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Supporting Beginner English Learner Success in Low-Incidence Districts: Reading
Accommodations for the Content Classroom

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

Hamline University
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I would like to thank my student, a beginner English Learner, who inspired me to pursue this topic so I could better support him. Thank you to my husband, Tom, for your love, support, and encouragement as I pursued graduate school. Thank you to my mother-in-law, Carol, for the hours you spent watching our newborn, Evan, so I could complete this capstone. I would not have accomplished this without any of you.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview of the Chapter

In this introductory chapter, I will discuss my rationale for pursuing the topic of reading strategies for low-incidence high school content teachers to use with their beginner English Learners (ELs). Due to the increasing population of ELs in the United States, there is a great need in our public schools to address this population in equitable ways that make content accessible to them. In order to fully understand the topic, I will also identify key vocabulary that will be used throughout this paper. Next, I will provide an explanation of how teaching and supporting ELs became a passion for me and where that has led me thus far in my profession as an educator. Through this journey I have identified some problems regarding beginner ELs in the **low-incidence** district where I work. A low-incidence district is one where there is a low percentage of language learners (Consentino de Cohen et al., 2005). The content-area teachers in this district have little experience with beginner ELs, which has resulted in a struggle to meet these student's academic needs. This paper and project seek to address a part of that problem and work towards a solution that benefits these students. Lastly, this chapter will end with a brief overview of each chapter, outlining the problem, current research, gaps in research, and the project that I have created to address a small part of the problem. Throughout the paper, the specific research question that will be addressed is: *How can low-incidence high school content teachers provide reading accommodation strategies with beginner EL students to impact student success?*

Important Terminology

Four key terms have been identified throughout this paper as key to the topic of reading strategies for low-incidence high school content teachers to use with their beginner ELs. These include: low-incidence districts, high school content teachers, reading strategies, and beginner EL students (ELs).

The first term that may be unfamiliar, depending on the reader's community context is “low-incidence.” A low-incidence district is one that has a low population of ELs. Technically a district is labeled low-incidence if there is an enrollment of less than 25% of the student population of ELs (Consentino de Cohen et al., 2005). Low-incidence districts tend to be located in rural areas.

For this capstone, “high school content teachers” refers to grade 9-12 teachers of Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, History, and English. While all teachers are important in shaping a student’s educational experience, the amount of complex academic content taught in these core areas is especially taxing for ELs (Zwiers, 2014). The intent of this project is to support content teachers because they are the ones that have reached out to me, the district EL professional, expressing concern with how to work with this student population. Therefore, my goal in supporting these teachers is for them to be equipped to support these students in their classroom contexts. This is beneficial for the content teachers because they spend a considerable amount of time with students in a highly complex academic setting. By having more knowledgeable and equipped content teachers, they will be better able to meet the academic needs of our district's language learners.

Reading accommodation strategies are strategies that teachers can use to provide students with extra support when reading is above and beyond their current ability. There are many

strategies that can be used, but the strategies selected for this paper are from the Zwiers (2014) text that was required in Hamline's K-12 ESL teachers licensure program. The text itself focuses on how to build academic language and the strategies were chosen specifically for their ease of implementation. It is also important to note that teachers who can engage with academic language support all learners. While the text is not specific to ELs, the preface of the text acknowledges that most disparities in academic language exist due to students who have "not been primed for mainstream schooling's way of learning, speaking, reading, and thinking" (p.x). These include non-native English speakers (2014). While many strategies exist that benefit learners, this project focuses on strategies that are easy to implement without extensive training.

Lastly, throughout this study there will be key vocabulary that is specific to the topic of English Learners (ELs). WIDA, or World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, is a consortium that designs and assesses educational opportunities for students learning English (WIDA, n.d.). When a potential English learner is identified in a district, and that district is in a state that is a part of the WIDA consortium, they can use a WIDA screener to assess the students English language proficiency. For kindergarten through first semester students in first grade, the EL professional will screen prospective language learners in a one-on-one setting with paper materials. For all other first grade through twelfth grade, students are screened using an online assessment. WIDA assigns a level for each student on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the lowest level of English proficiency. Zacarian and Haynes (2012) consider beginning language learners as level 1 and level 2 students. This definition is what will be used to define our beginner English learners. Next, it is important to note that while my district refers to these students as ELs, this designation of a student population has many different names. In other settings, these students may be referred to as ESL students (English as a Second Language), or ELs (English Learners).

In legal documents, as referenced in the literature review these students are referred to as LEP (Limited English Proficient). Most recently there has been a push to move towards an asset-based approach and refer to this student population as MLs (Multilingual Learners) (Kleyn & Stern, 2018). While I think that this change is moving the educational field in the right direction, it will likely take longer to reach rural districts.

Educational Background

As a child I attended a rural, low-incidence district about sixty miles from where I currently teach. I enjoyed my experience, feeling that I had close personal relationships with my teachers and that I was provided the opportunity to try extracurricular activities I would not have been able to in a larger, more competitive district. My community growing up was not terribly diverse, and I do not think that I realized there were students receiving extra language support services. I attended Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, which is a small, private, religious college. College was likely the first time that I realized that there was a lot more diversity than I had ever noticed before. I attended school to become an elementary teacher, and a requirement for elementary teachers was to complete an EL clinical. During this clinical experience, I worked with elementary students who knew three to five languages. I was amazed and inspired. I thought about how difficult school had been for me and could not imagine trying to learn content while navigating multiple languages.

After college I taught English in Malaysia for a year for students in grades one through six. For the first time in my life I experienced what it was like to be a minority. In a city of 100,000 people, there were only two caucasian individuals. I learned what it felt like to have everyone stop what they are doing and look at you while you walk by. I experienced what it was like to be surrounded by written and oral language that you do not speak or understand. I had no

resources or curriculum, so I did my best with what I had learned and what I knew as a native speaker. This was an incredibly humbling and empowering learning opportunity. When I moved back to Minnesota after one year of teaching, I applied to be a substitute teacher in a variety of surrounding districts. I found large districts to be the most overwhelming, as there were more students than I was used to, but I loved the diversity in those schools. I found that my favorite area to substitute teach in was ESL classrooms. Five years came and went so when the time came to apply for teacher positions, I was drawn toward the familiarity of what rural districts provided, and hoped that in the future I would be able to work with language learners.

My Experiences in a Low-Incidence District

Three years ago I applied for an elementary teaching position in a rural neighboring community. When asked where I saw myself in five years, I mentioned having a desire to pursue my masters degree in English as a Second Language. They offered me the EL teaching position and encouraged me to start moving towards my K-12 ESL licensure. Therefore, I entered my district on a teaching variance and started my teaching career in an area for which I did not yet have the required training. I think one of the gifts that I brought to the position was that I had a foundation of elementary teaching. However, I did not expect a limited curriculum or such a limited number of students. I never had more than a group of three students at a time.

As the only K-12 EL teacher in my rural Southwestern Minnesota school district, I have found that there are many challenges that teachers face when it comes to making accommodations for their ELs. When I started this position three years ago, my district enrolled only 21 ELs. At the high school level, I started with only two students, one of which was a long-term English learner, having received services since kindergarten. Fast forward three years, and our district currently enrolls thirty-one students who qualify for EL services. At the

high school level, there are only five students who fit this description and only one who is considered a beginner EL. For the eight content teachers who have this one student, I have been approached out of distress and concern as teachers have struggled to provide quality instruction for this student.

Listening to content teachers in distress helped me to see a need in my district to move beyond the “pull-out” model where I work with the student during his study hall, and instead start researching ways to support content teachers with their instruction. I wanted to focus on more than just the 20-30 minutes of “pull-out” instruction I provide, and find ways to equip content teachers, to allow for the student to access content throughout the entire day, not just the 30 minutes that I provide EL-specific instruction. I was able to refer to assigned texts through my Hamline courses that provided insight on reading strategies, specifically for building academic language with ELs (Zwiers, 2014).

