

Hamline University

DigitalCommons@Hamline

School of Education and Leadership Student
Capstone Projects

School of Education and Leadership

Fall 2023

Implementing Equitable and Effective Practices for Dual-Identified Learners

Annelise Walsh

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp



Part of the **Education Commons**

Implementing Equitable and Effective Practices for Dual-Identified Learners

by

Annelise Walsh

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2023

Capstone Project Facilitator: Laura Halldin
Content Reviewer: Dr. Jill Leet-Otley, Ph.D.

For Alex and Mohamed

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE	5
Introduction	
Rationale	6
Context	8
Summary	11
CHAPTER TWO	13
Literature Review	
Introduction	13
Legislation and Prevailing Perspectives	14
Identification of English Learners in Special Education	22
Best Practices for Teachers	32
Conclusion	40
Summary	40
CHAPTER THREE	42
Project Description	
Chapter Overview	42
Project Overview	43
Audience	45
Timeline	46
Assessment	47

	4
Summary	48
CHAPTER FOUR	49
Conclusion	
Introduction	49
Personal Growth	49
Revisiting the Literature	50
Implications, Limitations, and Future Research	54
Project Use	56
Summary	57
REFERENCES	59

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the United States today, the population of English learners is growing, and within that population is a growing number of students with disabilities. English language teachers are the experts responsible for supporting students identified as English learners in developing English language proficiency, and special education teachers are the experts responsible for supporting students with disabilities. When students are identified as eligible for both English language and special education services, they are often referred to as dual-identified students. These students have a legal right to programming and support from teachers in both areas, and their needs concerning language development and disability support are often intertwined in complex ways. Yet the English language and special education teachers who serve dual-identified students often do not collaborate, and their programming can even be conflicting or contradictory (Kangas, 2018). Educators often do not know how best to support dual-identified students, as it can be unclear which supports should be the role of the English language teacher versus the special education teacher, and additionally, which should be the role of the general education teacher in settings where special education students attend general education classes.

Consequently, the research question I will address in this capstone is as follows:

How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom? The purpose of this capstone is to explore these strategies and share them with other educators of dual-identified students through a series of

professional development workshops. This chapter will provide the rationale and context this research is rooted in, including my personal interest and involvement in the area of study, as well as the professional relevance of researching this question.

In this capstone, I will use the terms “disabled students” and “students with disabilities” interchangeably, because identity first versus disability first language is a choice made only by the individual person being discussed. However, when referring specifically to autistic students, I will use disability-first language, as this is the general preference of the broader autistic community. I will use “English learner” to describe students who qualify for English language services in the public school system. Finally, I will use “non-speaking” instead of “non-verbal” to refer to students who do not communicate through speech, as many non-speaking students do communicate with words through the use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). I will also use “limited-speaking” to describe students who occasionally use speech, but mainly use other forms of communication such as AAC.

Rationale

I chose to pursue the research question, *How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?* because I am an English language teacher at a Federal Setting IV school. In the state of Minnesota, this is defined as a separate special education site. Therefore, all of the English learners I work with at this school are disabled and receiving special education programming, and are therefore dual-identified. Personally, I would like to know the best research-backed strategies to support this population of students to ensure that I am helping them gain language

proficiency to the best of my ability. Additionally, I would like to be able to share these strategies with their special education teachers and education assistants.

On a broader scale, the support and education of dual-identified students is an emerging field of scholarship, so researching what specific strategies are effective in the pursuit of language growth with these students is essential. Currently, English language teachers often implement programming designed for non-disabled English learners, and special education teachers implement programming designed for monolingual students with disabilities. For students at the intersection of these identities, these separate approaches from both sides may not be the most effective methods, considering how complexly intertwined language learning and disability can be. This research is especially pertinent to consider in relation to exit criteria for English language services. For dual-identified students, meeting the criteria for English proficiency and subsequently exiting services can be much more challenging, and students spend more years receiving services than their non-disabled peers, and often never exit at all. Researchers have examined how educators often chalk this inability to meet the exit criteria up to either the student's language proficiency or their disability, without stopping to question other factors that could be at play (Kangas, 2021). Namely, educators should also be pausing to reflect on whether dual-identified students not meeting exit criteria could be a result of the programming they are receiving.

Additionally, educators also need to consider whether or not their own teacher preparation programs adequately prepared them for working with this population of students. Miranda et al. (2019) found that special education teacher preparation programs resulted in a lack of mastery of content as well as a lack of sense of efficacy in relation to

working with dual-identified students. If effective strategies for working with this population are researched further, perhaps teacher preparation programs can create more robust curriculums that leave educators feeling prepared to work with this ever-growing population in our school systems.

Another issue that is relevant to this research is that of disproportionality. Depending on the state and on disability category, English learners are often disproportionately underrepresented or overrepresented in identification for special education services, with a range of 0% of English learners receiving special education in some states to 42% in others (Counts et al., 2018). Within education persists common misconceptions that misidentifying English learners as disabled will only lead to greater support and thus positive outcomes. On the opposite side persists a misconception that English learners should not be evaluated for a certain length of time if a disability is suspected, in case their language learning is mistaken for a learning disability. Both misconceptions are harmful to English learners, and too often result in them not getting the programming that will be most effective for them, and that they have a legal right to receive. If we examine the most effective strategies for supporting dual-identified students, we might also gain insight into how best to assess and evaluate these students for special education services. Examining effective strategies for supporting language development will assist educators as well as students and their families in the pursuit of quality education for all students.

Context

When I first began working with English learners, I was a reading tutor in a summer school program. I was working with kindergarten and first grade students, most

of whom were English learners. One of these students was also identified as a special education student, but I was not given much information about his specific disability or individualized education plan (IEP). When I inquired about him specifically to his teachers, there was an air of dismay, with his classroom teacher saying something to the effect of, “We don’t really know what to do with him at this point.” Instead of trying new strategies with this student, I observed his needs often going completely ignored, or him being removed from class when he demonstrated a lack of engagement. He was only in first grade, but it seemed his teachers were already at a loss for how to work with him.

Unfortunately, this scenario repeated itself as I continued my career in education. I went on to work as a special education assistant at a middle school, where I worked with a number of students with disabilities, several of whom were also English learners. Additionally, I was able to work with several more dual-identified students during and after this time while completing my teacher preparation field experiences and my student teaching. I now work closely with dual-identified students in my current job as an English language teacher. At all of the schools I have worked at, there has been a persistent confusion and even tension as to how to work with these students. I have witnessed as well as experienced this tension firsthand between special and general education teachers and English language teachers, with some special education teachers not understanding why students with disabilities (in particular non-speaking or limited-speaking students with cognitive disabilities) need English language instruction to begin with, and with some general education teachers assuming that all special education and English language support is the job of special education teachers and English language teachers, respectively. I have also met English language teachers who

are uncertain as to how to provide language instruction or support to students with disabilities, and as a result fail to differentiate for them or plan instruction in accordance with their IEP goals. Again, I have in particular observed this uncertainty around instruction from English language teachers concerning non-speaking and limited-speaking students, as these students do not communicate productively in the same way as other English learners do, and therefore the “best practices” that English language teachers have learned are often not applicable to these students without differentiation.

As someone who has worked in the role of special education support in both special education and general education classrooms, and now as an English language teacher, I know the value and expertise teachers in all three roles bring to the education of dual-identified students. However, I also recognize that these services do not work as effectively without collaboration and planning among all teachers involved in supporting these students. In my experience, disjointed services without consideration to the student as a whole have not been successful, and as such I became interested in discovering what is successful. In arriving at this research topic, I have also been inspired by the work of other English language teachers in my state who meet regularly to explicitly discuss working with dual-identified students, out of recognition that there is a lack of scholarship and guidance to draw from when planning and implementing programming for our learners.

It is also important to consider how my own identities shape my perspective on these issues. I am a middle class cis-gender woman in my mid-twenties. I am a native-English speaker. I am neurodivergent and I have an invisible and dynamic physical disability, but I did not require nor receive special education services in school.

