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Supporting English Language Learners in a Co-Taught Classroom through the Curriculum

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**Supporting English Language Learners in a Co-Taught Classroom through the
Curriculum**

Supporting English Language Learners in a Co-taught Classroom through the Curriculum

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Supporting English Language Learners in a Co-Taught Classroom through the Curriculum	1
Introduction	4
Introduction	4
Context	4
Personal Experience	6
Professional Significance	12
Summary	13
CHAPTER TWO	14
Literature Review	14
Introduction	14
Rural and Small Town Schools and EL Services	14
Best Practices for ELLs	18
Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol	18
Co-teaching	22
Teacher and Student Attitudes and Perceptions of the EL Classroom	26
WIDA Standards	31
Conclusion	35
CHAPTER THREE	36

	3
Project Description	36
Introduction	36
Curriculum Development	36
Setting	39
Timeline	40
Conclusion	41
CHAPTER 4	43
Conclusion	43
Context	43
What I Learned	43
Revisiting the Literature Review	45
Implications/Limitations/Recommendations	47
References	50

Introduction

Introduction

Chapter one lays out the purpose of my Capstone Project. I am an English Language (EL) teacher teaching in a rural/small town school district. My teaching career, so far, has been teaching in this type of setting. Because of my experience as an EL teacher in rural/small town school districts, I am interested in how EL teachers can help English Language Learners (ELLs) and content teachers create a successful learning experience for ELLs with the ultimate goal of earning a high school diploma.

My research question is: *How can the current English Language Arts classes be aligned with the WIDA standards to make the class more accessible for English Language Learners?* This is the question I want to address and answer in my Capstone project. I also discuss my personal experiences as an ELL teacher in this chapter as well as show the connection between my personal experience and how this project will add to the discourse on this topic. Finally, I touch on the upcoming chapters and discuss their contents.

Context

The experiences I have had over the past few years, especially my current teaching situation, have increased my interest in the project topic. I have worked for more than 5 years as an EL teacher at two different, rural school districts. Not only am I interested in this project, I think it is imperative as many ELLs are struggling in the content classrooms, especially at the high school level. I want to find some way to help students in these content classes. The audience for this project is not only the students but also the content teachers in the school district. I want to create something that is not only

useful but something that teachers will readily use. I want to create true change in the classroom. The system as it is now is not working; it is not equitable. ELLs are struggling in their classes; they are not getting the support they need to learn and succeed.

To renew a teaching license in MN, the qualifying teacher should have training in meeting the needs of ELLs according to MN Statute: Expiration and Renewal Public Law No. 122A.187. Despite this training, I see that many teachers struggle with having ELLs in the classroom. Because this is a requirement in the state of MN, I want to focus on ways to reach content teachers who do not feel equipped to deal with these students. These students are not just “my students”; they are students of all the teachers and staff at the school. Every teacher must be invested in their success.

There is an abundance of research on co-teaching as well as documented strategies to help ELLs such as Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocols (SIOP) and other strategies or curriculum. SIOP is a model that is designed to provide “sheltered instruction...teaching ideas for each of the model’s eight components...ways to differentiate instruction in multi-level classrooms, and...lesson scenarios” (Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 13) and is discussed further in Chapter 2. This is a strategy that was specifically developed to support ELLs, though it can support all students. Even Echevarria et al indicated that all students benefit from the SIOP approach (2013). Co-teaching is another strategy that is used to support ELLs. Honigsfeld and Dove (2014) discussed this in their book with a collection of essays on co-teaching. In the introduction, Honigsfeld and Dove outlined the importance of having a book that focuses on ELL co-teaching practices rather than using materials that are intended for the special

education context (2014, p. xix). Both of these types of strategies are two that I am focusing on in regards to my Capstone project.

Personal Experience

My first teaching experience was in a rural school district in Southwest Minnesota. This community has a large population of immigrants and refugees from all over the world, predominantly coming from Central America. It has been the home of many immigrants and refugees over the past 30 years. It is one of the most diverse counties in Minnesota. According to the United States Census, this county has a diversity index of 59% (United States Census, 2022). Only two counties in Minnesota have a higher diversity index than the county in which this district is located. According to the US Census, the diversity index is used to “measure the probability that two people chosen at random will be from different race and ethnicity groups” (United States Census, 2022). Teaching and living in this community was a very unique experience.

When I started my teaching career in this district, I worked at the Alternative Learning Center (ALC). I co-taught several classes in my two years there, with varying results as well as having my own classes that I taught. Many ELL students did not graduate because of outside issues such as working full time, family issues, or other concerns. Many students struggled in the content classes at the ALC, but because it was an ALC, the classes were smaller and it was easier for students to get individualized help. Because we were a small team at the ALC, we were able to effectively work together to help ELLs in the program. The ELLs at the ALC typically were there because they were behind in credits and had come to the United States when they were in their teens.

After two years, I transferred to the high school in the same district. Because of the influx of immigrants and refugees to this community, I had my own EL classes that were always bursting at the seams with students. We had about 300 ELLs at the high school alone with a staff of 8 EL teachers at the high school. This is of course a good problem to have! But this “problem” also created other problems. Because we had our own classes, we were unable to support students in the content area classes that students needed to graduate. However, because we had such a robust program and several EL teachers, we were able to have sheltered EL classes for the different levels of students. This helped the students prepare for their content classes when they made the leap to content classes with more challenging material. Because the school district was very diverse and had been very diverse for such a long time, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other staff were accustomed to this population and accustomed to making accommodations and modifications for ELLs.

Of course, no school district is perfect. Some teachers were better at accommodating ELLs, while other teachers struggled with modifying their materials and scaffolding to help ELLs be successful in the content classes. The EL teachers at this high school also had some control over scheduling, and we knew which classes would be the most manageable for ELLs and we were able to place them in these classes.

There were many barriers to helping ELL students graduate, not only academic, but also personal. Many ELLs that came to the high school were older when they arrived in this country; they did not have as much time to learn English and to also graduate. Because of the EL classes that students were required to take, students could be behind in their credits. Many students also worked overnight and/or had many other

responsibilities, such as caring for family members. It is very difficult to catch up when a student comes to the United States and does not speak English and/or also did not have a lot of schooling in his or her home country. We also had many students with Limited or Interrupted Education (SLIFE). In summary, in this district, though there were problems, because of the large population of ELLs, teachers and other staff knew and understood the importance of helping these students to graduate. There were also a lot of resources to help students, even if they did not graduate. I also worked for the Adult Education program, which was a very robust program that not only helped adults obtain their GEDs, but also had many EL classes that were always full.

I worked with a team of teachers in this district that truly cared about ELLs and were sensitive to their individual needs and situations. These teachers wanted to help them succeed. Everything was not always perfect, but many students successfully learned English and graduated high school, though sometimes they were not able to do both because of limited time frames.

This experience showed me that while the sheltered EL classes helped students learn academic English, we could have done more in the content classes, such as co-teaching. The EL teachers in this district had their own classes and because of this, there was limited time to help students with their content classes. Collaboration between the content teachers and EL teachers could have been an effective way to address the struggles that ELLs had in their content classes.

