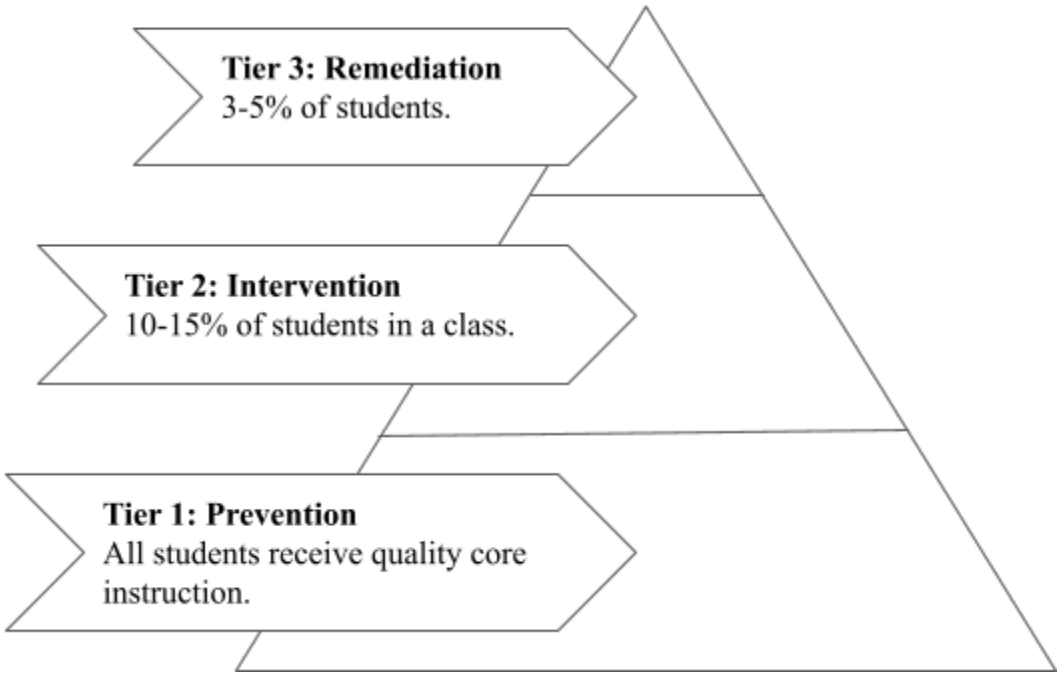
Albers and Martinez (2015), Haas and Brown (2019), Hannigan and Hannigan (2021), Buffum et al. (2018), and the Minnesota Center for Reading Research (2019) share the typical triangle (see Figure 3) characterization of RTI and MTSS as having three tiers. Tier one, the bottom level of the triangle shape, involves all students within the core curriculum receiving quality instruction. Tier two is the middle level and it normally is only 10-15% of the population in a classroom that needs intervention. The top layer, tier three, may be associated with Special Education (SPED) but does not necessarily mean instruction is with a SPED teacher, rather it encompasses 3% of all students and would be the tier for remediation and smaller group sizes with increased time per week with a specialist.

MTSS at Tier One

At tier one, Buffam et al. (2018) described two groups within the school responsible at this tier: teacher teams and schoolwide teams. Buffam et al. (2018) shared that teacher teams are responsible to know the necessary standards that help students

Figure 3

Response to Intervention Triangle



master the content and skills for their grade level or course. The authors also shared that creating a map for how students master these identified standards, as well as the use of assessment information (formative and summative), is foundational to instruction at tier one. Mapping out these necessary standards helps to identify students needing support in tier two (intervention) and assures their needs are met in a timely way through a school's professional learning community structure and use of data to inform instruction (Buffam et al., 2018; Williams & Hierck, 2015). With MLs, Haas and Brown (2019) shared that "all instruction be aligned to EL [ML] students' level of language proficiency and connect to their cultural and experiential backgrounds" (p. 29).

Buffam et al. (2018) also described this tier as the prevention level. Similarly, Haas and Brown (2019) shared that core instruction is crucial at this tier and benefits about 80% of students. Albers and Martinez (2015) explained this tier is connected with

the core curriculum and most students (85-90%) should have their needs met through high-quality instruction in the core curriculum. Haas and Brown (2019) shared that "MTSS begins at Tier 1 with general education classrooms that utilize evidence-based instructional practices and are culturally and linguistically responsive, inviting every student to engage in meaningful, rewarding learning in a caring and nurturing environment" (pp. 29-30). Albers and Martinez (2015) described high-quality core reading curriculum as including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. They also shared that at this tier "all teachers collect frequent formative assessment data (e.g., curriculum-based measurement) to monitor students' academic progress and modify instruction/intervention accordingly" (Albers & Martinez, 2015). Beyond the numbers-related data, Haas and Brown (2019) recommended more unique considerations like getting to know the students specifically related to "social-contextual factors and backgrounds" (p. 31). They also recommend teachers knowing the levels of language proficiency represented in their classrooms (Haas & Brown, 2019).

Buffam et al. (2018) described at this level there is a responsibility across the school as a whole (schoolwide team) to know the most important standards that need to be taught, provide access to the grade-level curriculum, and monitor the learning of the standards through universal screening. In addition, Buffam et al. (2018) described curricular planning time for alignment with other grade levels and coordination with staff across the school as needed. Buffam et al. (2018) shared that the schoolwide teams should have universal screening assessment tools to identify students that did not master essential learning and will need support either in the form of "preventions" (intervention at tier one), intervention (tier two), or remediation (tier three).

Data-based decision making from universal and progress monitoring sits as the foundation for support in MTSS (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Bailey et al., 2020; Brown & DoLittle, 2008; Dexter et al., n.d.; Haas & Brown, 2019; Hughes, n.d.; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010; United States Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). Buffum et al. (2018) also recommended schoolwide teams provide time in the master schedule for instruction in the core subject to occur without interruption by interventions. This uninterrupted core time Buffum et al. (2018) shared assures students do not miss core instruction and then fall further behind.

MTSS at Tier Two

Tier two is where students receive more time and support with those key standards taught at tier one (Buffum et al., 2018). These authors described the goal of this tier as to figure out the cause of why a student is falling behind and provide support so the student can master the essential standards. In tier one, Buffum et al. (2018) described the teacher teams and school team roles.

At the teacher team level, a grade-level team's responsibilities are to design and lead supplemental interventions, screen for skills needed to access new instruction, monitor the progress of students receiving supplemental supports, and provide extensions for students that have already mastered content (Buffum et al., 2018). While the teacher teams provide this support, Buffum et al. (2018) described schoolwide teams' responsibilities as being to assure that there is time for supplemental intervention to take place, and assure there is a process for identification of students that need additional help. They described this process as proactively providing universal screening to assure no

student is missed, measuring progress in the assessments with the grade level goal in mind, and having a process for staff referrals (Buffum et al., 2018). The planning and implementation of the interventions and coordination for students needing these supports take place across the school with a team of specialists in different spheres of the school (Buffum et al., 2018). Albers and Martinez (2015) shared that besides quality core instruction and intervention fidelity other critical components of RTI are having "universal screening and progress monitoring procedures that help educators make data-informed decisions" and "a process for determining movement between intervention tiers and corresponding supplemental interventions" (p. 31).

Haas and Brown (2019) described tier two as often including a double dose of instruction where the instruction that occurred in tier one is again delivered, but the student is monitored closely to show that they are growing with progress monitoring tools. The authors Haas and Brown (2019) also shared that at times students may be sent to a problem-solving team to plan the right supports and assure progress is monitored with the correct tools. Albers and Martinez (2015) shared that "most ELLs [MLLs] require at least a Tier 2 level of support from the beginning to gain the necessary Academic English to be successful in school" (p. 26).

MTSS at Tier Three

Tier three falls primarily as a tier supported across the school with the school's leadership team looking at the big picture view of the needs of the school as a whole (Buffum, 2018). Tier three may or may not be with a Special Education teacher, but often it includes a specialist service provider like a Title 1 Teacher, a Reading Teacher, or other related service provider (Brown & DooLittle, 2008). Buffum et al. (2018) shared that

identifying students for this intensive support should be gathered through the universal screening process and started immediately or even with the previous year data being assessed in the spring of the previous year to have a clear support picture of the upcoming year.

Another role of the schoolwide team was to have an intervention team that coordinates and leads out support within tier three, aligns resources based on the needs of the student with a collaborative approach, create a systemized way to refer students to a problem-solving team that is time-efficient, and assess the effectiveness of the interventions (Buffum, 2018). Buffum et al. (2018) shared that within the intervention team that provides support at this tier their role is to determine the needs specifically and to carry out and monitor support at this level. They also shared that the level of intensity of the intervention and if special education is required is made within this team (Buffum et al., 2018).

Although RTI can identify students that fit the special education category, Haas and Brown (2019) warned that

> Some systems lacking an understanding of students' backgrounds, initially attempt to support struggling EL [ML] students by placing them into special education programs, even when eligibility teams do not have sufficient data to suggest an intrinsic disability. Providing a struggling EL student with intensive, small-group support through special education may seem a reasonable form of catch-all intervention, but in reality this practice is rarely effective. It also results in segregating EL students from necessary general education instruction, which may violate their civil rights. (p. 28-29)

Buffum et al. (2018) shared that educators need to be careful not to view RTI as a system to identify students for special education support. This is only a secondary benefit of a structured system of support (Buffum et al., 2018).

Support Models

Several different kinds of models can be utilized for MTSS. Problem-solving models, functional assessment models, standard protocol models, and hybridized or blended models (VanDerHeyden, n.d.). Universal features to models for support included quality core instruction including systematic and explicit literacy instruction, ongoing professional development for teachers, schoolwide academic and behavioral systems of prevention and intervention, data-based decision making through the use of universal screeners, and progress monitoring tools for students both in the core classroom and in intervention groups, ways to measure fidelity of instruction in interventions, criteria for movement within the instructional support tiers and special education eligibility (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Buffum et al., 2018; Bursuck et al., 2004; Haas & Brown, 2019; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2010; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2014; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015).

MTSS also supported the identification process for remediation in SPED, and a system should influence the professional development focus for teachers to carry out such support. (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Green et al., 2013; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010; Sugai & Horner, 2009). With preventative models for MTSS, it is necessary to have a research-validated reading curriculum, differentiated instructional supports, data collection systems with clear decisions for when supports are needed, and

professional development tied to practices within the classroom (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Bursuck et al., 2004).