Therefore, I can never fully understand the perspectives of my dual-identified students in relation to the services they receive in school for either category. I am also white and a citizen of the United States, and it is important to consider that most of the students I work with are people of color, and some students are non-citizens. Within this group are students who are undocumented themselves or come from mixed-status families. I lack a firsthand understanding of how race and immigration status impact education outcomes, and I wanted to understand more about this topic through my research. In this capstone, I will examine research that validates the complex and intersecting identities of these students and takes their perspectives into account as much as possible so that I can better understand the dual-identified students I work with.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced my research question: *How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?* I provided the necessary background information to support the meaning of key terms and concepts related to the question. It is essential for English language teachers and special education teachers to implement strategies that consider both aspects of a dual-identified learner's educational status. Additionally, I explained the broader educational implications of the research question, including reasoning for different stakeholders involved. Exploring these strategies will further teachers' understanding of how best to work with students, and dual-identified learners will receive more beneficial programming as a result. Lastly, I detailed the context of how I personally and professionally arrived at posing my research question. As an English language teacher working regularly with dual-identified

students, I feel compelled to explore and share research-backed methods for furthering the language development of this population.

In Chapter Two, I will explore the existing literature on the topic of educational strategies for working with dual-identified students. I will discuss the history and legislation concerning programming for dual-identified learners, identification practices for English learners in special education, and the strategies that researchers and educators have found to be both effective and ineffective at fostering language development in English learners with disabilities.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I will review the existing scholarship that addresses my research question: *How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?* First, the literature will address the topics of historical perspectives and legislation related to the service of dual-identified students.

Understanding the historical practices and policies related to dual-identified students in public education is vital for examining the contemporary state of educational practices for this population, especially since many of the same perspectives and regulations are still in place today and continue to shape educator instruction and interaction. I will also examine the literature regarding identification processes for both English language services and special education services, as these identification practices are complex, especially since learner identities intersect in inextricable ways. There is a long history of disproportionality of English learners in special education, and thus careful consideration needs to be given when identifying English learners for special education services.

Additionally, I will review the literature on assessment practices for evaluating dual-identified students for special education services. Disproportionality of English learners in special education is an issue that has persisted in education, and therefore equitable evaluation policies and procedures are essential. Finally, I will discuss existing scholarship on effective instructional practices both in pre-service teacher training and in the classroom. It is vital that educators receive adequate preparation for working with

dual-identified students and are able to consistently improve their practice as more research and expertise emerges on working with these students.

Legislation and Prevailing Perspectives

English language learners are a fast-growing population in the United States, and within that population is a growing number of students who qualify for special education services. As of 2016, the population of English learners grew by 50% over the preceding decade; this trend is expected to continue increasing, yet the decades-long challenge of how best to serve this diverse group of students also persists (Counts et al., 2018).

Historically, there has been a lack of collaboration between special education and English language teachers that results in conflicting or inconsistent programming (Stinson, 2018).

Oftentimes, a student's English learner status and disability status are treated as two

entirely separate identities that are thus supported with separate programming, as special education professionals are not experts in English language learning and English

language teachers are not experts in special education. This section will provide an

overview of the history of legislation, programming, and perspectives on

service-providing for dual-identified students. Understanding this history and the

contemporary ideologies surrounding the education of dual-identified learners is an

important foundation for considering how to move forward with best practices in working with English learners in special education.

In order to examine the policies and viewpoints surrounding dual-identified learners, it is important to consider who these students are in the broader context of

American public schools. Dual-identified learners constitute approximately 1% of

students in America, the majority of whom come from Hispanic/Latino cultural and

linguistic backgrounds, though different schools and communities have different demographic compositions, with some school districts representing 100 different language backgrounds among their students (Counts et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that dual-identified students, though identified as a group throughout this project, are an extremely diverse population of learners. Furthermore, linguistic and cultural backgrounds within the population are not the only variations that exist from place to place. Percentages of English learners who have been identified as eligible for special education services also vastly vary from state to state, ranging from 0% in some states and up to 42% in others (Counts et al., 2018). These large variations in representation of English learners in special education bring about the issue of disproportionality, when a sub-group is either underrepresented or overrepresented within a particular group. Disproportionality of English learners in special education has been a perpetuating issue in the field of education, further complicated by the fact that statistical definitions of disproportionality also vary from state to state (Counts et al., 2018). Therefore, although disproportionality is recognized as a widespread problem, making inter-state comparisons has proved challenging for researchers. The discourse around disproportionality, among issues related to the education of dual-identified learners, has historically been and continues to be shaped by relevant federal legislation in addition to state-by-state guidelines.

The issue of disproportionality and related legislation is one of the main reasons why it has been ingrained in educators to frequently pose the question: “Is the performance and behavior of this particular student influenced by language or disability?” Kangas (2021) gave a history of how this question began in education to

promote equitable treatment and programming for dual-identified students, but has since evolved into a catch-all filter through which all problems faced by this population are examined, thus ignoring any systemic disadvantages and morphing the language vs. disability question into a filter bound to ableism and monolingualism when used in this overextended fashion. While the question itself is an important one to consider, it is the posing of the language-disability question without a thorough examination of all factors contributing to student challenges that is problematic. Kangas (2021) purported that one of the first mentions of the question was by Cummins (1981), who put forth the question in an examination of assessment tools for identifying English learners in special education; Cummins was questioning the validity of these tools due to their conflation of the manifestation of second language acquisition with intelligence level. Therefore, one of the earliest applications of the language-disability question was to examine potential systemic issues concerning dual-identified learners: identification practices, rather than questioning the performance of students themselves. It was not until decades later that the question became further cemented in the educational lexicon, when Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorizations and other scholars began to mention the importance of making the distinction between language learning and disability during special education evaluations (Kangas, 2021). This distinction was deemed especially important when considering speech and language impairments and specific learning disabilities due to similarities these disabilities can have to the process of second language acquisition (Kangas, 2021).

Arreaga-Mayer et al. (2003) also examined how the IDEA amendments in 1997 shaped our understanding of providing services for dual-identified students. The

amendments established procedural protections for the evaluation process including requirements that identification assessments for special education are administered in a student's native language and that educators give careful consideration to the assessment of English learners to ensure that they are being assessed on disability qualifications and not on their level of English proficiency. These policies mean that posing the question of language vs. disability became of legal importance in ensuring students are being accurately identified for special education services. IDEA regulations in 1999 specifically named "limited English proficiency" as an exclusionary factor for special education eligibility; before this, students were being referred to special education services because of their limited English proficiency, and this regulation aimed to protect students from this systemic discrimination (Kangas, 2021). Since second language acquisition is not a disability and should not be treated as such, this law helped bring to the forefront educator's responsibility in distinguishing students in need of language services from those in need of special education services.

Another piece of legislation that has shaped the issue of considering language vs. disability is the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, which mandates that school districts keep separate data on the performance of English learners with disabilities and the general English learner population (Kangas, 2021). Since these data must be taken, educators are able to make comparisons between groups of students and consider the differences between language and disability as they relate to school success. The importance of carefully examining whether student performance and behavior is due to language or disability is an idea that has been shaped in part by educational legislation,

and it is a pervasive contemporary perspective that I will examine further in the “best practices” section of this literature review.

In addition to considering legislation related to dual-identified learners, it is also vital to understand scholarly perspectives as well as common misconceptions as they relate to providing educational services for this population. Some of the most common and persistent debates related to education for dual-identified learners have centered around assessment; scholars have debated about test bias, psychological testing, and construction of tests for decades (Arreaga-Mayer et al., 2003). Since dual-identified English learners make up a small percentage of public school students, tests are not typically created for this specific population, and a persistent problem when testing said students is making sure that English proficiency is not limiting their performance on a test unless that is precisely what is being assessed. However, as was mentioned previously, it can be difficult to ascertain whether student performance is related to disability or to language, which is essential to consider when creating and implementing assessment tools, to ensure that assessments are accurate. That said, research indicates that although educators are aware that language learning and disability are related, many of them feel underprepared in servicing dual-identified students (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017). While understanding that language and disability intersect and interact in complex ways is an important part of servicing this population, awareness is not enough when providing an equitable education. Kangas (2021) agreed that educators are aware that asking the question “is it language or disability?” can be important and helpful, but that educators have mis-applied and overextended the use of this question in inappropriate contexts. For example, when considering the high percentage of

dual-identified learners who are never re-classified as English proficient, teachers often ask the question of whether it is students' language skills or disability that is holding them back from exiting language services (Kangas, 2021). In this way, educators tend to apply the question to all issues regarding learner performance, when there are other factors at play such as the learning environment, the service model, or the exit criteria themselves. Kangas (2021) pointed out that too often, dual-identified learners are placed in environments with behavior management as the focal point of their school day, when exposure to meaningful language and academic content are essential factors in helping students meet exit criteria for English language services. When relying only on the language vs. disability question to explain a lack of progress, as many educators do, these factors may be missed. Therefore, while the language-disability question can be helpful within some contexts, it is also essential to examine other factors contributing to dual-identified learners' progress and performance.