I am currently working in a new school district in Southeast Minnesota, closer to the Twin Cities. This school district has similar problems as my previous school district, but at a much larger scale. The ELL population of my current school district is much

smaller than my previous school district. There are about 70 ELLs at the high school, many of which are long-term ELLs. I see ELLs struggling to succeed in content classes as well as graduating. These problems are inequitable for the ELLs. We also have limited EL staff and resources compared to my previous school district. I also feel that this school district has not had to contend with a large influx of immigrants and refugees, so they are inadequately prepared in general, and the system at the high school was not created for ELLs to successfully navigate. This is a striking difference from my previous district.

The high school in this district operates with a co-teaching model to support ELLs. I have been co-teaching for the whole year along with having my own class of newcomer ELLs. My first co-teaching experience this school year was with an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher who had also previously co-taught with a former EL teacher. I also am currently co-teaching with a different ELA teacher who has never co-taught before with an EL teacher. I also have my own class that I teach, though it is a small class with only about 10-12 students. Luckily, I have been able to work with two ELA teachers and have co-taught the same classes in each semester. For example, in the first semester, I co-taught two sections of English 11. I am currently co-teaching in an English 10 classroom. I feel that I have been helpful in helping shape the curriculum to have scaffolding and modifications to support the ELLs. I have been lucky and had the same co-planning time as my co-teachers and we have been able to collaborate on the class. I also have worked with teachers that are open to co-teaching with an EL teacher, though the co-teaching set-up happened last minute and was not necessarily ideal to create a successful partnership. This is my first year in the district, so I do not have any

prior experience to fall back on, but it seems like the co-teaching partnerships were put together haphazardly and the EL team is scrambling to keep up with the problems that are arising. Every day, it feels like there are new fires to put out and new issues that we need to address. The EL team has been feeling very overwhelmed this year as we struggle to keep up with the issues that are arising, such as students struggling in their content classes or changing schedules for students.

Despite the positive co-teaching experiences I have had over the past few months, there have been problems in the high school in helping ELLs be successful in the content classroom. At the high school level, there are only 2 full-time EL teachers and 1 part-time EL teacher. One of the EL teachers is dual licensed in Social Studies, so she teaches sheltered Social Studies courses. This has made it difficult for us to help all of the ELLs that need help as we can only co-teach so many classes. We also are resources for teachers that may have one or two ELLs in their classroom but are not able to have a co-teacher in the room. All of the team has had content teachers reach out seeking help with accommodating ELLs, but as we have limited resources, we are not always able to effectively help these teachers. One of the other EL teachers who is also full-time like me, usually gets queries about ELLs in content classes. She has been in the district for several years, so most teachers already know her and reach out to her. For example, she tried to help an ELA teacher, who was not co-teaching, with strategies and ideas to help a newcomer student in the teacher's English class. According to my colleague, this teacher made no use of the ideas that she was given and continued to teach the way she always teaches. The newcomer student, who has a strong academic background in Spanish,

struggled and almost failed the class. When the student showed me the assignments, I had trouble figuring them out, so I can imagine it was insurmountable for this student.

Another example is a teacher reaching out to my colleague and indicating that he could not communicate with a newcomer student in his class. This particular teacher also had this student last year, though it was in a co-taught class, but it seems like this year, the teacher has given up on anything he learned from the co-teacher and is having material translated into Spanish. These are two examples of the apathy that I feel the EL team receives in this district from content teachers. Teachers do not seem to want to try anything to help students and resort to translating everything. Google Translate, of course, can be a tool that is used, but it is not something that should be relied on. I also am not always able to communicate with students, because we do not speak the same language, but I am able to figure it out. Many of our ELLs, despite many of them being newcomers, are being forced quickly into content classes and the EL team is struggling to support them. I feel that sometimes content teachers view these students as a problem that someone else (the EL team) has to help in order for the students to be successful. I want to help but we are only 2.5 teachers and we can not physically be in every classroom or modify teaching materials for every teacher that is struggling to teach ELLs. I also feel like some teachers do not want to change the way they teach to help students. These students are not just “my students,” they are the students of all the teachers and staff at the school and we need to have all teachers invested in their success.

Because students are struggling, some of them have indicated that they would just like to stop going to school. We have had a couple of ELLs dropout of school this year. It is not just because their content classes are difficult, there are other issues too, but it is

very demoralizing to the other students as well as the EL team, especially because the EL department and the number of ELLs is already so small in this school. This is what we are up against and the small EL team is struggling to stay afloat and also keep our students afloat.

Professional Significance

These problems that I have encountered in both of the teaching positions that I have held are not isolated occurrences. There has been a rise of immigrants and refugees in rural areas and in small towns. With this rise in immigrant and refugee populations, there is also a rise in the ELL population in schools. This obviously creates a need for EL services. However, according to Ruecker (2021), it can be difficult to attract EL staff and build programming for ELLs. Some of the other problems that Ruecker addresses in rural school districts is the placement of ELLs in inappropriate classes and lack of resources for teaching ELLs. As stated above in my personal experience, these problems have existed in the school districts where I have taught. These experiences have fueled my desire to create some change in whatever way I can.

However, there is hope for creating change in the teaching landscape in regards to ELLs and supporting them. Co-teaching is a practice used in my current school district to address the problem of students being placed in inappropriate classes. This can be an effective way to teach ELLs, but only if both teachers are on board and treat each other as equals. Davison (2006) pointed out that EL teachers also need support and training to co-teach and that specific teaching of language and language development is important in the co-teaching classroom. This project will allow me to focus on language development in a co-taught curriculum, which is crucial in supporting ELLs. WIDA (2020) also has

many resources that help with supporting ELLs and I am using these resources to inform my project and the work that I am doing.

Summary

My research question addresses the unique situation that rural and small-town schools seem to have. My research question is: *How can the current English Language Arts classes be aligned with the WIDA standards to make the class more accessible for English Language Learners?* My project will help answer this question through realigning a content curriculum with the WIDA standards.

This chapter focused on the rationale for this project and my personal experience and background as well as who this project is aiming to help. I also laid out how this project will add to the current literature and research on this topic. Chapter 2 is a review of the current literature on this subject. It also ties the current research to my project, which is a curriculum. Chapter 3 describes the project and my plans for the curriculum. And finally, Chapter 4 looks at the overall view and my findings with the curriculum. . Finally, I will create a project by modifying an existing curriculum.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

My research question is: *How can the current English Language Arts classes be aligned with the WIDA standards to make the class more accessible for English Language Learners?* This project is focused on modifying an existing curriculum in the English department in my school setting. In this literature review, I discuss the research behind best teaching practices for English Language Learners (ELLs), such as different strategies that are research-based. I also provide research into small town and rural school districts and ELL populations in these sorts of districts, as this is my current setting. I also look at the perceptions and attitudes of not only ELLs, but also teachers that they come into contact with, especially content teachers rather than English Language (EL) teachers. Finally, the bulk of my project is focused on the WIDA 2020 standards, and I delve into the new standards especially in regard to creating and designing curriculum. I have focused on these areas of study as they include the reality of my setting, a small town, and they are focused on strategies for ELLs as well as standards from WIDA. Finally, a big part of teaching ELLs is knowing their struggles and their perceptions of their education as well as how content teachers view them.