With the unique needs represented in education for MLLs, an intermixing of two models are recommended by Haas and Brown (2019): a standard treatment protocol or a problem-solving model combined approach. According to VanDerHeyden (n.d.), a standard treatment protocol model included having planned research-based interventions for every child that meets the criteria for support and interventions that are matched to student needs based on data and not differentiated or designed for students based on their needs. Rather, every student receives the same treatment of intervention (VanDerHeyden, n.d.). A problem-solving model uses data as well, but the intervention can be aligned to the student. If students are not making progress with an intervention, the data team evaluates the progress of the student and they may make enhancements to the intervention to meet the varied needs of the MLL (Haas & Brown, 2019; Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

Prevention Model. According to Bursuck et al. (2004), a prevention model existed to address student reading struggles at the first moment they are noticed. This model has systemized and explicit instruction in the five key literary pillars: phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary instruction, and comprehension (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Bursuck et al., 2004). Differentiation is part of this model with clear data collection and indicators for decision making (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Buffum et al., 2018; Haas & Brown, 2019; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019). Teachers are provided support that is job-embedded to improve core instruction (Bursuck et al., 2004). With a model that is preventative, the focus is not only on those

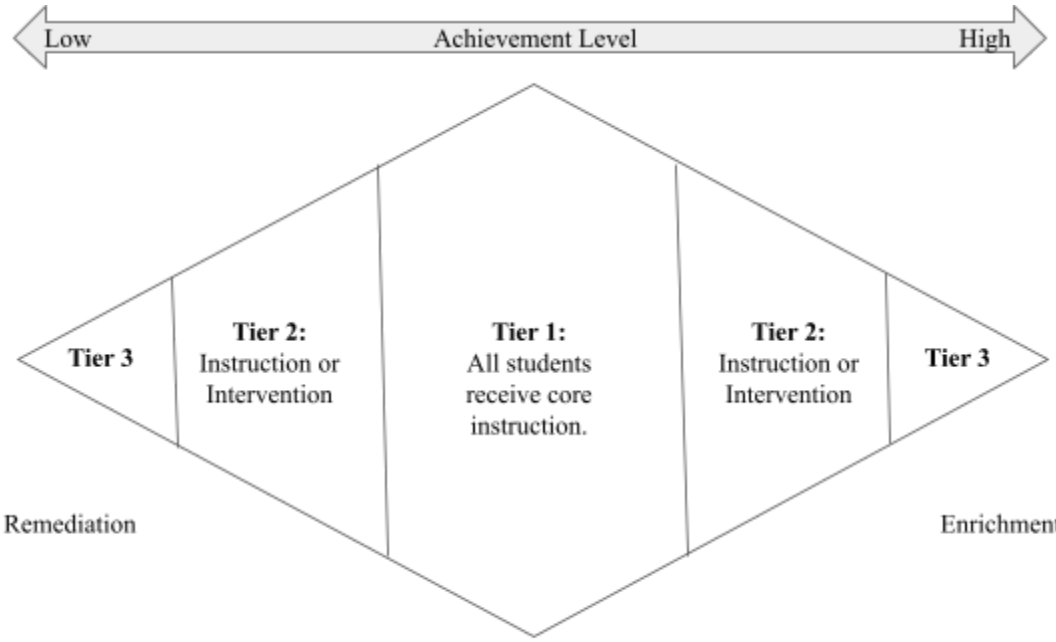
that need intervention, rather it includes those that may need enrichment opportunities too (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Buffum et al., 2018; Green et al., 2013).

Diamond Model. One MTSS support model that encompasses gifted and talented programs has emerged and places the typical RTI triangle of support on its side in the shape of a diamond or two triangles put together (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Green et al., 2012). See Figure 4, adapted from Albers and Martinez (2015). Targeted instruction and intervention are at either end of the diamond shape with special education eligibility on one end of the spectrum and gifted and talented education (GATE) on the other end. Represented in this diamond model shape is a range of student needs. Academic remediation is represented on the left end of the diamond to GATE on the opposite end. Tier one of a typical RTI triangle sits in the center of the diamond where most students fall and tier two is on either side of the center with the idea that intervention or further instruction/extension occurs at either end of a spectrum (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Green et al., 2013). Buffum et al. (2018) recommended having time for targeted support built into the master schedule so both interventions and extensions can be provided without interrupting the core instruction block of time.

Many times MLLs are not represented in GATE programs. To identify students Harris et al. (2007) suggested using multiple data sources besides universal screening data including caregiver reports and assessments in their first language (L1). In other literature, Callahan (2005) shared how the use of a portfolio of student work can help identify students. They also suggested using an authentic assessment that incorporates the student's language.

Figure 4

The Diamond Model



Adapted from The RTI model for schoolwide reform figure (Albers & Martinez, 2015, p. 30)

The National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) recommended that the essential components of MTSS include the schoolwide response to prevent students from falling below grade-level expectations both in academics and behavior. The assessment screening takes place at least three times a year and progress monitoring of data is closely monitored (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Bailey et al., 2020; Brown & DoLittle, 2008; Dexter et al., n.d.; Haas & Brown, 2019; Hughes, n.d.; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010; United States Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). Likewise, decisions for further support or enrichment were made with data. Movement within the tiers of support took place with close analysis of the data. The structure also allowed for students that have other issues impacting their learning to be identified (National Center on Response to Intervention,

2010).

Through exploration of the research, Haas and Brown (2019) shared it is evident that teachers need training to understand the differences between language acquisition versus disabilities. In addition, teachers need to know the different language proficiencies of students they are teaching to plan appropriate instruction (Brown & Dolittle, 2008). Brown and Dolittle (2008) stated, "If several true peers are struggling, this is an indication that the instruction is less than optimal for that group of students" (p. 68). This means that if the data shows that a majority of students are struggling in the class, the instructional support must be examined (Haas & Brown, 2019). Establishing a model for a school's approach to meet the multidimensional needs of the students is necessary as schools begin to form a framework of support (Albers & Martinez, 2015). In the next section, the literature explored cultural responsiveness more in-depth when working with MLLs and how views of language impact a child's learning.

Cultural Responsiveness

Within support models, educators need to be culturally sensitive to students and the assets they bring to their language education (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Haas & Brown, 2019; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2020; U.S. Office of Special Education, 2018). Ladson-Billings (2009) included culturally relevant teaching as the connection to students' cultures within the context of the classroom. In effect, the use of a students' culture in the classroom helped students to identify themselves in the school context (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Haas and Brown (2019) shared how the ability to speak multiple languages does not imply that they have a cognitive inability to learn or grow, rather the involvement of the students' language in the classroom can promote literacy

development. Brown and Doolittle (2008) clearly articulated that “a child’s language and culture are never viewed as liabilities, but rather as strengths upon which to build an education” (p. 67). Similarly, teachers should think of a student’s language as an asset and a resource for learning (Flores et al., 2015). Assumptions that the home environment is to blame for linguistic challenges are the opposite of an asset approach (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; United States Office of Special Education, 2015, 2018, 2020; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). According to the U.S. Office of Special Education (2020), Culturally Responsive teaching is “based on the understanding that all learning is shaped by the specific sociocultural context in which it occurs (eg. home, community, school) and involves integrating students’ cultural and linguistic knowledge into the learning process” (p. 5).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)

Ladson-Billings (1995) explored how the teacher positions themself towards the student’s culture or is culturally responsive to their students. Ladson-Billings (1995) shared this topic in a study of several teacher’s ways of interacting with students in a diverse school setting. She found that three primary areas were noted in teachers' approaches. The teacher’s concept of themself in relation to others was the first area. Teachers that were successful with students, held the values that all students were capable of success. Another area Ladson-Billings (1995) found was in social relationships. There were fluid teacher-student relationships and connections to all students. Strong collaborative learning communities were developed within the classrooms observed. Last, Ladson-Billings (1995) shared the concept of knowledge being shared rather than coming only from the teacher. Vang (2005) supports this idea of cooperative learning

when he shared about how Hmong social customs outside of the classroom involved daily activities conducted in small groups rather than in an individualistic manner. Ladson-Billings (1995) shared that the teacher provided scaffolded learning and encouraged critical thinking and assessments allowed for multiple ways of showing student understanding.

In a Tedx Talks video, Emdin (2012) shared Reality Pedagogy. Taking Ladson-Billings CRP one step further, Emdin encouraged the incorporation of spaces within the classroom for students to have a voice and provision to express themselves based on their lived and shared experiences. He encouraged the empowerment of students to create "cogenerative dialogues" where students can critique the teacher and the use of co-teaching to encourage the student to have experienced being the teacher. He suggested bringing the ways students communicate outside of the classroom into the classroom and focus on the immediate cultural expression of the students by exploring their perceptions. He placed the learning of content last due to how without connection teachers are unable to teach the content and thus it should be last in the equation of learning (Edmin, 2012).

Multilingual Learner Considerations

To understand the predominant students in the school where the researcher worked, information from their cultural perspective was sought. Originally Duffy (2000) shared that the Hmong had a written language of their own and it was said to have been lost as the Hmong were driven out of China in the 19th century during the unrest between the Chinese and Hmong. As a people group, Duffy (2000) shared they worked in more agrarian areas and the written language was not passed down from each generation. Duffy (2000) went on to share how the Hmong eventually ended up in Laos, and it was

there they were excluded from access to education due to geography and government oppression. Later in the 1950s, missionaries created a new written language based on the Roman alphabet (Duffy, 2000).

In a study conducted with four Hmong elders, Ngo (2017) interviewed and recorded translations of the leaders to synthesize perceptions surrounding losses experienced by Hmong families related to education. Families desired cultural representation within the curriculum their students learned (Ngo, 20017; Vang, 2005). Having a culturally-rooted identity to being Hmong both linguistically and bilingually was viewed positively in the students' connection to their families and their heritage language, and the interviews Ngo (2017) uncovered how the elders found Hmong youth lacking proficiency in both Hmong and English causing struggle within the home and school and resulting in a loss of identity for the child. The perspective shared was that the youth struggled to acculturate to being Hmong and did not identify as being fully American (Ngo, 2017). Flores et al. (2015) shared how language assimilation affects identity and the resistance to assimilate can be "manifested through academic disengagement in favor of social engagement" (p. 126). Similarly, Haas and Brown (2019) shared how "students from a diverse background may feel alienated from school because they are unsure that their interpersonal communication has yielded an understanding of their cultural identity" (p. 43). Ngo (2017) shared that the cultural disconnection of Hmong students left the students unable to move between the two domains of their lives (school and home). Ngo (2017) shared that families wanted their children to be taught the Hmong history, cultural understanding, and the story of how they came to the United States. The leaders felt that this teaching would strengthen the

family bond. Ngo (2017) shared how the Hmong elders felt the youth had lost their cultural identity of communal focus to the more individualistic focus of American culture.

In a different study, Vue and Rodriguez (2018) conducted a secondary analysis of data from the Minnesota Department of Education, Health, Human Services, and Public Safety assessment. The study of the assessment data compared Hmong students with other minority and nonminority student groups in Minnesota. Significant differences were seen for Hmong students in areas of positive identity, empowerment, and family/community support (Vue & Rodriguez, 2018).

Xiong et al. (2019) examined parental involvement in Hmong student's academics. They discovered that female Hmong students had more parental involvement than male students and that children with smaller family sizes had more parental involvement. The study by Xiong et al. (2019) also found that students that were bilingual in Hmong and English had more parent engagement. Part of CRP involved a connection between the home and the school Haas and Brown (2019) shared "learning occurs beyond the school walls, with each student bringing unique experiences and therefore unique understandings with them to school and the classroom" (p. 41). Therefore bringing that connection into the classroom helps to connect to students' cultural identities (Haas & Brown, 2019).

Asset-Based Literacy Approach

Any MTSS framework needs to be supported by a learning environment that honors and supports their cultural and linguistic diversity (Spycher, 2020; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). Evidence-based practices that support and encourage

growth in both language and literacy are necessary and are supportive of a quality educational environment for MLLs (Haas & Brown, 2019; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2018). Spycher et al. (2020) suggested classrooms should approach first language use from an asset-based lens with particular sensitivity to students' identities concerning their language use to promote linguistic growth in both languages. Teachers should expand the student voice through activities that connect to students' cultural histories and identities (Haas & Brown, 2019; Spycher et al., 2020). Reduction of academic rigor due to student linguistic abilities should be avoided (Spycher et al., 2020). The U.S. Office of Special Education (2020) stated that culturally and linguistically responsive teaching "is based on the understanding that all learning is shaped by the specific sociocultural context in which it occurs (eg. home, community, school) and involves integrating students' cultural and linguistic knowledge in the learning process" (p. 5).