Aside from the short-sighted nature of the language vs. disability question, there are several misconceptions about dual-identified learners that persist in the field of education that must be addressed. Cheatham and Hart Barnett (2017) detailed several major misconceptions regarding this population that still have a foothold in the field, including the ideas that students with disabilities cannot or should not be bilingual and that English should be the only instructional language. These assertions are false, yet persist in education today and are barriers to equitable education for dual-identified learners. Disabled students can indeed be bilingual and benefit from bilingualism for all of the same reasons that their non-disabled peers do, including connections to culture, communication with family, potential for enhanced language learning, and understanding

identity; furthermore, there has been no evidence that bilingualism negatively impacts learning and development (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017). Additionally, Cheatham and Hart Barnett (2017) explained that there is mounting evidence demonstrating that bilingual instruction can be just as effective, if not more effective, than English-only instruction. Since bilingualism benefits both disabled and non-disabled English learners, the benefits of bilingual instruction should extend to both groups in schools that offer dual-language programs or other bilingual educational opportunities; however, it is the norm for English-only instruction to be the standard service model.

Counts et al. (2018) detailed an additional misconception that harms dual-identified learners, which is the tendency for essentialization, in which English learners are treated as a monolith instead of the incredibly diverse population they are. Cheatham and Hart Barnett (2017) also pointed out that it is a common misconception for educators to assume that all families of English learners will automatically value bilingualism, when some families choose not to pass on their language to their children with the intention of helping their child succeed, a choice that families are entitled to make and which educators must ultimately respect (though they might supply resources and information about the benefits of bilingualism). Counts et al. (2018) also discussed additional varying perspectives of groups within the English learner population, pointing out that voluntary versus involuntary minority groups such as Native American people, Black people, pre-colonial people of Mexican origin, and Native Hawaiian people might have a more negative experience with the education system in America; they may have or may still be receiving biased treatment, or they may have cultural norms that play a role in their perceptions of special education and/or English learner status. The

essentialization of English learners is something that still occurs in our educational system that educators must be aware of; it is important to not make assumptions about learners or their families and to recognize and honor diverse perspectives, cultures, and beliefs.

Educator bias, be it conscious or unconscious bias, can be harmful to English learners since these biases inherently affect classroom practices. Ford (2012) pointed out how educators' misconceptions can have a negative impact on students, stating:

Teachers' beliefs and values about foreign language speakers play a role in their attitudes and behaviors, including how they see the verbal strengths and potential of these students. Some educators have little patience for students who are not yet proficient in English, some are entrenched in the belief that English is the only language that ought to be spoken in our schools, and some even believe that not knowing English is a special education issue. (p. 397)

These ideas are harmful not only if they are held by English language teachers or special education teachers who work with dual-identified students, but by any teachers who work with them. A final persistent misconception noted by Ford (2012) is the idea that false positives in special education identification is not harmful, because the students will receive more support through special education services. This unfortunate idea is still prevalent in schools today, and is also harmful to students who do not need to be identified as dual-identified learners, as not only can a disability label bring stigma, lowered expectations, and exclusion, but the student will simply not be receiving an education that corresponds to their needs. As all students, dual-identified or not, have the

right to an equitable education, confronting misconceptions that prevail in education is requisite in the education of dual-identified students.

Identification of English Learners in Special Education

There is a persistent issue of disproportionality of English learners in special education. English learners are often either over-identified or under-identified, depending on many factors including the state, school district, disability category, age, and home language of the students. Educators often mistakenly assume that English learners who have not made academic progress have a learning disability, when in reality they often have not had quality learning opportunities or interventions (Becker & Deris, 2019). This tendency of inappropriate referral also occurs due to signs of language learning being mistaken for signs of a disability. Inappropriate referrals can be damaging to English learners, especially since students have more than a 50% chance of being identified as having a disability once a referral is made (Becker & Deris, 2019). Additionally, after students are identified, they will likely remain in special education services for a long period of time and may never exit, which can unfortunately mean having lower academic expectations placed on them, less exposure to non-disabled peers, and placement in racially-segregated settings (Counts et al., 2018). Therefore, educators must ensure that all referrals are appropriately made.

On the other hand, signs of a disability might be overlooked or a special education evaluation might be delayed out of caution due to a student's status as an English language learner. Underrepresentation can also be an issue, as students who do not receive special education services when they should be at a higher risk of grade retention or dropping out of school (Counts et al., 2018). It is vital that students are correctly

identified so that they are receiving all of the services they are entitled to, and not receiving unnecessary services that might restrict their environment or hinder their progress. Although inappropriate referrals or failure to make necessary referrals violates state and federal law and there is no reason English learners should be represented more or less than monolingual peers in special education, these issues have persisted (Becker & Deris, 2019). This section will examine disproportionality, perspectives on the disentanglement of language and disability, systemic factors contributing to misidentification, and pre-referral interventions.

Disproportionality involves both over and under representation of English learners in special education, and it is a complex problem that cannot be explained by one contributing factor. Some elements that contribute to disproportionality include inconsistency of assessment practices and eligibility criteria for each disability category from state to state, lack of training on English learners and language development, assessment bias, and assessment practitioner bias (Becker & Deris, 2019). Counts et al. (2018) also pointed out that not only is there inconsistency in testing and eligibility, but also in the definition of what constitutes disproportionality itself, as different states have different measurements. These differences make comparisons of disproportionality difficult, complicating researchers' ability to fully investigate the issue. Counts et al. (2018), named multiple areas that need to be addressed in further research to better understand and remedy the issue, including the creation of standard terminology, definitions, and statistical analysis for disproportionality, as well as insight into representation of students from specific cultural and linguistic groups within the English learner population. Ford (2012) advocated for the same need for research, emphasizing

the necessity of refining definitions and standards and applying standardized statistical methods to different linguistic, cultural, and immigrant versus non-immigrant groups. Since English learners are not a homogenous group, breaking the population down into more specific subgroups for research will help create a fuller understanding of the problem and how it can be addressed.

Currently, research points to multiple patterns of disproportionality of English learners. Research has shown that English learners are underrepresented in special education in districts with large English learner populations, and overrepresented in districts with small populations of English learners (Counts et al., 2018). Additionally, there are patterns of disproportionality within specific disability categories and some cultural groupings that have been researched. Troublingly, English learners are overrepresented in more restrictive environments within the disability categories of intellectual disabilities, speech and language impairments, and specific learning disabilities (Counts et al., 2018). There is also some evidence that Hispanic English learners, specifically, are overrepresented in the categories of learning disabilities and speech language impairments (Becker & Deris, 2019). More research needs to be conducted to further investigate this overrepresentation of Hispanic students as well as what representation consists of within other cultural, linguistic, and racial categories.

Other researchers have argued that there is a flaw in the accepted methods of researching and interpreting disproportionality of English learners in special education. Umasnky et al. (2017) argued for the use of an “Ever-EL” framework when researching disproportionality, which analyzes the whole population of students who begin their schooling as an English learner; this method ensures that the population studied is held

stable, given reclassification eliminates students from the current English learner population over time. Murphy and Johnson (2022) also supported the use of this framework in analyzing disproportionality data; other studies use cross-sectional or longitudinal data that only include currently designated English learners, thus ignoring the effects of reclassification and potentially drawing misleading conclusions. In Umansky et al.'s (2017) study, longitudinal data in two states were taken to analyze for potential disproportionality. Researchers did not find patterns of overrepresentation in either state when using this framework; rather, they found that while overrepresentation was indicated while using the traditional framework of current versus noncurrent English learners, the Ever-EL framework showed overall patterns of underrepresentation and delayed representation.

Additionally, Umansky et al. (2017) found that dual-identified students were less likely to reach reclassification criteria for English language services than non-disabled English learners; which indicates that reclassification plays a role in overrepresentation of current English learners at secondary levels. The results of this study indicate the need to conduct more longitudinal studies using an Ever-EL framework in additional locations and for subgroups of English learners, as well as the importance of expanding the focus of disproportionality from identification procedures to include reclassification criteria. Umansky et al. (2017) explained that dual-identified learners might be less likely to eventually meet reclassification criteria and exit English language services because these criteria are not designed with disabilities in mind. Similarly to defining disproportionality and enacting identification procedures, reclassification is an issue left up to individual states. Alternate procedures for reclassification may be considered for dual-identified

students such as team-made decisions and portfolios in place of standardized assessments (Umansky et al., 2017). Counts et al. (2018) indicated that language support services often decrease as students age, and so as students are receiving inadequate support and fail to continue progressing academically, teachers may refer them to special education services. Since Umansky et al.'s (2017) study was limited in scope, it is important to remember that reclassification is not the only explanation for potential overidentification when analyzing disproportionality data. Therefore, reclassification and identification in older students need to both be considered when examining disproportionality. However, the Ever-EL framework is a valuable model that should be researched further, as all aspects of disproportionality are important to understand in the pursuit of equitably supporting English learners.