At the time, I looked for the easiest thing that a content teacher could do. For this student in particular, he started school here in the 9th grade, and had solid literacy skills in Spanish, his first language. I asked the English content teacher to experiment with Spanish versions of the novels read in class, which allowed the student to follow along with what everyone else was doing. The next step was to also provide assessments on the novel in Spanish, which was something the teacher was less willing and possibly able to do. This experience helped me to realize there was limited understanding on how to meet the needs of ELs. In the previously mentioned scenario, the content teacher was struggling with equality of assessment instead of equity of assessment (Gottlieb, 2016). She felt that all students needed equal, or the same, assessments. The question I should have asked was, “what are you trying to assess?” If the answer was their understanding of what they read, the content knowledge, then a Spanish

translation of an assessment would have been an equitable option. In addition, what was communicated through this conversation was that teachers, even highly qualified teachers like this one, are unsure of when and how to provide appropriate accommodations for students. This is when I first considered the idea of creating a professional development session for the district. For many districts, assessing and instructing equitably has become a top priority. Educational equity is ensuring that all students have equal access to the support, opportunities, and tools that they need to succeed (Gottlieb, 2016). This is the foundation of our public education system. Federal legislation guarantees that all kids living in the United States have the right to a free public education including equal educational opportunities, regardless of their race, status, language, etc (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Minnesota Department of Education, 2020).

Making the Largest Impact

There were many different approaches that could have been considered to meet the needs of our beginner ELs. In order to make the largest impact, I thought it would be best to consider a strategy that would impact the most teachers, as well as an area that is especially difficult for ELs, academic language. This led me to the idea of focusing on reading. For many students, academic texts are incredibly challenging. For our ELs this is amplified, as they are expected to learn English and content synchronously. These considerations, in addition to the fact that acquiring academic language takes significantly longer than social language, is reason to focus time and energy on this area of language acquisition (Gibbons, 2009). Teachers have mistakenly assumed that a student who can hold a social conversation is proficient in English, but they do not take into account that academic language is much more complex and challenging. A student being able to tell you what their favorite flower is, is not the same as that student being able to

explain the process of photosynthesis. This extended time for a student to acquire academic language is also an important factor on why I think creating professional development opportunities for my district on the topic are incredibly vital.

By exploring this research question, I hope to provide information and strategies for those who work with beginner ELs or the general EL student population in low-incidence districts. I think this information will be useful for classroom teachers, or district administration who want to improve equity in their school by being intentional about the learning opportunities that they are providing their language learners. In turn, ELs should benefit from having more knowledgeable educators, and ELs' academic growth should increase. For the sake of this project, individuals in low-incidence districts will likely relate more closely to this problem and its proposed strategies. A gap in research has been identified regarding this specific student population, which further increases the disparities in the support provided to them. Both my experiences and my research have inspired me to create Professional Development opportunities for the staff in my school district so that we can address *how low-incidence high school content teachers can provide reading accommodation strategies with beginner EL students to impact student success*.

Summary

In the first chapter, I provided my rationale for pursuing this research question. Seeing the lack of academic support for these beginner ELs in my low-incidence district inspired me to look for resources that would support them. To answer this research question, I will begin in the second chapter, looking at research within different areas of the issue. The following subtopics are addressed: low-incidence districts, high school content teachers, reading strategies, and beginner English language learners. The third chapter outlines professional development

sessions aimed at supporting content-teachers by providing reading strategies to be implemented in their curriculum. The fourth chapter will reflect on what I have learned during this process, share some implications or limitations from the PD sessions, and suggest areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this capstone paper is to examine reading strategies that best support low-incidence teachers and their beginner English Learners in their content classes. This information will be shared with mainstream high school content teachers in the form of professional development so they can provide the necessary accommodations for the unique needs of beginner ELs. The specific research question that will be addressed is: *How can low-incidence high school content teachers provide reading accommodation strategies with beginner EL students to impact student success?*

This chapter seeks to explore the research behind reading accommodations and strategies specifically for English Learners who score as a level 1-2.4 on the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) language proficiency assessment and to discuss the professional development of low-incidence high school content teachers so that they can better support these learners. First, I will explore what a low-incidence district is, so that we can better understand the context of these districts. Next, we will discuss what content-area teachers in the areas of Mathematics, Science, English, History, and Social Studies need to know about ELs. Then, we will look at the research behind a variety of reading accommodations strategies to better understand how to make content accessible for students. Lastly, we will be discussing a key group of students, beginner English Language Learners. Accommodations need to be adapted on a student-need basis, and beginner language learners have unique needs that need to be addressed in order to set them up for success.

Low-Incidence Districts

In order to better understand the context of a low-incidence district, we must first define it, and then explore what it looks like from a student and staff perspective. The Urban Institute analysis of NCES Schools and Staffing Survey provided the data used in this review. The data collected between the years of 1999-2000 will be used to analyze Limited English Proficient (LEP) schools, students, and staff (Consentino de Cohen et al., 2005).

A low-incidence district is considered a school where 23.5% or less of the student population identifies as English Language Learners. At times, low-incidence may be referred to as low-Limited English Proficient, or low-LEP. Limited English Proficient is a federal designation that is used for children learning English. Schools where there are low or no-LEP students are most commonly found in suburban and rural settings (Consentino de Cohen et al., 2005). It is important to note that while a school may have low or no-LEP students, it does not mean that a diverse student population does not exist. The focus on low-incidence is primarily about students' current ability to speak English.

Students in low-LEP districts, at the time of the Urban Institute analysis of NCES Schools and Staffing Survey, consisted of the following student populations in order of highest percentage to lowest: Black students, Hispanic students, Asian students, and Native American students (Consentino de Cohen et al., 2005; Gruber, et al., 2002). This survey found that students in low-LEP settings have lower incidences of poverty and health issues compared to students in high-LEP settings. This finding is significant because it tells us poverty or health are less likely to be factors hindering student success. Therefore, if academic issues arise, it is less likely to blame on those factors, and other areas should be considered instead.

Teaching Challenges in Low-incidence Districts

Content teachers in low-incidence districts have historically been less diverse, often following a similar representation of their student demographics (Hill & Flynn, 2004). This has implications for when students with diverse backgrounds enter a district, as staff are often unable to relate to student background and experiences, which leads to isolation of the student. Many rural, low-incidence districts have limited experience with the resources required to meet the needs of their diverse learners. Hill and Flynn (2004) acknowledge that this results in teachers experiencing academic and cultural challenges in the teaching of students who are learning English. In addition to these apparent language and cultural barriers, Consentino de Cohen et al. (2005) states staff in these districts are less likely to receive LEP-related professional development opportunities and training with how to work with LEP students. This leaves staff in these districts in an unfortunate situation that does not benefit them or their students. Not only does staff diversity play a role in low-incidence districts, but so does staff understanding of language learners.

Hill and Flynn (2004) explain there has been a historical misunderstanding that ELs must first learn English before they should be allowed to take content classes. In their research, students who were not yet proficient in English were left out of content classes to learn English, and the result was they were now a year behind their peers in content-related material, ever widening the gap between students who know English and those who are still learning it. They highlight this in their resource guide for rural low-incidence districts in order to deter districts from falling into this trap of exacerbating the inequities between language learners and English proficient students.

In these settings, it is not uncommon for the district to have a single EL teacher for all students, K-12. There is little research regarding the trend of the learning model used in most low-incidence districts, though in my neighboring low-incidence communities, EL support typically comes in the form of pull-out classes. Other models of language support include push-in and co-teaching. Both push-in and co-teaching involve an EL professional pushing into a content classroom to work with ELs. Co-teaching differs in that it requires co-planning with the content teacher and shared leadership of the content classroom (Zacarian & Haynes, 2012). To align schedules and/or provide additional time for teacher planning is a challenge. There are benefits to these models, such as ELs receiving direct language support connected to classroom content, rather than a separate EL curriculum that may not connect with what students are learning in their content classes (Gibbons, 2009).

In low-incidence districts, these options are challenging because pushing into a content classroom takes a lot of time to impact so few students. Additionally, a low-incidence district may have only one EL professional who is responsible for an entire EL population making the amount of services provided to students limited. Co-planning can appear to take away from instructional time for other students. Another, newer option districts have been using to address EL needs is a coaching type format. This approach requires the classroom teacher and the licensed EL teacher to work together to plan, but places the core of instruction on the classroom teacher. This coaching model, as highlighted by Benegas and Stolpestad (2020), really equips content teachers to meet the needs of the language learners in their classroom. An identified drawback on this strategy is that these two teachers spend a significant amount of time creating specific instructional strategies to again benefit only one or two students (Nuss, 2020). Additionally, finding the time to have coaching sessions during contract hours again takes away

from direct student instruction. All of this suggests that there are unique challenges in the low-incidence setting that often do not lead to decisions being student-centered. This is unfortunate but a necessary conversation to have.