Instruction at each level of support in an MTSS model needs to be based on evidence-based practices (Klinger & Edwards, 2006). Instruction with the view that families wanted their child to succeed with the involvement of parents in the solution-seeking for academic growth is defined by Klinger and Edwards (2006) to be CRP. Assumptions that it is the home environment or the child that caused the academic struggle without looking at the classroom first should be avoided (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Haas & Brown, 2019; Klingner & Edwards, 2006).

In the exploration of what MTSS design works best to support MLLs, a culturally responsive approach to learning and a close look at the learning environment first should take place (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Haas & Brown, 2019). The way a teacher positions

themself towards the cultures represented in the class implicitly or explicitly needs to be explored (Haas & Brown, 2019; Klinger & Edwards, 2006; Vang, 2005). Students that do not see themselves represented in the classroom context will struggle to make academic gains (Vang, 2005). This is important to the research as it is evident that stronger training practices for teachers in schools that are facing large achievement gaps need to take place in particular with understanding the cultures and contexts of the students in the school community. In the next section, the literature explored assessment practices and how these practices are important when creating a framework of support.

Assessment Practices

Assessment is a key part of MTSS and should be used to make decisions on placement within supports (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Bailey et al., 2020; Haas & Brown, 2019; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2020; Unruh & McKellar, 2017). Students who are MLLs can appear to be behind academically compared to their peers that are not biliterate (Haas & Brown, 2019). Assessment practices play a role in placement into the tiers of support within MTSS and how and where a student is placed must be supported with data (Bailey et al., 2017). The way schools gather data and organize this data as well as the assumptions teachers make from data impacts student placement into support.

Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring

The purpose of universal screening is to identify students before they are failing who may need additional support (Albers & Martinez, 2015; Buffum et al., 2018; Haas & Brown, 2019; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). Screenings from a validated screener are given two to three times a year. In schools where this type of

assessment is given three times a year, the initial screening is used to determine needs for placement into a framework of support (Buffum et al., 2018; Haas & Brown, 2019; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019). Similarly, the mid-year screening is used to look for any students that were not showing need at the beginning of the year and are now showing need (Buffum et al., 2018). At the end of the year, this benchmark testing is done to show growth as well as to look at the picture going into the next year for support needs (Bailey et al., 2020; Buffum et al., 2018; Hughes & Dexter, n.d.; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019).

Progress monitoring is used to monitor growth in the areas that students identified at performing below criteria to assure that the interventions are addressing the students' needs (Bailey et al., 2020; Buffum et al., 2018; Dexter & Hughes, n.d.; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019). Students who are making gains would continue on the path determined by the data; students who are not showing growth would then need to have a further discussion surrounding why they were not growing and determine an adequate plan of action to take (Bailey et al., 2020). In addition with MLLs, it is important to gather oral language assessment information and take into account their proficiency in their oral language development (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2020; Unruh & McKellar, 2017). A new plan may include more instructional support in a smaller-sized group or referral to special education (Buffum et al., 2018; Bailey et al., 2020). Progress should be monitored weekly or biweekly for students in this tier of support (Bailey et al, 2020; Buffum et al., 2018; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). There needs to be a system in place for ongoing evaluation of the data that is collected and gathered together to be analyzed

(Buffum et al., 2018; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019). This plan should include analysis of both universal screening and progress monitoring data (Dexter & Hughes, n.d.; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019).

When choosing assessment screeners and progress monitoring tools, ease of access to data across the school is needed (Bailey et al., 2020). Clear benchmark criteria are needed so teachers can make decisions based on clear data points (Bailey et al., 2020; Buffum et al., 2018; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019). With the use of progress monitoring data, the data is needed to confirm student needs for support and to identify estimated improvement rates over time (Bailey et al., 2020). Last, it is used to see how well the intervention meets the intended result, student growth. Standardized procedures for progress monitoring should establish the frequency of monitoring, what determines if the intervention was carried out as it was intended (fidelity), and goal-setting procedures (Bailey et al., 2020; Buffum et al., 2018; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). Progress monitoring should be short and frequent skill-based assessments and it should be only students in the 20% tier two instructional level (Bailey et al., 2020; Buffum et al., 2018). If there are more than 80% of students in a classroom needing intervention in tier one, it is necessary to examine the fidelity of instruction in the core program or provide a classwide intervention (Bailey et al., 2020; Buffum et al., 2018; Haas & Brown, 2018; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019).

Two types of progress monitoring data can be collected. General outcome measures (GOM) are data that can be measured across a school year time span to see a student growth trajectory toward benchmark mastery (Bailey et al., 2020; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019). Single skill measures track individual student skills

in a particular area (Bailey et al., 2020). For example, if a student is not yet reading three-letter words with short vowels, a teacher could use a phonics measure to track progress in that skill. This is not the same as a GOM as it is not comparing the data to grade-level standards. Common forms of GOM used in primary settings are letter sound fluency and nonsense word or decodable word fluency (Bailey et al., 2020). In upper grades where students are reading text GOM in oral reading fluency can be used (Bailey et al., 2020).

Diagnostic data is used to collect information on specific student needs and is used to pinpoint the specific area to target for growth (Bailey et al., 2020; Buffum et al., 2018; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019). Diagnostic data can be used to set goals and to also identify gaps in foundational skills. This information should be used to influence and inform the interventions that take place. Using the GOM can aid in finding out if a student is making rigorous progress towards the grade-level standard. If the student is not, engagement in a problem-solving process should take place to determine if there is a need to adapt or adjust the intervention (Bailey et al., 2020; Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019, U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015).

Data-Based Decision Making

The use of screening and progress monitoring data aided in making decisions of support within an MTSS model. It also is used to explore the instruction in the core classroom (Buffum et al., 2018). The benefit of using data is that decisions are based on data rather than solely on teacher observations only, feeling, or assumptions (Haas & Brown, 2019). Having clear exit and entrance guidelines for support ensures students are aided and ongoing discussions surrounding progress monitoring data are taking place

(Buffum et al., 2018; Bailey et al., 2020). In addition, frequent data reviews should occur throughout the school year using a data assessment team made up of members in the general education setting, SPED, ELD, and Title to have all shared perspectives while making informed decisions for placement or movement in the tiers of support (Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019; U.S. Office of Special Education, 2015).

Early Literacy Assessment Studies

Some notable studies have been done looking at the validity of early literacy screening data for MLLs. In one large study of 1,143 students, Ostayan (2016) found that letter naming fluency using a measure like Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELs) in kindergarten predicted students' success in oral reading fluency in first grade. In the classes Ostayan (2016) studied, the literature found that teachers that received assessment data feedback aided students in making considerable gains compared to teachers that did not. Findings showed that lower proficiency in English correlated to lower literacy proficiency later for students. If they received early targeted and explicit intervention to address the specific skill areas, they made higher gains (Ostayan, 2016).

In yet another study Geva et al. (2000) explored how phonological awareness and rapid automatized naming of sounds can aid in identifying students at risk of reading issues in both first language and second language acquisition in English. Findings in this study showed that phonological awareness is a prerequisite for word recognition and in students whose first language was not English, it played a more important role and could be useful in predicting future reading needs (Geva et al., 2000). In each study, it was evident that delaying intervention until English language proficiency reached a specific level was not best practice (Geva et al., 2000; Ostayan, 2016).

Two studies contradicted one another. Fien et al. (2008) recommended the use of nonsense word fluency to predict reading growth in early elementary MLLs and found that nonsense word fluency predicted reading proficiency. Fien et al. (2008) examined five groups of 2,400 students' data and supported the use of this tool to screen for reading issues. In contrast, Bostrom (2020) found that nonsense word fluency was not a culturally valid form of measurement for Hmong students learning English. Bostrom shared the reason it was not a valid form of measurement was because spellings of the nonsense words studied created real words in Hmong that had unique sounds or spellings shared between Hmong and English. Bostrom found that these assessments have distracting Hmong meanings to words and could influence the outcome of the assessment. Bostrom recommended future assessment practices use decodable words versus nonsense words specifically for Hmong students.

In designing an MTSS framework for MLLs, data must be infused in every decision made for students (Bailey et al., 2020). This non-assumption-based system assures that decisions for students are made with evidence-based valid assessment information. Students receiving intervention are monitored for growth, and regular analyses are completed to determine if interventions are working for those that are receiving interventions. Placement into tiers of support should not wait for English proficiency for students in the early literacy years. Rather, students should receive dual support in English language development and literacy interventions if the data points to it being necessary early on (Bailey et al., 2020). In designing a framework of support for MLLs, it is necessary to analyze how data is currently being collected and used in the systems within the school (Bailey et al., 2020; Buffum et al., 2018).

According to Bailey et al. (2020), data can point to inefficient systems of support. Interventions that were intense and targeted are the hardest component of MTSS to get right if assessment practices are not aligned. School procedures and practices in Tier 1 and Tier 2 assessments impacted the ability of teachers to effectively use MTSS data (Bailey et al., 2020). The screening and progress monitoring assessment practices have a direct result on the MTSS framework implementation. Early literacy studies by Geva et al. (2000), Ostayan (2016), Fien et al. (2008), and Bostrom (2020) showed how letter naming fluency and nonsense or decodable word fluency screeners can be used to direct teachers and specialists to further pinpoint students in need of early intervention as well as use these screening tools for progress monitoring growth over time. This is important to the research question as a strong framework of support must have clear assessment criteria and ample support in the structure and the implementation of data analysis (Bailey et al., 2020; Buffum et al., 2018). In the next section, the literature shared how teacher professional development is critical in providing quality instruction in the literacy classroom for MLLs.

Teacher Professional Preparation and Development

In addition to assessment, research also showed that in an MTSS framework, teacher development plays a key part in the quality of instruction at tier one (Minnesota Center for Reading Research, 2019). Teacher training and development in knowing the language, culture, and customs of students aids in helping teachers understand their students more. For example, McCall and Vang (2012) shared within the Hmong culture, the importance of the family is highly valued. Children are taught to help and many times girls carry more responsibilities in support of the home. Likewise, Holdway and

Hitchcock (2018) shared how a teacher beliefs about the language used in the classroom and their role in supporting the teaching and learning process impacted MLLs. Professional development that explores core beliefs and perceptions of language used in the classroom is important to provide within teacher professional development programs (Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018). Haas and Brown (2019) shared "that language is a verbal expression of culture" (p. 32). Holdway and Hitchcock (2018) proposed teachers encourage the use of more than one language in the classroom to express understanding and learning.

These same authors found that use of students' first language aided in bringing their voices into the classroom. Teachers needed to be aware of the way students acquire a second language and the role that the culture of the student played in learning (Haas & Brown, 2019; Jong & Harper, 2005).

Jong and Harper (2005) wrote how teacher preparation for teaching MLLs is important as the language being learned had certain aspects to be acquired that needed to be directly taught. They found that investing in the teachers' understanding of student language and culture leads to effective practices for MLLs. Jong and Harper (2005) explained how teacher education programs need to help teachers better grasp how to observe language growth in the classroom through speaking, reading, and writing. Jong and Harper (2005) shared that students need explicit instruction in the structure of language for both reading and writing. The process of teaching a student that is ML needs to be done with collective responsibility, not in silos where the expectation is the English Language Development teacher will assure that the student receives the support needed (Buffum et al., 2018; Jong & Harper, 2005; Williams & Hierck, 2015).

