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Supporting Dual-Identified Learners' English Expressive Language Development

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Supporting Dual-Identified Learners' English Expressive Language Development

by

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A capstone thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in Arts of Teaching English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2023

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the guiding question that informed the creation of my Capstone Project: Supporting Dual-Identified Learners' English Language Development. Chapter One provides a brief background of the situations that led me to my research question. Then, I provide definitions of the terminology of "dual-identified" and "long-term" English Language Learners. I also provide a brief summary of the purpose of my project in relation to my placement and colleagues. Last, I offer a summary of Chapter One before moving on to Chapter Two.

Background of Research

Before I began teaching ESL, I worked as a paraprofessional in a high school science department for the Anoka-Hennepin School District. During this placement, I helped support students in the classroom, worked one-on-one with students, and read tests aloud. In this role, I also worked closely with the English Language (EL) Department to support English Language Learners (ELLs) and with the Special Education Department (SPED) as well to support SPED students in the context of the science classrooms. In this context is where I first came into contact with and worked closely with individuals whom my district refers to as "dual-identified" learners, or students who are eligible to receive both EL and SPED services. While I planned on pursuing my initial licensure in teaching ESL, as I have always loved language acquisition, working with SPED students and reviewing IEPS, interested me. I found it incredibly fulfilling to help support teachers by ensuring students were supported with the appropriate accommodations to help them access the content in their courses. After

watching how students were supported by their case managers and the SPED department, I considered getting an additional licensure in Special Education but ultimately chose to focus solely on my ESL K-12 Licensure.

In the Fall of 2019, I completed part of my student teaching at this high school, and worked as a long-term substitute in an EL classroom. I taught a newcomer class and two sections of an English Language Development (ELD) class called “Academic Discourse,” which was targeted at supporting expressive language (especially in the areas of writing and speaking) for high-level ELLs. The goal of the class was to support students to help them exit the EL program by improving their scores across the four language modalities, or domains, (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking) on the ACCESS test. Particularly, this course focused on the expressive language modalities of writing and speaking, but to access the content, students needed to also be able to read effectively. To exit the EL program, students needed a composite score of 4.5 across the four domains with only one area lower than a 3.5. Almost all of the students were WIDA level 4 or higher. Many students were bilingual and had been born in the U.S., having received EL services in elementary and middle school. Several students were close to potentially being defined as “long-term” ELLs. A few of my students were also dual-identified learners. In this context, I began wondering how to best support my learners, especially when they were also impacted by various disabilities, such as SLD in reading. Especially in the high school setting, there was a push to get the students to exit services before leaving high school, to help them graduate, and to support them as they continued on in their education after. According to the Minnesota Department of Education Graduation and Enrollment Data Graduation, from 2016-2020, students who

exited EL services before high school and current ELs graduation rates increased at higher rates than their non-EL peers. ELLs saw an increased rate of 2.1% and exited-ELLs saw an increase of 4.2%, while non-ELL peers only saw an increase of 1.2% (Minnesota Department of Education, 2022, p. 20).

After I finished my initial licensure program, I began teaching at a middle school in January 2020. I taught a section of WIDA level 2 ELLs. Two of my students were dual-identified as well. When the Covid Pandemic hit, I struggled, alongside my colleagues, with best supporting learners and meeting their accommodations (both language based and SPED identification needs) in a virtual setting. The barriers created by the Covid-19 Pandemic further highlighted the inequities existing for my learners in the school system and the need for active student involvement and buy-in. Many of my students expressed frustration with the virtual setting, struggled to stay engaged in material, and floundered without one-on-one support from the teachers. Several expressed sentiments of feeling “dumb” compared to peers and felt that no matter how hard they tried, they were failing, so they did not want to try anymore. This encouraged me to continue to seek new ways to better advocate for my students’ needs and support their learning.

In the following three years, I taught at two middle schools in the Anoka-Hennepin District. I taught both in-person settings and hybrid settings. The disruption to students’ academic and socio-emotional development caused by the pandemic became more apparent and students showed signs of backsliding, reflected in their ACCESS test scores and in their classwork. In both schools, I taught ELD classes to newcomer students and to higher-level students close to exiting. When supporting my

newcomer students, at times, it became apparent that there were additional barriers to their progress than just language. In addition, several students who were not newcomers were placed in my newcomer ELD classes due to their lower composite ACCESS scores. These students were either dual-identified, or in the case of one, not yet identified. Several of these students could fit the definition of “long-term” ELLs. These students often became frustrated because they were at the level of their mainstream peers conversationally and did not need the vocabulary building component of the ELD I course. Many of these students scored higher in Speaking and Listening, but struggled with reading and writing in Academic English. The ELD I material, which focused mostly on vocabulary building, oral language, and constructing simple writing responses offered little academic rigor to these misidentified students and offered little support for reading development. Overall, because of my students’ language needs and the disruptions due to COVID-19, teachers, including myself, struggled to differentiate if needs were due to previous needs or an unidentified learning disability. There was also a question of how to ensure students received the rigorous instruction they were entitled to and where was the best placement for them. In the higher level ELD classes, students who struggled with reading and writing fell behind and were discouraged by the apparent gaps in their abilities and those of their peers. In my class, these students became disengaged and struggled to complete work, especially when it came to writing assignments. Their content-area English Language Arts (ELA) teachers reported similar issues with work completion, as well students’ dependency on teachers to complete tasks and a reluctance to ask for help. When students did complete writing activities, I observed that my learners were struggling with argumentative writing, especially when

asked to follow the patterns of claim, evidence, and reasons. This was a sentiment also echoed by their ELA teachers. In the lower level ELD classes, these same students were able to quickly complete activities, but showed very little progress due to the lack of rigor for them.

Who are Dual-Identified Learners?

Dual-Identified Learners are students who are eligible to receive both EL and SPED services in my district. The label is broad and encompasses a variety of SPED identifications. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, ELLs dual-identified are most likely to have a specific learning disability (SLD), followed by speech/language impairment, autism spectrum disorder, and developmental cognitive disorders, with dual-identified learner numbers increasing in the last few years (Minnesota Department of Education, 2022, p. 16). For the sake of this project, with the wide variety of exceptionality identities represented within Special Education, I focused mainly on dual-identified students with SLD identities, especially exploring how they are related to long-term EL status in high-level ELLs or students who are scoring higher in several domains, but lower in reading and writing.

Who are Long-Term ELs?

Although Minnesota does not have a formal, legal definition for Long-Term English Language Learners (LTEL), states are required under the Every Student Succeeds ACT (ESSA) to report students who have not gained English proficiency within the first 5 years of their identification as ELLs ("English Learners in Minnesota 2020-2021" Report, 2021, p. 3). For the sake of this capstone, I used this perspective, ELLs who have not gained proficiency in English Language within 5 or more years of their classification

as ELLs as the intended meaning of LTEL. Proficiency is accessed through WIDA's ACCESS assessments. To exit EL services in Minnesota, students must earn a composite score of 4.5 or higher with at least a 3.5 in all four modalities (listening, reading, writing, speaking). Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the average time K-12 students received EL services before exiting was 4.6 years (Minnesota Department of Education, 2022, p. 13). The COVID-19 Pandemic may have led to an increase in LTEL, impacting EL exiting rates. In 2021, the number of LTEL students in Minnesota schools increased from 104 to 2,443 between grades 4 and 5, while remaining between 2,099-2797 in grades 5-12 (Minnesota Department of Education, 2022, p. 13). Of these numbers, 33 percent of LTELs were dual-identified learners as well (Minnesota Department of Education, 2022, p. 13).