An area for future research is evaluating recent data within the last five years on schools and staffing to acquire a more accurate depiction of what our schools look like today. Since 2000, immigration patterns have changed, affecting who is moving into the United States and where they are relocating to. This data may expand our understanding of schools today. Next, the data referenced in this section is regarding elementary schools and students. While elementary school students eventually transition into high schools, it is possible that high school demographics differ from the data that was previously collected and discussed by the Urban Institute. Lastly, research on the types of EL programming that occurs in low-incidence schools may be insightful on how these districts address this specific population in their schools.

High School Content Teachers

It is the responsibility of content-areas teachers in grades 9-12 to support our language learners. Working with students who have different needs can pose a challenge to content-area teachers, especially if the students' needs are something the teachers have not experienced before. The rationale on focusing on this specific staffing population is due to the fact that all of these educators teach subjects that are richly dependent on complex texts in order to meet content standards.

Laws Impacting Schools and Language Learners

Regardless of the percentage of the EL population in a given school district, ELs have laws that protect them and require staff and teachers to make accommodations for the students' unique language needs. The 1974 Equal Education Opportunities Act (EEOA), states that

English language learner students have equal access to education (Equal Education Opportunities Act, 1974). This law requires school districts to provide language support so that students can effectively participate in the school's educational curriculum. It also mandates that states cannot deny educational opportunities by failing to address language needs. A decision in the 1974 U.S. Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* reaffirmed the civil rights law concluding that equal opportunity to education does not equate to identical education for all students (Lau v. Nichols, 1974).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) required English Learners to participate in high-stakes testing along with all other children. Not only did these students need to participate in content-based high-stakes testing, but they also had to participate in language proficiency assessments in which they needed to make adequate yearly progress towards proficiency. On the occasion that these students were not successful, the districts were penalized (Menken, 2010). The Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 has since replaced NCLB and provides greater flexibility to districts in that individual teachers are no longer held accountable for test scores, and states have more flexibility on when to intervene in districts not meeting academic growth goals (Menken, 2010). It is possible that this plan still focuses too much on high stakes testing and that it is similar to NCLB in that way. Regardless of opinions, it is clear that a need for providing education to language learners is realized as a priority and while there is not a one-size-fits-all solution, a national focus on this educational matter is here to stay. Therefore districts and their teachers need to actively plan on how to support language learners in their classrooms.

Content Teacher Responsibilities

As noted from the NCLB Act, when schools became responsible for student growth through high-stakes testing, more pressure was placed on teacher accountability. Lewis-Moreno (2007) states that to ensure the success of our ELs, all teachers need to be skilled in instruction accommodations. While what Lewis-Moreno says may be true, there are no prescriptive expectations for what these instruction accommodations look like. Even at the state level, there is little guidance and support for content teachers in this area. While the examples of accommodations may be lacking, the Minnesota Department of Education has provided a state rubric for teacher model performance standards of teacher practice, communicating specific expectations and standards for teachers to meet (*Strategies to Support Teacher Practices*). There are four domains that are covered in the rubric including planning, environment, instruction, and professionalism (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014). Each domain that is covered in the rubric can be connected with supporting ELs. Despite the efforts to lay out expectations in these ways, researchers such as Reeves (2006) have found that teachers feel they do not have enough time to deal with the needs of ELs and therefore feel overwhelmed with being responsible for the needs of ELs and non-ELs. Within the last few years, one area the State of Minnesota has tried to address this issue is through the requirement of continuing education hours specific to ELs in order to apply for relicensure.

Understanding Adult Learners

For the focus of this project, the teachers involved will become learners. It is important to consider how adult learners process information in professional development sessions so the teachers can get the most out of the PD sessions and have the greatest impact on their students. In planning for professional development, Darling-Hammond et. al's (2017) work on effective

teacher professional development inspired the active learning, collaboration, and coaching portions of the sessions. Malcom Knowles' (2005) work on adult learning theory, specifically that of the Whole-Part-Whole model, helped in understanding what needs to be included in PD sessions. The first "whole" of the sessions is to provide learners with objectives and a learner-oriented introduction that will motivate them as well as provide context for the session. Next, the 'part' or in this case, the parts include information and activities that lead towards mastery of the objective. Lastly, the second 'whole' allows teachers to take what they have learned and apply it to their specific context. This particular model is helpful because it starts with motivation to tackle an identified problem, and then ends with something Reeves (2006) identified as a barrier to using accommodations: time.

Reading Accommodation Strategies

When considering a way to impact the most teachers, and therefore the most ELs, it is clear there is the need for students to be able to read and comprehend academic texts across the content areas. The strategies in this paper come from leading experts in the EL field, Pauline Gibbons (2009) and Jeff Zwiers (2014). Both experts suggest that students need to understand the implicit information in a text, or they will not comprehend what the text is communicating. Teachers typically approach this by using an oral translation, simplifying the text, in order to communicate the message in a more understandable way. Another way that teachers may try to make content more accessible is by providing written copies of simplified texts (Zwiers, 2014; Gibbons, 2009). While both of these strategies make content accessible, they are not recommended as a primary reading accommodation. Goldenberg (2008) proposes that we can not limit our ELs to only simplified texts and language.

Instead, Zwiers (2014) suggests teachers must scaffold the following strategies: first, the reader must connect their understanding of word meanings with the intended meaning of the author. This is especially difficult when abstract or figurative language is used. Second, readers need to “chunk” the information that they read. This may take the form of training students to use and identify nominalizations. Nominalizations are when verbs or adjectives are used or transformed into a noun. For example: “They destroyed the boat. The destruction of their property was unwarranted.” In the first sentence ‘destroyed’ is a verb. In the second sentence ‘destruction’ is a noun. The words stem from the same meaning, but each plays a different role in the sentence construction. Students need to be able to distinguish these advanced grammatical trends that take place in academic English (Gibbons, 2009). Language learners go through a process that is cognitively taxing, which is not something native speakers of a language always identify when they read something in their own language. But, without understanding what is being read, learning is hindered. Therefore, this section will highlight some strategies that teachers can use in their context in order to support their language learners.

Below are strategies that are recommended by Zwiers (2014) and Gibbons (2009), leading scholars on supporting ELs’ academic language development. These strategies may be familiar to teachers, and not seem like anything specific for language learners. Through their descriptions the goal is to highlight how these particular strategies may be of benefit to language learners. Unfortunately there is limited research as to how these strategies would specifically impact beginner learners, so a potential outcome of this project could be insightful for this specific target population and could contribute to future research on this minimally studied group of language learners.

Oral Scaffolds

Students who have difficulty reading grade level material are more likely to have had less exposure to the target language as well as time being read to (Zwiers, 2014). This lack of reading modeled by proficient readers could impact students' success. Providing oral scaffolds for students is one way to build and support language readers who need to access complex texts.

Read-alouds are ways to support language growth and thinking through the modeling of complex texts. While this strategy is often thought of as elementary in procedure, it is something that benefits students of all ages. Zwiers (2014) notes the use of this strategy being particularly beneficial for language learners due to the modeling of how to read complex texts. As they follow along during the read-aloud, students see how content teachers, experts in that area, stress key points and use punctuation and intonation. For these students, this may be the first time they are hearing the fluent use of such academic language. The next step after read-alouds is when the teacher takes it to the next level and processes what they are reading, through what is known as comprehend-aloud, sometimes also known as think-alouds.

Comprehend-aloud is the process of making our thoughts visible. Teachers have the ability to draw attention to the way an author structures a text and uses language. Academic language functions differently in Math than in Social Studies or Language Arts. Therefore language learners will benefit more if they receive reading instruction from the content-area expert. Below in Figure 1 is a chart that shares some different categories of comprehend-aloud as well as some sample sentence starters.

Comprehension Processes	Sample Sentence Starters
Noticing academic language and thinking	Here the author is comparing... Ramifications means effects. Why would it cause that to happen?
Identifying confusing parts and clarifying them by rereading	I do not understand that, I will read a few more lines to see if it becomes clearer.
Figuring out long sentences and breaking them down into manageable pieces	This is telling us that light is a wave. So it was greed that caused the war.
Making predictions and inferences; the processing if they were answered or correct	This subheading makes me predict that the next sections will be about.. I see that my prediction was wrong/correct.
Connecting text to self, text to world, or text to text	This reminds me of the movie I saw about... This is similar to when...
Asking questions	Who really fired the first shot? I wonder why light doesn't travel at different speeds? Why does the author want me to care about ___?

Figure 1 Comprehend-aloud strategies and examples

Adapted from Zwiers, J. (2014). *Building academic language: Meeting common core standards across disciplines, grades 5-12*. Jossery-Bass.