School Leadership and School Climate

School leadership and climate play an important role in the instructional outcomes of teachers (Elfers et al., 2013; Pray et al., 2017; Williams & Hierck, 2015). Pray et al. (2017) shared that the school structure, collective teacher effectiveness, school culture, and the political atmosphere of a school all affected teacher ability to act purposefully and constructively. Collaborative cultures are needed to solve key findings within MLLs academic achievement (Buffum et al., 2018; Elfers et al., 2013; Pray et al., 2017; Williams & Hierck, 2015). In a study by Ronfeldt et al. (2013) they analyzed students in fourth and fifth grade across New York City elementary schools in eight academic years. They found that among the diverse student body, teacher turnover was higher among schools with higher numbers of MLLs. This harmed students' academics, especially in lower-performing schools. It also impacted the other teachers that remained in the school affecting staff morale, and it placed higher burdens on teams (Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

Elfers et al. (2013) explored the support that schools or districts put into place to support teachers and their work with MLLs. Conditions that supported teacher development were having embedded opportunities for teachers to focus on learning with the aid of coaches or others who supported in the classroom. They also had specialized staff that could provide a supportive presence. Access to instructional materials and other resources to address the differentiated needs. Last, they found that teachers focused on serving MLLs' needs in a collaborative, collegial community was key. The leadership focus and action between administration, coordinators, and others in leadership roles played a key part in the supportive structure (Elfers et al., 2013). Similarly, Williams and Hierck (2015) and Buffum et al. (2018) shared that building that collective commitment

in every aspect of the school was necessary to align the structures within the school and tackle the needs of the school as a working, functioning system of support.

Preparation and Development

In a study by Ronfeldt et al. (2013), they found that teacher turnover harms student academics in English Language Arts and mathematics, especially in lower-performing schools. The study also showed that the staff turnover had a negative impact on teachers that remained in the school. In yet another article Pray et al. (2017) examined functional systems (social/power structures within a school) that either helped or held back educators' support of MLLs. In their study, they found that there was confusion surrounding evaluation and expectations for MLLs. Leaders did not understand how teaching students that were biliterate was different from teaching those whose first language was English, Last, they found that collaborative environments where shared resources and expertise aided in supporting MLLs (Pray et al., 2017).

Jong and Harper (2005) shared that the knowledge teachers had of second language acquisition aided in preparing them for educational careers. The authors recommended instruction at the University settings to better prepare teachers for the diversity within the classroom. A teacher with limited knowledge of MLs language acquisition created mistaken assumptions of student cognitive ability when the student was not able to express themself in English. These incorrect assumptions led to teachers' assumptions that there is a language delay or a cognitive issue and referrals to special education services (Haas & Brown, 2019; Jong & Harper, 2005).

Cultural understanding of students and their backgrounds was another theme for teacher training and development (McCall & Vang, 2012). Jong and Harper (2005) shared

how in many cultures the teacher is seen as an authority and to question the teacher would be seen as a sign of disrespect. In still other cultures, students may be unaccustomed to competitive structures that prevail in U.S. classrooms. Being more culturally aware aided teachers in being prepared for the diversity of the classroom. McCall and Vang (2012) explained the background on cultural values of the Hmong. One cultural practice that stood out was the cultural view of family and the importance family plays within students' cultural values. Children, specifically girls, are taught to help when they are little, and this can create a disconnect between the cultural American values of education playing the most important role of the student versus the expectations to help in a family to care for those communally above their academic responsibilities (McCall & Vang, 2012). McCall and Vang (2012) encouraged teachers to bring in authentic sources of literature through the use of story cloths (paj ntaub) as part of the inclusion of cultural heritage into the classroom.

Teachers and the instruction they provide in the classroom made up the first tier of support in an MTSS framework. Teachers' understanding of instructional planning for MLLs and carrying out the instructional support within the classroom is the next part that affects students directly. Williams and Hierck (2015) described MTSS as,

> The teacher practices (instructional delivery, assessment, and student discipline) and typical processes (the daily, weekly, or monthly routines of educators, such as schedules, collaborative times, and methods of communicating) that impact and are impacted by the things we do in education. (p. 116)

The day in and day out practices and processes of teachers ultimately impact the students and the education they receive. From the research in this section, it is evident that a

framework that has supported training for the teachers in MLL is necessary. In the next section, the literature explored how quality core instruction carried out by the grade-level teacher is the first tier of support in MTSS.

Quality Core Instruction

The research identified key themes that affect the instruction of all students, particularly MLLs. The quality of the literacy instruction in the general education classroom was one theme. August and Shanahan (2006) shared,

> Becoming literate in a second language depends on the quality of teaching, which is a function of the content coverage, intensity, or thoroughness of instruction, methods used to support the special language needs of second-language learners and to build on their strengths, how well learning is monitored, and teacher preparation. (p. 3)

Gersten and Geva (2003) and the U.S. Office of Special Education programs (2014) identified that high-quality instruction for MLLs results in MLs being able to read as well as those that speak English as a first language, and the acquisition of basic literacy skills between MLs and English-only peers develop similarly. Gersten and Geva (2003) shared that successful instruction for MLLs included explicit and systematic instruction in phonological awareness and decoding, vocabulary development, interactive teaching strategies, and instruction that was differentiated for students' learning needs. Culturally responsive instruction encompassed being able to know and differentiate between whether learning concerns are language-based, culturally based, or a learning disability (Gersten & Geva, 2003; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2014). Cole (2014) explored the instructional approaches of cooperative learning, collaborative, and peer

tutoring to see what impact it had on literacy growth in MLLs. Cole (2014) found that students who participated in these interactive types of learning approaches made significant growth. Finally, the literature suggested a different type of lesson design called Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

Effective Instruction for MLLs

Short et al. (2008) shared how the teacher influence and orchestrated delivery of the instructional content affected student achievement. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model was created as a framework for lesson design and implementation that meets the needs of MLLs (Short et al., 2008). There are 30 total features, spread across the eight key components within this framework: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and review and assessment (Echevarria et al., 2017; Short et al., 2008). This model can be used as a tool to rate lesson effectiveness and aid in directing coaching with individual teachers. Within this model, teachers focus on the creation of quality instruction to meet the diverse needs of their MLLs (Echevarria et al., 2017).

The research echoed these same trends within instruction that help MLLs achieve. Gersten et al. (2005) shared MLLs in first grade are able to read as well as those who speak English as their first language if given effective reading instruction. In their study Gersten et al. (2005), used an observation instrument to gather data in key areas: explicit teaching, instruction geared towards low performers, sheltered English techniques, interactive teaching, vocabulary development, phonemic awareness, and decoding. Other items that were also gathered was the way the teacher provides directions and how the

teacher uses students' languages in the classroom environment. Findings showed that MLLs who made similar academic achievement to native English speakers had teachers with higher ratings in the instructional areas on the observation instrument (Gersten et al., 2005).

In yet another article, Kibler et al. (2015) shared about how the changes in the literacy standards have implications for the way teachers plan instruction within English Language Arts. The authors suggested classrooms should provide times for socialization (interaction with peers) within authentic differentiated texts that contain text complexity. Teachers should have the proper scaffolds in place for students to access content (Kibler et al., 2015; Echevarria et al., 2017). The writers Kibler et al. (2015) provided a particularly insightful definition of scaffolding as "intellectual push with concomitant [accompanying] support which eventually leads to a process of handover/takeover" (p. 23). Scaffolds provided the proper push for students to ultimately rely on themselves to pursue the learning within the interactive strategies created within the classroom environment. Echevarria et al. (2017) listed scaffolding to be highly effective for MLLs. The authors described three types of scaffolding: verbal, procedural, and instructional (Echevarria et al., 2017). Within verbal scaffolds, the teacher used the students' language proficiency data to extend their learning and develop oral language support (Echevarria et al., 2017; Haas & Brown, 2019). Some examples of these verbal scaffolds were paraphrasing, modeling think-aloud (where a teacher explained their thinking out loud), pointing out definitions embedded within a text and repeating a student response verbally back with correct pronunciation (Echevarria et al., 2017). Procedural scaffolds were described by Echevarria et al. (2017) as the way instructional scaffolding is carried out

within explicit instruction and grouping practices (procedures). The last kind of scaffold support Echevarria et al. (2017) described are instructional scaffolds. These included the supports that teachers used like graphic organizers and models of work that had been completed. In the Echevarria et al. (2017) definition of a scaffold they defined it as "a temporary structure for helping students complete a task that would otherwise be too difficult to do alone" (p. 132). This highlights that scaffolds are temporary and meant to usher the student to independent learning and then be removed.

Collaborative Learning

In another study, Cole (2014) examined instruction that was student-centered with activities like cooperative, collaborative, and peer tutoring to influence reading achievement in MLLs. The study by Cole (2014) compared student interactive learning to teacher interactive learning. The student interactive learning resulted in higher academic achievement gains than the one involved in the teacher providing the primary dialogue (Cole, 2014). Likewise, Echevarria et al. (2017) described the development of oral language in MLLs as requiring ample opportunities for MLs to participate and engage in meaningful academic conversations using content learning with their peers. This engagement in collaboration and development of oral language helped students to solidify their learning and develop their language proficiency at the same time (Echevarria et al., 2017).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is a different way of approaching instruction in the classroom so that all students have the opportunity to learn and express their learning (CAST, n.d.; Morin, n.d.; Ralabate, 2011). Ralabate (2011) shared the origin for UDL came out of research at

the Center for Applied Special Technologies as part of the changes in both technology advances and educational use of technology. As part of the American Disabilities Act, schools became more accessible, and as technology has advanced even further, the use of UDL has advanced (Ralabate, 2011).

Morin (n.d.) described UDL as the way a teacher approached student learning to provide all students access to content through adjustment in the ways students get to learn, engage, and are assessed in their learning in non-traditional classroom ways. The author also explained that the goal is to give students the equitable access they deserve. Examples of UDL were things like closed captions, text to speech, and speech to text (CAST, n.d.; Morin, n.d.; Ralabate, 2011). With technological advances, UDL is a learning option for schools to consider specifically when working with MLLs. In another article on this concept, the authors Kieran and Anderson (2019) described UDL and how it aligned in the way teachers designed non-traditional means for learning and assessing students. They shared that this approach is marked with having many ways for students to access learning as well as many ways besides paper and pencil-based assessments to understand if a student has learned the material (Kieran & Anderson, 2019). UDL challenges teachers to change the way they view learning. Rather than thinking of students being unable to learn, the writers Kieran and Anderson (2019) challenged teachers to consider the methods for representing knowledge. They also encouraged a reframing of when students do not understand as positioning the misunderstanding as an inability for the student to show what they know rather than the student is lacking in knowledge (Kieran & Anderson, 2019).

Another organization, CAST (n.d.), brought a depth of understanding to UDL in

three main categories: engagement, representation, and action and expression. They shared that providing multiple ways for students to engage in content using their senses motivated learning. With the representation category, the authors of CAST (n.d.) explained students understand things differently and may need other ways to understand or approach the content being learned. Sensory, visual, linguistic, and cultural differences influenced the way students would represent or understand learning and the diversity of representation is good for learning to occur (CAST, n.d.). For the category action and expression, CAST (n.d.) encouraged teachers to provide different ways to allow students to show what they understand. Students with motor, cognitive, or language barriers may find expression to be difficult in written form, but through a presentation, they can share their knowledge (CAST, n.d.).