Context of Research

I teach at a middle school in a district that has the third largest enrollment of ELLs and has shown a steady increase in numbers from 2017-2021 (Minnesota Department of Education, 2022, p. 10). As of Spring 2022, ELLs made up 8.2% of the population at my school and SPED made up 18.7% (Minnesota Department of Education, "Minnesota Report Card," 2022). To support ELLs in their content-area classes, my district has adopted a consult-model teaching practice. In this, an EL teacher pairs with either an interested content-area teacher or a whole department. The EL teacher then works with their colleagues to ensure supports are being offered in their classrooms. This includes joining collaborative time meetings (CT) to review curriculum materials and tests, helping create scaffolds and sentence stems, and offering feedback. Occasionally, EL teachers will observe content-area teachers and provide coaching as well, this practice

was previously supported by Hamline's ELM Project, a grant-funded project to help meet ELLs needs in their mainstream classes by training EL teachers to effectively partner with and coach their mainstream colleagues. This training and the district's consult model help build relationships and rapport between departments and help content-area teachers grow more confident in supporting ELLs in their classrooms to acquire Academic English. This partnership also helps EL teachers understand the content materials and language their students are interacting with outside of the EL classroom. Eventually, the goal of consult is to release responsibility to the content-area teachers and have EL teachers move to work with a different department. In the district, higher level ELLs (WIDA level 4) take a mainstream or SPED English Language Arts (ELA) course and are also enrolled in an English Language Development (ELD) to further support their expressive language development in speaking and writing. With this existing relationship in mind, I sought to create a curriculum unit to support ELL dual-identified learners in the English Language Development (ELD) classes that aligns with the current district EL curriculum, while also adapting elements from their ELA classes.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project is to investigate the guiding questions: How can educators support ELL and dual-identified learners' English language development in the modalities of writing and speaking? What is the intersectionality between language acquisition and SLD issues?My goal is to gather a body of research to create a curriculum unit that better supports my dual-identified ELLs in not only their ELD classes, but in their ELA class as well. This project also seeks to examine information to help content-area teachers, EL teachers, and SPED teachers collaborate to better differentiate

between language acquisition issues and specific learning disabilities, especially with the goal of identifying areas of need and supporting learners' expressive language before they transition into high school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this Capstone Project seeks to explore the questions: How can educators support ELL and dual-identified learners' English language development in the modalities of writing and speaking? What is the intersectionality between language acquisition and SLD issues? This chapter provides a brief background of the situations that led me to my research questions and definitions of the terminology of "dual-identified" and "long-term" ELs in relation to some relevant data. Chapter One also briefly summarizes the purpose of my project in relation to my placement, colleagues, and the consult model of teaching present in my school. Chapter Two examines relevant research that informed my creation of my Capstone Project across the topics of the relationship between the label LTEL and Dual-identity, the intersectionality of EL and SLD,and the perspectives towards ELLs in the education system. Chapter Three offers a description of the Capstone Project: Supporting Dual-Identified Learners' English Language Development, a curriculum unit that I created to support my learners in my higher and lower ELD classes. Chapter Four reflects upon my project and includes my takeaways from developing my curriculum unit.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter examines research to answer the questions: How can educators support ELL and dual-identified learners' English language development in the modalities of writing and speaking? What is the intersectionality between language acquisition and SLD issues? Additionally, this chapter explores research pertaining to the relationship between Long-Term EL classification and Dual-Identity. Along with this, this chapter also examines the intersectionality between EL and SLD issues, with the goal of better facilitating differentiation and examining why differentiation is key to learner success. Finally, this chapter will examine the different perspectives present in the education system towards ELLs and their labels and how these perspectives affect learner outcomes such as exiting EL programs and graduation rates.

Long-Term EL Classification and Dual-Identity Relationship

Long-Term English Language Learners (LTEL) are defined as students who have not reached English Language Proficiency (ELP) within the first 5 years of instruction after being identified as an English Language Learner (ELL) ("English Learners in Minnesota 2020-2021" Report, 2021, p. 3). This section seeks to examine the research on the relationship between LTEL identification and identification as having specific learning disabilities. Next, this section seeks to identify any trends and gaps between identification. As well, the section explores the nuances of the label "Long-Term EL" in the research as it affects learner achievement rates and exiting EL programming, also referred to as being reclassified.

Relationship Between LTEL Identification and SLD

When examining the relationship between LTEL identification and SLD, it is important to examine the ways in which these different classifications are related and impacted by one another. Sahakyan and Poole (2023) found that a focus on English Proficiency levels of students' may obscure evidence of learning disabilities in ELLs or viscera (p. 72). In other words, attributing students' difficulties or gaps in learning solely to their level of English learning can lead educators to miss signs of SLD or focus on students' SLD identity may hide language acquisition related issues. This obscuration can lead to delayed identification, impeding students from receiving services, and can, in turn, contribute to students attaining an LTEL status (Sahakyan & Poole, 2023, p. 72). Students' disabilities, identified or not, can negatively impact their literacy, cognitive, or content knowledge skills and impact their ability to meet EL exit criteria, such as ELP Assessments (Umansky et al., 2017, pp. 92-93). Callahan et al. (2010) argued that on a whole, ELLs, due to the nature of various school systems, may have less access to rigorous courses, which impedes their academic development. In schools with heavy special education placements, this may also lead to less academic classes and support for students, and place students on a path of less academic rigor. While more studies are needed to confirm this correlation, this pattern does hint at a relationship between ELL and special education placements (Callahan et al., 2010). While some policies are in place at state and federal levels to support dual-identified learners, more accommodations and considerations for reclassification of ELLs are needed to best support dual-identified learners (Sahakyan & Poole, 2023, p. 88). Along with accommodations, reconsidering reclassification, and a timely identification of learning disabilities, intersectional teacher

preparation, with a focus in EL and special education, can also better support dual-identified learners to achieve success (Umansky et al., 2017, p. 94).

Trends and Gaps in Identification

Although ELLs are more likely to be identified later for special education services than non-ELLs, ELLs are both overrepresented in special education services at a secondary level and underrepresented in special education at an elementary level (Artiles et al., 2005, p. 290). In some states districts and grade levels, close to 40% of ELLs at the secondary-level are also identified with a disability (Umansky et al., 2017 as cited in Umansky & Avelar., 2023, p. 129).This disproportionality could be owed to confusion in labeling students as well as the complexity of reclassification, the process by which ELLs exit EL services *(*Umansky et al., 2017, p. 77). Artiles et al. (2005) also found that ELLs identified as "semilingual" or students who have limited proficiency in both their native language and English have the highest rates of special education identification in elementary and secondary levels. In both instances, this group of ELLs had a higher chance of being placed in special education than ELs with limited L2 (limited proficiency in English), English Proficient Learners (exited ELLS) or White learners (non-ELLs) (p. 294). Shin (2020) analyzed a data set of bilingual Spanish-speaking ELL students from an urban Californian school to differentiate the academic experiences of LTELs, students who remained in EL services by 6th grade, and "On-track" EL students, or students' who exited the EL programs and initially fluent English proficient students (IFEP). Shin (2020) noted that LTELs had the highest proportion of students identified for special education services, while IFEP had the lowest (p. 189).

Linguistically and diverse students are historically overrepresented in special education potentially due to policies that do not account for possible bias, encourage eligibility, and include assessment decisions not consistent with current knowledge (Umansky & Avelar, 2023, pp 128-129). When Umansky et al. (2017) examined the numbers of current ELs versus former-ELs they found that at a middle school level current-ELs were 2.5 times as likely to receive special education services. When including reclassified ELs in this number, it trended more in line with the rates of identification in non-ELs and did not point to overrepresentation. While pointing to possible correlations between LTELs and special education identities, two clear patterns did emerge in the two sites examined.

Umansky et al. (2017) found that ELLs were underrepresented in special education in all grades except K-1st and that in the second site, ELLs had delayed identification, with non-ELL identification peaking in 4th-5th grade and ELLs peaking in 5th-6th grade (p. 85). Overall, students who entered the schools as ELs were less likely to be identified and were underrepresented in all areas of special education including SLD (Umansky, et al, 2017, p. 85-86). Umansky et al. (2017) also cautioned that imposing limits on the identification process for dual-identified learners will not correct the overrepresentation of ELLs at the secondary levels, instead they recommend reworking reclassification criteria and processes for dual-identified learners (pp. 92-92).