Rural and Small Town Schools and EL Services

The National Center for Education Statistics (n.d) has four classifications for school districts, rural, town, suburban, and city. The focus for this project is on rural and town schools according to this classification. My current school setting is in a small town

in Southeast Minnesota and it falls under this category according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Rural and small town school districts have increasingly changed over the years predominantly becoming more diverse with an influx of immigrants and refugees. As the Latino population rises in rural areas, so does the need for English Language (EL) services for migrant students coming into these districts (Kinkley & Yun, 2019). Some of the challenges facing these districts are hiring and retention of certified staff, lack of support, and building and maintaining systems of support for English Language Learners (ELL) (Ruecker, 2021). This section provides an overview of issues in rural and town school districts and potential solutions.

As stated above, rural and small-town school districts have rapidly diversified in recent years and also have a large population of students who speak a language besides English at home. Ruecker (2021) pointed out that much of the research on diversity and language support happens in urban settings rather than rural or small town settings. Rural and small town settings have different challenges than urban schools. These challenges need to be addressed with solutions that are geared toward these types of settings. Ruecker focused his study on these settings to find answers and solutions for the challenges these districts and schools face. Some of the challenges that Ruecker (2021) discussed include the retention of qualified teachers, the language programs that were in use in these settings, and the placement of ELLs in classes that may be inappropriate. However, Ruecker also discussed how these schools have been innovative and have faced the challenges of new arrived immigrant and refugee students.

Other researchers have looked at rural and small-town school districts to see how ELLs can be accommodated to be successful. Zehler et al. (2008) have created a framework for services that can promote academic success for ELLs. The framework components are personnel, instruction, administration, assessment and outreach (Zehler et al., 2008). Though all of these components are important in supporting ELLs in school, I am focusing on instruction. Zehler et al.(2008) focused on different aspects of instruction, such as choosing a curriculum that will support ELLs and also trying different levels of support, such as team-teaching or other strategies to meet the needs of ELLs. Showalter et. al (2017) also pointed out the difficulties that are unique for ELLs in rural school districts. Showalter et. al (2017) discussed the fact that in many rural settings, ELLs are considered at risk and live in poverty. There is also a disconnect between the school district and parents or guardians of ELLs. Many parents or guardians can sometimes have a distrust of the school system and there is normally a language barrier. This can make these parents or guardians feel like they do not have a voice in the system. Because of these issues, it can appear to school staff that parents or guardians of ELLs are not invested in their children's education, which is not necessarily true. (Showalter et. al 2017).

Ruecker (2021) observed 5 different rural schools in New Mexico and presented his findings on the different frameworks referenced above. For personnel, Ruecker noted that many teachers that teach ELL either do not have full training in ESL (though this study took place in New Mexico with different education standards and requirements than Minnesota) and are stretched thin, usually having to teach non-ESL classes. He also pointed out that language support seems more adequate at the elementary and middle

school levels. Mostly, it is difficult to hire and retain qualified teachers for rural school districts and sometimes qualified teachers are not available and other teachers in the school have to teach ELD. For instruction, he noted that many programs have dated or no curriculums to follow. Many of the teachers in Ruecker's study said they had to create their own curriculums or had cobbled together a patchwork of resources. Others were used as homework help and they were expected to help with homework from other classes. For administration and assessment, Ruecker wrote about how there can be a lot of turnover in staff, not only for teachers but also at the administration level. Ruecker also pointed out that at urban schools with large ELL populations, there can be differentiated levels, but when a school has a small population, students at different abilities will be placed in the same class. This can be difficult for a teacher to teach when dealing with students of different abilities. Also, teachers and administrators in these smaller districts often have to take on multiple roles, which can stretch staff thin and be very stressful and difficult for staff.

Finally, Ruecker (2021) had recommendations based on his observations. He stated that administrators would benefit from more education in EL education and that administrators need to be supportive of EL programs. Teachers also need more training when they are obtaining their licenses. There is a lack of EL education in these programs. (Note: this study was done in New Mexico with different requirements and standards than in Minnesota.) Also, there should be relationships between local entities and the schools to build up EL programs. Finally, the state needs to be more supportive of EL programs (Ruecker, 2021). This limited research into ELLs in a rural setting showed that there can be a lack of support for these students. However, it also showed that teachers

have been adaptable in trying to support their students. This section only focused on these particular settings and the issues they had. The next section focuses on strategies that can support ELLs in all settings.

Best Practices for ELLs

There is a great body of research on what strategies can help support ELLs, in both sheltered EL classrooms and mainstream classrooms. Some of the strategies that are considered best practices are discussed in the next section. Two of the strategies that are used to support ELLs are called Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and co-teaching. The first part of this section discusses SIOP and other best practices in either the EL classroom or the mainstream classroom. The next section delves into co-teaching, which has become a common practice in many schools around the country, including the district where I work.

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocols (SIOP) is a method that has been espoused in helping not only ELLs, but all students. This method was developed because of achievement gaps in ELLs in comparison to their peers. According to Echevarria et al. (2013), ELLs perform significantly behind their English speaking peers. For example, since the No Child Left Behind Act became law in 2001, many ELLs are not receiving high school diplomas according to Echevarria et al. (2013). However, there has been some improvement recently with graduation rates rising for ELLs. According to the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) (2020), ELL graduation rates have been rising since 2010. In the 2017-2018 school year, “the median state-level high school graduation rate for ELs was 68.4%” (OELA, 2020). In Minnesota in the same school

year, the graduation rate was 66% (OELA, 2020). There is a range from 31% graduation rate in New York and 93% in West Virginia, (OELA, 2020) but this document did not go into the difference, just that the graduation overall is rising. It also stated that from 2010 until 2017, the graduation rate for ELLs went from 57% to 68% (OELA, 2020). Also, it compared the graduation rate of all students compared to ELLs. While there is still a gap, it is not as extreme as it used to be in 2010. Though the gap between ELLs and non-ELL students receiving high school diplomas has decreased, SIOP was created to address these concerns that many ELLs are not receiving high school diplomas.

SIOP has 8 components and 30 features (Echevarria et al. 2013). The 8 components are lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and finally review and assessment. There are also 30 features in these 8 components. For example, the component building background has the features of “making connections with students’ background experiences and prior learning, and developing their academic vocabulary” (Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 16). SIOP is one of the methods that I was taught in different professional development experiences over my years as a teacher. This method is seen to be the gold standard among many EL teachers in teaching ELLs, especially in the content classroom.

In this book, Echevarria et al. (2013) also discussed the importance of academic language. They explained that academic language has many definitions but most definitions include reading, writing, speaking and listening skills that are used in the classroom. There is a specialized vocabulary that is used in the classroom but not in everyday life or in social English. Many ELLs appear to have a good grasp of social

English, but struggle with academic English as it is more formal. Knowing and being able to use academic language is imperative in schools and this is different from social language. Learning and using academic language is imperative for language development, especially if schools want ELLs to be successful. (Echevarria et al., 2013)

SIOP was created to address the situation in schools after No Child Left Behind became a law in 2001. It is just one solution to address the problems of ELLs not being successful in the content classrooms. The authors stated:

The model provides guidance for the best practices for English learners, grounded in more than two decades of classroom-based research, the experiences of competent teachers, and findings from the professional literature. It has been used successfully in both language and content classrooms and with this approach, teachers can help English learners attain the skills and knowledge associated with college and career readiness. (Echevarria et al., p. 13).