In addition to considering research frameworks for studying disproportionality, it is also beneficial to consider more specifically how disproportionality shows up specifically in teacher training and in the classroom. Zetlin et al. (2011) discussed the lack of teacher training in distinguishing between language acquisition and disability and maintaining high expectations for all learners. The absence of this training can result in inappropriate referrals to special education evaluation. Or, as Counts et al. (2018) pointed out, it can also lead to teachers delaying referrals for students who need them. Therefore, this lack of training can contribute to disproportionality on both sides. Additionally, teachers often do not have enough training in teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in general, and thus might make referrals without addressing a lack of language supports; teachers may not know how to implement such

supports or how to administer and interpret appropriate assessments for English learners (Counts et al., 2018).

If educators are not provided with a basic foundational knowledge of second language acquisition, it is inevitable that many well-meaning educators will continue to make inappropriate referrals of English learners to special education. Becker and Deris (2019) agreed with this notion, citing educators' lack of knowledge concerning second language acquisition manifestations such as English learners going through a silent period; participant educators in their study confused this stage of language learning with a disability. These misconceptions illustrate the necessity for increased training related to English learners in pre-service teacher training. Counts et al. (2018) suggested that one aspect of this training should be misidentification prevention training, which would focus not only on avoiding incorrect identification, but also on how to immediately correct any mistakes, provide effective core instruction, and recognize characteristics of second language acquisition. Common specific manifestations of second language acquisition that tend to be confused with disability include pronunciation mistakes, lack of comprehension, trouble following directions, and anxiety (Hoover et al., 2016). These signs of second language acquisition, as well as the typical stages of language acquisition should be a part of pre-service teacher training so that teachers are better equipped to support English learners and avoid inappropriate referrals. Culturally responsive practices as well as interdepartmental collaboration are also essential elements of effective English learner support that cannot be ignored in teacher training programs (Counts et al., 2018). Before making referrals to special education, there must be supports catered to students'

linguistic and cultural needs in place as well as collaboration among all teachers who work with these students.

A key systemic factor contributing to the misidentification of English learners in special education is the lack of culturally responsive teaching practices. Zetlin et al. (2011) detailed elements that are often ignored in the referral process but should be included, such as teaching styles, teacher expectation, school conditions and resources, and preparation and training of teachers. All of these factors are systemic in nature and are not rooted in deficits found in the student, which are too often the sole focus of identification processes. Counts et al. (2018) argued that bias and power can contribute to overrepresentation as well, as approximately half of public school students come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, however fewer than 20% of teachers and administrators are from these shared backgrounds. Considering the population of culturally and linguistically diverse students is increasing, it is essential that bias and power are taken into account. Cultural and racial backgrounds, intentionally or unintentionally, affect expectations and attitudes; teachers may have biases, which can lead to inequitable practices and outcomes for students, such as disproportionality of English learners in special education and in more restrictive environments (Counts et al., 2018). Ford (2012) also noted that the greatest contributing factors to disproportionality of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education are teacher attitudes and expectations along with testing practices. Low expectations and deficit thinking can come about as a result of cultural and racial differences, which in turn negatively impact student education.

Liasidou (2013) expanded on the notion of testing itself contributing to disproportionality, explaining that the assessment process for special education is influenced by the beliefs, values, understandings, and professional interests of educators, and going so far as to suggest that these factors may contribute more to the outcome of the process than the intrinsic characteristics of a student. Furthermore, Liasidou (2013) argued that since high-stakes testing is often the measurement used to determine school quality, educators are incentivized to make referrals to special education for students who underperform on these tests (including English learners) to justify their scores. Since these tests are not standardized for culturally and linguistically diverse students, they are not set up to perform on such achievement tests. Another systemic factor to consider is the educational environment. Underfunded schools often have lower levels of academic achievement and student engagement, as well as less resources to draw from in service-delivery. In these schools, distinguishing disability can be more challenging since norms of achievement are shifted, and students who are eligible for services may be overlooked because their performance might not be distinguishable from the majority of students (Counts et al., 2018). Family and culture are also factors that need to be taken into account. Since economic status as well as language barriers can limit access to community services and healthcare, students may not be able to attain an accurate medical diagnosis, which would be beneficial in the identification process (Counts et al., 2018). Ford (2012) argued that educators must reject any colorblind ideologies and consider all aspects of systemic factors that contribute to student education. In order to equitably identify students and provide all necessary supports and services, it is essential to examine culture, bias, and power as they relate to students' lives and education.

One systemic factor that educators have direct control over in the classroom is ensuring that strong pre-referral interventions and supports for all students are implemented. If the emphasis on post-identification interventions is shifted to prevention, more students' needs will be met and unnecessary referrals to special education will be limited (Ford, 2012). Zetlin et al. (2011) agreed with this notion, stating that previous studies have not emphasized classroom instruction due to deficit-thinking centered in the referral process, yet the classes that English learners fall behind in often do not provide accommodations and language acquisition supports. If an English learner's language needs are not being addressed before the referral process, then such referrals are inappropriate. Pre-referral interventions and supports must be culturally responsive, and student responses to these interventions can serve as relevant data should a student end up needing a special education referral (Liu, 2008). Hoover et al. (2016) argued that aside from being culturally responsive, pre-referral educational contexts should be rooted in multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and response to intervention (RTI), which means instruction structured in three increasingly intensive tiers of support. Tier one is high quality instruction for all students and frequent screening to determine at-risk students, tier two is group interventions and supports along with frequent progress monitoring, and tier three is intensive individualized support for students who do not make progress at tier two. At tier three, considerations for referral are made (Liasidou, 2013). English language supports are a tier one support, so English learners must receive these basic accommodations along with more individualized and intensive supports if necessary before a referral is even considered (Hoover et al., 2016).

Liu et al.'s (2008) study examined the traditional discrepancy model that many schools and educators still use instead of RTI. The discrepancy model is an identification practice that focuses on standardized test scores and comparisons of IQ to school achievement. The study found concerns in the education environment for dual-identified students, including lack of interventions for English development even for students not making language progress, lack of quality education and interventions in the general education environment before referral, a lack of variety of assessment tools, and no consideration of cultural and linguistic differences. Liu et al. (2008) also suggested that although there is an awareness of these issues in the identification process for English learners, policy and practice is not consistent with this awareness and knowledge. It is vital that we make the shift toward best practices, which include exposing English learners to high-quality education environments before making referrals.

Once an English learner is ultimately referred to special education, it is also essential to carefully consider how students are assessed for special education eligibility criteria. There is a lack of assessment tools normed to specific English learner populations other than Spanish-speakers (Counts et al., 2018). Most often, students take assessment tools that are normed for monolingual English-speakers, and English language proficiency and time spent in American schools are not taken into account (Counts et al., 2018). These limitations are problematic for accurate identification for other language groups. Hoover et al. (2016) explained that if a child with limited English proficiency is given an academic achievement test in English, this test is instead measuring their English proficiency, thus invalidating the assessment. Therefore, accurate testing would need to be conducted in a students' home language as well as in English.

Liu et al. (2008) added that this testing process would give a better assessment of student abilities and allow for more comparison of student abilities in each language as well as comparisons to both monolingual and bilingual students. Additionally, it is vital for those conducting assessments to consider that there is not a single testing method that should be used for assessing English learners. Instead, a variety of informal and formal measures should be included, such as observations, interviews, language surveys, authentic assessments, and work samples (Hoover et al., 2016). Families should also be consulted during the assessment process, as they can provide valuable insight into student history, life experiences, and culture (Liu et al., 2008). Once a referral is made, English learners should not go through the same assessment process for special education as their monolingual peers. Instead, cultural and linguistic factors must always be at the forefront of assessment decisions. Taking these factors into consideration is a vital component of supporting English learners and ensuring that identification for special education is accurate.