Nuances of LTEL Label

While labeling students as "LTEL" is intended to better differentiate with English learners' needs and distinguish between newly arrived learners and students who have received prolonged English instruction, there are issues with using the LTEL label. Thompson (2015) studied the effects of the label LTEL in the Bayside, California district by following the progress of 3 students who fall within the spectrum of this label. Thompson found that a key issue with the label was that it fails to recognize the heterogeneity of the students along with their individual needs and successes (p. 36). In several instances, while the students had not attained all the criteria to exit the program, or be "reclassified," several times they had met various individual criteria (p. 36). In addition, the results pointed to students internalizing a sense of failure or fear of feeling "dumb" which led to a reluctance to speak in classes (pp. 31-33). This reluctance was due to a fear that LTELs would reveal a lack of proficiency in English and appear "dumb" which led to anxiety (p. 33). In addition to stigmatization experienced by students, use of LTEL labels can lead to a deficit-minded view of students (Sahakyan & Poole, 2023, p. 70). Overall, to better understand the needs and experience of ELLs, a clearer understanding of the subpopulations within ELLs are needed when studying the education needs and experiences (Artiles et al., 2005, p. 294).

As this section shows, while the relationship between English Language Proficiency (ELP) and SLD can be muddled, at times the lack of understanding of how ELP and SLD affects students can result in students either missing services or receiving less rigorous instruction. To help remedy this, teachers need to be prepared to provide

rigorous instruction to their students, be aware of the intersectionality of EL and SLD issues, help identify SLD, and provide appropriate accommodations to support students in accessing content. Although some research points to both an overrepresentation of ELLs and underrepresentation of ELLs in SPED, re-examining or limiting the identification process alone for ELLs will not correct this issue. Instead, educators should advocate for a reexamination of reclassification, or exiting, criteria as it pertains to ELLs and must also look at the processes in which dual-identified learners are being serviced. In addition, simply classifying learners as LTELs, educators must be mindful of the deficit-based thinking that the label can carry as well as the fact that it does not acknowledge the wide-range of issues that can impact different students defined as LTELs. In relation to my research question, this research shows that the issue is not simply about differentiating issues, instead educators must also focus on individual students' needs to better support their English Language Development. In informing my project, this research helps me to better understand which materials to use in my curriculum development to better support my students who could fall under the LTEL labeling.

Intersectional Issues: Differentiating EL and SLD Identifications

Although up to 10% of the world population has a non-apparent learning disorder such as dyslexia, a specific learning disorder, many individuals are not diagnosed (Delaney & Hata, 2020). This section examines the research present on the various assessments and accommodations present for EL, Specific Learning Disorder (SLD)-identified learners, and dual-identified learners. I also examine the challenges present in identifying specific learning disorders in ELLs. Along with this, I discuss several of the biases and disproportionality present in Special Education identification as it may affect ELLs. Through this examination, I also describe various supports discussed to support dual-identified learners in the classroom.

Assessment Concerns for EL, SLD, and Dual-Identified Learners

Abdi (2014) stated that dual-identified learners, which he referred to as "ELLWD" (English Language Learners With Disability), are affected by both classification issues and validity concerns pertaining to their two classifications (p. 4). These issues affect student success, causing problems with curriculum, assessment, and accommodations (p. 4). Particularly, when viewing dual-identified learners through their EL classification, linguistic complexity of English assessment items can affect validity of tests, interfering with students' comprehension and contributing to performance gaps between ELL and non-ELL learners (Abdi, 2014, p. 7).

Abdi (2014) also noted a similar performance gap present in scores of students with disabilities (SWD) and non-ELL, non-SWD learners, highlighting the impact of linguistic complexities in assessments on creating significant gaps between ELLs and native speakers of English.(Abdi, 2014, p. 11). In addition to linguistic complexities

present in assessments, there are also cultural factors that can impact ELLs. Dual-identified ELLs not only deal with these struggles, but with the impacts of their disabilities, making assessment results from assessments developed with only mainstream learner populations in mind invalid. Due to the impact of linguistic and cultural factors and also because of their disabilities, assessments that are developed and field-tested for the mainstream student population may not provide valid outcomes for these students (Abdi, 2014, pp. 14-15). While ELLs' assessment scores' validity and reliability are impacted by linguistic and cultural biases in the assessments, SWD's results can be impacted by linguistic complexity, test format, fatigue or frustration due to test length or layout (Abdi, 2014, p. 17). Dual-identified students' scores suffer from both types of variables (Abdi, 2014, p. 17).

Wagner et al. (2005) suggested an option to combat these validity and reliability issues, which is that ELLs should be assessed in comparable assessments in both their L1 and in English, which assess the same domains, at identical levels, and identical rigor and precision (p. 10). Assessing students in only their L1 or only in English does not fully demonstrate students' knowledge, abilities, and provide accurate input on their instructional needs (Wagner, et al., 2005, p. 10). Unfortunately, for many districts, these resources do not exist, and development of comparable assessments for ELLs are considered technically and financially demanding (Wagner et al., 2005, p 10). Barrio (2017) echoed this sentiment when describing how rural districts lacking resources or training may not be able to administer bilingual assessments or assessments in students' native languages, which can affect test validity (p. 66).

Shino (2020) noted that some LTELs, who did not meet state reclassification criteria in the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), were able to meet criteria on an ELA test for English-Only students (p. 200). This phenomenon, as CELDT was considered the prerequisite for entering mainstream courses, seemed to indicate a possibility that ELP tests, such as CELDT, were becoming a more difficult challenge for students and hindering them from accessing content-area academics(Shino, 2020, p. 201). Shino (2020) argued that the ELP tests that were designed originally to evaluate students' proficiencies with the purpose of supporting their language acquisition, were potentially holding ELLs to higher standards than non-ELL (p. 201). With this in mind, Shino (2020) urged policymakers and educators to continuously evaluate goals and EL services (p. 201).

Recommended Accommodations for ELLs, SWD, and Dual-Identified Learners

Abdi (2014) stated that dual-identified learners need accommodations that both support their disabilities and linguistic challenges to be successful academically (pp. 21-22). Shino (2020) argued that ELs with disabilities, who need additional support, should be distinguished from “regular ELs” to ensure that they are provided tailored services in collaboration with relevant experts, such as special education teachers (p. 202). Similarly to this sentiment, Abdi (2014) said relying solely on many of the accommodations that were created originally for SWD, and may actually not be an appropriate support for ELLs (Abdi, 2014, pp. 21-22).

Abdi (2014) recommended systematically addressing issues in the education of dual-identified learners by examining all factors affecting their academic performance including improper classification of dual-identified students which can render their

assessment results invalid and ineffective (pp. 15-16). Invalid and ineffective results also can lead to inappropriate, inadequate instruction for dual-identified learners (Abdi, 2014, pp. 15-16). Along with examining factors affecting ELLs performance, Abdi (2014) also said that instructional and assessment materials must be free of linguistic and cultural bias as unnecessary linguistic complexity in assessments profoundly affects dual-identified learners' performance (pp. 15-16). The supports that Abdi (2014) recommended are: making sure students are correctly identified as ELL, SWD, or dual-identified, controlling variables of linguistic and cultural bias on test to make them as accessible as possible, providing adequate accommodations to help students face challenges caused by linguistic needs or disabilities, choosing accommodations that do not alter the content being measured, and choosing accommodations that are not only practical but easy to implement (p. 26). Mahoney and MacSwan (2005) argued that both identifying and reclassifying ELLs must be conducted in a child-study approach that takes into account a wide variety of data focusing on learner needs, not only relying on standardized testing scores (pp. 38-39).

