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AVID for ELLs in Content Classes

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AVID for ELLs in Content Classes

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Masters of Arts in Education.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As a teacher of English Language Development (ELD), I have often felt like I work in isolation. I pickup my students for their pull-out group, and try to catch a little of what the teachers are teaching, wondering if we are teaching similar themes from the units we are both instructing but do not have the time to collaborate on. I teach in a district where less than 5% of the student body is classified as English Language Learners (ELLs). That means our staff of seven are spread thinly across our nine campuses to accommodate all of our students. With our students representing a small part of the student population, one of the important jobs of staff in our department is to advocate for our students.

When our district began implementing Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) at the primary level in 2019, I recognized the opportunity to align strategies from the framework to strategies that support students in the ELD (English Language Development) program. AVID is a program and curriculum that focuses on improving student success in school and beyond. With this new framework at our elementary schools, I began searching for established curriculums of AVID specifically for ELLs. Then, when I could not find one, I dreamed of one day establishing my own. With the opportunity to create this capstone project, my research question evolved with that interest at the center: *How can AVID strategies be used to support the academic language development of multilingual students in upper elementary content classes?*

In this chapter, I explain the background for the research question. I provide both an explanation of AVID and ELD and the reasons why they are at the center of my

interests. There will also be a description of the significance and implications of this research question and how it will impact teaching methods and multilingual learners.

I do want to take a moment to expand on some of the acronyms found in this paper. The acronym most are familiar with is ESL, or English as a Second Language. In my field, TESOL, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, there has been a movement away from ESL. ESL implies that English will be my students' second language when many of them are actually speakers of several languages. ELL then is English Language Learners. However, many students who are classified as ELLs grew up bilingual, so classifying them as learners of English is not accurate. With a growing awareness that the field needs to focus on students' assets, many districts are now classifying students as MLL or multilingual learners. This focuses on what strengths students are bringing, rather than what they are lacking. My own class is called English Language (EL) class or English Language Development (ELD). Many of the acronyms will be used interchangeably in this paper.

Background and Context

Personal background

I grew up in a household where education was highly valued. My dad was and continues to be an elementary teacher. I heard his experiences in the classroom, both positive and negative. As he was a teacher, he was often the one helping my sister and I with homework assignments and projects. I remember reading aloud papers to him as he helped me through the editing process and working on dioramas of electrical circuits. My middle school was near his building, so many days after my school day was done I would walk over to his school to help out in the classroom. I also had my mother, who did at

home daycare for my early life. She did this to be able to stay home with me and my sister. Once we both reached middle school age, she went back to school to become a nurse. Seeing her attend school full-time while working full-time will always be an inspiration to me. It taught me the value of hard work and education, and most importantly that you do not need to follow one path your entire life, and can continue to make changes. With both of these formative experiences, I set off to university after graduation with the plan of teaching high school English. However, before I finished my sophomore year that plan would change.

Midway through my sophomore year, I applied for a university program abroad in Japan. The program included a semester at a junior college learning Japanese culture, Japanese language and courses in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). At the end of the course, we would join others from across the globe and teach English at a series of summer camps throughout Japan. With the hours in the camp programs, and the instruction over the semester, I would leave the course with a TESOL certificate.

At the age of 19 I found myself flying out of the country for my first time to a completely new place. Being 19, I did not feel very nervous but excited for how my life would change. Needless to say I had an incredible experience living in an international dorm, making friends from around the world, learning so much about Japanese culture and getting to experience so much. I was even able to extend the visit, at the end of the summer I took another internship teaching English at a private school in Nagasaki. When I returned to the United States, I knew I did not want to return to my original plan of teaching English at the secondary level.

After deliberation and reflection I decided to instead pursue a teaching degree in the field of TESOL. This would give me the opportunity to get my teaching license for K-12 education, but also enable me to teach internationally if I chose. I tease my husband that I fell in love with him and stayed here instead of teaching abroad, but we both hope to move internationally one day. He is bilingual and a dual citizen, so we hope to raise our children to be multilingual and with the appreciation of their multiple cultures. It was insightful for me during my studies to hear about his immigration experience and to be around his family who do not speak English in the home. Being a TESOL educator in the U.S. still allows me to learn about other languages and cultures and build relationships that empower students to take pride in their heritage.

Professional background

Currently I teach students in kindergarten through fifth grade and do my best to juggle each grade level's content standards as well as WIDA's English Language Development standards. WIDA is a consortium of states and international schools. WIDA provides standards, testing and professional development for schools across the globe ("Mission and history", n.d.). Now having completed my sixth year of teaching in our district, I have come a long way in my organization of these standards and my instructional practices. As organized and as focused as my units are, I have about 30 minutes with my students in a pull-out group each day, a little more or less depending on their WIDA ACCESS scores.

With that limited time, I can only accomplish so much. That is why in every professional development I have created, in every opportunity I can, I repeat the same thing: Every teacher is a language teacher. All teachers, regardless of content area, are

language teachers and are responsible for teaching the language needed for students to access and fully engage with the course content and related classroom work (Harper & de Jong, 2004). Language is not learned in isolation; it cannot be the responsibility of the EL teacher alone to support students' academic and social English language development. Every teacher in the school should be considering both the content objective and language objectives as well as the specific instructional supports they will include. Not only is it their legal responsibility, but the scaffolds they should be providing for ELs are supportive for all students.

While I have sung the same refrain for many years, and each year share scaffolding ideas with teachers, I time and time again see my students struggling in classes and teachers not putting in the effort to scaffold or modify their instruction for their ELL students. Many teachers do not even recognize that their students need support. I have heard time and time again “My student speaks English so well! They can not possibly be ELL.” By failing to recognize the language needs of students, they will certainly not be focusing on instructional practices. So now not only am I seeking to encourage teachers to add specific scaffoldings, I plan to educate teachers on the nuances of bilingual language acquisition.