The authors of the SIOP model have years of research to back up their claims that SIOP is one of the most effective ways to teach ELLs. However, there has been pushback from other researchers. Krashen (2013) discussed two hypotheses of how language is acquired, the “skill-building” hypothesis and the comprehension hypothesis. The main difference between these two hypotheses is that the “skill-building” hypothesis is centered around the idea that language learners need to learn the skills of language first, such as grammar, before they are able to use these skills in real-life situations. The comprehension hypothesis is centered around the idea that language learning happens when a language learner understands messages in the target language. This hypothesis states that language learning does not happen through producing language. Krashen’s

discussion of these hypotheses is important, as he claimed that the SIOP model does not choose one hypothesis to focus on and instead accepts that both are true. Krashen (2013) argued that the research shows that the comprehension hypothesis is the correct one. Some of the features used in SIOP are aligned with the comprehension hypothesis while others are examples of the “skill-building” hypothesis. Krashen (2013) claimed that because of these dueling hypotheses, this research cannot show whether SIOP is an effective method. He also discussed that because of these two competing hypotheses, it is impossible to know what actually is causing success for students. Krashen (2013) used four studies (this information may be outdated) that compare a group of students taught using SIOP and a control group of students not taught with SIOP. Krashen (2013) claimed that 3 out of 4 of these studies were by the original group of researchers. This is something that I have noticed, that most of the information that I found about SIOP is usually published by the original authors of the SIOP method. Krashen’s conclusions about the studies are as follows:

There are few studies in which SIOP is compared to competing methods, and we are not sure what those competing methods were. There also exists an unusual number of flaws and gaps in the studies, and results are only modest, despite a large investment in SIOP training. Even if SIOP were shown to be successful, because SIOP is a mixed bag, we would not know what is responsible for the results because the effect of different parts of SIOP was not separately analyzed.

(Krashen, 2013, p. 11)

Overall, Krashen believes that the research behind SIOP is flawed and needs to be addressed. Note that the idea of sheltered instruction is an idea that was adapted from

Krashen and Terrel's book *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom* (2015) as referenced in Williams' review (2022). This makes Krashen's arguments compelling and his research on language acquisition has been influential in the language learning and teaching world.

Krashen is not the only one to criticize SIOP. Williams (2022) has a review of a book entitled *The Trouble with SIOP ®: How a Behaviorist Framework, Flawed Research, and Clever Marketing Have Come to Define — and Diminish — Sheltered Instruction*, by James Crawford and Sharon Adelman Reyes (2015). Crawford and Reyes wanted to criticize the pedagogy of SIOP and also outline their own approach to language acquisition (as cited in Williams, 2022). Like Krashen, they also criticized the research methods of the original authors of SIOP and claim that the authors have been successful with SIOP because of a marketing campaign. Crawford and Reyes believed that SIOP and SI (Sheltered Instruction) are two completely different frameworks and combining them does not work in supporting ELLs (as cited in Williams, 2022). SIOP is a prescribed curriculum with prescribed lessons. Overall, the arguments from this book seem to be many of the same arguments that Krashen brings up. The book also delves into Sheltered Instruction, an idea from Krashen that has been used in SIOP but used incorrectly according to Crawford and Reyes (as cited in Williams, 2022). Not only are there many strategies that can be used in supporting ELLs in the classroom, there are other strategies of supporting students, such as co-teaching, which the next section discusses.

Co-teaching

Abdallah (2009) defined co-teaching:

Co-teaching is an opportunity for two teachers to be of equal importance in teaching a lesson. It is not a situation where there is one main teacher, with the second teacher functioning as an assistant. When two teachers work together to co-teach, they do all the work equally. It should not be the case that one teacher works more than the other, while one teacher rests and relaxes more often.

(paragraph 4)

Abdallah (2009) also discussed the benefits of co-teaching, if implemented correctly, for the students. ELLs will be exposed to native speakers of English and can be immersed in learning English with EL strategies to support them as they learn content. Mainstream students also are benefited as they are exposed to their peers from different backgrounds and cultures.

Honigsfeld and Dove (2014) published an edited book of articles with differing topics on co-teaching and collaboration between content teachers and EL teachers. Teachers in a collaborative model should be committed to the collaboration, must be able to effectively communicate and problem solve, and should be flexible in finding planning and collaborating time. There are several problems that can come up in the co-teaching model. Teachers may have personality conflicts or there may not be buy-in from both teachers. It can also be difficult for teachers to find the time to plan together. There could also be negative attitudes toward teaching ELLs in the classroom and power struggles between the teachers (Bell & Walker, 2012).

As a result of their research, Bell and Walker (2012) have 6 components of a successful co-taught classroom. They are: a rationale for the collaboration, a shared definition of co-teaching between the teachers, collaborative practices, contextual factors,

barriers, and the outcomes that can happen (Bell & Walker, 2012). These components are not just for teachers but also administrators and policymakers. They acknowledge that co-teaching is not easy, especially when looking at these components, but when this collaboration is successful, it greatly benefits students.

Davison (2006) agreed that co-teaching partnerships are ideal to help multilingual learners and notes that many EL programs are moving to co-teaching and collaboration to support multilingual learners. She focused on how to determine whether these partnerships are successful or not. Davison (2006) included what is essential for a partnership to work:

... a clear conceptualisation of the task, the incorporation of explicit goals for ESL development into curriculum and assessment planning processes, the negotiation of a shared understanding of ESL and mainstream teachers' roles/responsibilities, the adoption of common curriculum planning proformas and processes, experimentation with diversity as a resource to promote effective learning for all students, the development of articulated and flexible pathways for ESL learning support, and the establishment of systematic mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and feedback. (p. 456)

All of these parts of collaboration take time and effort and there are obstacles to ensuring that all of these tasks can happen. The most obvious barrier to these happening in the collaboration process is lack of time. Davison (2006) pointed out that there may be a power imbalance in the classroom, with the EL teacher seen as an "extra set of hands" and the EL teacher may feel the need to be subordinate to the content teacher. Davison's research and expertise is mostly in the educational systems in Australia and the United

Kingdom, but she raised good points about the role of the EL teacher in the collaborative process. She argued that EL teachers have not been prepared to navigate this system and the common assumption is that EL teachers do not need guidance in this process (2006). She also argued that there needs to be planned language development built into the curriculum and that the focus on co-teaching needs to be the curriculum and not just including multilingual learners in the normal everyday activities (2006). However, it can be difficult to incorporate language development into the content standards as many content teachers, especially at the secondary level, do not see themselves as language teachers and can be resistant to explicitly teaching language (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014).

Davison's study focused on whether these collaborative partnerships are effective or not. She identified five stages of effectiveness of teacher partnerships. They are, at the lowest level of effectiveness, passive resistance, compliance, accommodation, convergence, and finally, creative co-construction (2006). The ultimate goal is to reach creative co-construction where the partnership is seamless and very creative and adaptable. There are also four areas of teacher concerns in regards to attitude, effort, achievements, and expectations of support (2006). The findings are discussed in these four areas of concern in relation to the different levels of effectiveness. Overall, the study by Davison showed that teachers' attitudes toward collaborative partnerships can vary greatly. Obviously, co-teaching is a challenge and Davison believed that there should be more research on this subject in different schools as this was only one study in one school. She has created this framework as stated above but she believed that there should be more research to see if this framework will work in other settings.

SIOP and co-teaching are just two strategies that are used with multilingual learners. There has been much research about these methods of instructions and the implications for multilingual learners. It appears that both of these methods are tools that can be used to support multilingual learners. SIOP has research backing it, according to the authors, and co-teaching can be an effective strategy if implemented correctly. These two strategies, SIOP and co-teaching inform the background of my project in creating a curriculum. The next section discussed attitudes and perceptions of not only teachers, but also content teachers in regards to the EL classroom.