Delaney and Hata (2020) argued that learners with LD and ELLs can be better supported and assessed by the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework which involves offering multiple means of engagement, or representation, and expression (p. 84). Offering various forms of stimulus material, or the information given to learners to help them demonstrate knowledge on the test, can help make assessments more accessible to learners (Delaney & Hata, 2020, p. 85). Delaney and Hata (2020) recommended pairing written instructions with verbal ones, keeping assessments visually uncluttered and keeping instructions in short sentences can help improve learner

comprehension and reduce fatigue (p. 85). Delaney and Hata (2020) recommended modeling instructions by completing an example question or task so students understand the task they are being asked to do to demonstrate learning (p. 85). Additionally, learners should be offered multiple ways and opportunities to demonstrate learning, including in "low-stake" formative assessments for no score (Delaney & Hata, 2020, p. 88).

Challenges in Identifying SLD in ELLs

Correctly identifying whether ELLs are also experiencing the effects of SLD is key in supporting learning success, but this diagnosis can come with many challenges. In some cases, ELLs disabilities are masked by their limited language proficiency, which impacts their instruction, assessments, and access to appropriate accommodations (Abdi, 2014, p. 5). Conversely, some ELL students with lower English proficiency may also be misclassified as having a learning disability due to their language proficiencies (Abdi, 2014, p. 5). Ferlis and Xu (2016) described an aspect of this dichotomy when examining teachers' experiences referring Latino ELLs for possible learning disabilities. EL teachers reported having to "fight" school personnel and special education departments to consider referring ELLs for services as they were told, even when providing evidence of progress-monitoring their students, to give them more time and students' struggles were dismissed as being because of language barriers (Ferlis & Xu, 2016, p. 32). In addition, EL teachers reported feeling pressured to not refer ELLs in their schools (Ferlis & Xu, 2016, p. 32). Ferlis and Xu (2016) also highlighted the struggles present in their study when teachers asked for students to receive assessments in their native languages. Often, they were told that the cost was too much. In addition, several teachers also pointed out a breakdown in communication between special education and EL departments had

occurred, with EL teachers being excluded from referral meetings in some cases (pp. 32-33). Teachers who participated in the study, while knowledgeable in ESL pedagogy, second language acquisition, culturally and linguistically diverse students, and research-based interventions, viewed pre-referral processes as ineffective because of the lack of understanding from school personnel and also a perceived resistance from ELLs' families (Ferlis & Xu, 2016, p. 33). Feris and Xu (2016) recommended more focus of schools on professional development on differentiating between language acquisition and learning disabilities as gaps in educators' knowledge correlates with disproportionate identifications of ELLs with SLDs (Ferlis & Xu, 2016, p. 34).

Shore and Sabatini (2009) stated, when assessing if an ELL has a reading disorder (RD), a first step educators must take is to see if any learning difficulties manifest in a students' native language (p. 14). As difficulties may not completely manifest in a students' native language, it is also important to examine ELLs second language acquisition in phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension, as it pertains to reading (Shore & Sabatini, 2009, p. 15). Wagner et al. (2005) stated that, while assessing ELLs in English or their native language is often a complex issue dependent of the proficiency of ELLs in their native language, assessment using only English can be problematic as students may not understand the task instructions, rendering them incapable of completing the task and not providing accurate results (p. 10).

Farnsworth (2016) argued that both formal and informal assessments are needed when assessing bilingual students, which Farnsworth refers to as "dual language learners." Only giving formal assessments, because of their lack linguistic and cultural

variation, does not offer the full scope of students processing skills, a necessary component needed to distinguish language development from SLD (p. 95). Farnsworth (2016) stated that educators not only must be familiar with aspects of language acquisition, such as forms and functions of language, factors impacting language acquisition, and behaviors at different stages of acquisition, but also must understand characteristics of and eligibility for SLD to assess students (p. 106). To appropriately assess students, there should be a variety of authentic language and performance assessments in different domains of language (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and one must recognize the benefits of observation of students with peers to gather data on students' social language development (Farnworth, 2016, p. 107). Farnsworth (2016) argued that along with authentic assessments, educators advocate ethical practices to distinguish language differences from SLD (p. 107).

Shore and Sabitini (2005) described how pre-referral and referral strategies to identify ELLS with learning disabilities are poorly defined and poorly implemented (pp. 30-31). To remedy this, Shore and Sabitini (2005) also recommended more training on the pre-referral process, data-tracking, research-based interventions, and consideration for ELLs' needs before initial formal testing for ELLs occurs (pp. 30-31). Additionally, educators need a better understanding of language development, reading development for ELLs, second language acquisition, and be given the tools to work with learners and utilize a variety of assessments (Shore & Sabitini, 2005, p. 33).

Bias and Disproportionality in Special Education for ELLs

The Office of English Language Acquisition, as cited by Abdi (2014), estimated the number dual-identified learners to be over 350,000 students, representing 9% of all ELL students, and 8% of all children in special education (Abdi, 2014, p. 4). In examining other research, Abdi (2014) stated that ELL students with a lower level of English proficiency had a substantially higher chance of being misclassified as having a learning disability than their non-ELL peers (p. 6). Barrio (2017) discussed the phenomenon of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, including ELLs, are both underrepresented and overrepresented in special education depending on the location of the school (p. 65). Barrio (2017) reported that rural districts, which lack support and resources, are more likely to either over- or under-identify ELLs as having learning disorders (p. 65). Barrio (2017) summarized that this phenomenon could be due to a lack of training or resources to administer bilingual assessments, a subjectivity to the referral process, a lack of multi-tiered interventions for ELLs, and a lack of teacher and paraprofessional training in English language acquisition (p. 66). Figueroa and Newsome (2006) examined the process of referring ELLs and bilingual students for learning disabilities. In all situations, they found that psychologists did not consider the impact of bilingualism and language acquisition on students' language deficits, but viewed them as a result of a learning disability (p. 211). In addition, the psychologists were unaware of the research-based view of the slower mental processing and delayed language production normal in second language acquisition. (Figueroa and Newsome, 2006, p. 212). Klingner et al. (2005) noted the disproportionality of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education services and argued that this representation would

be reduced if students received culturally responsive and valid instruction (p. 16). Through providing appropriate instruction, culturally responsive interventions, increasing teacher awareness, and creating more equitable education, schools can decrease inappropriate referrals to special education programs and result in a proportionate representation (Klinger et al., 2005, p. 23).

When examining the intersectionality that exists between EL and SLD issues, one can gain a clearer understanding of the complex situation faced by dual-identified learners.The research particularity pertaining to assessment, accommodations, challenges in identification, and bias present in the education system, supports the need for more explicit instruction on linguistic complexities present in various assessments and instruction materials. The research also shows the need for better differentiation and supports for dual-identified learners. Especially when researching assessment concerns for ELLs, SLD, and dual-identified learners, overwhelmingly the research points to a need for valid assessment and highlights the inequities present within current assessments and screens, especially in regards to linguistic and cultural complexities. This research is particularly relevant to my project as it provides a necessary context to the educational environment in which dual-identified learners are expected to perform, as well as the systemic issues that educators also must contend with while supporting positive learner outcomes.

Perspectives Towards ELLs within Education

Within the field of education, there are various perspectives at play influencing learner success. This theme sets out to examine several of these perspectives, especially relating to equity within the classroom. In the first section, I examine the larger view of dual-identified learners in the field of education in the U.S. as shown in various district policies and trends. In the next section, I examine the view of dual-identification in teacher mindset and perspectives in the classroom. Finally, I examine learners' perceptions of their identities and placement within their instruction impacts their success in exiting EL programs and graduation rates.

Large View of ELL Learners in the U.S.