When the teacher emphasizes how they monitor for comprehension, it communicates that the process of comprehending what they are reading takes a lot of intentional thinking (Zwiers, 2004). This process should not stop at teacher modeling, but should also include opportunities for the whole class, small group or partner comprehend-aloud.

Partner reading is another option that is less teacher-centered, but according to research done by Ogle and Correa-Kovtun (2010) is highly effective for ELs. They found pairing students at similar reading levels and interests for the purpose of content learning allowed students to feel comfortable in the reading exchanges. This strategy is helpful for engaging these students when a whole group discussion seems too overwhelming for them. Key to the success of content comprehension was asking the students to read and re-read the passage. Repeated reading is a reading intervention that has been used for years. Some have found the idea of rereading texts multiple times to be helpful for struggling high school readers as these readers may take significantly longer than their peers to decode and understand texts (Hawkins et. al, 2011).

Text Discussion Activities

Discussing texts allows students the opportunity to process what has been read. This is especially helpful when the reading activities are done independently and there may be some misunderstandings of the text (Zwiers, 2014). There are three text discussion activities that will be discussed that are helpful for a variety of content area classrooms.

Anticipation Chats are a branch off of anticipation guides, which were used in the 1970s to help students build on their prior knowledge of a topic (Merkley, 1996). The difference between an anticipation guide and an anticipation chat is that a guide requires students to write out their responses and reflect on them individually. In a chat, the students discuss their thoughts and opinions and share their prior knowledge with the class. This verbal expansion allows language learners to hear fluent English speakers make connections, and allows for the possibility of connections of their own.

Role-based discussion groups take shape in a variety of ways. Some that may be familiar are reciprocal teaching or literature circles. In these settings, students form groups and each group member takes on a role that is necessary for everyone to contribute to the task (Zweirs, 2014). These groups typically require modeling of the process and some mini-lessons so all students understand the roles and can work successfully as an independent group. While students are assigned specific roles, they are also encouraged to participate through all areas of discussion. When each group member has contributed to the discussion, the group completes their purpose by creating a final product or sharing their findings with the other groups. The benefit of the prescribed roles is that every student contributes and is provided with a learning environment where they can engage (Zwiers, 2014). This is especially important for language learners who may not get ample discussion time in the whole group setting.

Partner problem solving is most often used in math or science. It is a process where partners have the role of a listener or a problem solver. In this process students read through problems and take turns in their role. For the problem solver, they may read the problem out loud, think aloud and describe how they may solve the problem. The listener will listen to the problem solver, and ask clarifying questions or offer suggestions as needed. The students will then switch roles. Wang (2016) found that think-alouds such as this were of benefit to ELs.

Vocabulary Instruction

Teaching vocabulary is one way to help students understand curriculum content. The first thing that teachers need to consider are the terms necessary to teach. Content specific terms are considered Tier III words. Beck's Three Tiered Model is used by language teachers to

categorize vocabulary into these three tiers (Beck et al., 2013). The first tier consists of common everyday words, such as go, like, or read. The second tier consists of words that cross content areas, such as explain, describe, or understand. The third tier is made up of content-specific words that will only be present in a specific context, such as photosynthesis, massacre, or equation. To help students be successful, teachers should preview units and select three to five Tier II or Tier III words. If a teacher is unsure on which words to focus on, McGlynn and Kozlowski (2017) suggest having students read a short passage and indicate which words they are not sure on, and which words are completely unknown. While identifying words for instruction is a valuable skill, McGlynn and Kozlowski (2017) also recognize that teachers need to consider the method in which they present the terms in order to have a memorable and accessible effect. Unfortunately, challenges arise in the methods in which to teach it. For example, teaching vocabulary in isolation is not the most effective; rather, vocabulary taught in context is preferred, as it helps students make connections in ways that isolated vocabulary instruction cannot do (Calderon & Soto, 2017).

Word walls are a visual tool that helps students to build academic vocabulary.

While some may feel that this tool is too “elementary,” it is especially useful for language learners, even more so when images accompany the words. Zweirs (2014) suggests that teachers take the idea of the word wall to the next level by dividing words into four different sections on the wall. He proposes an area for content words, general academic words, classroom discussion terms, and terms for writing. In the last three, sentence frames may be included to model how to use the terms in a discussion. Sentence stems are commonly used with language learners to support writing development in their second language, so it would be logical to have these phrases present on a word wall for

discussion as well. Zweirs also suggests that these terms be reviewed and referred to often when the terms come up in a text or discussion. Another way to utilize them would be in the last few minutes of class, allowing students the opportunity to share with a partner what the word means or how it would be used in the context it was just learned within.

Use of Native Language

Goldenberg (2008) states that teachers need to be aware of what students can and cannot do in their native language. Knowing this information will provide insight on whether use of native language is appropriate. For students who are fluent in their native language and have a literacy background in that language, it may be appropriate to include readings in the student's native language while they acquire English. This support is helpful due to the transfer of various reading skills across languages. Encouraging students to use their native language while acquiring a new language is helpful in encouraging multilingualism. The name for students strategically utilizing their native language while they acquire a new language while engaged in content-area classes is called translanguaging (Garcia & Tatyana, 2016). When translanguaging, students move through multiple languages in the same sentence as they navigate understanding of the content. There is nothing that the teacher needs to do but encourage the student to utilize their native language. Students may not know that it is okay to do so in their classes, so giving permission for students to use their full linguistic repertoire is helpful. A more concrete way that teachers can engage with a student's native language is through cognates. Cognates are words with the same origin and they allow students to make connections from words that they know in their native language to words in English that may have similar structures (Garcia et al., 2020). For example, the Spanish word 'atención' is very close to its English cognate: attention. Garcia

et al. (2020) investigate the use of cognates in an upper elementary setting and cautions that without explicit instruction in cognates, students were less likely to use them as a reading comprehension strategy. So, if a teacher intends to use cognates, this research would suggest teachers have a firm understanding on who would benefit from the use of cognates in their context.

Next, it is important to acknowledge that if students do not have a strong literacy foundation in their native language, providing content in that language will not benefit the student. Students' native literacy levels may not be information that is widely available, but conversation with the student or EL professional can provide insight to this information. Another way teachers can use the student's native language is through explanation and clarification. If the teacher does not speak the language of the student, they may rely on another student who speaks the same language or a bilingual paraprofessional if one is available. There are some downsides to utilizing student explanations which should be considered, primarily in that the student explanation may not be accurate (Goldenberg, 2008).

Goldenberg (2008) offers another option to “frontload” content in the student's native language, teach the content in English, and then review in the student's native language. The rationale behind this strategy is the student will go into the new topic with a base understanding of what is being taught, then while the content is being taught, these students will spend their time connecting what they know to what is being taught in English. The idea is the content should be more comprehensible due to the frontloading, and in the end, the review in the student's native language will allow them to reflect on what they have learned. The end result is more content and language learned (Goldenberg, 2008).

While use of a student's native language can be incredibly helpful at the beginning stages of language learning, teachers may feel uncomfortable using this strategy if they do not speak the student's native language. Entigar's review (2016) explores how Garcia and Kleyn's 2016 research within classrooms where multiple languages were spoken showed that it is not necessary for teachers to speak a student's native language in order to use the native language in a classroom. In fact, Entigar highlights that Garcia and Kleyn's research was an important contribution to education, encouraging education as a place where monolingual ideals should not be the norm, rather, all educators should be encouraging language learners to use their full linguistic capabilities to access content in order to provide equitable educational opportunities. It is rare that a teacher will be able to speak the language of all of the student's in their classrooms, but in a rural low-incidence district, the quantity of languages spoken is likely to be less. In addition, if the language spoken is a commonly used language, such as Spanish, it is highly likely that the district can order a textbook in Spanish as a place to start.

Benefits of using native language in the classroom includes supporting bilingual students towards biliteracy. A biliterate individual is able to read and write in two languages (Boyle et al., 2015). A case study was done among elementary age students in a Dual Language Education program that found biliteracy to be an important way to help students connect socially and culturally with peers who speak their language (Bauer, et al., 2020). This study found that use of native language alongside English allows for positive identity development. A student's positive sense of self allows for a lowered affective filter, which in turn prepares them for better learning outcomes (Bauer, et. al., 2020).