Teacher and Student Attitudes and Perceptions of the EL Classroom

Attitudes and perceptions of both ELLs and content teachers can affect the EL classroom and the content classroom. Teachers' perceptions of ELLs can vary with many teachers saying that they feel unprepared to teach ELLs (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). The first part of this section focuses on ELL's perceptions and attitudes about their schools and content classes. The second part discusses content teacher attitudes and perceptions of ELLs in all different content areas.

De Jager (2019) performed a study from the perspective of students and SIOP methods that their teachers used in the classroom. De Jager also pointed out that there are not many studies from the student perspective, so this study focused on how students perceived the different categories of SIOP. The results were interesting and varied across the different categories. Many students indicated that class objectives were not clear to the students and many students also indicated that teachers did not help them when they needed it, which contradicted some of the other responses that students gave. Overall, de Jager reported in the conclusion that there needs to be more robust teacher education

preparation programs and that there also needs to be training for teachers on how to teach effectively using sheltered instruction and allowing students to work collaboratively together.

Ardasheva and Tretter (2012) created a study addressing the issue of not enough research on multilingual learners' attitudes towards their education. Ardasheva and Tretter indicated that language learning strategies can be taught to multilingual learners and can be an effective way to teach English. They also mention two instructional models that explicitly teach language learning strategies, SIOP, mentioned previously, and also Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA). They wanted to perform research on attitudes towards language learning strategies from a teacher perspective, but also from the student perspective. The strategies that were examined were memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies (Ardasheva & Tretter 2012). Ardasheva and Tretter (2012) give examples of these different kinds of strategies. Memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies are direct strategies. Examples of direct strategies are note-taking (cognitive), using context (memory), and using gestures (compensation). Metacognitive, affective, and social strategies are indirect strategies. Examples of indirect strategies are self-evaluation (metacognitive), anxiety control (affective), and asking questions (social) (Ardasheva and Tretter, 2012). Ardasheva and Tretter found that teachers had high approval of language learning strategies. At the high school level, the highest rated strategy for both students and teachers was metacognitive followed by social. The lowest scoring strategy across all of the settings and for teachers and students was the affective strategy (2012). Students also reported medium frequency of strategy

use though teachers gave high scores to all language learning strategies. Overall, metacognitive strategies were the most effective according to teachers and students. Ardasheva and Tretter concluded from this study that though teachers have a high ranking of language learning strategies, students only have a medium level. This seems to indicate that there needs to be more explicit instruction of language learning strategies in the classroom to help multilingual learners be successful. They also concluded that there may need to be more explicit professional development on language learning strategies.

Flores and Smith (2013) focused on multilingual learners in the context of a chemistry classroom. This is another study from the perspective of multilingual learners. They noted that there has been research on multilingual learners at the elementary level in science classes, but there is not much research on these students at the high school level. Flores and Smith (2013) pointed out that at the high school level, multilingual learners are expected to not only learn English, but also pass science classes that are at a high academic level, such as chemistry and physics. This study was focused on a chemistry class. Flores and Smith focused on two theoretical frameworks: phenomenography and hermeneutics. Phenomenography is “The description of different ways people interpret shared experiences” and hermeneutics is “providing a voice to individuals or groups who either cannot speak for themselves or are traditionally ignored” (Flores & Smith, 2013, pp. 152-153). They used these approaches to fully understand the perspectives of multilingual learners.

The students that were interviewed for this study first talked about their experiences learning English. One of the hindrances they faced in learning English was not being able to be understood in Spanish (Flores & Smith 2013). They also used

support from classmates and many of them had external motivations to learn English, such as being able to graduate from high school. The main takeaway from this section is that students felt supported not only by their teachers but also their peers and their families. In regards to learning chemistry, the main difficulty for these students seemed to be the fact that not only were they trying to learn English, they were also trying to learn the language of chemistry. Flores and Smith noted that the students indicated that they understood the words when they read, but had trouble understanding them and remembering them (2013). The math in chemistry was also difficult, though Flores and Smith noted that this can be true for all learners. There seems to be a disconnect for multilingual learners and their understanding of the formulas used in chemistry. One student noted that they had to understand the words and then use them in formulas (Flores & Smith, 2013). All of the students indicated that they used codeswitching to succeed in chemistry class. They would translate the words they learned in English into Spanish and then used this to help them make connections and respond to assignments (Flores & Smith, 2013). The students also addressed their experiences with classmates, which ranged from negative to positive. They were positive when they felt supported by their classmates, especially when they were in a class with mostly other multilingual learners. Their experiences were negative when the other students that were not ELs seemed indifferent to the teachers (Flores & Smith, 2013). Interestingly, according to the students, it did not matter whether instruction was in English or in Spanish, but that teachers presented the material and supported and helped the students. Students also indicated that word walls helped them, which makes sense as these students are dealing with learning the vocabulary of science. The findings from these interviews, though

geared towards chemistry do have implications for other disciplines as well. Students indicated that first language support, real world examples, and inquiry based learning were all helpful in their success in chemistry class (Flores & Smith, 2013). This was a small study, so it would be interesting to see the results of students in another content class that is not science.

Szpara and Ahmad (2007) looked at the perspective of teaching social studies to multilingual learners. Their study was not as detailed as the previously mentioned one on chemistry, but they came to many of the same conclusions. That is, there is not enough support for multilingual learners in content classrooms, including social studies. They noted that there are sometimes not even textbooks geared towards multilingual learners (Szpara & Ahmad, 2007). They concluded that there needs to be a strong support system in the classroom, so students will feel supported as they learn English and the content (2007). There also needs to be resources that will reduce the cognitive load for students and are accessible, such as resources in different languages (Szpara & Ahmad, 2007).

Rubinstein-Avila and Lee (2014) indicated that most secondary school teachers view their multilingual learners favorably. They also noted that how teachers view multilingual learners varies depending on the school setting. For example, in a school described as “rapid-influx” the teachers felt overwhelmed by the influx of refugee students but also understood that it takes longer than a year to learn English (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). On the other hand, a school described as a “migrant-serving school” had teachers with more negative attitudes toward multilingual learners (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). Rubinstein-Avila and Lee (2014) concluded that there needs to be systematic change in changing teachers’ negative attitudes toward

multilingual learners. This can be achieved through pre-service programs, professional development, and through collaboration.

Overall, it seems that there are many strategies that are used to support multilingual learners and despite some criticisms, they appear to be effective in teaching multilingual learners. There have been many studies, cited above, that have looked at the effectiveness of these strategies. The perceptions of multilingual learners and their teachers are both positive and negative. It seems to depend on the strategies used and how much support multilingual learners feel that they have. This research has informed my project because it helped me understand the various perceptions from ELLs and teachers that I have seen in my own teaching career. It also guided the creation of my curriculum in that I understand better the perceptions that ELLs have and in creating the curriculum, I want to make sure that students feel supported by the curriculum I modified. The next section discusses the WIDA standards that are important in understanding the standards that are used for ELLs.

WIDA Standards

The state of Minnesota is part of the WIDA consortium. The next section focuses on the WIDA standards. The WIDA standards include English development standards across all disciplines. This section also explores the connection between language and the different disciplines.