Best Practices for Teachers

This section will review effective practices for educating dual-identified learners. First, this section will discuss what information should be included in teacher preparation programs to adequately prepare all educators for working with dual-identified learners. Then, equitable frameworks for promoting learner success in the classroom will be explored, followed by a case for collaboration between English language and special education teachers. Finally, this section will detail specific interventions, strategies, and practices for the classroom. All of these elements are essential for educators to understand in their provision of an equitable education for dual-identified learners. All

educators who play a role in educating this population must have an understanding of these practices for these students to succeed.

Teachers cannot adequately provide services to English learners with disabilities if they do not have an understanding of second language learning and cultural competency. Since there is a history of disjointed services for English learners in special education, teacher preparation programs can help remedy this issue by ensuring that special education, general education, and English language teachers alike all have an understanding of how to support English learners. One major addition to teacher preparation programs would be a general understanding of language. More et al. (2016) purported that the five subsystems of language should be incorporated into teacher training, which includes phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Furthermore, differences between academic and social language should also be considered. In general, teachers should understand that language demands are different within different contexts, and language learning must be rooted within these specific contexts (More et al., 2016). If teachers have a basic understanding of these components of language, they will be able to better support and accommodate dual-identified learners. Aside from language in general, educators should also have an understanding of language acquisition and development. It is important for teachers to be aware of all of the factors that affect second language acquisition, including social environment, culture, first language proficiency, language attitudes, and personality (Klingner & Artiles, 2006). Ortiz and Roberston (2018) also noted that all teachers who work with dual-identified students should have a shared knowledge base that includes the stages of second language acquisition, the influence of languages on one another, and the advantages of

maintaining bilingualism. Teachers should thus be aware of students' home languages and their general proficiency and literacy levels in these languages, and should encourage students to continue language development in their home language whenever possible.

Topics to include in teacher preparation programs extend beyond linguistic understandings to cultural understandings as well. Becker and Deris (2019) noted that teacher preparation programs should move beyond the inclusion of racism and bias to discuss strategies and approaches that honor cultural diversity in the classroom. Ford (2012) agreed with the inclusion of these matters, noting that teachers need to learn about individual student cultures and their families and avoid thinking about culturally and linguistically diverse students as a monolith. Furthermore, it is especially important when working with dual-identified learners to recognize that language use is not the only way that students communicate, and teachers should honor multiple ways of meaning-making in the classroom (Chan, 2022). Welcoming diverse forms of communication is another aspect of being culturally competent. Kangas (2021) advocated for inclusion of curriculum in pre-service teacher programs that goes a step further than educators being aware of and honoring cultural differences; she argued that training should prepare educators to critically examine systemic inequalities dual-identified students face such as biased assessment, lack of access to quality academic instruction, and lack of access to the dual services they are entitled to by law. Liasidou (2013) took a similar approach, stating that educators should view teaching as inherently political; in order to have professional and equitable practices, teachers must be dedicated to being a continuous learner and advocate inside and outside of the classroom to attain equity for culturally and linguistically diverse students. In other words, teacher preparation programs should

equip all educators to be advocates for the issues that impact our students, because the systems that harm them affect all aspects of their lives, including their education.

Part of being an advocate for dual-identified students is adopting equitable frameworks that shape classroom practices. One such perspective that teachers should adopt is an asset-based approach. Piazza et al. (2015) stated that viewing student strengths as the beginning of instruction is a necessary component of culturally-responsive teaching. An asset that is too often overlooked in dual-identified students is bilingualism. Bilingualism contributes to school success and connections with family and culture for disabled and non-disabled English learners alike (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017). Liasidou (2013) argued that educators should be encouraging bilingualism and making connections to student home languages whenever possible, which can include learning a handful of words in student home languages and using them in the classroom to encourage student learning. In addition to learning about student language, part of adopting an asset-based approach involves cultural reciprocity. Educators should not only be aware of student culture and background, but they should build learning from this knowledge base (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017). Orosco and O'Connor (2014) argued for the importance of an asset-based perspective:

From this culturally responsive structure, teachers go beyond “just plain good teaching” that omits students’ cultural and linguistic experiences, in which they make the concentrated effort in the classrooms to incorporate students’ language, history, literature, and other cultural aspects of a particular racial or ethnic group to instructionally engage students’ belonging to that group in authentic student-centered learning. (para. 7)

In this approach, student learning is built from what they already know and are familiar with, thus facilitating learning via making connections.

Another aspect of an asset-based perspective that is essential to consider for dual-identified learners in particular is the importance of viewing cognitive disabilities as a mismatch between a student and their environment, rather than as an intrinsic deficit (Chan, 2022). Our role as an educator is to supply the correct environment for these learners to succeed by building on their strengths. Cheatham and Hart Barnett (2017) also expressed a similar viewpoint, stating that educators should not assume that student challenges stem from language, disability, or other intrinsic factors, but rather educators should ensure that instructional strategies align with students' interests, backgrounds, and goals. This approach also aligns with Kangas's (2018) scholarship on the language vs. disability question, which she contended was a harmful filter to rely on when explaining dual-identified student challenges, as it ignores all other factors and is problem and deficit-oriented. Instead, it is essential to adopt a framework of intersectionality, as when working with dual-identified students, it is impossible to separate their identities as both disabled and an English learner. Kangas (2021) explained how dual-identified learners are too often educated via compartmentalized services that cater to one identity or another and fail to consider how these identities intersect and are compounded by further identities such as race, culture, and social class. Instead, educators must provide an inclusive education rooted in intersectionality, which necessitates that intersecting identities are carefully considered to determine how systemic disadvantages are compounded for dual-identified learners (Liasidou, 2013; Migliarini & Stinton, 2021). Disability and English learner status cannot and should not be compartmentalized.

A barrier to an intersectional approach is the lack of educators who are competent in catering to both special education as well as linguistic and cultural needs (Liasidou, 2013). One solution to this problem is encouraging and facilitating professional development and collaboration between special education, general education, and English language teachers. Kangas (2018) described the “specialization trap” that occurs when all team members who work with dual-identified learners do not collaborate: broader needs of students are ignored and services within each subject area might become diminished. This collaboration should include negotiating space and resources, co-planning and co-teaching, modifying materials, and clarifying roles (Stinson, 2018). Additionally, the IEP process should involve co-creation of goals and supports that take into account language supports, home language, and language development goals (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017). Kangas (2018) further clarified that second language acquisition goals in all four language domains can and should be included in a student’s IEP, along with information about service models and any other information relevant to language support. While this collaboration is necessary for equitable service delivery, it also should be noted that there are often constraints on teachers’ ability to enact it. Delgado (2010) found that although teachers themselves wanted to collaborate in order to improve their practices, school leadership often does not accommodate the time or resources necessary for teachers to do so. Therefore, it is essential that changes are made at the administrative level to accommodate best practices.

In addition to teachers collaborating with one another, there are also many specific interventions, policies, and practices that can be enacted in the classroom to promote dual-identified learner success. One such practice is rooting all learning within a

meaningful context. Chan (2022) found that implementing learning with a real-world context that involves exploration and problem-solving resulted in increased student engagement. Teaching students language use within specific contexts is an essential part of fostering language development. Orosco and O'Connor (2014) also advocated for this type of instructional practice, stressing the importance of connecting student experience to academic standards. One example of this practice would be selecting culturally relevant model texts that students can identify with. Piazza et al. (2015) discussed how this rooting of literacy development within relevant sociocultural contexts is an essential part of equitable practice, because it connects students to their learning rather than marginalizing them. More et al. (2016) gave further examples of how to create context-rich environments for students, including the use of realia such as props, videos, and elements of student home language. Liasidou (2013) advocated for the use of total physical response (TPR) in which learning is connected to kinaesthetics. This physical element can provide another form of context to base student learning in. Rooting learning within a rich context and connecting it to student sociocultural knowledge aligns with an asset-based perspective and promotes student success.

Another best practice involves implementing response to intervention, as previously discussed as an essential component of providing pre-referral interventions. The provision of RTI does not stop after identification, as students should still be a part of the quality educational environment with their individualized modifications and accommodations in place to support them. As a part of RTI, teachers should regularly examine how linguistic differences might be impacting student learning and whether their presentation of content is accessible to all students (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017).