When examining the larger view of ELLs within the U.S., two narratives arise, one of attributing difficulties solely to language proficiency errors and another to learning disabilities. Ferlis and Xu (2016) discussed the struggles of EL teachers feeling as though they could not refer ELLs for learning disability concerns in addition to their concerns being dismissed as simply the students needing more time to acquire English (p. 32). Ferlis and Xu (2016) also highlighted the struggles present in their study when teachers asked for students to receive assessments in their native languages. Often, they were told that the cost was too much. In addition, several teachers also pointed out a breakdown in communication between special education and EL departments had occurred, with EL teachers being excluded from referral meetings in some cases (pp. 32-33).Callahan et al. (2010) noted that ELLs may also have limited access to rigorous courses, impeding their academic development. Schools with heavy special education placements, this may also lead to less academic classes and support for students, and place students on a path of less

academic rigor. This shows a lack of understanding of linguistically diverse students' needs.

Similarly, Rivera et al. (2009) stated that often ELLs are overlooked for early reading interventions because of their limited English proficiency, with educators assuming that their reading will increase as their oral proficiency does (pp. 7-8). Due to this oversight, ELLs in the primary grades who struggle with reading skills such as sound-symbol correspondence or word recognition may miss out on the more explicit reading services that may have benefited them more than just ESL instruction (Rivera et al., 2009, pp. 7-8). Additionally, this bias also is further exacerbated by the fact that early literacy instruction screening focuses on print awareness, phonological awareness, and letter-word recognition but does not assess vocabulary knowledge, this prevents learners with limited knowledge of especially Academic English vocabulary from being identified and provided explicit instruction (Rivera et al., 2009, pp. 7-8). Rivera et al. (2009) argued that to remedy this, classroom teachers and their supporters need training in both language and literacy development in kindergarten intervention models as well as having a comprehensive language and literacy screening and assessment system in place (p. 8).

Conversely, Figueroa and Newsome (2006), in their study of a California districts referral process for ELLs, noted that in all cases, psychologists did not consider the impact of bilingualism and language acquisition on students' language deficits, but viewed them as a result of a learning disability and not other factors such as instructional flaws and inadequate curriculum for students' bilingualism (p. 211).

Flores et al. (2015) examined the effect of the deficit-minded label "LTELL" on Spanish-speaking ELLs in a New York School system. They argued that the label of

LTEL (which they refer to as LTELL) does not acknowledge the complex linguistic identities of learners (p. 131). They called for educators to not only create programs to meet students' needs, but also view them through a better understanding of their fluid and complex linguistic abilities and not through a deficit lens as framed in a monolinguistic world view (p. 131). Flores et al. (2015) called for schools to recognize students' complex language identities and address their needs through responsive schooling (p.130). This can be done by acknowledging students' ability to navigate multiple languages in various contexts and their identities tied to their family's countries of origin and home language as strengths that they bring into the classroom (Flores et al., 2015, p. 130). Garcia (2009) argued that educators and legislation should label learners as "emergent bilinguals" as it acknowledges the potential that students learning English have to become bilingual and acknowledges their home languages as an asset (pp. 322-323).

Teacher Mindset and Perspectives in the Classroom

Dabach (2014) examined the effect on teachers and students of sheltered EL programs through teacher interviews. Dabach (2014) reported that another teacher was frustrated as he was encouraged by EL staff to teach the same content to ELLs more slowly, which led to students developing feelings of the curriculum being beneath them and also internalized the ideas that they were less intelligent (pp. 105-106). To combat the negative perceptions, the teacher explicitly told students that they were receiving the same content as their mainstream peers, that the content would be just as rigorous and college preparatory, and that he was holding them to the same high standards as their peers (Dabach, 2014, p. 106). Hammond (2015) argued that culturally responsive

teachers should strive to build rapport with culturally and linguistically diverse students through building trust and affirmation, not through building learner self-esteem as this is deficit-minded, and a focus of teachers on making students “feel good” about themselves because of their identities can instead make students feel marginalized (p. 76). Similarly, Kingler et al. (2005) urged culturally responsive teachers to observe their students, the ways they interact, and also self-reflect on their reactions and beliefs instead of jumping to conclusions about what student behavior means (p. 18). Hammond (2015) also argued that teachers must build trust with students through listening and creating a space for learner voices and partnering with them in their learning (p. 86). Hammond stated that culturally responsive teachers can support students in taking ownership of their learning and engage in more rigorous content (Hammond, 2015, p. 86). Through doing this, potentially learners can achieve more positive outcomes.

Additionally, teachers’ perceptions of learners’ labels can impact access to more rigorous learning. Bianco (2005) studied 247 elementary teachers, 52 of whom were special education teachers, in a Florida school district to see if the labels of LD or EBD affected the rate of teachers’ referrals to gifted and talented programs (p. 287). Bianco (2005) found that when giving both general and special education teachers identical students profiles and asking them to make decisions about referrals to a gifted program, teachers who had been told the students had LD or EBD were less likely to refer them, illustrating that teachers are negatively influenced by disability labels (p. 292). Bianco (2005) observed that Special Education teachers were less likely to refer students with or without the disability labels. She proposed that this occurrence could be due to the fact that the special education teachers’ focus on identification and remediation of students’

deficiencies caused them to focus on students' weaknesses rather than observing their strengths (p. 290). Bianco (2005) also noted a teacher response of "Placement in a gifted program would place undue academic pressure on this child. Such a placement would hinder social skills as well," and concluded that teachers may also want to protect students from academic or social pressure (p. 290). Echoing the power of labels, Garcia (2009) argued that using asset-based labels, such as emergent bilingual, which recognizes students' potential and knowledge, allows teachers to hold higher expectations for students, not simply view them through a lens of remediation and limited English learning (p. 323).

Kanno and Kangas (2014) noted a tendency of teachers and counselors being inclined to steer ELLs from higher-level courses due to a fear that the amount of reading and writing in these courses would "overwhelm" students (p. 864). In addition, teachers and counselors asserted that higher-level courses were for independent learners, capable of managing the extensive course-work. The refusal to put ELLs in such a class implicitly characterized ELLs as passive and incapable of meeting these challenges, which placed the deficit on the students and not on a lack of supports offered in the classes to make up for their lack of linguistic and cultural knowledge (pp. 865-866).

Impact of Learners Self-Perception on Academic Outcomes

Dabach (2014) reported instances of students feeling that sheltered EL instruction were punitive and not rigorous enough, which resulted in poor grades, poor academic achievement and an increase in student behaviors (p. 104). Dabach (2014) wrote of a student, Ana, who reported that being in EL sheltered instruction made her feel “stupid” and overall students appeared to internalize a message that they were not equal to their peers, but inferior and lacking intelligence (p. 105). One teacher also reported a story where a newly-exited ELL made a joke, “I am not a shelter” drawing a clear distinction between current ELL students and reclassified students, further showcasing the negative self-perception students had internalized (Dabach, 2014, p. 105). Kanno and Kangas (2014), when analyzing ELLs placement in higher-level courses, observed that students’ lack of self-confidence caused a reluctance to advocate for higher-level placement and in some cases prevented them from seeing themselves as candidates for the classes (p.867). This lack of self-advocacy and self-confidence, which affected students' abilities to pursue more rigorous academic challenges, is possibly owed to the deficit-minded position they were assigned within the school which impacted their view of themselves as ELL students (Kanno & Kangas, 2014, p. 867). Hammond (2015) reported that students, especially those who are still dependent learners, experience more anxiety when they feel marginalized because of their race, language, or gender (p. 50). This anxiety is registered as a threat by learners’ brains and negatively impacts learning and performance (Hammond, 2015, p. 50). Flores et al. (2015) noted similar phenomena when observing a Spanish class designed to help empower Spanish-speaking LTEL students. The class had an emphasis on Academic Spanish, which devalued students’ home dialects, causing

students to disengage in class (p. 125). Flores et al. (2015) proposed that this engagement was the result of a passive resistance on the part of students to language instruction that felt foreign to them, as it conflicted with their view of themselves as Spanish speakers, and also led to a learned helplessness and reliance on the teacher to complete work (p. 125).