ELD Intersections With AVID

In the summer of 2019, the AVID program was introduced to the elementary schools in our district. Teachers were given the opportunity to attend a local multi-day convention on AVID best practices. We spent the days working with the wide variety of strategies and practices contained in the AVID universe. Many teachers, including myself, recognized that we were already using many of the AVID strategies in our

classrooms, we just found them in a new system. The main parts of AVID are put together in an organizational system called WICOR - writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization and reading. For example, in the writing part of this system, we find strategies like graphic organizers and sentence starters. At the initial training and subsequent training, we applied the methods to our current practice and reflected on how we could implement others. I recognized many of the strategies as ways I currently scaffold my instruction and wondered if there were specific outlines for EL students.

I continued to ask this same question to my AVID district coordinator and to other Minnesota EL teachers. I continued to wonder if there were specific AVID strategies and courses for ELLs. My AVID coordinator said while programs with AVID existed for middle school, no specific programs existed for elementary. AVID Excel is the program developed for middle school students that can be licensed in addition to other AVID classes. It is not something that my district participates in, and is unfortunately limited to middle school students. In the summer of 2021, I took a virtual course with AVID that directed focus to the four languages domains: Academic Language and Literacy. I began to think about how these AVID strategies could support ELs and all students, and how to make it easier for content area teachers to use these strategies as a part of their regular instructional planning.

Significance

My question for this capstone is: *How can AVID strategies be used to support the academic language development of multilingual students in upper elementary content classes?* Language needs to be taught in context, as anyone who has taken a language class knows. We learn vocabulary in themed units and practice both expressive and

receptive skills. As children, we are taught to describe the world around us as we experience it. So when teaching the English language is viewed as the sole responsibility of the ELL instructor, we are missing opportunities to help our students develop their English in the context of their learning and social experiences. Many EL teachers feel burdened with the sole responsibility of educating their ELL students. Due to limitations of training programs, mainstream classroom teachers lack specific training in understanding the linguistic demands of their content (de Jong & Barko-Alva, 2015). Additionally, teachers who have not been trained in TESOL may mistakenly assume teaching ELD is simply good teaching, and not acknowledge the specific training required (Harklau & Ford, 2022). If teachers cannot recognize the specific linguistic knowledge required to address the content, they can not then implement support to help students with those demands. Therefore, EL teachers face the additional pressure of teaching the linguistic keys to every content area in their limited instructional time.

AVID is a part of over 8,000 schools worldwide (McKinney et al., 2018, p. VI). By bringing the focus of language acquisition to the lens of AVID I hope to make this extra lens of linguistics more approachable. My intention is not to change what teachers are teaching, just to ask them to consider and implement specific language objectives and scaffolds. My capstone project is a series of professional development sessions. The professional development sessions include specific AVID instructional practices, educator reflection questions, as well as background knowledge for educators on ELLs. My project could be utilized by ELD teachers at AVID schools to educate the staff on best practices. As previously mentioned, many AVID strategies are ubiquitous and found outside the structure of AVID, so the methods outlined in this project could be used by content area

teachers in any context.

This will be significant to the students in content area classrooms that are not being given the proper support to access their grade level content. Developing proficiency in multiple languages takes time, but needs to be viewed and supported as an asset. Classroom teachers will learn how to support and validate the strengths multilingual students bring. It is a cultural shift for schools to unlearn low expectations for a group of students, but through quality professional development educators are supported in the transition.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained my personal and professional background as well as the context for my interest in my research question. I began with a preliminary explanation of AVID and ELD. I outlined the significance of my research to students, teachers, and to the community of AVID educators. I outlined the specific considerations for my research within the broad areas of both AVID and ELD. In the chapter two literature review, I cover research relevant to my topic. I explain in detail the history of AVID, what it is, and the cornerstone of the program, WICOR. I explain the history of programming for ELL students and how the policies came to be, as well as the legal responsibilities of schools to support these students. I also examine research related to educators and their attitudes towards ELLs. It is important to examine their perceptions of ELLs as well as their willingness to modify their instructional practices for the benefit of their students.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the effectiveness of AVID (Advancement via individual determination) strategies, the needs of students in the ELD (English Language Development) program, and the gaps in teacher instruction. This literature review synthesizes ideas that provide a foundational background for my question: *How can AVID strategies be used to support the academic language development of multilingual students in upper elementary content classes?* The following chapters outline my project and specific AVID strategies that benefit students. AVID strategies have improved student outcomes in college and careers nationwide, and in this chapter, I outline a brief history of AVID, what AVID is and how it looks in schools. I also share how AVID schools and students are doing. The next section is about English Language Learners in the United States. Students who are multilingual have unique needs and considerations. I provide context and history of ELL (English Language Learner) education, information about WIDA and how it is used by schools and finally how ELLs have demonstrated academic needs. Additionally, I address teacher perceptions of ELLs, their willingness to adjust their instructional practices and some research around professional development. This literature review lays the foundation for the project where I outline specific aspects of WICOR that support ELD in content classrooms in easy to implement methods for teachers.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

To understand why AVID strategies are a natural scaffold for multilingual

students in content classes, it is important to understand the foundation and history of the AVID program. Mary Catherine Swanson was a teacher at Clairemont High School in San Diego when the student body was significantly changed after a court-ordered integration of 23 schools (McKinney et al., 2018, p. VI-VII). After the court order, the upper-middle class, predominantly white school had 500 low-income, ethnically diverse students bussed in to attend school there. As a result much of the original student body left, and faculty had low expectations for their new students. However, Swanson saw an opportunity to work with these students in a course focused on academic reading and writing, study skill development and collaborative study groups. Swanson recruited 32 students to enroll in this AVID elective course and a challenging course taught at the school. Using what they learned in their AVID course, the students both passed the rigorous course and 30 of them graduated high school with 28 going on to postgraduate studies. Since the original 32 students in 1980, the AVID program now serves over 800,000 students worldwide (McKinney et al., 2018, p. VI). Although it was initially developed for high school, and later for students in grades 5-12, it now has expanded to include both elementary and postsecondary (Llamas et al., 2014, p. 197). In the summer of 2019 staff from the school where I teach attended the AVID Summer Institute and began our integration of AVID strategies into our school.