Quality core instruction is the preventative tier of support in an MTSS framework. Having quality instruction provides fewer needs for intervention in a system of support and thus it is necessary to explore the research surrounding instruction in the core classroom. Successful instruction is inclusive, equitable, and differentiated for the needs of the students. Collaboration provides support for students to practice content with their peers while scaffolding provides the necessary support for students to learn and grow individually. UDL is a way of allowing all students to both engage and express their learning making it fully accessible to all. In the last topic of the literature review, the research explored the early intervention studies in foundational literacy skills.

Early Intervention Studies in Foundational Literacy Skills

In an executive summary report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth, August and Shanahan (2006) summarized how

literacy instruction should be explicitly targeted where language does not cross over phonologically from the first language to English. They also shared that instruction in the five core literacy pillars (phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension) had an orchestrated positive influence on MLL literacy development. They also found that oral language development helped students build their writing and comprehension skills (August & Shanahan, 2006). In the report, August and Shanahan (2006) also outlined how first language development helps English literacy.

In another study, Leafstedt et al. (2004) explored how weaker phonological awareness skills created a breakdown in reading for MLLs. Similar to native English speakers, MLLs responded to phonological awareness intervention that is specifically targeted and explicitly taught. MLLs who received the intervention made more gains than those who were only provided typical classroom instruction (Leafstedt et al.,2004). This research confirmed the importance of foundational skill growth in phonological awareness.

In a study of students' development of oral language and literacy skills, Vaughn et al. (2006) found that students who received direct-instruction interventions made significant gains in word reading, vocabulary, and comprehension of a passage, but not in fluency. The authors Vaughn et al. (2006) discovered that students made growth in foundational skills in first grade, but then later stagnated in their fluency growth after one year. Haager and Windmueller (2001) described this later stagnation as a "fluency wall" that students would hit due to a lack of a foundation in oral language proficiency while learning to read. Haager and Windmueller (2001) found a need for early intervention in

both foundational skills and oral language development to simultaneously occur for students that showed the need for both.

Early preventative measures for MLLs reaped greater literary rewards for students if they developed the foundational skills (phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics decoding, and fluency within text reading) in literacy alongside support for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students. Kamps et al. (2007) found that struggling English as a first language students made the same growth as MLLs when provided explicit instruction in phonological intervention. Findings in their study supported the use of explicit instruction in foundational skills supportive to growth for MLLs similar to their monolingual peers. Lovett et al. (2008) studied elementary MLL and nonMLL struggling readers over a four-year time frame. They found similarly that systematic explicit instruction in foundational skills (phonological/phonemic awareness, decoding, and reading connected text fluently) supported growth for both types of struggling readers, and they found that language proficiency at entry into school played a role in the overall growth a student made. Several studies supported the use of systematic and explicit intervention instruction focused on foundational literacy skills (Kamps et al., 2007; Leafstedt et al., 2004; Lovett et al., 2008; Richards-Tutor et al., 2016;

Early Identification for Intervention

Several of the studies showed predictive elements for students' later struggles in literacy based on the early assessment results for English Language Proficiency and foundational literacy skills (Burns et al., 2017; Geva & Farnia, 2011; Kieffer, 2008; Linklater et al., 2009; Lovett et al., 2008; Vanderwood et al., 2008; Whiteside et al., 2016). Kim et al. (2010) found in a large longitudinal study of 12,536 children that oral

reading fluency in first grade was predictive of future reading growth and could be used to identify students early on for intervention.

Kieffer (2008) identified one reason for early identification is they found students that entered kindergarten with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) had significantly lower growth trajectories in literacy into the upper-grade levels than their peers who spoke English as their first language. When Kieffer (2008) compared data to native English speakers of a similar socioeconomic status group as those with LEP, scores were very similar across both groups. Kieffer's study supported other research in the prioritization of supporting LEP students with early interventions in both English Language Development and foundational literacy supports (Kieffer, 2008; Linklater et al., 2009).

Similarly, Whiteside et al. (2017) cautioned that interpretation of data without the use of English language proficiency (ELP) data should be avoided. They also shared that a focus on increasing ELP helped student social-emotional and behavioral growth while at the same time increasing their ability to meet curricular goals. Likewise, Linklater et al. (2009) also found in their study that kindergarten reading outcomes could be predicted based on initial sound fluency, phoneme segmentation fluency, and combined phoneme segmentation task data early in the year. Linklater et al. (2009) argued for the support of LEP students to receive support early on in language and literacy support and not to wait until their ELP advances to a higher level. The findings supported the identification of students that need intervention through screening measures. Linklater et al. (2009) shared, "school personnel no longer have to wait until an ELL [English language learner] student has failed in reading or gained English proficiency before action is taken to intervene" (p. 392).

In a study by Kim et al. (2010), growth data for oral reading fluency, vocabulary, phonological awareness, letter naming fluency, and nonsense word reading fluency was tracked for 12,536 students from kindergarten to third grade. This study found that struggling readers should receive early intervention and that students who are struggling early in the year should be closely monitored using Curriculum-Based Measures (CBM) specifically for oral reading fluency to help plan or modify intervention instruction. Similarly, Burns et al. (2017) explored how ELP related to reading growth during interventions. Interventions were matched with data to the areas of decoding (phonics) and fluency. Phonics intervention included explicit instruction in letter sounds with anchor images and word encoding with boxes and magnetic letters to build the words. For fluency, students who needed mastery with speed, accuracy, and/r expression participated in partner reading within a leveled passage and repeated readings. All of the students received a vocabulary intervention. Burns et al. found that second and third graders who had the lowest scores for ELP showed the most gain in oral reading fluency (the number of words read accurately per minute) when they received a targeted reading intervention based on the data. Burns et al. (2017) confirmed the idea of providing early intervention for students in literacy intervention despite their ELP measure being lower. In the last study, Geva and Farnia (2012) explored how 539 students' (72% being MLLs) reading fluency was connected to their language skills. In their study, they found that word reading became stronger as the student grew in their reading ability. While text fluency was interdependent on language skills. The results of their study supported the prediction of struggle with reading comprehension in fifth grade by using vocabulary knowledge and phonological skills in second grade for MLLs and monolingual peers. Of

note, the differences early on in vocabulary skills were predictive of reading comprehension differences in future years (Geva & Farnia, 2012).

The studies highlighted in this section supported a priority on early intervention specifically for MLLs that have LEP. When students received intervention to support early on in foundational areas alongside the quality core literacy instruction in the five pillars of literacy and oral language development, students made significant growth. It also was evident from the research that interventions should be done in tandem with English language development support for MLLs that show the need. It is evident from the research that an MTSS framework should align literacy instruction to both the literacy and ELP data gathered for MLLs.

Summary

Chapter Two highlighted the current research to answer the question: *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS framework for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) in order to inform reading instruction?* Theoretical underpinnings behind language and literacy were explored, and an overview of the tiers of support within MTSS. The literature reviewed the kinds of MTSS support models recommended for MLLs. Next, the literature explored cultural responsiveness to student literacy development with culturally relevant pedagogy. The writing explored the assessment practices and data-based decision-making for universal screening and progress monitoring. Then, research surrounding early literacy assessment studies shared the validity of early literacy screeners and their use in the decision-making for intervention support. Teacher professional development and ongoing support was another area the literature showed affected the system of support. In the section on quality core

instruction, the research shared general effective instruction for supporting MLLs to more specific support like collaborative structures and universal designs for learning. The last section, early intervention, and foundational literacy skills shared several studies that supported the direct, explicit targeted instruction approach for intervention and early identification to inform placement within a support framework.

From these studies, I used what was learned to create professional development sessions that are centered on adult learning theory to support the learning of staff. In Chapter Three, I outline the project description for each professional development session, the adult learning research behind the activities, and provide a detailed explanation of the sessions, the setting, who participated, and the timeline for their completion. Last, I outline the assessment used to indicate the effect the training has on the participants.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Informed decisions are essential when working with students. The complexity of figuring out what a student might need in terms of support to make academic achievement can be challenging. Students show trends in data and these trends can influence the type of intervention and approach to intervention. In this chapter, I explored the project that developed from the review of the literature.

The literature researched helped to explore the research question: *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) in order to inform reading instruction?* The research provided clear themes within the literature on what needs to be in place in a school to develop an MTSS model. The literature review explored the theoretical underpinnings, defined MTSS at each tier of support, and explored different support models. In addition, the review shared about cultural responsiveness, assessment practices, and teacher professional development. Last, it highlighted how quality core instruction and early intervention research in foundational skills helps to build a strong framework.

In Chapter Three, I provided an overview of the research paradigm, an overview of the project with a description for each session. Included in this chapter was information regarding the project setting, participants, timeline, and method for adults to provide feedback in the professional development sessions. The project was focused on implementing professional development for teachers in a series of large-group professional development sessions. Each session highlighted steps to take as a school and

staff to provide supportive learning for MLLs from Tier one core instruction to intervention. More details surrounding the specific professional development sessions are found in the project description.

The professional development I have experienced as an adult included hands-on, collaborative engagement with other adults in much the same way that a teacher facilitates collaborative engagement within the classroom. It was important to have the sessions be aligned with adult learning theory and set in the context of the teacher's experiences with the class. More information on the rationale for why this project was selected is explored in this chapter as well.

Research Paradigm

The theories used to influence the creation of this project included models of adult learning and the focused conversation format for inquiry. Adult learning theory has been described by Knowles (1992) as active engagement versus passive participation. The presenter must start with the adult's background, interests, and needs. Information presented should have some basis in the context of the learner and encouragement towards self-directed learning. Using small groups during a large-group setting encouraged exploration of the information presented in a collaborative team, the goal is reflection and application by the adult learner in a socially constructed format. Vogt and Shearer (2011) shared that large group presentations can help direct new initiatives. Thus, the format of the large-group sessions was chosen as this initiative is for the entire school. Embedded in the large-group sessions are small-group work. The span of the professional development was designed to provide teachers ample time to learn, apply, gather data, and refine the new ideas being rolled out.

Likewise, the process used for engaging teachers is important. The large-group presentation had topic content outlined with intermixed periods for conversation and then application within the grade-level teams and classroom or team data through facilitated activities. Echevarria et al. (2008) recommended providing time for interaction with fellow teachers as important for collaboration and application of the new knowledge in a generalized setting. Using this collaborative process in the large group sessions through conversational prompts, teachers had the opportunity to discuss and analyze their students' data together to apply and practice the new knowledge learned. Teachers then practiced in teams with feedback and coaching. Similarly, in subsequent small-group sessions during professional learning communities, teachers engaged with the same teams to continue analysis and deeper conversations together.

Focused conversations are a structured questioning strategy also known as an ORID. Nelson (2001) shared the four stages (one for each letter in ORID) that help conversation to flow are concrete objective perception, reflective response, interpretive judgment, and decisional discussion. This discussion technique led the adult through the natural process and patterned learning that we do as a younger inquisitive learners. It helped to move the adult through processes that often happen unconsciously. Nelson (2001) shared, "If no reflective questions are asked, the essential world of intuition, memory, emotion, and imagination is never evoked. Information is left at arms length, and participants struggle with its relevance to their own life" (p. 15).

Thus, the questioning in a focused conversation was really about having the teacher engage in exploring a more complex topic in a focused way. In this case, the foundational understanding of MTSS was explored in the first session through a focused conversation

activity.