Brooks (2022) interviewed 20 bilingual Mexican ELL students from Tesoro High School in Central Texas, where the majority of students interviewed were unaware or did not understand their label as ELL. Brooks (2022) argued that this lack of explicit communication from the schools robbed students of an opportunity to learn about themselves and participate more fully in their courses and English Language Proficiency (ELP) test (pp. 1236-1237). Brooks (2022) argued that while some view explicit discussion on EL label and ELP testing as stigmatizing to students, when done from a position of informing students on the policies and practices that affect their academic trajectory can open opportunities for students to question, voice their concerns, and more actively participate in their education (p. 1237). Brooks (2022) also argued that students should not be viewed through a deficit lens, but as knowledgeable participants in the EL program and can provide useful feedback to help educators and policymakers rethink current EL practices, better empower students for academic success (pp. 1237-1238).

Lee and Soland (2023) argued that ELs have lower Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills, defined as self-management, growth mindset, self-efficacy, and social awareness, due to factors such as lower expectations and stigma (p. 33). These lower SEL skills, like self-efficacy, are associated with lower achievement, a slow academic growth, and achievement gaps (p. 33). After examining students who were reclassified into

mainstream courses, Lee and Soland(2023) noted that self-efficacy among students showed significant improvement (p.45). Factors that could contribute to this could be the removal of the EL label, which could cause stigma, higher academic expectations and standards, or ELLs beliefs and attitudes about their success (Lee & Soland, 2023, p. 45).

By examining the differing perspectives towards ELLs in the educational system, the larger view of dual-identified learners in the field of education in the U.S, effect of teacher mindset and perspectives in the classroom, and learners' perceptions of their identities and placement within their instruction impacts students' academic outcomes, I can better understand complexity of factors affecting ELLs. On the whole, a misunderstanding of ELL and SLD issues present in education, can complicate students' receiving access to the support they need to achieve academic success. When considering educator perspectives, I need to be mindful and examine the mindset I have towards my learners, being aware of any bias or deficit-based perceptions that could affect my expectations for my students, my pacing, and the content I chose to teach them. By providing less rigorous content, not only does that affect students' ability to become independent learners, but also can lead to negative self-perceptions. Particularly, this negative self-view internalized by students can affect students and lead to poor educational outcomes and behaviors.

Summary

In conclusion, this Capstone Project explores the questions: How can educators support ELL and dual-identified learners' English language development in the modalities of writing and speaking? What is the intersectionality between language acquisition and SLD issues? This chapter provides a review of the relevant research

available on the themes of dual-identified and LTELs, intersectional issues, and various perspectives. This research helps inform my creation of my Capstone Project as well as provide a better context to the need of support, accommodations and relevant, engaging materials to better support positive learner outcomes for dual-identified learners both on assessments and in their classrooms. Chapter Three provides an outline and rationale for the curriculum unit I have created to support dual-identified learners with SLD in a mixed grade middle school English Language Development class.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

In Chapter Three, I offer a description of my capstone project. In Chapter Two, I gathered and reviewed literature to answer my research questions: How can educators support ELL and dual-identified learners' English language development in the modalities of writing and speaking? What is the intersectionality between language acquisition and SLD issues?In this chapter, I share an overview of the project, discuss research tied to my planning, describe my audience and setting for the project, review my timeline, and discuss how I will assess student learning.

Project Description

For this project, I designed a 5-6 week long curriculum unit to be used in my English Language Development (ELD) classes. The curriculum unit focuses on the expressive language domains of writing and oral language production, the two areas holding many of my students back from exiting the EL Program. I am creating a curriculum unit for an English Language Development course of mostly dual-identified learners This curriculum is meant to be integrated alongside our already existing writing curriculum materials, which include writing lessons on argumentative paragraphs, summary paragraphs, and a literary response paper. It also integrates some of the materials and terms from students' ELA textbook. Instead of completing this unit with the provided short stories in the respective unit, which students struggled to engage with, I planned this unit alongside reading the book *Alone* (2021) by Megan E. Freeman. I chose the book *Alone* as it is a story with a protagonist with a similar age to my students, is told

in poems, and was one of the books that was read at a school event "Battle of the Books," so it is popular with their non-EL peers. This unit directly follows a short 3-week unit on poetry and figurative language, which supported students' learning in their mainstream English Language Arts (ELA) classes.

My curriculum is designed using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). The document is also inspired by a colleague who contributed to my district's curriculum documents (Chandler, 2020). Following these two designs, my unit includes WIDA standards, contains essential questions, and lists common misunderstandings of students. All of these components guided my lesson plans and influenced my assessments. It includes the learning targets for writing and speaking drawn from the WIDA Standards. Following Wiggins and McTighe (2011), I then focused on the desired final project, a literary response, which requires my students to write a four-paragraph paper containing an introduction paragraph, a summary paragraph, an opinion paragraph, and a conclusion paragraph about a text. I designed my lessons over the course of several weeks around writing and speaking activities, slowly increasing in rigor, to build and refine my students' expressive language and scaffold their writing process.

UbD framework and backwards design to complete the curriculum unit, I designed it around the summative writing assessment, the literary response(Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). This enabled me to think individually about each component my students need to master before completing a literary response. I designed lessons and extension activities around practicing the skills of making claims, giving reasons, and supporting evidence. Incorporating Wiggins and McTighe (2011)'s backwards design I

crafted essential questions and learning targets, which aligned my activities to the WIDA Standards. By better aligning my curriculum with the standards, along with students' interests, I created a cohesive unit that stays focused on the end product and offers valid assessment.

Connection to Research

When developing my curriculum unit, I drew on the work of several researchers to modify and adapt my district's current writing curriculum materials, National Geographic's *Inside A* and *Inside B* (Bernabei, 2014). Through utilizing group work (in the form of discussions and analyzing poems) and individual writing (response paragraphs) I hope to better support my students in developing pragmatic, discourse, and metalinguistic competencies. As stated in Herrera et al. (2015), students need explicit instruction on English discourse patterns, so to help them reach the standards of the content area, I included explicit instruction as well as modeling. According to Gibbons (2009), modeling oral language and thought processes helps to provide a scaffold by which students can advance and helps support dual-identified learners as it helps break down multi-step directions and provide a clear idea of activity expectations. Zwiers (2014) stated that journaling assessments offer students a chance to take risks with their grammar and vocabulary. Zwiers (2014) also stated that writing is a way for students to generate more complex language than when they speak as well as provide a way for teachers to see students' language and thinking abilities. Francis et al. (2006) said that while various factors are at play in ELLs' academic success, a lack of Academic English proficiency can affect students' ability to analyze and comprehend texts, limits their abilities to write and express themselves, and also hurts their acquisition of knowledge in

content-area classes (p. 7). To remedy this, Francis et al. (2006) recommended explicit instruction on Academic English vocabulary as well as pointing out to students the differences in conversational and academic English (p. 7). Rivera et al. (2009) also recommended building vocabulary and background knowledge for dual-identified learners as a way to increase positive outcomes with reading (p. 26). Rivera et al. (2009) stated in addition to explicit instruction before, during, and after reading, students need opportunities to connect readings to their daily lives, more opportunities to read, write, and speak, and extensive feedback, scaffolding, and support while producing language (p. 31). Vaughn (n.d.) argued that ELLs with reading difficulties should be provided with opportunities for peer learning such as peer pairing to support their reading.

In addition to supporting students with developing their reading through explicit instruction, through providing poetry as a vehicle for language, I am creating a culturally-responsive learning environment for my students' that honors their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Hammond (2015) argued that a culturally responsive teacher's role is to help students access their funds of knowledge and understand learning to help design more authentic learning experiences (pp. 140). In addition, Hammond (2015) said that having students craft stories or spoken word words can be a culturally responsive way to help them ground concepts and connect to content, as well as helping them practice writing, drafting, and editing (pp. 134). By having students study models and craft their own poems and responses to better understand figurative language, I am also helping them demonstrate knowledge in an authentic way. Hammond (2015) said that anchoring a unit with a place-based project helps learners to apply their new knowledge and skills while connecting it to real-life (p. 138).