Beginner English Learners

According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2017) English Language Development Program Entrance and Continuing English Learner Eligibility document, students who identify as speaking a language other than English on their home language survey are required to take a language screener and annual language assessments until they meet state language proficiency guidelines. English proficiency is assessed for four domains of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Through these annual language assessments, students are identified as level 1-6 in terms of English language proficiency. In addition to the six levels, the following phrases are used in correlation with each level, starting at level one: entering, beginning, developing, expanding, bridging, and reaching. Therefore, a level 1 EL student may also be referred to as an ‘entering EL’ and a level 2 EL student may be called a ‘beginning EL’. For this paper, beginners are referred to as students who score between level 1 and 2 for English language proficiency (Zacarian & Haynes, 2012). The use of “newcomer” is avoided for the purpose that while students may be new to the United States, they may not be new to learning English. Minnesota ELs are labeled English proficient when they have a cumulative score of 4.5, with no single domain below a 3.5 on their annual WIDA language assessment.

There are some things to consider when discussing beginning ELs. First and foremost is the student’s literacy level in their native language. Zacarian and Haynes (2012) say that it is important to know the student’s literacy background and behaviour, due to an increase in ELs in the United States that come from families where the parents have limited educational experiences. If a student is not literate in their native language, or has a limited literacy background, they will need a different set of scaffolds than a student who is literate in their native language and is now learning English. Students who fall in this category may be

considered SLIFE, or students with limited interrupted formal education (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.). The Minnesota Department of Education defines these students as having at least two years less of schooling than their peers, performing at least two years below grade level in math and reading, potentially being preliterate in their native language, starting school after the sixth grade, and having a language other than English spoken in the home (n.d.). SLIFE students have a particular set of needs, as can be identified through their very definition.

When discussing beginning ELs, people often ask, “what can I expect from students at this level?” The WIDA Proficiency Level Descriptors (2020) is a resource that is used to support teachers with what students can do at each language proficiency level. WIDA also recently updated their English Language Development Standards, which act as a guide for all educators that work with language learners (2020). These updated standards contain many resources that make teaching language learners accessible.

In addition to these resources, linguists often refer to Krashen and Terrel’s (1983) theory of second language acquisition, which highlights five predictable stages of second language development: pre-production, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency. This Natural Approach theory describes that when students are learning a new language for the first time, they begin the pre-production stage, often referred to as the “silent period”. During this timeframe, lasting up to six months, students may not produce the target language, but that does not mean that they are not learning and absorbing content. The next stage is the early production stage. In this stage the students will speak using memorized words or phrases (Holmes et. al., 2008). Students in both of these stages could be considered beginner ELs. It is important to acknowledge that from the pre-production stage to a student

reaching native-like language command takes most students approximately six years (Goldenberg, 2008).

While researching this population of students it became apparent that research regarding ELs, specifically at the level 1 phase is less available. More often than not, language learners are grouped together, with little focus on what students can do at their particular levels, save from the WIDA resource below. This gap in research is problematic because there are significant differences in the needs of students at different levels of language proficiency.

WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework

The WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards Framework (2020) is used in states that are a part of the WIDA Consortium, of which Minnesota is a part. It is an extensive document that seeks to provide resources and support for staff working with ELs. WIDA's mission is to "advance academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are culturally and linguistically diverse through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators" (p. 11). It is a document that aims to look at ELs with an asset-based frame of mind. Section three of the framework includes Grade-Level Cluster Materials (pp. 179-215), which highlight the key ways that language is used across 9th-12th grade content areas. These "Key Language Uses" are to narrate, explain, inform, and argue (pp. 180-81). The materials show these Key Language Uses for each content area, as well as annotated language samples that show what these standards in action look like. All of these materials are beneficial for content-area teachers, but the proficiency level descriptors (see Appendix C) inform what a student might be able to do at their particular level of English language proficiency. The descriptors provide examples for academic language use within the interpretive and expressive communication modes. For the purpose of this project, this resource

is especially helpful because it highlights each of the four language domains (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), allowing participants to focus specifically on reading -- which is an interpretive communication mode -- at the beginning EL proficiency levels of 1-2.

Conclusion

An overview of low-incidence districts, high school content teachers, reading accommodation strategies, and beginner English Learners brought insight to the research done on these topics and gaps in research that have the opportunity yet to be explored. The goal of this literature review was to lay the groundwork for the question on how to support low-incidence high school content teachers with reading accommodation strategies in order to help beginner English learners with content comprehension in their classrooms. Through the research provided, it was clear that there are simple, low-preparation options for teachers to choose from when deciding how to implement reading strategies for language learners in their classroom. Since these are general strategies that have been proven to help all learners, the hope is that these strategies will allow ELs to be more engaged in the classroom, being active participants in their learning. Through this project these strategies will be evaluated to see how they help support the teachers goals of making learning accessible for beginner ELs. The assumption is that all students, in addition to beginner ELs should result in academic growth in content areas when implemented.

It was also apparent through the lack of research of beginner ELs that there is still work to do in supporting these students in public schools. As we become a more culturally and linguistically diverse nation, even in the most rural parts, our school systems, administrators, and teachers need to find ways to provide equitable options for students at the beginning stages of English language proficiency. This research highlighted the fact that all teachers must engage

with ELs and take responsibility in their classrooms for their learning. It is not enough to wait for prescriptive options to be laid out; rather, districts must begin to look more closely at areas of need, where students are struggling, and start to implement small changes that could result in big impact. That is what this project hopes to accomplish.

The next chapter will outline the project that was created based on the research findings in this literature review. It will include a context, framework, and rationale for the professional development designed for low-incidence high school content teachers. This professional development project will educate low-incidence high school content teachers on reading accommodations that will support their ELs and hopefully provide insight to their effectiveness with the specific group of beginner ELs.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

This project is designed to gather information on current use of specific reading strategies for EL accommodations, introduce new strategies for teachers, and evaluate the effectiveness of the PD sessions in providing the support that teachers need to increase their use of reading strategies to support beginner ELs. The main research question is: *How can low-incidence high school content teachers provide reading accommodation strategies with beginner EL students to impact student success?* The PD sessions will also address the following questions:

- How do I support beginner ELs with different levels of native language literacy?
- How can content teachers help their ELs learn content?
- How can content teachers provide grade-level content with language rich support?

Theoretical Framework

The chapter two literature review indicates there is a need for further skill development in order for high school content teachers to better support their beginner ELs in low-incidence districts. Therefore, this capstone project will focus on professional development opportunities to address these needs, specifically in the area of content reading accommodation strategies.

Professional Development

These professional development opportunities will be developed using Malcom Knowles' (2005) work on adult learning theory, Darling-Hammond et. al's (2017) work on effective teacher professional development, Pollock's (2007) lesson planning format, and a teacher leadership coaching framework (Benegas & Stolpestad, 2020). The professional development

outline will be broken into three different sessions and take place at the end of the second quarter of school in order to implement the strategies and monitor them in the third quarter. Each of the sessions will use a slide deck to present information and guide the participants in interactive learning opportunities. The first session will include an outline of the session, learning objectives, and a unifying concept, which is the showing of a short film. These components satisfy Knowles' first 'whole' in the Whole-Part-Whole learning model. In order to help the teachers satisfy their needs towards goal attainment, which Knowles acknowledges is central to their needs, these parts must occur and be understood in order for the next 'whole' or sessions to be successful.

In addition to these components, high school content teachers will receive background on ELs, as well as reading strategies they can implement. The second session will focus on the reading strategies of oral scaffolds and text discussion activities. In the third session teachers will be introduced to two more sets of reading supports: vocabulary instruction and native language use. Woven throughout the second and third session will be suggestions for what works best for students with limited native literacy vs. strong native literacy. During the second and third session, teachers will also be invited to bring an upcoming lesson or unit and work collaboratively with a content-area peer to discern where to implement the strategies learned that day. These activities fulfill the 'part' of Knowles' model by incorporating activities that help to meet the objectives of the session. In addition, using this active learning opportunity allows for the transfer of knowledge obtained in session one to move to long term knowledge. This step fulfills the second 'whole' in Knowles' Whole-Part-Whole learning model. Allowing time to put into practice what has been learned could be the most beneficial use of time and provide space for change to occur. In order to best support these content teachers, a coaching opportunity will

be presented as available to any content teacher in the PD sessions that would like to collaborate with the district's EL professional during the duration of the quarter in order to collaborate on the implementation of the reading strategies presented. Finally, teachers will be invited to consider participating in an interview at the end of the quarter to discuss their experience of reading strategy implementation as well as how effective they thought the PD sessions and presented strategies were in relation to their needs.