Becoming an AVID school means using the school-wide system to support students in improving their attitudes towards school, fostering a growth mindset and possibilities for postsecondary education (Llamas et al., 2014). This section expands on the foundations of AVID in Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading (WICOR). It also includes a look at AVID in practice and what it looks like in schools.

The final section is an exploration of the effectiveness and limitations of AVID.

WICOR and the AVID Framework

Before expanding on WICOR, it is important to note AVID’s mission “to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society” (McKinney et al., 2018, p. 4). Every part of the AVID framework, including WICOR, is designed to support this mission. There are four primary components of the AVID structure: Instruction, Systems, Leadership, and Culture (Bennet et al., 2016, p. XII). WICOR are the tools that a teacher will primarily use in their classroom to create an environment of high expectations and rigor. At the elementary level, WICOR strategies are implemented school-wide to create cohesion for all students (Hubbard et al., 2021). Having a cohesive approach to teaching academic skills is beneficial for all students, particularly for our ELL students who are juggling learning the academic vocabulary of school with their content learning.

WICOR

Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading are all familiar terms, but this system of WICOR helps both educators and students scaffold their understanding of the why; in other words, this framework supports students who are learning how to learn (Hubbard et al., 2021). As this framework has been expanded into volumes of textbooks, we can only scratch the surface of this schema of learning. Within the AVID system, writing is often characterized as “writing to learn” or writing to make sense of information (Bennet et al., 2016, p. XIII). Common strategies in the writing system are Cornell notes, two or three column notes, layered note taking and quick writes (Bennet et al., 2016, p. XIII). Writing, of course, is one of the productive methods in which students

use language, so multilingual students benefit from consistent writing methods used in a school-wide approach.

The next initial in the acronym is Inquiry. It is the teacher's responsibility to create a space where students can comfortably ask questions and wonder (Bennet et al., 2016, p. XIII). Costa's levels of thinking are often used to visualize and conceptualize the type of thinking students are doing (McKinney et al., 2018, p. 11). This continues to support AVID's mission of learning to learn. Collaboration has been a part of AVID from Swanson's inception of the program. It prioritizes group outcomes in activities like Socratic Seminars and Philosophical Chairs (Hubbard et al., 2021). These activities are deeply scaffolded to give students an opportunity to succeed even in a risky social situation where students are engaging in ongoing debate.

The organizational system AVID promotes is often the gateway to AVID in schools, as it is a tangible visible tool. The 3-ring binder is an important tool in the organization system (Jacobson, 2007). The binders contain color-coded tabs, agendas and pencil pouches (Hubbard et al., 2021). The school I teach at aligns the color coding system across grade levels so each color is used for a similar content area year after year. Students are taught how to use this system and are expected to maintain it and undergo frequent binder checks. These systems are successful because teachers are not just telling students to be organized and expecting that, teachers are instructing how to be organized (Hubbard et al., 2021). Classrooms display photos of what an organized binder looks like so students can continue to see it modeled and replicate the system in their own binder. By creating consistent systems, all students feel more confident (Kirk & Watt, 2018). Reading is another of the language skills, a receptive language skill. Reading in AVID

means reading for meaning and understanding (Bennet et al., 2016, p. XIV). Important strategies for multilingual learners in reading include building vocabulary, effective use of graphic organizers and summarizing.

By understanding the instructional practices in the AVID framework, the natural supportive practices for multilingual learners become evident. Within the WICOR acronym, we can see how both receptive and productive language is supported. A consistent focused approach using AVID allows multilingual learners to focus on the material and content rather than on unpacking a new method for learning.

AVID in Schools

By 2018, AVID had been implemented across the United States and beyond. Its programs are in 44 states and 16 other countries and territories (Bennet et al., 2016, p. VI). While my project focuses on AVID in elementary schools, it is important to understand the history of where and why AVID was created. The AVID program began as an elective course to help high school students succeed in rigorous classes (Bennet et al., 2016, p. VI). Students who take AVID courses congruently with advanced placement-type courses learn from the rigor, structure, and challenge (Jacobson, 2007). Without the AVID program, many students would not have had the opportunity to take these more rigorous courses, as students are tracked or grouped by ability from a young age (Hubbard et al., 2021). This is one of AVID's core beliefs, that all students are capable of learning (Bennet et al., 2016, p. IX). As AVID continued to experience nationwide success, AVID Elementary (AE) was introduced in 2007.

As elementary schools do not have elective classes, students at AVID elementary schools benefit from the school-wide approach. The schoolwide approach is led by each

school's site team (Clark et al., 2017). The site team collaborates regularly to set ongoing goals for the school and to provide motivation and inspiration for the school (Hubbard et al., 2021). When AVID began at the school where I teach, following our multi-day professional development, we met to set up our first goal for the year and monthly goals to work towards that goal. We started with organization as our site-wide goal and set up many of the systems that our students continue to use.

Taking the time as a site team is one of the important parts of maintaining and growing an AVID school. Students benefit from the streamlined focus that a school-wide approach brings. Having teachers across grade levels and classes use the same systems for organization, strategies for collaboration and writing formats creates a more predictable environment for students. These consistent structures are helpful for all students, and for multilingual students, who are navigating learning the academic and social language (Jacobson, 2007).

Part of the philosophy of AVID is that all students are capable of succeeding in a rigorous educational experience. However, AVID teachers know that not all students may begin with the tools and understanding of how to learn and how to stay organized. AVID teachers teach and reteach not only tools for learning, but also skills around growth-mindset (Hubbard et al., 2021). By taking the time in elementary to explicitly teach strategies for learning, student confidence, motivation, and success increase (Bernhardt, 2020). One strategy that the fourth-grade teachers use at my school is creating an image of a successful student. At the beginning of the year, each student gets an outline of a person. After discussing and brainstorming what a successful student has and does, students label and decorate their own student. Their students then live in the

cover pocket of their AVID binder where they are revisited throughout the year.