WIDA is an organization that creates standards for ELLs in K-12. Minnesota is part of the WIDA consortium, so schools in Minnesota follow these standards. WIDA has 5 standards for language development: social and instructional language, language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science (WIDA, 2020, p. 9). These standards are about

academic language in each of these content areas as well as social and instructional language that is for the purposes of communication in general. These standards were recently updated in 2020.

The standards from 2020 have four big ideas. These four big ideas are “equity of opportunity and access, integration of content and language, collaboration among stakeholders, and functional approach to language development” (WIDA, 2020, p. 17).

Equity of opportunity and access is about making sure that all multilingual learners have equitable access to education. This also means that teachers should set high expectations for multilingual learners and create learning experiences that use multilingual learners’ rich language and cultural backgrounds to help these students learn (2020, p. 18).

Integration of content and language is about how multilingual learners learn content and language simultaneously. As WIDA wrote, “academic content as a context for language learning and language as a means for learning academic content” (2020, p. 19) WIDA also references multimodality in teaching multilingual learners. This means that not only is spoken and written language used in instruction, but other modes of communication can and should be used. For example, facial expressions, gestures, videos, and images (2020, p. 19). Collaboration among stakeholders is about the collaboration between all of the people involved in the education of multilingual learners. These include parents, EL teachers, content teachers, administrators, students, and any other stakeholders that are involved (2020, p. 19). Finally, a functional approach to language development is the last of the four big ideas. WIDA compares language to a toolbox. WIDA stated:

...the language toolbox contains various tools that function for different needs.

Particular linguistic tools achieve certain purposes. For example, we make choices

with language to reflect the topic at hand, the social roles and identities of those involved (am I talking to a college admissions interviewer or to my best friend?), and the needs of our listeners and readers. (2020, p. 20)

WIDA has a language framework that is composed of four parts: five WIDA ELD standards statements, key language uses, language expectations, and proficiency level descriptors (PLD) (2020, p. 23). The five ELD standards were previously mentioned, but WIDA underscores how important social and instructional language is. It helps students to communicate in all of their classes as well as build relationships with teachers and their peers. WIDA has four key language uses. These uses are narrate, inform, explain, and argue (2020, p. 26). WIDA also briefly defines each. Narrate is about recounting experiences, whether they are real or imaginary. Inform is giving factual information. Explain is about explaining the why and how of different situations or topics. Finally, argue is using evidence and reasoning to justify claims (2020, p. 23).

Language expectations are goals used in instruction. They help make the ELD standards statements and the key language uses more specific and are used in guiding instruction. They are typical of what many educators see in their own standards. There are four aspects to language expectations: reference codes, language functions, communication modes, and example language features (2020, p. 28). Language expectations have a reference code that includes the “WIDA ELD Standard Statement (incorporating an academic content area), grade-level cluster, Key Language Use, and communication mode” (WIDA, 2020, p. 23). Communication modes are expressive or interpretive. Interpretive modes of communication are listening or reading while expressive modes of communication are speaking and writing. Language functions and

language features are also part of language expectations and words in tandem together.

Language functions are:

common patterns of language use that showcase particular ways students might use language to meet the purposes of schooling. For example, a series of Language Functions is associated with the process of constructing fictional narratives, informing peers of newly gained knowledge, explaining phenomena, or engaging in scientific argumentation. (WIDA, 2020, p. 29)

Finally, there are proficiency level descriptors. Proficiency Level Descriptors (PLDs) “are a detailed articulation of multilingual learners’ growth in interpretive and expressive language across levels of English language proficiency.” (WIDA, 2020, p. 31). These proficiency levels range from 1 to 6. 6 is open-ended according to WIDA because we are all language learners and are constantly learning a language throughout our lives. Even if a student is at a 6, the levels are a continuum and all speakers of English, whether it is a native English speaker or someone learning the language are still learning the language.

WIDA also includes grade cluster levels for different grades. I will be focusing on the high school level here. The ELD Standards statements are the same at all of the grade levels, but the section on high school focuses on important key features, language expectations, and proficiency level descriptors for multilingual learners at the high school level. It also includes grade level examples. This section is divided into the different ELD standards and uses the key language features such as “narrate” to show what students can do at this level. In the previous iteration of the WIDA standards, there was a focus on the different levels of 1 to 6 and the can dos of what students can do at different levels. This new edition focuses on language functions, and this is the first time I have really delved

into the new edition. I actually find it more helpful, because it does focus on functional language, which could be useful in planning for a co-teaching situation. At the end of the high school section, WIDA does have the proficiency level descriptors in regards to the expressive and receptive communication skills. Overall, these standards seem more concise than the previous standards and I can see their uses in the classroom, especially in the co-taught classroom.

Conclusion

These research topics relate to the project/thesis that I have proposed. Rural and small town school districts face different challenges than their urban counterparts. My research question is: *How can the current English Language Arts classes be aligned with the WIDA standards to make the class more accessible for English Language Learners?* The perceptions of multilingual learners can range from positive to negative and multilingual learners' perceptions of school and classes can affect their ability to learn. There are many strategies that can be used for multilingual learners and best practices were discussed in the above section. Co-teaching is another strategy that has gained popularity recently and is something that is used in many schools, including the schools I work in. Finally, the WIDA standards ties this all together and provides a framework for best practices. The next chapter discusses the specifics behind the Capstone project that I have created.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The previous chapters discussed my interest in this topic as well as the research behind rural/small-town settings, strategies that are typically used with multilingual students, perceptions of students and teachers, as well as the new WIDA 2020 standards. My research question is: *How can the current English Language Arts classes be aligned with the WIDA standards to make the class more accessible for English Language Learners?* My plan for this project was to use the existing curriculum for an English Language Arts (ELA) content class and align the curriculum with the WIDA standards for multilingual learners so that the English Language Learners (ELLs) in the class can also be successful. I also used the Understanding by Design (UbD) by Wiggins and McTighe (2011) to inform the curriculum planning.

Curriculum Development

I am specifically working with the ELA department, and even more specifically, English 11. I have co-taught with the English department previously and I feel comfortable with their content. Because I feel comfortable with my ELA colleagues and the content, this was a good area for me to adapt and modify the curriculum and the plan for next year is for me to co-teaching in only ELA classes. I will be co-teaching in two English 9 classes, one English 10 class, and two English 11 classes. As stated above, I have decided to focus on the English 11 class, as I have co-taught it before and am more familiar with this curriculum and the content teacher. The plan is to have an EL co-teacher in each of the English classes for next year. If there is already a modified unit

or lesson, this will help both the content teacher and the EL teacher as well as all of the students. Going through this process of creating a curriculum will also ensure that I can go through the same process when co-teaching other classes.

ELLs struggle in these ELA classes, which is why many of these classes are co-taught now with the content teacher and an EL teacher. Because I had co-taught English 11 before, I knew from experience the parts of the curriculum that ELLs struggled with. Based on my past experience, the part that was most difficult for ELLs was reading the texts and writing responses to the text. I modified and adapted everything in the English 11 curriculum, but I particularly focused on reading and writing.