Education for all students, including dual-identified students, should be rooted in the general education content curriculum. Therefore, it is important for teachers to consistently consider how to differentiate for individual students, which can include accommodations and modifications such as visual cues, graphic supports, extended time, chunking of information, and flexible grouping, which entails purposefully grouping students for a task depending on what type of peer support would be most helpful (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017). For some tasks, grouping students by similar language backgrounds and/or levels is beneficial, whereas for other tasks, grouping students based on different language backgrounds and/or levels would provide the best type of support.

Another accommodation that is absolutely necessary for dual-identified students whose communication is impacted by their disability, such as autistic students with limited or inconsistent speaking, is the provision of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). In her study on serving ELLs with disabilities, Stinson (2018) stated that AAC devices should be regularly updated and programmed with the current content and language vocabulary that is necessary for students to fully access and engage with the current content. Dual-identified students should not be limited in their access to lesson vocabulary that allows them to participate in the classroom. Since AAC is the primary mode of communication for many dual-identified students, it is essential that teachers make sure that their devices always have the necessary academic language required for engaging with the content. Zetlin et al. (2011) also emphasized the importance of accommodating non-speaking students, as it is often assumed that these students do not need language support since they do not communicate by speaking; this misconception ignores all the receptive language skills that students may have in English

and their home language. Ensuring access to regularly updated AAC is one essential component of supporting non-speaking dual-identified students, but it is also essential that educators advocate for these students' entitlement to language support services. Teachers should be aware of and implement research-backed practices for supporting dual-identified learners in the classroom in order to fully provide a quality education.

Conclusion

Understanding historical perspectives and legislation that shape the education of dual-identified learners, the assessment practices that place them into special education services, and the best practices that promote positive educational outcomes for these students is essential for the pursuit of providing an adequate education. All educators who work with dual-identified students, including special education, general education, and English language teachers, are obligated to facilitate an equitable education for this population by law. Yet, the equitable educational policies and procedures outlined in this research are often not followed in our schools, and dual-identified learners are therefore not receiving the education they are entitled to. It is vital that changes are made in the education system to accommodate and appropriately identify, support, and educate our English learners in special education.

Summary

This chapter presented a review of the literature relating to the research question: *How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?* In this review, I detailed historical perspectives and legislation that have shaped the state of education for dual-identified learners, explained the

problems persisting in special education identification for English learners and offered solutions, and laid out pedagogical recommendations for both teacher preparation programs and classroom practices for all educators who work with dual-identified learners.

One theme that persisted throughout the literature was the need for further teacher education on how to both equitably assess and educate this population of students. Therefore, in Chapter Three, I will use the findings laid out in this literature review to inform the creation of a series of professional development workshops for teachers on best practices for supporting dual-identified students. The chapter will detail the overview of the project, including the content of the professional development sessions, the intended audience, the timeline for the project, and how the effectiveness of the sessions will be evaluated.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Chapter Overview

This capstone project addresses the research question: *How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?* Chapter One introduced the research question as well as my personal and professional interests in the topic, and Chapter Two examined the literature on legislation and historical context, identification practices, teacher training, and pedagogical strategies related to dual-identified learners. Based on the scholarship presented in Chapter Two, I created a professional development series for educators of dual-identified students. This sequence of professional development sessions addresses legislation and pertinent background information, improvements to identification of English learners in special education, and best practices in the classroom for educating dual-identified learners. Chapter Three will detail the creation of and rationale for this project.

This chapter will begin with a description of the overall project, including the rationale behind its construction and implementation, in order to explain why I chose to shape this project into professional development workshops rather than an alternative product. Subsequently, I will detail the intended setting and audience of the professional development series, followed by the timeline for the project's creation and implementation. Finally, the chapter will explain how the effectiveness of the professional development sessions will be assessed, so that it can be determined whether the sessions helped educators address the question of: *How can educators understand and*

apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?

Project Overview

The research I conducted in Chapter Two led me to the creation of a series of professional development workshops for all educators who work with dual-identified students, including special education teachers, general education teachers, English language teachers, and education assistants. Cheatham and Hart Barnett (2017) identified multiple misconceptions about dual-identified learners that unfortunately still persist in education today, including that students who receive special education services either should not be or cannot be bilingual. Additionally, Ford (2012) identified the misconception that false positives in identification of English learners for special education services are not harmful, when in reality misidentification can result in students spending more time in restrictive and isolating environments, having lower expectations placed on them by teachers, being stigmatized by educators and peers alike, and lacking access to an education that corresponds with their individual needs. All of these misconceptions are not uncommon, and need to be addressed among educators who work with these students.

Additionally, Kangas (2021) explained that teachers often over-use the question “Is it language or disability?” to explain dual-identified students’ lack of academic progress, instead of taking into account the systemic factors acting as barriers to student education. Educators need to be able to move beyond simply identifying language or disability as a cause of student performance toward considering and improving upon all aspects of a student’s learning environment. However, educators cannot make these

improvements if they are unsure of where to start. Therefore, there is a need for increased educator training on proper identification and services for dual-identified students (Becker & Deris, 2019; Counts et al., 2018). One way the lack of teacher education and training on working with dual-identified students can be addressed is through professional development, as teachers do not stop learning new and improved practices once they receive their teaching license. Professional development can challenge the misconceptions about dual-identified learners and give teachers specific strategies to improve their intervention, identification, and service practices.

Some of the major sections of the professional development workshops I created include educational legislation and background information relevant to this population, identification practices including pre-identification interventions, pedagogical frameworks, and strategies to implement in the classroom. The professional development sessions center around active learning and collaboration instead of exclusively lecture-style presentations, as adults, similar to students, learn best when they are directly engaged in active learning that builds on their strengths and interests (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Collaborative learning is an especially essential part of this professional development, as collaborating with colleagues is one of the main components of best practices for working with dual-identified students. Therefore, incorporating this collaboration directly within the professional development itself will give educators a good foundation to carry this practice on in their planning and teaching to result in lasting school change. I also incorporated time for reflection in between sessions, as educators will be better equipped to utilize their knowledge if they can take the time to practice and continually reflect as they are learning. In summary, my project consists of multiple

professional development sessions in which educators will collaborate, reflect, and engage with information on legislation, identification practices, pedagogical frameworks, and effective strategies for working with dual-identified students.

Audience

In Chapter Two, I included research which indicated that although educators are aware that language learning and disability are interconnected, they do not feel adequately prepared to teach dual-identified learners (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017). If educators are feeling underprepared, there must be an increase in training to help rectify this knowledge gap. The professional development I created for my project is intended for a target audience of the employees at approximately 20 schools in a district serving around 1,000 students in the northern metro area of the Twin Cities in Minnesota. The district serves students from kindergarten through age 21 who require specialized services, including special education services, an alternative school setting, or in-patient mental health treatment. Due to the high proportion of special education students in this district, there are many dual-identified students. All educators who directly support dual-identified learners in the district are the target audience of my project. This audience includes case managers, classroom teachers, English language teachers, and education assistants. As collaboration is a vital component of supporting dual-identified students, I designed my professional development with all of these stakeholders in mind so that students are receiving informed support from all educators on their team. Too often, services for this population are fragmented and therefore do not take the intersectional nature of student identity into account, which results in the student receiving a disconnected patchwork of services instead of the equitable education they are entitled to

receive. This professional development seeks to remedy the issue of compartmentalized services by catering to all educators who support any dual-identified students.

Timeline

I began this project in January of 2023 by exploring topics of interest and conducting research on dual-identified students. I finished conducting research and brainstorming the foundation of this project in April of 2023, and subsequently began the construction of the professional development sessions. First, I determined what information needed to be included in the professional development workshops, and I then brainstormed how I could disseminate this information through a mix of independent pre-learning, slides, activities, and discussions. I compiled resources and planned out the structure of each of the sessions. I decided to divide the professional development into three separate sessions; the main topics I settled on were legislation and background, identification, and best practices in the classroom.

In June of 2023, I began the creation process of the three sequential presentations intermixed with activities and reflection questions for educators to complete based on the presentations and their own classroom practices. I also selected the resources and questions for participants to review ahead of each session so that they have a foundation of prior knowledge to draw from during the workshops. I finished creating the professional development sessions and materials in August of 2023.

As for the timeline of implementing the professional development series, there will be one session a month, for a total of three months. I chose to create a professional development format that takes place over multiple sessions, because effective practices for professional development hold that sessions of a sustained-duration rather than the

traditional episodic one-time lecture better equip adult learners to internalize and implement their learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Therefore, instead of disseminating information in one sitting, this professional development was designed for educators to reflect and practice between sessions, so that they can return to subsequent sessions and continue to build on their learning.