AVID strategies do fill many textbooks and encompass all aspects of a school day so we can not explore the full effect here. It is important to note that while the AVID program mission includes closing the achievement gap, AVID elementary seeks to address the problems that create the gap and prevent it from forming (Hubbard et al., 2021). With this mission in mind, the AVID strategies can also be used to support multilingual students in developing academic English.

In conclusion, AVID Elementary benefits students by using a schoolwide approach. This approach is driven by the school's site team, and creates an aligned outline for the entire school to follow. By keeping an aligned focus throughout the school, teachers create predictable and supportive environments that benefit all students. While multilingual students have unique needs, strategies that are good for ELLs are beneficial for all students, just like AVID strategies.

Effectiveness and Limitations of AVID Nationwide

Part of understanding the AVID program is learning about the research done and both the effectiveness and limitations explored in the research. As many of the studies reviewed acknowledged, studies of AVID courses are usually done at model AVID schools or schools that the AVID network recommends, which is a limitation of the scope of the research available. However, as these model schools are demonstrating when AVID is fully implemented all students can achieve high academic success in their K-12 education and any postsecondary endeavors.

While many schools implement AVID and train teachers, continuous ongoing training and focus is needed to be a successful AVID school. Teachers may initially view

AVID as just another passing initiative. Without administrators investing in training and guidance, it may end up that way (Clark et al., 2017). Districts need to consider how AVID fits in with other school initiatives and continue to invest in the program through quality professional development (Hubbard et al., 2021). The program can only be as effective as what is invested into it.

Student success does shine at schools that have completely invested. A study done in 2018 focused specifically on Mexican American students that were enrolled in an AVID program in Texas. The participants in the AVID program reported higher aspirations for attending college (Kirk & Watt, 2018). Another study, published in 2014, used qualitative data via surveys to analyze 161 high school students from two central California high schools. Both students and teachers from the two schools reported many positive outcomes including feeling that the classroom environment was positive and created opportunities for social connection and self discovery (Llamas et al., 2014). Moreover, students felt academically prepared and confident. They reported that they experienced stronger personal motivation and felt supported by their AVID teachers and the program itself.

Beyond student confidence and preparation, the same study found college retention rates of 89% for students who had enrolled in AVID compared to the general college average of 66% (Llamas et al., 2014). This is showing that AVID not only prepares students, it truly can empower them beyond their AVID classes. Researchers found that AVID is often maintained for decades within school systems, which is not the norm for other implemented initiatives. However, AVID does lack a system of internal accountability (Hubbard et al., 2021). After training, it is up to the district to invest their

time and resources for staff to be successful with implementation. As there is a massive scale of implementation and continual funding, schools may not effectively or consistently implement the program (Clark et al., 2017).

While there are challenges in providing consistent training to properly implement AVID, there has been extensive research that shows how it can make huge differences in students' lives and school culture when properly implemented. These strategies benefit all students and have shown success for all groups of students, including ELLs. With a focus on some specific strategies, AVID can boost student achievement in content area classes in elementary.

English Language Learners in School

ELLs are one of the fastest growing groups of students in the United States (Lee, 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), ELLs in public schools in the United States increased from 9.2% in Fall 2010 to 10.4% in the Fall of 2019. That is an increase from 4.5 million students to 5.1 million. As the number of ELLs continue to grow, it is important to look at the history of ELL education in the United States. This section lays the historical foundation for ELL instruction from the court case that created the federal requirements to the current guidelines. It explains in more depth what WIDA is and how it was created in response to modern policy and grown from there. Finally, I analyze who the modern ELL students are and how they are doing in school in Minnesota and nationwide.

History of ELL in the United States

Before looking at the state of ELL education in the United States today, we must first understand where the federal requirement for English proficiency education began,

50 years ago. The court cases and policies described here are not an exhaustive list, but provide context for ELD programs today. In 1971, San Francisco schools were desegregated, and 2,800 non-English speaking students joined the school system (Spitzer, 2019). The district failed to provide English language proficiency classes to all the non-English proficient students and the case *Lau v. Nicholas* was brought forth. The case argued that the lack of English language proficiency classes and materials violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (“English learner education legislation,” n.d.). The case argued that not providing non-native English speakers the opportunity to learn English was a form of discrimination (Spitzer, 2019). The courts ruled in favor of the students and a federal policy was created that requires local education agencies to help non-English proficient students overcome educational barriers (Spitzer, 2019).

While *Lau v. Nicholas* was the foundational court case, it failed to define important aspects of what ELL education should look like. In the 1981 court case, *Casteñeda v. Pickard*, criteria to evaluate programs for ELLs were established (“Mission and history,” n.d). There are three parts to the evaluative criteria for an ELL program: is the program based in educational theory, are the people and resources implemented in an effective way, and does the program self evaluate to ensure progress is being made (“English learner education in Minnesota,” 2021) Although these seem common sense, the establishment of these were necessary to protect the education of the often vulnerable ELLs.

One example of education prior to these protections, is a story my grandmother told me about her elementary experience. My grandmother was born in 1940 in the prairie of North Dakota. Living in a rural farming community, they spoke German at

home and in the community. However, when attending school at a small schoolhouse, she and her sister had to hide their German. If they were caught speaking German at school, the teacher would hit the back of their hands with a ruler. While she grew up speaking German, because her language was not valued, she and my grandfather never taught German to their 8 children. It would be many years after her education before the protections of *Lau v. Nicholas* and *Casteñeda v. Pickard* were established. Another notable court case for ELLs in the United States is *Plyer v. Doe* of 1982. This case established that schools cannot deny students access to free public education due to their immigration status (“Mission and history,” n.d.).

Under these protections, government policies were also established which provide funding for the education of ELLs. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 established the Title III program requirements for English language proficiency instructional standards and assessments in proficiency (Thornley, 2017). WIDA was established as a result of the requirements being established, which is expanded on in the following section (“Mission and history,” n.d.). Today, Title III falls under ESSA or the Every Student Succeeds Act which replaced NCLB in 2017 (“English learner education legislation,” n.d.). Each year, districts must apply for Title III funding and prove they are meeting three requirements: that programming is being provided for ELLs, that professional development is being provided for staff, and that activities for family engagement are being offered (Thornley, 2017). Understanding the history of these court cases and policies is an important context for the state of programming in the United States today.