Project Overview

In this section, I described an overview of the project and its connection to the research as well as a detailed description of the project. The project was a series of three large-group professional development sessions held at different points during the school year. One session was held during the teacher workshop week in the fall, one in the first month of school (mid-September) following the fall benchmark for universal screening assessments, and the last session was held shortly after the mid-September large-group session in early October. There was a focused conversation that took place during the first professional development session. Each session was critical to the time listed above due to when district data was gathered. Data was used to make informed instructional decisions in each session.

Project Description

Darling-Hammond (2017) shared a study on effective professional development for adult educators and found that content-focused professional development involves active learning, support with collaboration in the context of teaching, modeling, coaching, and opportunities for feedback and reflection over a sustained duration. Likewise, Knowles (1992) shared that adult learners should "be active participants in a process of inquiry, rather than passively receive transmitted content" (p. 11). The project included three large-group sessions with interactive elements for teachers to participate in learning both through polls, games, and small-group interactions. The sessions incorporated adult learning theory to make the process engaging, applicable, and transformative. The group activities adults participated in involved collaboration with

teachers on grade-level teams and specialists with data from their classrooms.

Rationale. Professional development as the culminating project was the logical choice for this capstone. It was necessary to choose a structure that would be meaningful to me as I designed the project to utilize in the site where I work. It also aligns with adult learning theory in that as adults mature, the approach to learning shifts. Professional development designed for reflective tasks in the adult learner creates an immediate application for the teacher with the data being explored. The tasks were situated in the adult learner's context making the application of the data meaningful for them (Knowles, 1980, as cited in, Merriam et al., 2007, pp. 44-45). Teachers explored data from the students they instructed. This situated the adult learning in a meaningful context. The sessions are outlined in timeline order here in this chapter for purposes of understanding the progressive nature of the professional development content.

A large portion of this professional learning series was focused on assessment practices specific to literacy. The way teachers used data for instructional decisions is foundational to the way an MTSS functions. Data is used to determine instructional content decisions for students at each tier of support. To develop a clear framework of support, staff needed to establish a strong foundation for how data is analyzed, reflected upon, and interpreted to best make decisions for student groupings to impact academic achievement. I selected professional development for this project because it fit the professional learning needs of the staff at this midwest school. In replicating this it is important to note that if the staff at your school or district does not have the capacity or structures in place for collaborative support, it will be necessary to first establish a structure of personnel support before carrying out these professional development

sessions. The school had a structure of people-resources at every grade level. Teams had both general education teachers, Title reading specialists, English Language Development teachers, and paraprofessionals that speak the predominant languages within the school. Teams worked collaboratively and planned as grade levels for the anticipated learning needs. Thus, for replication, a structure or something similar should be the starting point in districts or schools that are starting without any previous structure in place.

Professional Development Session One. This first professional development session took place during the teacher workshop week before the first day of school with students. The session was four hours in length. In this session entitled "Foundations - Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)" teachers were introduced to an overview of MTSS. Following the overview, staff engaged in an interactive survey of beliefs regarding the languages, cultures, and customs of the students in the school. Teachers took a survey as part of the introduction activities and then explored the results as a staff. They explored their foundational language and literacy beliefs when working with students that are MLLs through interactive discussion. Exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy and overviews of reading theory along with the simple view of reading was explored too. In collaborative teams, they defined MTSS through a focused conversation.

Following the focused conversation, staff returned as a large group and the reporters for each group shared out the key information they discussed. Staff then completed a gallery walk of the posters that teams recorded the discussions on. In the second part of this professional development session, staff used WIDA ACCESS data to get a clear linguistic view of the students in their classroom overall composite scores. The

teams plotted their student scores in their classes into categories one through five for their overall composite English Language Proficiency scores. Before completing this staff learned about each of the categories and what students "Can-do" at each level using the WIDA Can-Do descriptors (WIDA, n.d.). Students who are considered "monitor English Learners," were placed in the section labeled for this. "Monitor EL" meant the English Language Development (ELD) teachers are monitoring the students because they scored above a composite 5.0 on the ACCESS test and no longer require ELD services because they are considered proficient in English. In addition to the language categories, students were also listed who are not MLLs and those that were unknown where they could be MLL, but they came from a new school and teachers were awaiting paperwork to be transferred. Staff followed up with these students to assure the information was gathered and completed. Future use of this document was used to coach teachers on how to plan for those predominant linguistic needs within the classroom, and how to leverage students that are one level above other students to place strategically in partner pairs.

Staff had discussions of where a majority of their class landed on the overall composite score maps, and they explored the WIDA Can do descriptors (WIDA, n.d.) at each grade level band to explore what students at each level of ELP "can-do" specifically about literacy. Having a clear view of what a student can do helped teachers to plan the beginning instruction and set up the proper scaffolds for future class activities and assignments in their core classrooms. As part of this portion of the professional development, the ELD experts within the school were enlisted to provide support for teams to help answer questions or discuss the linguistic needs within the grade-level classes. Finally, in the end, teachers took part in a self-reflection for the three things they

would apply from the activity completed. Staff completed a Google Form survey that was sent out via email following the session and displayed with a QR-code on the self-reflection slide of the presentation.

Focused Conversation One. The first focused conversation took place during the initial professional development session held during the teacher workshop week before the first week of school. It took approximately 30 minutes to complete in groups and then they shared out key take-aways for the last 15 minutes. In small groups, staff reflected on the definition of MTSS: MTSS is a multi-tiered approach for prevention, intervention, or remediation to support student academic and social well-being (Buffum et al. 2018). They also read and reflected on this statement by Williams and Hierck (2015):

> RTI [Response to Intervention or MTSS] can best be understood as the teacher practices (instructional delivery, assessment, and student discipline) and typical processes (daily, weekly, or monthly routines of educators; schedules, collaborative times, and methods of communicating) that impact and are impacted by the things we do in education. (p. 116)

Following the reading of the quote, staff worked collaboratively to discuss the focused conversation questions on the handout provided that brought them through the four stages of the ORID format (observation, reflection, interpretation, and decisional questions). The goal was reflective collaboration so that as a staff they defined what MTSS means at their school site. The activity also provided information for the coach and leaders to know what areas needed to be further defined and developed and what teams needed more support with this process. A recorder wrote responses onto posters that were hung up around the gathering space. The reporter for each team shared out the learning and

then the staff had an opportunity to take a gallery walk to view the other group work.

Professional Development Session Two. The second professional development session, "MTSS - Data-Based Decision Making: Initial Decisions," took place mid-September following the universal screening gathering and compilation of the data. The staff took a brief poll at the beginning regarding the types of data and the purposes for the different data types. Then, they explored an overview of different data types and their purposes for use. Determination of language difference versus a learning disability was an important conversation to have during this kind of data analysis, and so staff learned about both through a mixture of videos and discussion. Staff examined the universal screening data and made decisions based on the data for classwide support. Then they explored the different types of diagnostic assessment types and used this knowledge to plan out further data needs based on the universal screening data. The staff then broke into hypothetical case studies using the ELP data from various kinds of MLLs along with a summarized view of what these students may show on the universal screeners. Staff had time to discuss what they would do in each scenario. Following a break, the staff engaged in a deeper analysis of the ELP levels for listening, speaking, reading, and writing using the WIDA "Can-Do descriptors" for each subdomain, staff listed the ELP levels along with the decimal point information of their scores for each subdomain, and then the staff had facilitated discussion surrounding the ELP landscape for their classroom for listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Last, staff took district universal screening data for literacy and cross-compared the ELP descriptor information to discuss and make final instructional decisions for students. Similarly, for students that were not ML, they looked at the universal screening

literacy data to determine instructional needs at the start-up of the year. Teachers worked collaboratively to determine the instructional groupings for classwide intervention and determined the next steps for diagnostic data-gathering. They made plans for any additional diagnostic data that was needed and determined who on the teams would gather the data, and they set dates when the data was collected and organized. Teachers took part in a self-reflection at the end of the session, and then completed a Google Form survey following the session via a QR-code on the self-reflection slide for the presentation.

Professional Development Session Three. In this last session, "MTSS - Data-Based Decision Making: Decisions for Intervention," the timing of the session was reliant upon the diagnostic data gathering. This session was held in early October.

Staff worked as grade-level teams to explore the array of intervention needs across a continuum of literacy support. During this session, we revisited the MTSS overview from Session two and reviewed reading and language development. We had a brief Kahoot to review language differences versus learning disability. Then they had an overview of the stages of reading development along with intervention needs at each stage. Staff analyzed diagnostic screening data to determine decisions for intervention needs and grouped students according to those needs. The session was two hours in length, and the primary goal was for teams to walk away with a targeted area of intervention or extension for students with an instructional approach to try. Key parts to the training included exploring which area of literacy there was a breakdown for students- fluency, automatic word recognition, comprehension, vocabulary, engagement/motivation, or a mixture of many needs. Staff determined the progress

monitoring data to gather for interventions and set check-in points to meet to discuss growth and future data. Finally, at the end of this session, staff took part in a self-reflection and they completed a Google Form survey linked through a QR-code on the slide in the presentation.

Setting and Participants

This project was carried out during the first half of a school year with teaching professionals and specialists in this midwest charter school. Participants were from a range of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds including the building administration, cultural specialists (paraprofessionals that speak the predominant languages from the cultural groups that make up the student body), general education, Title reading, English Language Development, and special education teachers. Approximately 60 to 70 staff members made up the training. It took place within the school setting in both a large-group workshop with follow-up in professional learning communities. The participants were members of the school community where I served, and they carried out the instructional decisions made using the data.

Timeline

The timeline for the professional development was held over the first half of a school year. On three separate days during fall teacher professional development days, there were two large-group professional development sessions that were four hours in length and one that was two hours in length. The initial professional development workshop was held during the teacher workshop week before the start of the school year. The other two professional development sessions fell during staff professional development days in the fall (mid-September and early October). Staff who participated

in the large-group sessions completed four-hour training over two days and one two-hour training during the last session.

Assessment

In this capstone project, assessment information from the staff was gathered with a survey in Google Forms for each session. The survey was sent out to staff via their email addresses at the end of the sessions and it was linked to a QR-code that was posted in the slide presentation for each session. Staff completed the surveys at the end of each large-group professional development session. The purpose of the survey was to provide feedback for future sessions to the presenter. The data from these surveys was reflected upon following the sessions in the Google Form response section that automatically populated the response data, and any tweaks in session format or learning activities were made before the next session to best meet the needs of the staff. The questions were a mixture of multiple-choice, short answer, and the Likert scale format from unacceptable (one) to outstanding (five).

Session One Feedback Survey. The staff was asked to answer the following questions in session one. Did you walk away with a clearer picture of what a multi-tiered system of support means? What would you like more information about? How would you rate the professional development session? What was the presenter's level of knowledge on the topic? Was the pacing adequate for the activities and content to be covered? Was the presenter organized and prepared? What is one thing you will use right away? What suggestions do you have for future professional development?

Session Two Feedback Survey. The staff was asked to answer the following questions at the end of session two. Do you have a better understanding about different

data types? What would you like more information about? How would you rate the professional development session? What was the presenter's level of knowledge on the topic? Was the pacing adequate for the activities and content to be covered? Was the presenter organized and prepared? What is one thing you will use right away? What suggestions do you have for future professional development?

Session Three Feedback Survey. Staff wasThe staff asked to answer the following questions at the end of session three. Did you walk away with a plan of action for each intervention need or group? What do you feel you need more support with? How would you rate the professional development session? What was the presenter's level of knowledge on the topic? Was the pacing adequate for the activities and content to be covered? Was the presenter organized and prepared? What suggestions do you have for future professional development?