Assessment

The professional developments include an assessment component to examine how effectively the sessions met educators' needs in addressing the question: *How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?* As part of this assessment component, I created a self-assessment for educators to complete after each session so that I can measure their learning, and also so that the educators themselves can reflect on and measure their own personal growth. Each assessment is a short survey in Google Forms that is linked at the end of each presentation, and I also plan on emailing the link to participants with a reminder. Each survey asks educators to rate the effectiveness of the session, list any questions they have, explain how they could use the information they learned, and which aspects of the session were most helpful and which could use improvement. The third and final survey asks participants if they felt the overall professional development series was beneficial to their personal growth, and how they plan to better support dual-identified learners in the future.

I will use the data from educator self-assessments to help measure the effectiveness of the project. Written reflections from the activity portions of the

professional development that utilize Jamboard, Nearpod, and Google Forms will also serve as one way to assess learner growth over the course of the sessions within each specific topic area. Collecting feedback in the form of the self-assessments at the end of each session as well as the more informal information recorded during activities is important not only to understand the effectiveness of the project, but also so that the sessions can be improved upon should they be implemented again with a future group of educators.

Summary

This project consists of a series of three professional development sessions over the course of three months for all educators who work with and support dual-identified learners in school. The intended audience is a specific school district with a high population of dual-identified learners, though it is a beneficial workshop for all educators in the state who work with this population of students. The professional development includes the main topics of legislation and background, identification, and best classroom practices for dual-identified learners. Multiple methods are in place to collect data and feedback on the effectiveness of the project in addressing the research question of: *How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?* including post-assessments as well as written reflections and tasks. In Chapter Four, I will conclude my capstone by detailing my key takeaways, reflections, and results from the creation of this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

This capstone consisted of an introduction, a review of the literature, and a description of the professional development project I created, all of which together address the question: *How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?* In this conclusion, I will summarize what I have learned through the completion of this project and revisit the components of the literature that laid the foundation for my professional development sessions. I will also detail relevant possible implications and policy, the limitations of my project, and future research that needs to be conducted on the topic of dual-identified learners. Lastly, I will discuss how I will use the results of my project and how the professional development series I created is a benefit to the education profession.

Personal Growth

Through the research, writing, and creation phases of this project, I learned a great deal not only about the topic at hand, but also about myself as a researcher, writer, and learner. At the start of this project, I found the gathering of information to be very overwhelming, and I worried about pulling everything together into a cohesive and informative project. However, I learned that it is important not to rush through the phase where it feels as if you are wading through endless resources and ideas; going through the process and letting myself feel temporarily adrift ended up being essential for me to find

the right direction. The enormous undertaking of brainstorming and researching made it all the more exciting when I moved on to planning, writing, and creating.

The lengthy research process that led into a very enjoyable writing process also taught me that it is much easier to write about something that I am passionate about. By the time I began writing the paper component of this project, I already felt excited about creating my project because it was something that really interests me and directly relates to my current career as well as my goals for the future. While I have always enjoyed writing, most of the writing I have done has been for classes where I have not had as much freedom in selecting the broader topic. For this project, being able to go in a direction that was entirely my choice was very meaningful and rewarding. I know this project will not be the last time I learn about and research this topic, as it remains a passion for me that I hope I can continue pursuing in the future.

Revisiting the Literature

In the literature review comprising Chapter Two of this capstone, I incorporated a few key sources that ended up being especially useful in the creation of my project. Since my project is a professional development series, there was a great deal of information that I needed to incorporate that came directly from the sources I utilized in my literature review. One of the sources that played a crucial role in my project was Counts et al.'s (2018) article, which detailed the representation of English learners in special education. I utilized information from Counts et al. (2018) throughout the first two professional development sessions, as their article contained not only information on demographic patterns of English learners in special education and contributing factors, but also detailed the negative and educational trajectory-altering effects that misidentification can

have on English learners, such as lowered expectations and racially segregated settings. These harmful impacts on students are a key point I wanted to communicate to educators, to combat the myth that an inappropriate referral simply means extra support.

Another source that proved foundational to my project was Kangas's (2021) article about the overuse and misapplication of the language vs. disability question. This framework laid the groundwork for much of my project, as I introduced the question in the first session and returned to it through the lens of intersectionality when I offered ideas for best practices in the third and final session. I read Kangas's (2021) article, which urged educators to recognize the inextricable nature of dual-identified learners' multiple identities, early on in my research, and it shaped my understanding of all of the research I found afterwards. As someone who works with dual-identified learners every day, the language vs. disability question is something I hear all too frequently. Though I always felt the idea of narrowing down a trait or behavior into either the category of language or disability was impossible in a student who is truly disabled and an English learner, I did not fully appreciate all of the assumptions and effects that come along with the question. Kangas's (2021) article provided me with the language and understanding that while the question is important to consider during the identification process, it can become easily overused post-identification in a way that can be harmful to students.

While creating my professional development sessions, I also made new connections to the literature I cited in my review. My literature review was broader in scope, as I did not focus on a single state, but on English learners in special education in general. For my project, I incorporated more information on students in Minnesota specifically, since my plan is to utilize this project in my own school district. I was able

to include a graph from the Minnesota Department of Education Enrollment Data (2021), showing the breakdown of special education students by disability category, compared to the breakdown of dual-identified learners by disability category. This information connected back to some of the disproportionality patterns I discussed in the literature review, as in both Minnesota and in the United States in general, English learners were overrepresented in specific learning disabilities (Counts et al., 2018, MDE Enrollment Data, 2021). These data also allowed me to demonstrate that like in many states, there may not be disproportionality overall, but it still may exist when the data are broken down by other demographics such as disability category, as Becker and Deris (2019) explained in their article on disproportionality patterns. It was interesting to look more into Minnesota disproportionality data and see how the state compared to the broader research I discussed in the literature review.

While I have personal experience with the education of dual-identified learners, sometimes the information I came across in my research surprised me. For example, I was surprised at how many times researchers expressed their dismay at the lack of research on this topic. Many researchers discussed how difficult it is to study topics such as disproportionality because of a lack of consistency in terms, procedures, and statistical analyses (Becker & Deris, 2019; Counts et al., 2018; Ford, 2012; Umansky et al., 2017). I was aware that there was going to be limited research on my topic, but I did not fully understand that the reasoning behind these limitations was very complex and not a matter of a lack of interest. It was frustrating to come to realize that we could have much more information and resources on how to best support dual-identified learners if the practices

recommended by these researchers were put into place so that consistency could lead to increased understanding and research.

Another surprise was that the federal legislation from decades ago was more aligned with best practices than I expected it to be. For example, I was shocked that the IDEA Amendments of 1997 held that English learners should be assessed for special education in their native language (Arreaga-Mayer et al., 2003). However, this fact was not necessarily encouraging, because the reason it surprised me that this was written into law then was due to the fact that these assessments are still rarely actually given in a student's native language today, and assessments in languages other than Spanish are few and far between (Counts et al., 2018). Additionally, I also learned that federal legislation mandates that data on English learners must be disaggregated into disabled and non-disabled English learners according to the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (Kangas, 2021). After including this information in my literature review, I decided I should look for these data in Minnesota to include in my project, and I was surprised that though the data collection is federally mandated, it is not publicly available online in enrollment data. I did reach out to the Minnesota Department of Education to inquire about these data, and they confirmed that they could send the data upon request. Unfortunately, there is a long wait associated with inquiring about a specific dataset, and I did not receive the data in time to include it in my project. I plan on utilizing the dataset I receive in future presentations of this project, and recognize that it will be important to keep up to date on the changing patterns of disproportionality.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

Creating this project resulted in multiple implications for education and policy concerning dual-identified learners. Firstly, one implication is that more resources and efforts need to be allocated to locate and/or create the culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate assessment tools to align with federal legislation. Since IDEA has held that English learners should be assessed in their native language if at all possible since 1997, it is vital that we make every effort to ensure that possibility (Arreaga-Mayer et al., 2003). Over twenty years later, it is still difficult to find assessment tools in non-English languages aside from Spanish, and even Spanish-speakers are not consistently assessed in their language.

Another implication is the need for teacher education programs to incorporate more training on working with dual-identified learners and on disproportionality of English learners in special education. Several researchers discuss the need for all educators to be able to identify and understand manifestations of language acquisition as well as how to differentiate and support dual-identified learners in a way that aligns with best practices and is culturally responsive (Becker & Deris, 2019; Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017; Counts et al., 2018; Zetlin et al., 2011). Since the population of English learners, and thus the population of dual-identified students as well, is only increasing, more and more educators will need to know how to support and advocate for these students. Supporting all aspects of a dual-identified learner's identity is the job of *all* educators who work with these students.