WIDA

WIDA was built upon these policies and laws that protect multilingual students. Specifically, when NCLB was established in 2001, districts and states were required to meet new standards of instruction for their limited English proficiency (LEP) students. While the acronym LEP has fallen out of favor due to it being a statement focused on what students are lacking, it was and continues to be used widely in policy. Using this lack language can create a deficit mindset in the way teachers view students. There is a push now in multilingual education to focus on the assets of the students, but using the deficit focused language has already impacted educators and their students. The new requirements of NCLB were that each state must adopt English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards, and that states must administer an assessment of student ELP (“Mission and history,” n.d.).

WIDA was created in 2003 when a grant was awarded to the Wisconsin Department of Public Education (“Mission and history,” n.d.). In 2004, WIDA developed and published the English Language Proficiency Standards. These standards were the foundation of the ACCESS test that meets the Title requirements established by NCLB and ESSA. Today, WIDA has expanded to also include professional development for educators and is used in 41 states in the U.S. and in around 500 international schools worldwide (“Mission and history,” n.d.). Minnesota joined the WIDA Consortium in 2011 (“English learner education in Minnesota,” 2021).

WIDA Standards Framework

The WIDA English Language Standards Framework, 2020 Edition is bound with nearly 400 pages and establishes standards for students in grades kindergarten through

12th grade across multiple content standards. The standards have been developed with the integration of content and language. WIDA's position is that multilingual learners develop both content and language simultaneously and that students should learn both at the same time (WIDA, p. 19). The standards were established using a functional approach, an idea that language is used for a variety of situations and contexts and that it must be learned in a way that helps learners navigate and make meaning (WIDA, 2020, p. 20). Educators must then not simplify the content standards for their ELL students but use the WIDA standards to amplify both the content and the language demands (Grapin & Lee, 2020).

ESSA mandates that ELP standards are aligned to content standards (Lee, 2018, p. 317). This is a challenge for EL educators because it requires deep familiarity with multiple sets of content standards often across multiple grade levels (Lee, 2018, p. 318). Naturally, there cannot be a corresponding ELP standard for every single content standard as content standards themselves undergo frequent revision and the scope of such a document would be prohibitive. Instead, WIDA established its standards as a framework. There are four broad components of the framework, the WIDA ELD standard statements, the key language uses, language expectations and proficiency level descriptors (WIDA, 2020, p. 23).

WIDA ACCESS for ELLS. Another important component of the WIDA framework is the WIDA assessment and the corresponding proficiency levels assigned. NCLB required that an ELP assessment measure students' English language in the language domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing and composite scores of literacy, comprehension and overall ("Mission and history, n.d.). To meet this

requirement, students classified as ELLs in WIDA states like Minnesota, must take the standardized test WIDA ACCESS for ELLs each academic year. For students in grades 1 through 12 it is a 4 session test that typically takes around 4 hours to complete. The results of this assessment are shared in Individual Student Reports and student scores are reflected in their proficiency levels and scale scores. Both proficiency levels and scale scores are assigned for each of the aforementioned language domains.

As educators plan for their instruction, understanding students' proficiency level is an important part of navigating the WIDA ELD Standards Framework. The proficiency levels are number 1 through 6. In the state of Minnesota, an overall proficiency score of 4.5 is the requirement for exiting the EL program (“English learner education in Minnesota,” 2021). For each grade level band, there is an established set of proficiency level descriptors (PLDs) that are aligned to each language domain (WIDA, 2020). These descriptors can be used to evaluate progress of ELLs, as a collaboration tool or to design and scaffold instruction amongst other things (WIDA, 2020, p. 24). The PLDs are presented as a continuum that students are moving along. As students progress across levels, there are different expectations for how students may use language to meet academic standards.

Within the Standards Framework, WIDA notes that the PLDs are built on the idea that scaffolding supports students as they move along the continuum of language proficiency levels (p.79). The PLDs are also not a set of cognitive demands, but rather frame the ways in which students communicate what they know about a content area. Regardless of how they are communicating, all ELLs can participate in rigorous content learning (Grapin & Lee, 2022). AVID strategies provide an effective method for

scaffolding student learning across proficiency levels. While protections and policies have been in place for decades now, and WIDA is well established nationwide, there is still a need for supporting the academic progress of ELLs in the United States.

Demonstrated Need

The need to support ELLs is widely demonstrated through gaps in student achievement data. According to the National Center for Education statistics, 85% of students graduated high school on time in the 2016-2017 school year. During the same year, only 66% of ELLs graduated (“Trends in high school dropout and completion rates in the United States”, n.d.). The National Assessment of Educational data shows that 71% of fourth graders scored above or at standards for science, while only 28% of ELLs did in 2005 (Bravo & Cervetti, 2014). Another nationwide statistic shows that 7% of students are in gifted and talented programs compared to 2% of ELLs (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017). The data is clear that while legal obligations to provide equitable education to ELLs have been in place for around 50 years, there remain stark gaps in achievement.

In Minnesota, we also see those gaps between current ELLs, former ELLs, and students who were never classified as ELLs. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) published the 21-22 English Learner Education in Minnesota report. According to the report, ELLs are about 8.5% of the public school students. Of those students, less than 2% of ELLs were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. According to the same report, there are also massive gaps in achievement on all standardized assessments. In reading for example, 73% of ELLs did not meet the standards compared to 23% of students who were never EL. The gaps are similar in math but more significant in science. Only 5% of ELLs met the standard on the statewide science assessment

compared to 46.9% of students who had never been ELLs. It is important to note that only 22.6% of former ELLs met the standard. This data was troubling to me as in my district, science is one of the times that teachers are told to pull-out students for ELD at the elementary level. This shows the importance of AVID strategies to support all students, including those who are and once were classified as ELLs.