Standards

The standards addressed in this project are primarily from the “Performance Standards of Teacher Practice” (MN Department of Education, 2014). In the first domain: planning, it states that teachers must use student data to inform their instructional planning. This is very important for our beginner ELs, because their specific linguistic needs require accommodations on behalf of the teacher. We also see in the first domain that teachers must plan for differentiation, which is again in line with EL accommodations. The second domain focuses on the environment that a teacher creates in their classroom, and is not a focus of this specific PD session, but one could argue that providing accommodations for students creates a better learning environment for students. In the third domain the focus is on instruction. Two expectations regarding instruction that could apply to ELs are for teachers to communicate learning targets and content effectively, as well as to use instructional strategies that engage students. Communicating clear expectations and engaging ELs through strategies that support their needs would help teachers to meet the expectations of this domain. Next, in the fourth domain regarding professionalism, teachers must use self-reflection to improve instruction, as well as understand the cultural and linguistic background of their students. These Professional Development workshops will offer an opportunity to address all four of these standards. These standards are discussed at teacher

observations annually, and will therefore be familiar to staff. By addressing these standards at the beginning of the PD session, it will not only serve as a modeling opportunity for what teachers should be doing with their students, but it will also show opportunities for professional growth as a result of the PD sessions. By starting with the broader picture of teacher performance standards, it reminds staff we are all held to a certain standard, and there are expectations we must meet in order to provide quality education for our students.

Before moving on to the PD sessions, I would like to add that on a district level, we also hold ourselves to one more standard. Our school has a motto: “Working together as one in the pursuit of excellence”. This standard that the district has set for staff and students emphasises the team approach that is needed to help all involved be successful. What we have learned about the complex needs of beginner ELs along with the complexity of engaging these students in academic texts, it is more important than ever to work together to provide the most quality and equitable education possible.

Goals/Outcomes

There are a few short-term goals that pertain specifically to content teachers that these three professional development sessions have. First, teachers will be able to use the reading strategies of oral scaffolds, text discussions, vocabulary instruction, and native language use to make content accessible for beginner English Learners. Second, they will be able to transfer what they have learned about reading strategies and apply them to their content lessons and assessments. Lastly, teachers will understand that language modifications can help support content acquisition. Additionally, a long term-goal for content teachers is they would feel supported and comfortable collaborating with the district's EL professional.

In addition to goals for content teachers, there are a few long-term goals that pertain to the beginner ELs. This goal is that student comprehension on content readings will increase due to the reading support now provided by the teachers. Additionally, a goal for these bilingual students is for them to be biliterate.

Participants

These PD sessions will involve high school content teachers, specifically teachers of Math, Science, History, English, and Social Studies. This could result in up to a total of eight content teachers. An invitation for paraprofessionals to attend the sessions will also be extended, which could add an additional two individuals. Of these staff, nine are Caucasian with a breakdown of four male and six female staff. The content teachers are all native speakers of English. One of the paraprofessional staff is Hispanic, bilingual (Spanish/English), and works with our beginner ELs in the high school.

Setting

This project will take place in a rural Minnesota farming community. This is a low-incidence school district with currently 5 ELs at the high school level (grades 9-12), one of which is considered a beginner EL. The total student enrollment is 347 in 2021, as recorded in the Minnesota Report Card for the high school. Of the 347 students, 13.5% are students of color, and 30.3% of the students population qualify for free or reduced meals. 92% of the staff at the high school are considered experienced, meaning they have more than three years of teaching, which is higher than the MN state average. Courses that are taught by teachers in areas that they are licensed to teach drops slightly to 91.11%, which is lower than high poverty schools in MN. Lastly, the percentage of teachers who have advanced degrees results in only 24% of the staff at the high school, which is less than half of the state average.

Teachers will take one quarter of the school year to implement the reading strategies they have learned. They will be invited to participate in a coaching relationship for the duration of the quarter, so they can collaborate with and be supported by the EL professional. Those teachers who agreed to coaching will be interviewed for further insight of the effectiveness of the PD sessions at the end of the quarter.

Materials

Teachers will be provided with the WIDA **Proficiency Level** Descriptors name chart for grades 9-12 (see Appendix C). They will also receive a student profile that gives test scores, educational background, language background, and student listed strengths, goals, and areas for growth. These items are meant to build the necessary background on students to help the teachers have a better understanding of who they are planning accommodations for. A reading strategies chart (see Appendix D) will be provided for use with classroom content to keep track of which reading accommodations were used for each assignment. Teachers will print off a copy of their student assignments with the grades at the end of the second quarter, which will be used to see if there is a correlation to student success and the new support being provided. These grades along with the reading strategy chart will provide quantitative data needed to gauge the success of the strategies.

Timeline

The creation of this capstone project, which consists of PD sessions, will take place in the fall of 2021. The sessions will be created and reviewed by a content review, peer reviewers, and a professor at Hamline University during this time. The project will be completed by December of 2021. The PD sessions begin in January 2022 at the end of the second quarter. The strategies

learned during the sessions will be implemented during the third quarter with an evaluation of their success at the completion of the third quarter in March of 2022.

Learning Plan

Each professional development session uses the Performance Standards of Teacher Practice Rubric to guide the objectives for the session (Minnesota Department of Education, 2014). Each PD session will last ninety minutes. In the first PD session, teachers will be provided an overview on the topic of English learners with objective for the session, which are:

- Use student data to inform planning.
- Align learning targets with standards.

Session two presents the reading strategies of oral scaffolds and text discussion activities, and the objectives are:

- Use instructional strategies to engage students.
- Facilitate activities and discussions that promote high cognitive engagement.

Session three includes the reading strategies of vocabulary instruction and native language use, and the objective is:

- Plan for differentiation.

Next, teachers will be presented with the reading strategies provided in the literature review. The four main categories of strategies include oral scaffolds, text discussion activities, vocabulary instruction, and use of native language each include multiple sub categories.

I will use the GANAG lesson plan format (Pollock, 2007) in designing each professional development session, as shown in Figure 2.

Lesson part	Teacher/ presenter does...	Students/ content teachers do...
G Goal (Clarify your learning targets)		
A Accessing Prior Knowledge (Warm Up)		
N New Information (Knowledge or Skills) “I do, we do”		
A Application (Student Processing “You do”)		
G Generalization (Closure from the students)		

Figure 2 GANAG lesson plan

(adapted from Pollock, J. E. (2007). *Improving student learning one teacher at a time*. Washington, DC: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)).

In addition to the PD sessions, teachers will also be invited to enter in a coaching relationship with the EL teacher during the quarter they implement these strategies. This will allow teachers the opportunity to continue to revamp their attempts at reading accommodation strategies with the support of the EL professional. Together they can work through areas of concern and collaborate to provide the best experience for the content teacher and the ELs.

Assessment of Success

In order to assess the effectiveness of the professional development sessions, there is a variety of data that I can collect during and after the series of sessions. Mixed-methods research

indicates the use of quantitative and qualitative data in a way that works together to provide a more complete picture than one type of data on its own (Mackey & Gass, 2016). The use of the Likert scale will gather quantitative data during the first professional development workshop to assess high school content teachers. A Likert scale is a type of questionnaire that is used to scale responses (Mackey & Gass, 2016). This questionnaire will take place before the workshop to provide insight on the tendencies of the participants. Questions will include what strategies are in place currently, as well as questions regarding frequency of use. These responses will be kept anonymous. This data is a type of diagnostic assessment that will allow the PD leader an opportunity to adapt or highlight specific areas of the PD session. While scale responses are helpful, they do not provide further details that may be insightful, thus the need for qualitative data is also necessary.

At the end of the third session, a request for volunteers will be announced inviting teachers to participate in a final interview about the reading strategy implementation process to provide further insight to the effectiveness of the sessions. They will reflect on the following questions:

- What strategies were used?
- What were some successes that I noticed?
- What were some challenges I faced?

During the interview, we will also circle back to our initial questions:

- Did content teachers provide reading accommodation strategies with beginner ELs that impacted student success?
- Did these strategies help their ELs learn content?
- Were they able to provide grade level content with language rich support?

This qualitative data will provide insight into what challenges occurred, as well as the successes. The feedback from the interviews would allow for future revamping of the sessions to benefit staff in the future.

In the interviews, teachers would use a pseudonym to insure confidentiality. For their journals/reflections, teachers would type their entries into a shared document to avoid the opportunity to identify the teachers through their handwriting and maintain confidentiality.