Francis et al. (2006) stated that exposing students to more linguistically challenging texts is an important way to ensure students are learning academic English vocabulary (p. 14). Also, differences in opportunities to learn for ELLs from their peers can impact reading outcomes and students benefit when instructional strategies, such as explicit academic language development is implemented at a classroom level (p. 16). In addition to explicit language teaching, Francis et al. (2006) recommended that students also need to be taught to understand various texts (expository or narrative), the purpose of the text, and texts in various formats (p. 23). When students are actively engaged in examining these processes, students begin to develop meta-cognition and can better reflect on, monitor, and control their thought processes (p. 23). Zwiers (2014) recommended educators to explicitly teach students what is expected of them in rubrics, modeling using them with texts, and thinking aloud (p. 233)

Setting and Audience

While this curriculum is created for my own use in my classroom, I will share it with my colleagues as well. The school where I teach is a middle school in the northern suburbs of Minneapolis. According to MDE (2022), 9.9% of the student population at my school were classified as ELLs. Eighteen percent of the student population received SPED services. Sixty-four percent of the student body receive free or reduced lunches. Of the ELL population, according to ACCESS scores, 18.4 % are a composite score falling within the WIDA level 4, majority of the students are WIDA level 3 at 63.3%, 12.2% are Level 2 and 2% are WIDA level 1s. When looking only at students' literacy scores, the percentages shift. Students who score a level 4 or higher are 16.3%, level 3 is 53.1%, Level 2 is 24.5%, and Level 1 jumps to 6.1%. My classroom setting is two sections of

English Language Development class for ELLs. One section is solely for 6th graders, while the other section is a mixed 6-8th grade class. Each class is 45 min long and intended to support students' language development in addition to their block (two class periods) ELA classes. Some students are in mainstream ELA, while others take ELA through the Special Education Department. Several of the students are dual-identified learners. In addition to the identified students, three students are also in the process of being identified as potentially having an SLD and will receive reading interventions next year. Several languages are represented in my classes: Pashto, Spanish, Hmong, Russian, Ukrainian, and Liberian English. Several of the students have expressed the opinion that they are "dumb" or in "the dumb class" as they need more support at times with writing and comprehension. All students want to exit the EL program.

Timeline

I designed this curriculum unit from January 2023 to August 2023 and taught portions of it during Spring 2023. I collected student feedback in the form of an anonymous survey in May 2023. I refined the curriculum unit from June-August of 2023 following my observations on student performance and incorporating student feedback. I hope to use the complete unit in the Spring of 2024 with future ELD students.

Assessment

Students' learning is assessed using a combination of warm-up and exit questions at the start of lessons and at the end of lessons. Learning is also assessed informally during class discussions. Depending on whether students appear to be meeting learning targets, I will go back and reteach concepts. Students' writing will be assessed through "literary" response argumentative paragraphs in which students respond to a prompt

using both claim and reasons, and claim, reasons, evidence patterns that they learned in their ELA classes and in my ELD III class. Students will also be assessed through Flipgrid verbal prompts. Formative assessment will be done in the form of warm-up questions (to check for understanding), response paragraphs, and oral language production (such as class discussions and Flipgrids). Summative assessments will be in the form of the final writing project, a literary response paper. At the end of the unit, I will also provide students the opportunity to provide their own feedback in the form of an anonymous survey.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I outlined the research behind the development of this curriculum unit. Chapter 3 also provided a description of the setting and rationale that influenced the development of this curriculum unit. In addition, Chapter 3 also detailed the project and timeline of implementation. In Chapter 4, I review the research that went into developing the project. I will reflect upon the learning I have gained in creating this curriculum unit as well as discuss the benefits of the project as it relates to my research questions: How can educators support ELL and dual-identified learners' English language development in the modalities of writing and speaking? What is the intersectionality between language acquisition and SLD issues?

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of my capstone project was to explore the questions: How can educators support ELL and dual-identified learners' English language development in the modalities of writing and speaking? What is the intersectionality between language acquisition and SLD issues? Working both as a paraprofessional and a teacher, I have worked closely to support ELL and SPED students. Upon teaching my own ELD class, it quickly became apparent that there were additional barriers to my students' progress than just language, particularly in the case of my dual-identified students. Teachers, including myself, struggled to differentiate if needs were due to previous needs or an unidentified learning disability. I questioned how to ensure my students received the rigorous instruction they were entitled to and how I could better advocate for the best placement for them. My higher-level students, several who could fit the definition for LTEL, struggled with reading and writing and were discouraged by the apparent gaps in their abilities and those of their peers. In my class, these students became disengaged and struggled to complete work, especially when it came to writing assignments. Their content-area English Language Arts (ELA) teachers reported similar issues with work completion, as well students' dependency on teachers to complete tasks and a reluctance to ask for help. When students did complete writing activities, I observed that my learners were struggling with argumentative writing, especially when asked to follow the patterns of claim, evidence, and reasons. This was a sentiment also echoed by their ELA teachers. In the lower level ELD classes, these same students were able to quickly complete

activities but showed very little progress due to the lack of rigor for them. With this in mind, I sought to create a curriculum unit that would address the areas where they needed additional support, their expressive writing, and could hopefully engage my students' interests, increasing their motivation.

In this chapter, I describe my major learnings gained from completing my capstone project. I then revisit the literature I reviewed, describe how it influenced my work, and share new understandings I have gained. Next, I share the limitations and implications of my project. Then, I describe my future projects and how my project benefits the profession. Finally, I will summarize my chapter.

Major Learnings

The process of completing the capstone was challenging, but an extremely rewarding process. While I have never considered myself an ardent researcher, this project pushed me to grow. I've learned to be confident in finding not only applicable, but recent research, studies, and theories. Particularly, viewing research on emergent bilinguals and the power of labeling, has made me rethink my own language in my classroom. I want to make sure that I am supporting not only my students' Academic English development but also acknowledging their various dialects and home languages as well. I need to be mindful that I am reflective on my own language to ensure that I am framing my students in asset-based ways, especially considering their rich linguistic and cultural complexities, and not inadvertently putting emphasis on them in a deficit-minded way. As a learner, this has ignited a passion in me to continue learning. I plan on incorporating knowledge of various labeling into my advocacy for my students. I would

also like to find ways to work critical-thinking discussions about labeling into my classroom as a way to empower my students in the construction of their identities.

Another major learning was practically planning a curriculum unit using UbD (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). I was familiar with the UbD in my initial licensure program for single lesson plans or week-long lessons. I have also used UbD documents while participating in my district's curriculum plan writing for several classes, but I have never had to independently do the process of backwards designing a complete curriculum unit based on the summative writing assessment. Doing this with a literary response was immensely helpful as I had to think individually about each component my students would need to be able to do to reach the end result. It was also helpful to better align my planning with the WIDA standards. This is a process that I realize will help me in future planning, especially as I integrate in more material that aligns with my students' interests and needs to better support their learning as a whole.

My final major learning was in the process of planning my curriculum unit. I found how beneficial it was in meeting with my students' ELA teachers to identify areas of need. While my district has a consult model in which ELL teachers work with content-area teachers, I have never worked with ELA teachers. I found this process extremely beneficial as it helped me better understand what my students' were learning in their other courses and the areas they were struggling. It helped me not only have a better sense of what my students are capable of, but also a better sense of areas I can push them more. Additionally, when students realized I was speaking with their ELA teachers, I also noticed more of a sense of community forming, saw better rapport with my students and, in some cases, more accountability. My students were also able to play the expert in some

areas, such as identifying figurative language, and later finding evidence to support their reasons. Moving forward, I fully intend to continue to check in with my students, ELA teachers and hopefully SPED teachers as well.