While the need for academic support for ELLs is demonstrated in nationwide and state achievement data, there is a gap in research that specifically addresses the needs of these students. In one study, the researchers set out to synthesize studies specifically done for reading intervention (Moore & Kilinger, 2014). The goal was to analyze how the other studies accounted for special populations, in this case, for English language learners. Moore and Kilinger's (2014) position is that if specific populations are not addressed in these studies, we cannot be sure that the intervention strategies studied will be effective for ELLs. Of the 67 reading intervention studies analyzed, 25 of the studies were valid and could be generalized to the at-risk population of ELLs (Moore & Kilinger, 2014). So, not only ELLs demonstrate needs in their academics, but research has indicated a need for specific studies and interventions for this population. Other interventions cannot be generalized to this population without proper research.

As an ELD teacher, I have experienced many conversations with classroom teachers who are surprised that certain students are in ELD class. Teachers will say things like "but they don't have any problems sharing ideas in class!" I might then say that oral language is one of the students' linguistic strengths. Additionally, studies show that it will take ELLs 3 to 5 years to develop oral proficiency, and 4 to 7 years to develop academic proficiency (Bravo & Cervetti, 2014). With an academic proficiency lag that lasts about

half of students' public education, the academic achievement gap follows students even after they have achieved proficiency. This suggests that all teachers need to consider themselves teachers of the English language, not only EL teachers. Both students who are currently classified as ELLs, and former ELLs need instructional support to be successful in content area classes (Lee, 2018).

This gap has implications for not only schools and students but for society and the economy of the United States. As the number of multilingual learners in U.S. schools increases, the same growth is happening in our population. The Hispanic population is the largest growing population in the United States, but Hispanic college completion rates are much lower than white college student completion rates (Kirk & Watt, 2018). This demonstrates the need for greater college and career readiness programs like AVID to help students succeed in college and beyond. This is playing out in the workforce; in fields like STEM there is an underrepresentation of diversity entering the workforce (Bravo & Cervetti, 2014). From a social justice perspective, schools and governments should be investing in the education of these students to uplift marginalized communities.

There is a large need demonstrated in student achievement data. It is important to note that it is not only students who are classified as ELLs that are experiencing a gap in academic achievement, but students who had been previously classified as ELLs are also experiencing the same gap. Therefore, general education teachers need to be making specific choices about how they are supporting the linguistic demands of the content area. My project will specifically focus on AVID strategies that teachers can integrate into their lessons to support students' language development.

Educators and ELLs

All students in school deserve an opportunity to learn in an environment that meets their learning needs. While there are many challenges facing quality education in the United States, educators across the country remain dedicated to their students and their practice. However, we know that ELLs are struggling across the nation. There are many systemic reasons why this marginalized group of students is falling behind. Educators, naturally, are at the forefront of this in schools. The challenges students face are often amplified by educators who have a deficit mindset around the abilities of their students. It is important for educators to reframe and focus on what students can do and the unique assets they each have. This, however, requires educators to have a willingness to adapt and change their practice and maybe even their educational philosophy. High quality professional development can support a positive mindset shift, but requires consistency and follow through.

Educators Perceptions of ELLs

There are many barriers to educators' success in working with ELLs including lack of training in university, lack of time to collaborate with ELD teachers, and curriculums that are written without quality accommodations and scaffolding included for ELLs. Another significant barrier is educators' own biases and deficit mindset around ELLs ability to learn content. Researchers Murphy and Torff (2019) set out to test the hypothesis of how educators' attitudes about providing rigorous instruction differ for general education students and ELLs.

The researchers conducted a survey of 205 educators at two schools in a school district with a student population that had 65% of students classified as ELLs (Murphy &

Torff, 2019). The group of educators was randomly assigned to participate in one of two different surveys, both of which asked participants to rank the effectiveness of different academic activities. One group ranked the rigor of the activities for ELLs, the other for the general education population. The results were consistent, regardless of participant ethnicity or years of experience. The survey results indicated that the educators found the activities with high critical thinking or academic rigor were more appropriate for general education students and less appropriate for ELLs (Murphy & Torff, 2019). We can draw several conclusions from their research. If ELLs are being given less opportunity to use critical thinking skills and less opportunity to be challenged by academic rigor, they will fall behind their peers. The consistent data showing the achievement gap between ELLs and general education students supports that conclusion (Bravo & Cervetti, 2014).

When educators hold limiting beliefs towards ELLs, they limit the students' educational opportunities. This was shown in another research study which analyzed materials designed by preservice EL teachers and how their beliefs around the abilities of ELLs impacted the rigor of the materials developed (Carabantes & Paran, 2022). Through observations, the researchers concluded that each of the preservice educators held assumptions of the ELLs limitations. While explaining their instructional design choices, the participants consistently explained how tasks needed to be simplified or the ELLs would not be able to complete the tasks. Reasons given for the simplification of tasks included the activities being too difficult, too time consuming, or too challenging (Carabantes & Paran, 2022). This consistent belief about ELLs not having the cognitive strength for these tasks is a limiting belief that is preventing students from experiencing a rigorous education.

In past professional development that I have created for general education teachers, I emphasize the idea that lack of language is not the same as lack of knowledge. English Language Learners are capable students. AVID promotes a similar idea for students, one of the cornerstones of modern AVID is the Growth Mindset (Bennet et al., 2016, p. 17). This is important for students to learn, for teachers to model and, most importantly, for teachers to know about their students! Teachers need to believe that all students have the capacity to learn.

Lack of Educators Trained to Support ELLs

Instruction needs to be tailored to the needs of the students. In special education students have mandated Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), but no standardized equivalent exists for ELLs in Minnesota. Though specific goals and accommodations are not created for each student, it is federally required to ensure students have access to grade level content regardless of their language proficiency (English learner education legislation, n.d.). While these types of protections are important, the number of educators who are actually trained to support ELLs is low and the quality of instruction general education teachers receive on best practices is lacking (Harklau & Ford, 2022).