Summary

In Chapter Three, I outlined the adult learning theory that influenced the project creation including the format for the project and the approach to adult learning in the professional development sessions. This chapter outlined the adult learning theory used to develop the project. It included a project overview with a description, setting, participants, and timeline. A detailed description of the three professional development sessions and focused conversations that took place between and during the large-group session was provided in the project description. Last, I shared the assessment information that was gathered from the staff that participated in the professional development and how that information was used by the presenter. The research question: *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Multilingual*

Learners (MLLs) in order to inform reading instruction? provided the foundation of these professional development sessions, and the themes that were explored in the literature review helped to inform the creation of the professional development sessions.

In Chapter Four, I share my observations and reflections on what I learned in the creation of this project. I revisit the literature review and reflect on what parts of the literature review influenced my work the most with any new connections made to the literature that was reviewed. In addition to these things, I consider the policy implications and limitations of the project created. I share future recommendations and research-related projects that would be beneficial to consider. Last, I provide the professional impact the project has on the education profession specific to literacy instruction.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

At the beginning of this paper, I sought to answer the burning question that was created through the years of work with multilingual learners (MLLs) in this midwest school. I did not anticipate the breadth of the research nor the complexity of how one develops a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) specific for MLLs. There are many factors that influence instruction in a classroom, and this complexity became evident in the research that was studied. The question that I sought to answer in the research was *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) in order to inform reading instruction?*

In Chapter One, I discussed the rationale for this question, its significance to the field of education, my personal journey, and my professional background that influenced the curiosity behind this question. In Chapter Two, I provided a background to the theory of reading and the constructivist lens through which student learning for MLLs is viewed. The literature review proved to be quite immense. Following a definition of MTSS, the major themes that emerged were cultural responsiveness through culturally relevant pedagogy, considerations for MLLs, and having a positive view of language learning with a view of the student's first language being of value to another language being learned. Then, I highlighted the literature surrounding assessment practices that impacted learning at each level within MTSS. After this, the literature examined the teacher preparation and development practices which included school culture and the leadership role in developing MTSS within a school. In the last two major topics, the research pointed out

that quality core instruction was crucial as a bedrock to instructional quality and the prevention of students needing intervention or remediation. In the final portion of this chapter, I reviewed the early intervention studies in foundational reading skills that are important to consider when working with MLLs.

Chapter Three focused on providing an overview of the project (a professional development series) that included information on the adult learning theory that was used to create the project. This chapter provided a project overview that included a description of the project, the setting and participant details, the timeline for the project, and how the project would be assessed in a survey format from those participating in the professional development.

I have had the opportunity to reflect and synthesize the research to create a professional development series that builds foundational pieces to develop an MTSS framework specific to literacy for MLLs. In Chapter Four, I will outline the major learnings from the completion of this project and revisit the literature review to share the portions that proved most important for my capstone project. I share the policy implications and limitations of the project. In addition, I discuss recommendations and future ideas for research or project development. Last, I highlight how the project is a benefit to the education profession and how this project will be used in the future.

Major Learnings

There were three areas I discovered were prominent with creating this project that I learned as a researcher. First, school culture and leadership play an integral role in the creation of a cohesive MTSS framework. Second, the importance of assessment practices and the impact this has on decisions within MTSS. Third, the need for teachers to be

culturally aware of their students and their language and cultural norms to provide an environment where students can open up, feel safe, and learn.

The first major learning through this project completion has been how important leadership is to a school's overall function. MTSS starts with how well a staff collaborates. The school culture and attitudes of those working within a school impact students through the coordinated or lack of coordinated efforts across the school. It all starts with leadership and their ability to build a collaborative structure where teachers view students with a shared vision towards learning (the end goal). It is a collective effort of accountability, but this collective nature begins in the administration and leadership structure within the school. If this is nonexistent the initiatives will fail as schools will attempt to work in silos within their grade-level teams and not work in alignment with one another to problem-solve together.

Another major learning made was how important assessment practices are to the systems within the school. Data is used to make decisions at each level of support (prevention, intervention, and remediation). If data practices are not clearly outlined and structured, each grade level makes differing decisions with differing criteria which creates a system that is fragmented and ineffective. Data practices are meant to leave no child behind academically and when a student is showing signs that they are not meeting benchmark criteria, the necessary steps are taken to evaluate the data based on a set of agreed-upon criteria across the school to better implement change and analyze needs. This includes decisions made in intervention and remediation. The goal within these two tiers is for students to make rapid academic progress. The use of progress monitoring data plays a role in observing rapid academic progress. If a student is not making those gains,

teams discuss and have agreed upon support to move students towards the grade-level benchmark.

The last and most important learning that I walked away with was an understanding of the importance of knowing the students who are in your classroom. It is important to know the languages they speak, the cultural norms they have for interaction within their families, with adults, and with peers. Culture is much deeper and is represented by the beliefs held by people and the ways they engage socially with one another. Within education, teachers must also be cognisant of the adult/child communication that occurs culturally. Finally, it is detrimental that teachers understand the difference between language difference and learning disability. If a teacher mistakes a linguistic difference as a learning disability, students are falsely identified for special education services and then students are not provided the support needed for the student to grow.

I learned that researching and writing about a topic are not insurmountable tasks that I am unable to accomplish. Much like I learned how oral language development is so important for MLLs, it is how I have figured out how to write. I am very comfortable talking about this topic with other educators and those that do not have a background in education. This comfort with speaking about it has aided in my writing and although my background and trajectory to learning were not fully aligned with my peers academically, the task of this project was not insurmountable to write something of this magnitude. In the next section, I will highlight specific areas of the literature review and the portions that proved to be most important to the capstone project.

Revisiting the Literature Review

The literature review proved to be quite extensive and many topics emerged from the research question: *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) in order to inform reading instruction?* Due to the size and nature of the question, I focused the project specifically on key areas that are foundational to working with students that are MLLs to provide the appropriate professional development for the audience the project was created for. Areas from the literature review that were key to developing the professional development were the theoretical underpinnings, cultural responsiveness, assessment practices, and early intervention studies in foundational skills.

Theoretical Underpinnings

First, the theoretical underpinnings for the research were founded in reading development, specifically the Cognitive Model for reading (McKenna & Stahl, 2015) and the Simple View of Reading (Farrell et al., 2019). This underpinning is important to the project's development as I highlighted in two of the sessions specifically how these pathways related to language development and how literacy and language development are closely aligned. In McKenna and Stahl's description (2015), they describe three main pathways where reading comprehension can be impeded: automatic word recognition, language comprehension, or strategic knowledge. The connection to language learning is centered in the language comprehension pathway where a student develops vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, and textual structures to make meaning from text. Similarly, in Farrell et al. (2019) description of the Simple View of Reading (word recognition x language comprehension = reading comprehension), they highlighted the first two pathways from the Cognitive model in the categories word recognition and

language comprehension. The only difference between these two models was the strategic knowledge reading pathway. This pathway is not represented in the Simple View of Reading. Both models outline language comprehension and its role in learning to read. With MLLs, this is important to note as teaching the structure of language, building vocabulary and background are important to any reading that students engage in from the general education classroom to intervention. An area not listed, but noted in much of the research was in oral language development. The primary role of English Language Development teachers is to aid students' development of their oral language in English.

In addition to the reading theory, the other theory that influenced the creation of the project was the Sociolinguistic and Socio-Cultural theory. Tracey and Morrow (2017) described Socio-Cultural theory centering around the way language is socially created and how that social interaction influences people and ultimately their culture. Much of this theory centers around understanding our assumptions and understanding of the students and their cultures and how many cultures are communal where the western culture is more competitive. Moll (2014) encouraged the use of bringing the knowledge that students have from their homes and cultures as a way to better understand the student and the strengths they bring to the classroom.

Understanding the social learning structure was particularly important to the professional development creation for adult learners. I attempted to use social learning as a means to engage the adults in the learning taking place. This model of adult learning is described by Knowles (1992) as active engagement for adults. It is important to connect to the audience and get a context for the adult understanding in the audience. This was created through polls and surveys as well as engagement in a Kahoot to review

previously covered learnings. Besides these interactive elements, time for discussion and group work took place as well. This format was strategic as the way professional development is created is meant to model the collaborative learning structures and best practices for the classroom and school as a whole. From the leadership to the classroom, socially constructed learning and collaboration with collective responsibility create a model for quality learning to occur. Vang (2005) highlighted how important the idea of cooperative learning is, specifically when sharing Hmong customs and the nature of communal decisions and structures. Since Hmong is the predominant student group in the school, understanding how social learning is the best practice for students is important.

Cultural Responsiveness

The second key area from the literature review that influenced the project creation was cultural responsiveness through culturally relevant pedagogy, MLL considerations, and having an asset-based (positive) approach to language and literacy learning. Culturally relevant pedagogy was a part of the learning in the professional development series. In each session this was highlighted from the defining characteristics of it in session one, knowing the students and understanding each students' English language proficiency (ELP) as well as their first languages and the way the language is set up. In session two, knowing students was represented in the learnings regarding the contrast between language difference and learning disability. This understanding of the linguistic assets of students was present in the activity staff completed to identify student ELP subdomain scores and what a student can do in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Viewing the languages that students speak and the linguistic richness of language expression in their first language as a positive influence on their language learning in

their second language was also highlighted.

Ladson-Billings (1995) challenged teachers to consider their concept of themself in relation to the students they serve as a means to supporting the student learning. Likewise Haas and Brown (2019) shared how exploring your beliefs towards language and literacy helps to understand if there are any biases that teachers bring to the classroom. In the first professional development session, teachers explored language beliefs through self-reflective questioning that is important to consider when understanding their cultural identity and how that identity influences what they bring to the classroom. In addition, it became clear that understanding the difference between language difference and a learning disability was necessary to both define, but also discuss. Echevarria et al. (2017) outlined the differences between these two areas and in sessions two and three of the professional development, staff learned and reviewed these differences before data review in these sessions.

Much of the strategies for engaging MLLs and understanding the languages represented within the classroom were influenced by Echevarria et al. (2017) and Haas and Brown (2019). The ideas for how to best engage students when they have multiple languages and they are using language within the classroom are brought out and highlighted from these two authors. The last portion within this subtopic regarding an asset (positive) view of first language use in the classroom was influenced from several articles read and appears to be best practice when working with MLLs (Spycher, 2020; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2015). Specifically understanding that the learning environment created by the teacher can be supportive of student language diversity and that through knowing your students you can help them be comfortable

expressing themself linguistically in the classroom (Haas & Brown, 2019).

Assessment Practices

Another area that was a key influence from the literature review was in how assessment is used within MTSS, concerning the use of data for both interpretive means as well as purpose and kinds of data to use in MTSS. Data is such an important part of MTSS and having established criteria to use for moving between the tiers of support is necessary to establish as part of building a unified framework (Buffum et al., 2018; Bailey et al., 2020).

The last major influence of the professional development series was the discoveries made with the early literacy assessment studies that were outlined in the literature review. Many of the same assessments used to isolate students falling behind benchmark norms can be used for MLLs. Assessments like letter naming fluency in kindergarten, decodable word reading fluency in first grade, as well as passage fluency in the latter parts of the year for first grade and second grades and up can indicate needs for support (Bostrom, 2020; Fien et al., 2008; Geva et al., 2000; Ostayan, 2016). Knowing that these assessments can be used as preventative measures aided in creating how to look at and evaluate the universal screening data.