Through this process, I looked at the ELA standards and also used the WIDA 2020 standards. I used the UbD (Wiggins and McTighe, 2011) guidelines to also help me think about designing a curriculum. I used a template that had the features that are imperative to creating a curriculum such as the standards, the learning tasks, and the essential questions. I also added some of my own when modifying the template. According to Wiggins and McTighe, there are three stages for creating a curriculum. The three questions are,

Stage 1: What should students learn as a result of this unit (short term and long term)? Stage 2: What assessment evidence will show that students have met the Stage 1 goals? Stage 3: What key learning events will help students reach the goals and be successful on the assessments? (2011, p. 43)

When I looked at the English 11 curriculum, I asked myself these questions, especially in regards to ELLs and their learning. The WIDA standards also have similar guiding

questions in creating curriculum that will serve ELLs and I used these questions to help guide my modification and adaptation of the curriculum.

As stated previously, I also used the WIDA 2020 standards to help guide my curriculum design and planning. WIDA has guidelines on using its 2020 standards for collaborative planning in regards to content classes. While I worked on this project myself, I am planning to use these guidelines to make the curriculum aligned also with the WIDA 2020 standards. Typically, this is a collaborative process as WIDA outlines it. The steps are

1. Locate relevant WIDA ELD Standards by examining the unit's content standards.
2. Identify the most prominent Key Language Uses by analyzing the unit's content standards, summative assessments, essential questions, and main learning events.
3. Use Language Expectations to create unit language goals.
4. Unpack the Language Expectations, Functions, and Features in the context of your unit. (2020, p. 237)

WIDA has resources on following this plan and I used their resources to modify the current content curriculum. Going through this process has helped me understand what steps I can take when I meet with my co-teachers before school starts and planning for the co-taught classes.

The template I used is adapted from Wiggins and McTighe's UbD (2011). The template includes sections for the standards, both from the MN ELA standards and also the WIDA standards. I also have the understanding that I want students to learn by the end of the semester. The largest section on the template is the learning tasks. I have divided this into the five acts, as we will be studying a play. Each act has different

learning tasks associated with it. For example, in Act 1 of Macbeth, students will be taking a quiz on the act as well as answering two short writing prompts.

Finally, I will implement parts of this curriculum in the co-taught classes next year. I will also ask for feedback from the content teachers and we can decide if the changes I have made are working for our students. Ultimately, I think that the content teachers and I will see quickly if the updated curriculum is effective and if the ELLs are meeting the targets and standards. Also, if ELLs are able to pass the class and show their understanding will be the ultimate goal in recognizing if the curriculum has been successfully changed.

The research that supports my project is the WIDA 2020 Standards. These are the newest standards created by WIDA and are fundamental in helping multilingual learner teachers and content teachers understand how to support multilingual learners in the content classroom. WIDA has standards that are focused on social and instructional language as well as the language of science, math, social studies, and English language arts. I used the 2020 standards to guide the process of adapting and modifying the current curriculum that is not aligned with WIDA standards.

Setting

The location for this capstone project is a rural/small town school district in Southeast Minnesota. The school setting is the high school within this district. There are about 1,400 students at the high school. The high school is predominately white with 75% of students falling in this category. The other largest race/ethnicity categories are Hispanic or Latino at 14% and Black or African American at 7%. The current enrollment of multilingual learners is 82 or 5.6%. The current ACCESS scores for multilingual

learners is 10% at Level 1, 20% at Level 2, 67.5% at Level 3, and 2.5% at Level 4. Level 5 and Level 6 data is not available as students have exited at this point. The current multilingual learner staff is 2.5 FTE teachers. One teacher is only working part time, while the other two of us are full-time teachers. One multilingual learner teacher has an additional license in Social Studies, so this teacher teaches sheltered Social Studies classes for multilingual learners. The other teacher and I spend most of our time in co-taught classes. This year, we have co-taught in Physical Science, 3 English/Language Arts classes, and Health.

I currently co-teach in different classes and will continue co-teaching in the 23-24 school year. I will be co-teaching English 9, English 10, and English 11. I am updating the curriculum to align with the WIDA 2020 standards as well as be more accessible for ELLs. Though I am planning on aligning the current curriculum with the WIDA standards, this new curriculum will support all students. The intended audience of this project/curriculum is the ELLs who are taking content courses. The other intended audience is the content teachers who may be in a co-teaching situation with me or another teacher and can use this curriculum to help support ELLs, especially if co-teaching is not a feasible solution.

Timeline

The projected timeline for this project is over three months in the summer of 2023 for creating the curriculum. The first step in the project is contacting the department whose current curriculum I plan on updating and acquiring a copy of their current curriculum. The next steps will be to follow the WIDA 2020 Standards and Understanding by Design guidelines as outlined above. The final step is to implement the

curriculum in the Fall. Though this project has a timeline, I see this as a continual process. Once I have modified an existing curriculum, the things I learn will help inform co-teaching in the future and how to modify other curriculums, units, and lessons.

Though I am not collecting data as this was a project, I will look for feedback from the content teacher as well as students. According to Wiggins and McTighe (2011), in evaluating whether a curriculum or unit is effective is asking two questions, “Could the student do the performance but not understand? And vice versa: Could the student do poorly at the specific test but still be said to understand based on other evidence?” (p. 90). While creating the curriculum, I thought about the tasks in regards to these two questions. While implementing the curriculum, I will look for feedback from the co-teacher as well as analyze the learning tasks that we have assigned for English 11. Because I am co-teaching this class twice next year, that will help give me some informal feedback on how students are progressing with the learning tasks. I feel that going through this process has helped me understand the WIDA standards better and helped me in other co-teaching situations so that I can approach co-planning time as an accomplished language specialist.

Conclusion

My research question is: *How can the current English Language Arts classes be aligned with the WIDA standards to make the class more accessible for English Language Learners??* In Chapter 3, I discussed the research behind the WIDA standards, multilingual learner strategies, perceptions of students and teachers in regards to the education process, and finally the issues and problems that come up in rural/small town school districts in regards to multilingual learners. I also discussed the research behind

curriculum development, especially in regards to multilingual learners, current standards of the content area I will be focusing on and modifying, and strategies to incorporate into an edited curriculum. This research has provided a foundation of what I am doing for a project. In Chapter 4, I discuss the highlights of this process of creating a curriculum. I also discuss the curriculum and how this can affect my ELL students as well as my teaching.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Context

The previous chapters have discussed my personal and professional interest in this topic, the research behind this topic, and my project. My research question is: *How can the current English Language Arts classes be aligned with the WIDA standards to make the class more accessible for English Language Learners?* My project consisted of modifying a curriculum from an English Language Arts (ELA) class that I co-taught with a teacher during the last school year. This class was English 11. I have modified and adapted this curriculum according to the Understanding by Design (UbD) curriculum guide as well as using the WIDA standards to help guide the project in thinking about not just content, but also language. I have completed two units on allusions/mythology and Macbeth.

What I Learned

During this process, not only was I a teacher, but I was also a researcher, a writer, and a learner. The biggest thing that I have learned in regards to this project is learning about the newer WIDA standards. I started teaching in 2017, which was before the WIDA 2020 standards came into effect. I had more experience with the previous standards, especially in regards to using them when I was obtaining my teaching license. I also used the standards when using programs like Ellevation, a database that can be used in regards to EL services, and thinking about the different proficiency levels of students. I had seen the standards, but not delved into them at the level that I did with this

project. These standards were new for me and learning about them as well as applying them to a co-taught curriculum was very beneficial for me. Though I have only modified and adapted two units of the ELA curriculum, I feel better prepared for meeting the needs of my ELLs when I go back to school in the fall. Sometimes in the mix of preparing lessons and teaching as well as all the other duties of being an EL teacher, I forget about the WIDA standards and how WIDA is a source for me to use. I hope to continue delving into these standards and how I can use them in the co-taught classroom. My biggest takeaway from using these standards is that they are adaptable in many circumstances and can help me be a teacher teacher to the ELLs that I support, both in my own classroom and the co-taught classroom.