When states fail to prepare educators for the instructional needs of ELLs, many educators internalize the misconception that ELLs will benefit from simple good teaching (Harklau & Ford, 2022). This misconception leads educators to believe they do not need to learn the specialized skills for supporting ELD or to develop the knowledge necessary. If teachers are unwilling to see themselves as ELD instructors, they will not make the changes necessary for their ELL students to have success with the content (de Jong & Barko-Alva, 2015).

One of the challenges facing schools today is the lack of educators. According to the 2023 Minnesota Teacher Supply and Demand Report, nearly one third of new teachers leave teaching within the first five years of their career in education (p. 45). Unfortunately, the same report shows that around 38% of teachers who hold a license to teach in Minnesota are not currently teaching (p. 8). School climate and lack of administrator support were both overwhelming reasons teachers were considering leaving the field according to a survey taken by more than 14,000 Minnesota educators in the same report (2023). Without support in the school, and facing high levels of stress, many classroom teachers are completely unwilling to make changes to their instructional practices (Hubbard et al., 2021). However, educators can make changes when given the proper time and training to do so. AVID professional development offers strong research based strategies, and becoming an AVID school creates a climate where educators can continue to share and learn best practices.

Professional Development

Since becoming an AVID school is often a school cultural shift, it requires teachers to participate in continuous opportunities to learn from ongoing training (Hubbard et al., 2021). Undertaking rigorous professional development is how schools become AVID schools. The school where I teach at began in the summer of 2019. A cohort of teachers from elementary schools across the district attended the AVID summer institute, which hosts massive teacher trainings around the country over multiple days. Part of the AVID model is that, once schools have started the training process, they appoint a site team that is responsible for steering AVID in the school (McKinney et al., 2018). It is important that once trained teachers return to their schools, that the school site

team takes time to outline how AVID aligns with other ongoing initiatives (Clark et al., 2017).

EL teachers feel burdened with the responsibility of educating their students. Classroom teachers may not make the necessary accommodations and support for their ELLs, so the ELD class may be the only class a day where students can follow the instruction. EL teachers are specially trained to understand the needs of ELLs and how to understand the language demands of content (de Jong & Barko-Alva, 2015). Due to the lack of strong preservice education, it often falls to the schools' ELD instructors to not only plan and prepare for their students but to also create and deliver professional development for other educators (Harklau & Ford, 2022). It is a requirement of Title III grants that schools provide ongoing professional development to staff, but who and how this is administered is left to the districts ("English learner education legislation," n.d.). While this is a worthy endeavor, creating quality professional development is a skill in itself.

Teachers may receive professional development on a topic, but educators have varying background, personal experiences and professional philosophies, which all impact the likelihood of how they will implement new information into their teaching practice (Hubbard et al., 2021). That is why the consistency of ongoing professional development led by the AVID site team is so important. AVID strategies are shown to support students to succeed in rigorous content classes. Taking some of these strategies and specifically applying them with ELLs in mind will not only benefit that population, but it will benefit all students in that class. Educators are naturally people who want to help others and support students. However, the data shows that educators who are not

trained in teaching ELLs may not be providing the instructional support necessary for these students to access the specific linguistic demands. By creating high quality professional development in my project, and by connecting to the district's AVID team, I will support teachers in learning specific AVID strategies to support ELLs and multilingual students succeed in their classes. Choosing to do this in partnership with AVID creates a stronger expectation for success since AVID is a districtwide initiative.

Conclusion

Chapter Two was a literature analysis of AVID, WIDA, and ELLs and educators. AVID was specifically developed to support low achieving students succeed in rigorous courses and it has achieved that in schools across the nation. Its expansive framework has many opportunities for specific language support to be used. My question is: *How can AVID strategies be used to support the academic language development of multilingual students in upper elementary content classes?* By developing professional development that provides clear strategies for ELLs, I will help content teachers support their students in classes. The second section of my literature review covered WIDA and the important legal responsibilities of schools. Since Minnesota is a WIDA state, my professional development and materials will be aligned with the WIDA standards and framework. In the final section, I shared the important but difficult research done on educators and the deficit mindset around ELLs. If educators do not believe ELLs can be successful in rigorous content, they will certainly not take the time to support these students. That is why I will harness the can-do system of WIDA and the growth mindset of AVID to support teachers in their perception change. In the following chapter, I will provide an overview of how I will align AVID strategies to support ELLs succeed in content classes.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

All teachers are responsible for the language development of their students, regardless of content area (Harper & de Jong, 2004). ELL (English Language Learner) teachers learn to see the language in the content, a skill that is not always emphasized in the way other educators approach teaching (de Jong & Barko-Alva, 2015). The purpose of this professional development is to give educators tools to support language development in their content areas. As described in Chapter Two, AVID strategies and AVID skills have been shown to improve student academic success (Kirk et al., 2018; Llamas et al., 2014). My research question is, *How can AVID strategies be used to support the academic language development of multilingual students in upper elementary content classes?* By using these well-researched strategies, teachers can improve outcomes for the ELL students in their classes. As an ELL teacher, I support students in developing their English. I also work with educators to support our shared students in their classes. This project will further empower educators to see themselves as English language teachers.

Description of the Project

The project is professional development offered to elementary school teachers. It is designed to be offered asynchronously to teachers in small groups, possibly with their Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). There will be three sessions available for teachers to complete on Schoology. There are multiple components of the project, including a slide deck, teacher resources in a template of tools, as well as follow-up

assessments. Each section of professional development serves a different purpose. The first is an overview of AVID and ELLs and how AVID can be used to support ELLs in the classroom. Session two is a description of several AVID strategies with opportunity for reflection for each strategy. Session three asks participants to try out several of the AVID strategies then come back together as a small group to share. The AVID strategies shared specifically align to different linguistic demands. The included parts of the professional development are the slide deck for the professional development, the organized handouts, and the development pre and post assessments. The three sessions are designed to be taken over one semester. It is important to give participants both time to reflect and implement, but not too much time where they forget what they previously learned.