Lastly, to assess the effectiveness of the strategies implemented, teachers will use a provided progress monitoring chart to see if there is a correlation between the new support being provided to the ELs and their overall success acquiring the content knowledge. The chart will provide space for content-area teachers to report student data from class assignments and assessments. They will be asked to provide grades from the first and second quarter (pre-reading strategy implementation) and third quarter (post-reading strategy implementation) for their ELs. It would also be recommended that the teachers evaluate the entire class grades, to see how the implemented reading strategies affected the class as a whole, though that data would not be used for the purpose of this project, it could still be insightful for the teacher. Information gathered from these three sources will inform the findings of this project.

Conclusion

The methods of the PD sessions and the assessments for their objectives were described in this chapter. The PD sessions will take place at the beginning of the third quarter, providing opportunities for learning and practical application to upcoming units. The reading strategies presented during the sessions include oral scaffolds, text discussion activities, vocabulary instruction, and use of native language. To gather a baseline on student academic achievement, teachers will be asked to record current grades from assignments and assessments for their

beginner ELs. Teachers will then have the third quarter to implement strategies of their choosing. At the end of the third quarter, teachers will record grades from assignments and assessments and turn in that information. This information will be used to assess the effectiveness of the strategies presented. Teachers will also be invited to participate in an interview regarding the objectives of the PD session, evaluating if the strategies were effective for their students. The fourth chapter will reflect on the major learnings from this process, revisit the literature that influenced this project, discuss limitations and implications, provide recommendations for further research, explain how results will be communicated, and lastly, discuss how this project hopes to benefit the education profession. This final chapter will act as an overall conclusion of this paper and project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

The main research question guiding this capstone project is: *How can low-incidence high school content teachers provide reading accommodation strategies with beginner EL students to impact student success?* The rationale for this project came from my experience as the only EL teacher in a rural district with few high school ELs. I noticed that our high school teachers were struggling with what to do with ELs, specifically those speaking little to no English. I saw the students struggling and the teachers frustrated. This inspired me to see what I could do to make a positive impact in my context. I chose to research reading strategies that are helpful for beginner ELs, as reading is a skill that spans all content areas. In addition to researching these strategies, I also had to come to terms with the fact that in order to help our ELs be successful, a partnership between myself and content teachers is necessary. Equipping teachers through professional development feels like the most meaningful way to provide support for our ELs, as they spend the majority of their days in their content classrooms.

Major Learnings

This has been quite the journey for me. I started working towards my Masters of Teaching English to Students of Other Languages degree in 2018, not knowing which topics would catch my attention for further research. Since beginning my studies at Hamline I have switched careers, from youth ministry to teaching K-12 ELs, and had a child. I started research for this paper and project back in the spring of 2021. After months of narrowing down my topic and finding preliminary research, I focused on finding reading strategies that would support beginner ELs in their content-area classes.

This brings me to my first and potentially largest realization from this process. It is okay to not know everything. This seems like it should be obvious, but as educators there can be a feeling of needing to be the person with all of the answers. This process has reminded me that learning is continuous. When it came to researching my topic, I was challenged by the many keywords that can be used for any one item through the navigation of databases and library resources. I scheduled multiple meetings with Hamline librarians in order to navigate through databases, successfully searching for relevant content to my topic. Once I had research and resources, I worked with the writing center on making sure my thoughts were cohesive in print. Then came editing, which required copious amounts of feedback from peers and my professors. I have been in a constant state of learning, which is a humbling state of being. Even though it may not seem like it, asking for help is something that I struggle with, but it was necessary for me to learn and do my best.

A second major learning I have from this project is that supporting ELs does not have to be time consuming or challenging. Through my experience, I have always assumed that content teachers do not make accommodations for ELs because it is hard work. What I have found through research for this project is that lack of training and preparation is most often the reason for absence of accommodations. That being said, I think where the challenge lies with teachers is that every student has unique needs that require a personal relationship in order to uncover them. For example, if a student is not literate in their native language, using native language supports may not actually be beneficial to that particular student.

A third major learning is the amount of work that goes into Professional Development (PD). I have never created or led a PD session before, so researching what goes into effective and engaging PD was vital. These PD sessions were developed with PD best practices, using

Malcom Knowles' (2005) work on adult learning theory and Darling-Hammond et. al's (2017) work on effective teacher professional development. Knowles' (2005) Whole-Part-Whole model, specifically the 'part' sections that require activities that lead to mastery of the objective, was the most challenging. Providing meaningful activities to practice strategy implementation took a lot of time and creativity. Fortunately, both theories emphasized the importance of these meaningful activities in order to engage participants, so it was worth the extra effort and likely made my sessions more effective.

Revisit the Literature

Over the last four years I have been researching ELs, but the scope of research on this student population is vast. To narrow my focus for this project, I selected beginner ELs and the language domain of reading. Goldenberg (2008) states that for a student in the beginning stage of language acquisition, which he calls the pre-production stage, it takes approximately six years for a student to have native-like language command. This tells us that there is great work to be done to support these students, especially if they are arriving at the high school level.

The district that I work in is considered low-incidence. This means that less than 23.5% of the student population identifies as EL (Consentino de Cohen et al., 2005). I learned that schools where there are low or no limited English proficient (LEP) students are typically found in suburban and rural settings (Consentino de Cohen et al., 2005). Many rural, low-incidence districts have limited experience with the resources required to meet the needs of their diverse learners and are less likely to receive PD on how to work with ELs (Hill & Flynn, 2004; Consentino de Cohen et al., 2005). This information inspired me to fill that gap and meet the needs of teachers in this context.

The primary sources of my research on reading strategies come from work done by Gibbons (2009) and Zwiers (2014), experts in the field of language learners. Their work is used to prepare educators for working with ELs in the areas of academic language, literacy, and thinking. Both resources can be utilized to support any educator working with ELs with focus on multiple language domains. For the purpose of this paper and project, their work on the language domain of reading was instrumental in selecting reading strategies for the professional development sessions. What I appreciated most about the strategies I selected from their work was that they are easily accessible for content-area teachers who may be intimidated by EL accommodations.

Implications

At this time there has been no in-person training for staff regarding ELs at my school or district. After completing this project and presenting my learnings to school leadership, these PD sessions could open the door to training opportunities for staff related to EL support and differentiation. I would hope that these trainings would then lead to more equitable learning opportunities for our EL student population.

Limitations

When planning for this project a few limitations presented themselves. First, time to meet for PD sessions is a challenge. The district that I work for has limited staff inservice opportunities. There are one and a half days before school starts for professional development as well as an additional day in January. The topics are chosen by a committee and are typically chosen to have the highest impact on the most staff, typically focusing on required topics, such as blood borne pathogens and mental health, or areas needed for relicensure. Even though

understanding the needs of ELs is a new requirement for the state of Minnesota for relicensure, it has never come forward as a topic for a full staff development opportunity.

Another option outside of inservice hours could be staff meetings or Professional Learning Teams (PLTs). Staff meetings already consistently go over the allotted 30 minutes every other week, so any substantial training is unlikely to occur during this setting. Our PLTs meet on the off weeks of staff meetings and consist of grade level teachers meeting to discuss grade level content/issues. It could be a possibility to meet with PLTs that were interested, but when gauging interest for this in the past they have always seemed occupied with their own material and were unwilling to give up that time for EL matters. Moving forward, one way that the PLT time might work, would be to invite anyone who is willing and interested to attend. That way those who have buy-in would have the opportunity to engage in the content, and could potentially act as a grade level expert on ELs.

Coaching as a part of professional development has been shown to be highly effective (Benegas & Stolpestad, 2020). However, finding the time to have coaching sessions during contract hours again takes away from direct student instruction. Coaching is also not a current part of the professional development options at my school, and in the past it was used more as a punishment for poor student performance instead of a teacher initiated option for professional growth. Therefore, intentional groundwork needs to be completed, reassuring teachers that coaching comes from a non-judgmental stance and is teacher led.

The hope is that with personalized coaching and support, teachers will be set up for success and I will learn ways to continue to support them. During this process I will learn what works and what does not, and will be able to adjust to meet the needs of the teachers and

students. When that happens, it would be difficult not to share what we have learned as a district.

Further Research

While the reading strategies of oral scaffolds, text discussion activities, vocabulary instruction, and native language use are helpful for language learners, there is limited research as to how they would specifically impact beginner learners. Research on the effectiveness of these strategies for students with the proficiency levels of 1-2.4 would be insightful and would better prepare the teachers who work with this student population.