Finally, there need to be structural changes on many levels of education if dual-identified learners are to be supported and accurately identified. On all levels,

including national, state, district, and school levels, officials should consider redefining definitions of disproportionality, disability categories, and assessment practices so that consistency and equitable practices are at the forefront of these procedures. Consistency would allow for more accurate research to be conducted in the pursuit of equity.

Additionally, structural changes need to occur to allow for increased collaboration among educators. Students such as dual-identified learners often receive compartmentalized services, which do not align with an intersectional approach and best practices for language development and learning. Educators must be able to work together to ensure their service plans and educational content, systems, and supports align in a way that meets the needs of their students. Educators' current realities do not allow time for this sort of collaboration to take place, which harms all students, not only dual-identified students.

Although I had thorough research to draw upon in the creation of my project, there are still some limitations that need to be addressed. As was mentioned in the previous paragraph as well as the "Revisiting the Literature" section of this chapter, a lack of consistency in identification practices as well as data collection and analysis has resulted in challenges for researchers looking into English learners in special education. Therefore, there were limited datasets to be drawn upon when considering patterns in disproportionality and the impacts of identification on English learners. This limitation was true for national as well as state-level data in Minnesota.

Another limitation that persists is the constraints on educators. Although I posed many strategies and frameworks that align with best practices for dual-identified learners, it is important to acknowledge that there are limitations on enacting these best practices

that are not the fault of the educator. Educators have many obligations and constraints on their time placed upon them by school administrators and district officials. Changes in the education system need to happen to support educators in implementing the practices that they know to be effective and equitable.

Since constraints involving data collection and consistency limited much of the available research, there are many implications for future research on dual-identified learners. Part of the process of increasing consistent practices would need to involve more research into what frameworks and definitions to use when analyzing disproportionality. This process should also include research into assessment practices for identifying English learners in special education, since there is a lack of multilingual assessment tools at the present time. Additionally, there needs to be further research not only into English learner disproportionality by disability groups within special education, but also by other demographics as well, such as language, cultural, and racial background (Ford, 2012). Lastly, it would be beneficial to research how disproportionality and supporting dual-identified learners is included in teacher education programs (Zetlin et al., 2011). Doing so would help determine where there are gaps in educator preparation for working with this population.

Project Use

I set out to create a series of professional developments in order to increase awareness and support for dual-identified learners within the school district I work at personally. I plan on working with administrators at my school district in the fall of 2023 to ideally facilitate the series of professional development sessions I have created. My goal is to encourage more equitable assessment practices, collaboration among all

stakeholders in dual-identified learners' education, and strategies that best support learning for these students. Aside from sharing this project with my own school district, I also plan on sharing it with other schools and educators I know who support dual-identified students. Additionally, I plan on doing my best to implement the strategies and practices outlined in my presentation, and I will encourage other educators I work with to do the same. Most importantly, I plan on continuing to learn about the topics outlined in my project, as I recognize that it is a body of knowledge that will keep expanding and evolving with further research.

Summary

In this conclusion to my capstone project, I detailed the major findings and implications that came from researching the question: *How can educators understand and apply educational perspectives, equitable identification practices, and effective support strategies concerning dual-identified students in the classroom?* I discussed how I have personally grown as a learner and educator, the major themes I found in the literature, the policy implications I gleaned from my project, the limitations of the research and project, future research that should be conducted, as well as how I plan to use my project in the service of dual-identified learners.

This capstone project as a whole provides a model for information to include in educator training in order to prepare educators to equitably and effectively provide dual-identified students with the education and services they are entitled to receive. Professional development and training on this population is desperately needed, as common practice often does not align with federal and state requirements, let alone best practices. My hope is that this project can provide educators with ideas and resources

they can use and make their own to become better educators for their students.

Dual-identified learners are a fast-growing and underserved population, and it is my hope as an educator that we can one day readily provide them with the support and opportunities that they deserve.

REFERENCES

- Arreaga-Mayer, C., Utley, C. A., Perdomo-Rivera, C., & Greenwood, C. R. (2003). Ecobehavioral assessment of instructional contexts in bilingual special education programs for English language learners at risk for developmental disabilities. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 18*(1), 28-40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/108835760301800105>
- Becker, G. I., & Deris, A. R. (2019). Identification of Hispanic English language learners in special education. *Education Research International, 2019*, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2019/2967943>
- Chan, H. (2022). Adapting the task-based methodology for learners with intellectual disabilities: Five key facets for consideration. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 32*(3), 459-475. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12440>
- Cheatham, G. A., & Hart Barnett, J. E. (2017). Overcoming common misunderstandings about students with disabilities who are English language learners. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 53*(1), 58-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451216644819>
- Counts, J., Katsiyannis, A., & Whitford, D. K. (2018). Culturally and linguistically diverse learners in special education: English learners. *NASSP Bulletin, 102*(1), 5-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636518755945>
- Cummins, J. (1981). *Bilingualism and special education: Issues in assessment and pedagogy*. Multilingual Matters.

- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute.
- Delgado, R. (2010). Poco a poquito se van apagando: Teachers' experiences educating Latino English language learners with disabilities. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 9*(2), 150-157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431003618259>
- Ford, D. Y. (2012). Culturally different students in special education: Looking backward to move forward. *Exceptional Children, 78*(4), 391-405.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291207800401>
- Hoover, J. J., Baca, L. M., & Klingner, J. K. (2016). *Why do English learners struggle with reading?* (Second Edition ed.). Corwin Press.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506341385>
- Kangas, S. E. N. (2018). Why working apart doesn't work at all: Special education and english learner teacher collaborations. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 54*(1), 31-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451218762469>
- Kangas, S. E. N. (2021). "Is it language or disability?": An ableist and monolingual filter for English learners with disabilities. *TESOL Quarterly, 55*(3), 673-683.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3029>
- Klingner, J., & Artiles, A. J. (2006). English language learners struggling to learn to read. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39*(5), 386-389.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00222194060390050101>

- Liasidou, A. (2013). Bilingual and special educational needs in inclusive classrooms: Some critical and pedagogical considerations. *Support for Learning, 28*(1), 11-16.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12010>
- Liu, Y., Ortiz, A. A., Wilkinson, C. Y., Robertson, P., & Kushner, M. I. (2008). From early childhood special education to special education resource rooms. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 33*(3), 177-187.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1534508407313247>
- Migliarini, V., & Stinson, C. (2021). Inclusive education in the (new) era of anti-immigration policy: Enacting equity for disabled English language learners. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 34*(1), 72-88.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1735563>
- Miranda, J. L. W., Wells, J. C., & Jenkins, A. (2019). Preparing special education teacher candidates to teach English language learners with disabilities: How well are we doing? *Language Teaching Research : LTR, 23*(3), 330-351.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817730665>
- More, C. M., Spies, T. G., Morgan, J. J., & Baker, J. N. (2016). Incorporating English language learner instruction within special education teacher preparation. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 51*(4), 229-237.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451215589183>
- Murphy, M., & Johnson, A. (2022). Dual identification? the effects of English learner (EL) status on subsequent special education (SPED) placement in an

- equity-focused district. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 16237372211217. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737221121786>
- Orosco, M. J., & O'Connor, R. (2014). Culturally responsive instruction for english language learners with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 47(6), 515-531. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219413476553>
- Ortiz, A. A., & Robertson, P. M. (2018). Preparing teachers to serve English learners with language- and/or literacy-related difficulties and disabilities. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 41(3), 176-187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406418757035>
- Piazza, S. V., Rao, S., & Protacio, M. S. (2015). Converging recommendations for culturally responsive literacy practices: Students with learning disabilities, english language learners, and socioculturally diverse learners. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 17(3), 1. <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v17i3.1023>
- Stinson, C. (2018). Beyond compliance: An approach to serving English language learners with disabilities. *TESOL Journal*, 9(4), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.405>
- Umansky, I. M., Thompson, K. D., & Díaz, G. (2017). Using an Ever-English learner framework to examine disproportionality in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 84(1), 76-96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402917707470>
- Zetlin, A., Beltran, D., Salcido, P., Gonzalez, T., & Reyes, T. (2011). Building a pathway of optimal support for English language learners in special education. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 34(1), 59-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406410380423>