Early Intervention Studies in Foundational Skills

The final area of the literature review that played a key part in the creation of the project was in how students are identified for support that are MLLs and the intervention they receive. The decision trees that were developed as resources utilized both the research from the literature review along with the Minnesota Center for Reading Research (2019) Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites Model. The focus on

structured explicit literacy instruction stemmed from August and Shanahan (2006) and these areas where language does not cross over as isolated for this kind of instruction. Likewise, focusing on phonological and phonemic awareness first in the literacy continuum or in conjunction with phonics came from Leafstedt et al. (2004) study on phonological awareness and recommendations within the Minnesota Center for Reading Research (2019). Similarly, Haager and Windmueller's (2001) and Vaughn et al. (2006) were crucial in understanding how student oral language proficiency influences fluency if not developed alongside foundational skills in reading in kindergarten and first grade.

Several authors pointed out the need for preventative measures for MLLs that have limited English proficiency in foundational reading skills alongside oral language development with a licensed English Language Development teacher (Burns et al., 2017; Geva & Farnia, 2011; Kamps et al., 2007; Kieffer, 2008; Linklater et al., 2009; Lovett et al., 2008; Vanderwood et al., 2008; Whiteside et al., 2016). In sessions one and two of the professional development series, staff focused on the use of student ELP data to help understand the linguistic makeup of their classes. The process of identifying the student levels of ELP reveals students with limited ELP and the need to provide those students with extra support right at the beginning of the school year. In the next section, I will explore the possible implications of the project.

Policy Implications

Through this process of project completion, I learned some key policy implications within my school. First, how data is used and interpreted for support decisions is important. The second is in how teachers position themself to a student's instructional needs both linguistically and within the core instruction. The last implication

is how leadership supports and embeds a culture of collective responsibility within the school.

In the first area, using data to interpret support decisions for students is particularly important for teachers. Haas and Brown (2019) share that improving the system and capacity of teachers to correctly identify MLLs needs and having systems to monitor patterns within the data can aid in providing the support needed for students. "When an entire group of students with similar instructional needs is not meeting grade-level benchmarks, it is not an individual student problem, but rather an instructional problem" (Haas & Brown, 2019, p. 28). Likewise, rather than looking at data with a student being deficient or lacking, it is necessary to evaluate critically when instruction is not working for a large group of students. The root cause of student inability to meet academic expectations should be explored as well as changing the way instruction is being delivered. Interpretation of data is not meant to simply be read and observed, rather teachers should reflectively respond to data with changes to their teaching. One way to address this need in a school is through the use of instructional coaching and data meeting questions that prompt the discussions needed for the data. Having additional members of a staff whose sole purpose is to work on helping teachers hone their teaching craft, focused on data, can have a profound impact on student learning.

The second area for policy implications is in how the teacher views themself in relation to a student's needs within a classroom are important. This ties closely with the first implication with how data is used. "A successful system of interventions must be built on a highly effective core instructional program, as interventions cannot make up for

a toxic school culture, low student expectations, and poor initial instruction" (Buffum et al., 2018). More training on how best to meet MLLs needs linguistically without lowering rigor with proper scaffolding and removal of scaffolds is necessary to better meet student needs.

The last area of policy implications is in the leadership's role in supporting and embedding a culture of collective responsibility within the school. Buffum et al. (2018) outlined how this starts with the leaders of a district and school. The process Buffum et al. share is to have representation from across the school in the leadership of the school with responsibility for student learning not solely on individual classroom teachers but on all members of a school. They also outlined having a structure for teacher collaboration that includes a commitment to norms within each team. Buffum et al. (2018) share that collaboration starts with moving away from compliance-driven accountability and towards an environment of collective responsibility (mutual accountability). Williams and Hierck (2015) shared, "If schools and districts don't evolve from compliance to commitment, then they won't see the results of their work: improved learning for both students and adults" (p. 4). To make this shift, the work starts first within the leadership of the school and is then carried out within the grade-level teams from representatives from across the school. Building capacity within the teacher leaders and then building that movement from within the school. From the lead role within the school down to the students, accountability is openly shared and everything impacts the other within the school environment. From the office to the classroom, each person plays an integral part in the education of the student and all representatives must know their roles and the importance they bring to the learning and the organization as a whole.

The way teachers use data, the quality of the instruction within the core classroom, and the leadership's role in creating the culture of shared responsibility within the school are all policy implications that are important to consider for future successes within school communities. In the next section, I will address the project limitations.

Limitations of the Project

In this section, I outline the limitations of the project. The first limitation identified was how to address the number of themes that developed out of the literature review. Another limitation was how the demand for this system unfolded within my school. The last limitation is the scope of this task to address in a school.

First, I began reading for my literature review two years before this project was completed. This made for several references and materials that I read through as part of this process. As I began to narrow down the scope of the project, I had to consider this and focus on fewer elements from the literature review versus all of what was discovered and read.

The second limitation was how quickly this need developed in my school. With COVID-19 the desire to push this process forward became much more urgent and portions were in alignment with the work of the leadership team this past year and so these portions the staff already processed through. In retrospect, I realize this is a limitation as a school starting with nothing in place would need to begin with the areas that were completed by my school before this project's creation. This was being developed already within my school through the training of staff beliefs and understanding of how to teach MLLs and building collective leadership. Strategies for teaching MLLs are only briefly discussed in the professional development series, but it

would be highly recommended to develop this as another professional development if a school or district has a high number of MLLs and training of this type has not been completed. Likewise, if teams are not cohesive and collaborative, it is important to start and create a plan for addressing building collective responsibility as a focus for a leadership team, administrative team, or district level team. Starting with the leadership and then working down to the staff.

The final limitation is the scope of this task to address in a school. As I began this process, I thought it would be fairly laid out and straightforward on what the research would state to complete. I found there were many layers and as I traveled down one path, another area of research opened up that I wanted to discover. Although there are resources out there to aid in designing a framework of support for students, I did not come across one resource that outlined a way to do this effectively for MLLs and realized that this task was much too large for the scope of this project. In the next section, I will outline recommendations and future research I would suggest based on the work completed for this project.

Recommendations and Future Research

In this section, I will outline some recommendations I make based on the findings, future research projects, and how I will use the results of this project. In looking back on all that I have read and learned, I would highly recommend some specific resources for district or school leaders to have on hand to aid in this process for their school communities. A great book to help in understanding how to build a collectively responsible culture within school staff is the book by Williams and Hierck (2015) called *Starting a Movement: Building Culture from the Inside Out in Professional Learning*

Communities. This book is a good starting point for leaders to understand this process within their schools. Besides this book, I would recommend the book *Taking Action: A Handbook for RTI at Work* by Buffum et al. (2018). This book has several resources for working on implementing a support framework and provides a great outline for MTSS and its need within a school community. To pair with this resource, the book by Hannigan and Hannigan (2021) called *The MTSS Start-Up Guide: Ensuring Equity, Access, and Inclusivity for all Students* is a workbook text for leading this out at a school level and aligns to the *Taking Action* text by Buffum et al. (2018). Along with these resources, I would recommend Haas and Brown's book (2019) called, *Supporting English Learners in the Classroom: Best Practices for Distinguishing Language Acquisition From Learning Disabilities.* This text is a good stand-alone text to help navigate the intricacies of language learning versus learning disability especially as it relates to MLLs.

Beyond these text resources, I recommend creating an implementation timeline to focus work on this important task. This helps to highlight key areas and milestones, but it can also act as a means to figure out how successful the implementation process is going. In Hannigan and Hannigan's book (2021) they provide two assessments that can be used as indicators for the implementation process.

As I made the project, I thought of several other projects or research focuses that could be explored. One such project was the creation of a resource where teachers or educational professionals could see the stages of MLLs development in writing and speaking. The idea I had for this possible project would include writing samples for each grade level (kindergarten to 12th grade or any range in between) to show the development of MLLs in each of the stages (beginning to proficient) of development for

writing. Similarly, a handbook with stages (beginning to proficient) for speaking development samples across a range of grade levels and proficiency levels would be a valuable asset for future use for development or professional learning by teachers.

Another idea for a future professional development session would be in the use of essential standards. In the book by Buffum et al. (2018) they suggest teachers create units centering around essential standards. This process also aligns with the use of formative and summative assessments. I realized in the research that this understanding of essential learnings was very important to the work completed in Professional Learning Communities and also the decisions made for assessment purposes. Future professional development on this in particular would be helpful to work on grade-level teams to align essential learnings within each unit of study.

A future research thesis that I could see emerging from this work was in the form of a survey. Through interviewing recent graduates from teacher professional development programs from a variety of universities with specific questions on teacher preparation for teaching MLLs and knowledge of language differences versus learning disabilities, the researcher could gain insight into the gaps in teacher professional development programs. A possible project from this could be a written set of standards for general education teachers' university programs specifically about teaching MLLs. From this research, I could see teacher preparation developed at the university level for undergraduate and graduate-level education students to prepare them for working with MLLs in classroom environments.

The results of the research from my project are communicated in the capstone project. Information learned is shared over three professional development sessions. The

work from the literature review helped to create the handouts and resources within the capstone project. I also shared the slides for each presentation as a resource to staff that may be interested in reflecting on what was learned. The staff survey results gathered at the end of each session were used to help direct the next sessions. In the next section, I share the impact this project has on the education profession.

Professional Impact

This capstone project professionally impacts the education profession particularly in how teachers learn to use the ELP data to understand the linguistic strengths of the students they serve. The last impact this project has is on a structure for support for MLLs based on data-informed decisions.

The first area of impact was in how staff learned to use the ELP data to look at the overall strengths of the students in their classroom to get a general sense of student linguistic strengths in their classrooms using the WIDA Can-Do Descriptors (WIDA, n.d.). In the second session, the staff examines the ELP data by specific domains for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This deeper analysis provided teachers with a clear idea of what their students can do linguistically within each of these specific domains. This process of learning and completing this helps teachers to focus on what a student looks like that knows multiple languages.

The last impact the project has professionally is the way teachers use data to make informed decisions for MLLs. Understanding the make-up of the kinds of data and how it can be used specifically for classwide, diagnostic, and intervention purposes is explored in the professional development series. Within each grade-level band of support, the project provides decision trees to guide decisions including discussion guides to help

guide discussion with the data. This project is meant to be able to be replicated and used by other coaches or professionals within their districts and schools.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined how the project related to the research question: *How does the research recommend designing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) in order to inform reading instruction?* I outlined the major learnings from the completion of this project, and I revisited the literature review and the portions that impacted the creation of the project. I shared some specific policy implications that should be considered as part of changes within schools. I explored the limitations of the project, and I highlighted some recommendations and future research projects that could be considered. Last, I shared the professional impact that this project has on the field of education.

I began this paper by sharing about the widening academic achievement gap for minority students and the future it has on their lives. The time is now to have an organized plan to tackle the academic needs within the school communities of our nation. Teachers must be prepared to address the culturally diverse landscape of the modern classroom and make data-informed decisions to support student learning. Teachers that are not prepared for this type of educational support should be provided support within their school community and leadership must lead with the school's culture and climate in mind. Quality core literacy instruction must be the predominant focus of classrooms as most students are provided support that then prevents the further need for intervention. Last, students need to be supported in foundational literacy skills at an early age with

dual support in oral language development and literacy intervention if data shows it is necessary for MLLs.

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