Another thing I learned about myself as a teacher is using a curriculum design plan such as the (UbD) curriculum templates. I have been teaching for more than five years and of course, I have written lesson plans, but I had not used such a formal curriculum design before. Before starting my project, I read the complete book by Wiggins and McTighe to help my understanding of how to complete “backwards” curriculum design. I also appreciated that this method of curriculum design is something that can be applied to an already existing curriculum. Learning this process will help me when I get to modifying and adapting either the curriculum I use in my own classroom or curriculum in a co-taught mainstream classroom that needs to be modified.

I also learned that as a writer and researcher, I can accomplish writing a Capstone project! I found the parts of the project that were the easiest for me to complete were the personal parts, such as Chapter 1 and Chapter 3. The hardest part was completing the literature review, mostly because at the point when I was doing research, I did not have a

clear idea of where I was going with my project. From doing the literature review and the research, I learned that it helps just to delve into the research and not worry about the project or thesis, but rather look at what the literature says. Looking at the research can help guide the researcher, especially into what topics may be of interest to pursue. Once I got to the WIDA part of my literature review, this helped solidify my plans of what I wanted to do with the project. This is something that I wish I had known before I started the literature review, as it was a very overwhelming endeavor.

Finally, I think the most surprising thing that I learned from this is that I could actually do it. I had put off finishing my master's for a few years, because it seemed overwhelming to complete. However, I learned that if this is something I am personally and professionally interested in, that can spur my learning and understanding. I am proud of myself that I have come this far and that I have completed this project.

Revisiting the Literature Review

In the literature review, I looked at the topics of small town and rural school districts and the issues that these districts face, the new WIDA EL standards, best practices for ELLs, and perceptions of the educational system of ELLs and also the perceptions that teachers have of ELLs. The most important part of my literature review was definitely the research and reading that I did of the WIDA 2020 standards. These standards actually guided my whole project and what I planned to do. These standards were the most important not only because they guided my project, but they gave me purpose to what I was doing. The WIDA standards have four big ideas and while they are all important, the one that spoke most greatly to me during this project was collaboration among stakeholders. WIDA states that this collaboration is “essential for providing

multilingual learners high-quality educational experiences that are coordinated and comprehensive” (2020, p. 19). I did work on this project alone over the summer, but I plan to continue approaching the co-teaching experience in the same way and collaborating with these teachers to help ELLs be successful.

I also felt reassured by the research about small towns and rural areas. I have never worked in an urban setting, so I do not know the problems that are happening in these types of school districts, but it helped me feel that I am not the only EL teacher who has similar experiences and problems. Ruecker (2021) especially helped me see the problems that can be present in these types of school districts and solutions to solve these problems. These problems are complicated and not easily solved, as it is something that cannot just be changed at the school level, but we need policy changes for these to happen. Ruecker (2021) discussed the importance of having robust teacher and educational leadership education programs that focus on how to truly educate ELLs as well as more supportive state policies for ELLs. Obviously, I created this project to work through some of the problems that I mentioned previously, but it helped me to realize that my current teaching situation is not unique and that there are solutions to the issues that arise in these districts even though I focused on what I can control in my own school.

Something that surprised me was the research on graduation rates for ELLs. Some of the research I was looking at was a little outdated, and I learned that the graduation rates for ELLs have actually risen, which surprised me a little bit. According to the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) the graduation rate for ELLs has risen over the past ten years, from 57% in 2010 to 68% in 2020 (OELA, 2020). This information from

the OELA also has shown me that there is good and effective teaching that is being done throughout the country to help ELLs learn and graduate along with their peers.

Implications/Limitations/Recommendations

The implications of my project are mostly pertaining to me as a co-teacher and an English Learner collaborative specialist, which is my current job title. I have only been in my current position for a year, and feel that this project gave me some time to really sit down, think about the students that I will have in the fall, and plan out an ELA curriculum that I will be co-teaching in the fall. I started in this position last year and I also was a co-teacher last year. However, I feel much better prepared than I felt last year, especially in regards to how to make the curriculum more accessible for ELLs. My prior teaching position was mostly in a pull-out setting and moving to mostly co-teaching has been challenging, as it is not just working with students, but also with another teacher. I feel much more comfortable going into this next school year and will hopefully be able to help ELLs feel more comfortable and successful in their mainstream classes.

As far as implications for policy, I think this could have a positive effect on the policies at my school district, especially around co-teaching. All of the work I have put in over the summer has really shown me how much work this is and how co-teachers should have planning time to work together. I hope that policy makers and administrators understand how much time this work takes and that co-teachers have time to plan and collaborate together. I know that many EL programs not only in Minnesota, but throughout the country are moving towards co-teaching programs to support ELLs, so this is something that could affect policies around how to teach ELLs. However, to have

true policy change, educators of ELLs need to advocate for their students, whether it is at the school level or the state or federal level.

Some limitations of my projects are that I was not able to create and modify curriculums for all of the content classes that I will be co-teaching in the fall. I created and modified this ELA curriculum on my own, when ideally, this process would be with the ELA teacher and not completely alone. I know that I felt this sometimes when I was working on modifying the curriculum, that it would be best to be working on this with my co-teacher, but going through this process alone has helped me understand how to approach and work with future co-teachers.

Another limitation was that my project was specifically focused on an ELA curriculum, so I was unable to explore other content classes and how I could modify the curriculum to help ELLs in classes like science and math. Because I focused on an ELA curriculum, I did not look at the other WIDA standards as closely, such as the language of math, the language of science, and the language of social studies. In the future, I hope to co-teach in these sorts of classes and my project has given me the tools to support teachers and ELLs in other disciplines.

Another limitation of my current project is the fact that there are new ELA standards for Minnesota that are coming out in the next couple of years. I used the existing standards, as this is also what the ELA department at my school is using, but these will be changing soon, and thus will require more modifications to curriculum. In two years, the ELA curriculum at my school could look completely different than it does now, but again, going through the curriculum design process in regards to WIDA

standards has helped me to understand this process and how I could use it in the future when the ELA standards have changed or when I am co-teaching another discipline.

A future related project could be to focus on another content area and how these WIDA standards and the content standards can be used to create and modify a science curriculum or a math curriculum or a social studies curriculum. My recommendations would be to apply these standards and collaborate with other content classes, especially in a co-teaching situation. A future related thesis or research project could be using different strategies with research behind them such as SIOP in a co-taught class and discovering which strategies provide the best outcomes for ELLs.

Finally, creating this project helped me understand more about best practices in regards to co-teaching and using WIDA standards to support ELL students in a content classroom. I feel better prepared to co-teach especially in regards to planning and collaborating with the content teacher. I hope that my work on this project will see benefits for the students in my co-taught classes. I also hope that by working with content teachers, and exposing them to the big ideas that WIDA espouses, these teachers will begin to understand that they are also language teachers and need to support all of their students, even English Language Learners.

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