Another area for future research is evaluating recent data within the last five years on schools and staffing to acquire a more accurate depiction of what our schools look like today. Since 2000, immigration patterns have changed, affecting who is moving into the United States and where they are relocating to. This data may expand our understanding of schools today. Next, the data referenced in the second chapter is regarding elementary schools and students. While elementary school students eventually transition into high schools, it is possible that high school demographics differ from the data that was previously collected and discussed by the Urban Institute (Consentino de Cohen et al., 2005). Lastly, research on the types of EL programming that occurs in low-incidence schools may be insightful on how these districts address this specific population in their schools.

Communicating Results

Taking what we have learned as a staff after implementing the reading strategies presented (oral scaffolds, text discussion activities, vocabulary instruction, and native language use) in this capstone project could impact further PD sessions on working with ELs. One way to adjust these PD sessions in the future would be to use/model strategies with various content-area

texts. Each strategy could be modeled using texts from each subject area to really engage the teachers with how the strategy could be implemented in their context.

At the end of the third session, I ask for volunteers to implement the different strategies and share their experiences using the different strategies and their effectiveness at the end of the quarter. This information would be helpful for further PD sessions. What was learned from the content-area teachers at my high school could be used for further research or presented in PD sessions outside of the district. Our local teachers union leads PD sessions on a variety of topics, and this could be something that was offered to educators in our surrounding area. Our school is also a partner with the Southwest Initiative Foundation, which conducts a day of professional development every year in January, and they have not had any presentations regarding ELs. If the teachers at my school found the content in my PD sessions to be beneficial, I would not hesitate to offer to lead a workshop at these PD events in the future.

Benefits to the Profession

There is work to be done to help support our beginning language learners, especially in low-incidence districts. My objective was to do my part and contribute to the education of teachers so that they could better serve and support this population of ELs. I believe that the PD sessions presented in this capstone project will be meaningful in aiding a more equitable approach to content-area instruction for our beginner ELs. My goal is for this project to be utilized by other low-incidence districts who are looking for ways to support their beginning ELs in the domain of reading. While I created these PD sessions with my current district in mind the content within the sessions is easily applicable for teachers in any district. Additionally, these PD sessions will be available to the public on Hamline's Digital Commons web page, acting as a resource for those interested in this topic.

Conclusion

This chapter reflected on the process of creating PD sessions around reading strategies for beginner high school ELs. First, the chapter included information regarding major learnings of the process. Second, it revisited the literature that shaped the project through research. Next, implications and limitations were discussed followed by ideas for further research. The ways in which results would be communicated and how this project will benefit the teaching profession concluded this chapter.

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Appendix A

Pre-PD Session Survey

Link to google form: <https://forms.gle/gZnWFbJjHFbtk5rU8>

Questions asked:

What grade do you teach?

Are you familiar with your ELL student's language proficiency levels?

Which reading strategies are you familiar with?

How often do you use read-aloud strategies in your classroom?

How often do you use comprehend-aloud strategies in your classroom?

How often do you use partner reading strategies in your classroom?

How often do you use anticipation chat strategies in your classroom?

How often do you use role-based discussion groups strategies in your classroom?

How often do you use partner problem-solving strategies in your classroom?

Do you have a word wall in your classroom?

How do you feel about students using their native language in your classroom?

What questions would you like covered about ELs during these PD sessions, or future sessions?

Appendix B

GANAG Lesson Plan Template for Brainstorming

Topic:

Learning Objective:

Lesson part	Teacher does...	Students do...
G Goal (Clarify your learning targets)		
A Accessing Prior Knowledge (Warm Up)		
N New Information (Knowledge or Skills) “I do, we do”		
A Application (Student Processing “You do”)		
G Generalization (Closure from the students)		

GANAG lesson plan adapted from Pollock, J. E. (2007). *Improving student learning one teacher at a time*. Washington, DC: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)

Appendix C

WIDA Proficiency Level Descriptors

Grades 9-12 WIDA Proficiency Level Descriptors for the Interpretive Communication Mode (Listening, Reading, and Viewing)

Toward the end of each proficiency level, when scaffolded appropriately, multilingual learners will...

Criteria	End of Level 1	End of Level 2	End of Level 3	End of Level 4	End of Level 5	Level 6
DISCOURSE Organization of language	Understand how coherent texts (spoken, written, multimodal) are created...					
	to meet a purpose (to inform, narrate, entertain) in a series of topic-related connected sentences	to meet a purpose through generic (not genre-specific) organization (introduction, body, conclusion)	to meet a purpose through specific organization (orientation and explanation sequence)	to meet a purpose through organizational patterns characteristic of the genre (claim, evidence, reasoning) that link ideas, events, and reasons across text	to meet a purpose reflective of genre and discipline, linking ideas, events, and reasons in a variety of ways (causes and effects, factors and outcomes, events and consequences)	According to authors' strategic use of generic structure (combining different genres to meet their social purpose) for particular effects and for a variety of audiences
DISCOURSE Cohesion of language	Understand how ideas are connected across a whole text through...					
	multiple cohesive devices (synonyms, antonyms)	a variety of cohesive devices that connect larger meaningful chunks of text including (class/subclass, whole/part)	a wide variety of cohesive devices that connect ideas throughout a text (whole/part, substitution/omission)	cohesive devices and common strategies that connect ideas throughout a text (given/new)	various types of cohesive devices and strategies that connect ideas throughout a text	authors' strategic and creative ways to connect units of meaning throughout a whole text
DISCOURSE Density of language	Understand how ideas are elaborated or condensed through...					
	expanded noun groups with prepositional phrases (<i>the chemical element with the symbol H</i>)	expanded noun groups with embedded clauses (<i>chemical element that has these physical properties</i>)	expanded noun groups with a variety of embedded clauses (<i>chemical element with the symbol Na and an atomic number 11 that ...</i>)	expanded noun groups with embedded clauses and compacted noun groups (nominalization)	a variety of noun groups expanded with pre- and post- modifiers (<i>the chemical element with the symbol H and atomic number 1</i>)	authors' strategic use of noun groups and nominalization to elaborate and condense ideas characteristic of various genres and content areas

Criteria	End of Level 1	End of Level 2	End of Level 3	End of Level 4	End of Level 5	Level 6
SENTENCE Grammatical complexity	Understand how meanings are extended or enhanced through...					
	multiple related simple sentences (<i>All people have needs and wants. This is called demand.</i>)	simple or compound sentences with familiar ways of combining clauses (using coordinating conjunction: <i>All people have needs and wants and it's called demand.</i>)	compound sentences with frequently used ways of combining clauses (coordinating conjunctions: <i>All people have needs and wants but there are only limited...</i>)	compound and complex sentences with a variety of ways of combining clauses addressing genre, audience, and content area (<i>Whenever there is an increased demand, the prices go up.</i>)	a wide variety of sentence types that show various increasingly complex relationships (condition, cause, concession, contrast) addressing genre, audience, and content area (<i>Despite the obvious problems with equity, some people...</i>)	authors' strategic use of sentences that combine clauses reflecting increasingly complex relationships addressing genre, audience, and content area (<i>Interest rates are controlled by the Federal Reserve Bank, although some would argue...</i>) with awareness of how various sentences create different effects
WORD, PHRASE Precision of language	Understand how precise meanings are created through everyday, cross-disciplinary, and technical language through...					
	a growing number of words and phrases in a variety of contexts (<i>sit tight for the announcements, in this novel</i>)	an expanding number of words and phrases including idioms and collocations (<i>to make a long story short</i>)	a variety of words and phrases such as adverbials of time, manner, and place; verb types; and abstract nouns (<i>within seconds</i>)	a wide variety of words, phrases, and expressions with multiple meanings across content areas (<i>division of power versus long division</i>)	strategic use of various words, phrases, and expressions with shades of meaning across content areas (<i>tumultuous and catastrophic events</i>)	authors' flexible and strategic use of words and phrases across a variety of contexts and content areas (<i>stares, hesitates, agonizes and finally...</i>)

Image retrieved November 20, 2021 from:

<https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf>

Appendix D

Reading Strategies Classroom Check-list

Strategy	Assignment	Notes
Oral Scaffolds		
• Read-aloud		
• Comprehend-aloud		
• Partner reading		
Text Discussion		
• Anticipation chats		
• Role-based discussion groups		
• Partner problem solving		
Vocabulary Instruction		
• Word Walls		
Use of Native Language		
• cognates		
• translanguaging		
• Native language “Front-loading”		