Revisiting the Literature

Research on the ELLs self-perception and its impact on their performance was extremely influential in my choice of capstone project. Dabach (2014) noted that students placed in sheltered EL courses that lacked rigor appeared to internalize a message that they were not equal to their peers, but inferior and lacking intelligence. This belief results in poor academic performance and an increase in behaviors (Dabach, 2014). Students' lack of self-confidence caused a reluctance to advocate for higher-level placement and in some cases prevented them from seeing themselves as candidates for the classes (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). This lack of self-advocacy and self-confidence, which affected students' abilities to pursue more rigorous academic challenges, is possibly owed to the deficit-minded position they were assigned within the school which impacted their view of themselves as ELL students. Flores et al. (2015) noted students when confronted with instructions that conflict with their view of their identity displayed disengagement, helplessness, and reliance on the teacher to complete work (p. 125). With this in mind, I chose to integrate EL writing course material with Freeman (2021)'s *Alone*, a book that students were familiar with and one that many of their mainstream peers were reading. Incorporating aspects to the curriculum, such as checklists, rubrics, and opportunities for students to self assess their writing and revise were also ways I sought to increase student confidence and increase rigor.

Another area of research that was beneficial to my capstone creation was the research concerning teacher perspectives of students. Teachers teaching content to ELLs more slowly, because of their perceptions can lead to students feeling the curriculum is beneath them and also internalized ideas that they were less intelligent (Dabach, 2014). At times, deficit-minded views cause teachers and counselors to steer ELLs from higher-level courses due to a fear that the amount of reading and writing in these courses would overwhelm students (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). With this in mind, I planned this curriculum unit to involve 6 weeks of writing in unison with mini-lessons and revision activities. While the pace of the unit seems overwhelming, I would rather plan on having high expectations for my students' production and adjust according to their performance, learning, and feedback. Teachers should create space for learner voices and partner with them in learning, which supports students taking ownership of their learning (Hammond, 2015).

Finally, in addition to rigorous work, through UbD learners with LD and ELLs are better supported when given multiple means of engagement, or representation, and expression (Delaney & Hata, 2020). Offering various forms of stimulus material, or the information given to learners to help them demonstrate knowledge on the test, can help make assessments more accessible to learners (Delaney & Hata, 2020). Learners should be offered multiple ways and opportunities to demonstrate learning, including in "low-stake" formative assessments for no score (Delaney & Hata, 2020). This research impacted my decision to create a curriculum unit using UbD for my capstone project. Additionally, it also influenced the variety of assessment processes I used in my capstone project. By doing this, I hope to gain an accurate understanding of students' learnings,

their further needs, and also create ample opportunities for them to demonstrate mastery of concepts.

While creating my capstone project, two sources of research prompted new understandings and a need for more self-reflection on my teaching practice. While labeling ELLs can lead to deficit-minded thinking in educators and learners, explicit discussion on labels, one that includes learners' voices, can lead to a sense of agency (Brooks, 2022). Along with this, explicitly discussing the ELP tests and exiting guidelines with learners, can provide more clarity of expectations as well as create opportunities for learners' to share their thoughts and desires regarding their academic trajectories (Brooks, 2022). Using asset-based labels that recognize students potential and knowledge, creates opportunities to hold higher expectations for students (Garcia, 2009). As an EL educator, I need to be reflective on my teaching practices and how I am framing my students. I also need to support learner agency and autonomy by helping them understand and have a dialogue about the expectations for them.

Limitations and Implications

Some limitations for my capstone are practical and at a school-level. To potentially take the project further and use it in collaboration with colleagues, teachers need similar preparation times, and more opportunities for collaboration. To better understand the needs of dual-identified learners, there needs to be opportunities for mainstream teachers, EL teachers, and SPED teachers to meet and discuss learners. Additionally, more training about EL and SLD needs should be provided to teachers and staff.

A larger limitation is the systematic issues involved in identifying, valid testing, and supporting dual-identified learners. For example, Shino (2020) observed LTEL learners, who had not met state reclassification, were able to meet criteria on an ELA test for English-Only students. Shino (2020)'s observation, seemed to indicate a possibility that ELP tests were becoming a more difficult challenge for students and hindering them from accessing content-area academics. The ELP test was potentially holding ELLs to higher standards than non-ELL tests. This example highlights the inconsistencies present in ELP testing. While my project can help support students' language development, if they are being tested with unreliable, invalid tests, they may still not have desired results, such as exiting the EL program on ACCESS tests. Educators need to be mindful of the expectations for learners, listen and encourage learner voices, and advocate for learners' needs at a larger policy-level skill.

Future Projects

Moving forward, I would like to further research dual-identified learners and the correlation of this identity to LTELS. I would like to use this information to better advocate and facilitate conversation among my colleagues about how to place and support students. Along with this, I also hope to use the knowledge I have gained about explicit discussion on EL programing, ELP tests, and labels in a non-stigmatizing way with my students to increase their agency and understanding of how these aspects affect the trajectory of their academic journey (Lee & Soland, 2023). In doing this, I hope to better empower my students to think critically about the systems they participate in and better advocate for themselves. I hope that in doing this, I can support my students' view of themselves in an asset-based view.

In terms of curriculum planning, I am hoping to expand upon my current unit to use in my reading and writing block with lower-level students, which focuses on all the modalities (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and not only expressive language. I want to expand upon the activities to also include listening and reading activities. I would also like to continue the practice of adapting my current ELD curriculum to match other books that interest my students and in which they can relate to the characters, perhaps even incorporating books from their ELA classes or ELA book clubs. This would require more collaboration between my colleagues, but I believe would continue to ensure my students' are supported.

Benefits to the Profession

My project benefits the profession as I have created an expansive curriculum unit focusing on expressive language that addresses a need my colleagues and I observed in my ELD students. Through integrating my ELD III class writing curriculum, elements from students' ELA class, and a high value book, Freeman (2021)'s *Alone*, I hope to create materials that will benefit my future students not only in my classroom but in their mainstream courses as well. I intend to use this curriculum in my classroom and to share it with my colleagues. In addition, the fact that this unit is designed as a writing unit to be completed along with a reading unit, allows for the potential to do it in collaboration with another of my students' teachers who teach reading or potentially along with a book club activity, which students complete in the ELA courses. Additionally, I hope that by modifying existing curriculum to meet the needs of my students and incorporate their interests, I can also continue to do this in my classroom and also encourage my colleagues. Along with that, the knowledge I have gained on the complex experience of

dual-identified learners and LTELS will allow me to better advocate for my students in my building and district as well.

Summary

Chapter Four provided my reflections on the capstone process. In this chapter, I described the major learnings I gained from completing my capstone project. I then revisited the literature I reviewed, described how it influenced my work, and reflected on the new understandings I have gained. I shared the implications and limitations that impact my project. Then, I described my plans for further research and future projects and how my project can benefit the teaching profession. It is my hope that this project will help others to develop curriculum, self-reflect, and think critically about how they can also help support ELLs, dual-identified learners, and LTELs not only in developing their expressive language skills, but also navigate the systems in place in the American education system.

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Appendix

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<tr><td>Title</td><td>Unit Length:</td><td>Trimester</td><td>Audience (Students and Levels)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Unit Standards</td></tr>
<tr><td>Unit Understandings</td><td>Essential Questions</td><td colspan="2">Common Misunderstandings</td></tr>
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<tr><th colspan="2">EXPRESSIVE LEARNING TARGETS BY LANGUAGE DOMAIN</th></tr>
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<tr><th colspan="4">LESSON PLANS AND ASSESSMENT</th></tr>
<tr><th>Day</th><th>Learn Targets</th><th>Lessons and Activities</th><th>Additional Information</th></tr>
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