The professional development has been developed according to the guidelines of *Effective Teacher Professional Development* by Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017). They defined effective professional development as “structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes” (p. 2). Effective professional development is certainly the goal, as every teacher has been a part of ineffective professional development at some point in their career. The seven characteristics of effective professional development according to the authors are that the professional development “is content focused, incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory, supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts, uses models and modeling of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers opportunities for feedback and reflection, is of sustained duration” (p. 4). By using well researched techniques in professional

development, teachers will be able to apply what they have learned in an effective and beneficial way.

As I designed the professional development, I kept these seven characteristics in mind (Darling-Hammond et al., 2107, p.4). Providing professional development around the content teachers are using was very important, so the reflection questions embedded in each session allow the educators to make connections between their class content and the new learnings. Collaboration is embedded in the format of completing the professional development with their PLC. Since teachers have an established relationship with their PLC this format allows for open dialogue and trust. I worked to incorporate most of the seven characteristics in the professional development.

The WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework (2020) was also a pillar in the development of the professional development session, particularly when considering which AVID strategies best suit the language development needs of ELLs. The WIDA standards are an important part of aligning the AVID strategies to the content areas of school. The AVID manuals provided the actual activities, strategies, and mindsets that makeup the handouts and templates provided for the educators (McKinney et al., 2018.; Bennet et al., 2016).

Setting and Audience

The school district that I work in and facilitated the professional development for is a suburban school district near the metro area of Minnesota. The ELL population of the district has been increasing steadily. However, these students are still a relatively small part of the student population. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, about 5% of the students are classified as English Learners. According to the same MDE

Report Card, 27% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The school where I teach has an ELL student population of about 10% (22-23). This number has tripled since I started teaching at the school 6 years ago.

Although the growth of ELL students in my school in the district has been consistently growing over the past several years, our ELL staff have felt constantly stretched thin. The consistent feedback from the ELD (English Language Development) teaching team is that we can not be the sole teachers responsible for our students' language growth; every teacher in the school needs to feel responsible for and equipped to support ELL students. This is part of the motivation for offering professional development to teachers. Modifying for ELLs can feel overwhelming for teachers, like a separate task that needs to be accomplished in addition to their many responsibilities (de Jong & Barko-Alva, 2015). Our district is an AVID school district, and teachers are expected to be implementing AVID strategies and techniques. So, for this professional development, teachers will learn which AVID strategies will best support ELLs. By using this lens, hopefully teachers will be more inclined to support our shared students. The audience for the professional development will be teachers of grades 3rd through 5th in the school district.

The school where I teach first attended the AVID professional development in the summer of 2019. Since the pandemic of 2020 and a recent change in leadership in our district AVID coordinator, the AVID focus has felt weaker. There have been ongoing AVID trainings offered each summer for staff to participate in. The district shares weekly AVID tips and strategies in a newsletter format. I have recently agreed to be the AVID

building representative for the 23-24 school year and moving forward. Through this role, I will be able to continue to implement the designed professional development.

Assessment

Assessment of the professional development is in a google form. There is both a pre and post assessment. This allows responses to be tracked as the professional development is offered in a continuous way. This is especially important as the professional development will be completed asynchronously. The post assessment questions include a few agree or disagree questions like: “As a result of this PD I have used a new scaffold for ELLs.” The post assessment also includes a few short response questions like: “In your own words, describe in a few sentences why AVID strategies are a good fit for ELLs” and “As a result of this professional development, what is something you have changed about your educational practice or something you want to change for the benefit of your ELs?” Since the PD is asynchronous, this will allow me to check the effectiveness of the professional development. There will also be a question included on the google form where teachers can indicate if they would like to set up time to review the topic further with me. The assessment feedback will allow myself and other EL teachers to connect with educators in our buildings by following up with their questions and designing future professional development to support them.

Timeline

As this is asynchronous, it will continue to be available beyond first implementation in the Spring of 2024. Each session is designed to take approximately three hours, with the third session including the time the educators spend outside the session preparing. The first two sessions need at least one week between them, and the

final session should take place at least a month after the completion of session two. This allows the participants adequate time to engage in the materials. Since they will be offered on the schools schoology webpage, they will be easy for staff to access.

Additional professional development will be offered asynchronously throughout the year. It is important to continue the ongoing professional development to support teachers in their ongoing application of these strategies. The final assessment will take place within a week of completing the three sessions.

Summary

Teaching teachers to use AVID strategies to support our EL students in content areas will broaden the impact of ELD. If all teachers learn to think about the language of their content and how to scaffold their content, our ELL students will grow their academic language. That is why my research question is: *How can AVID strategies be used to support the academic language development of multilingual students in upper elementary content classes?*

In Chapter Three, I outlined the framework of the professional development and the format it is presented in. I referenced the research that supports the development of the project. I used the *Effective Teacher Professional Development'* manual as well as the WIDA standards and several AVID manuals in the Schoolwide Approach series. I described both the setting and demographics of the school district where the professional development will take place. I also covered important aspects of the student body and how it has changed. Finally, I described the timeline and the assessments that will be used to determine the effectiveness of the professional development. Chapter Four is a reflection on the entire project as a process and the results and limitations of the project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

During my time as an English Language Development (ELD) teacher, there are several questions my coworkers at school, and counterparts in online forums continue to ask again and again. One topic that we often revisit is: how can we empower classroom teachers to see themselves as language teachers? How do we support classroom teachers, special education teachers, and all educators to see the language in their content and support their multilingual students? In my district we have tried different trainings, at other schools they try co-teaching or implementing a coaching model. While learning about AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) strategies, I came to the conclusion that we as ELD teachers should not be trying to introduce something new, but harnessing something the district is already pioneering. I was inspired to make connections between the AVID curriculum and activities and best practices for supporting ELLs (English Language Learners) in the classroom. Eventually I brought that inspiration to my capstone project question: *How can AVID strategies be used to support the academic language development of multilingual students in upper elementary content classes?*

Although AVID is designed to serve students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, for the scope of my project it became necessary to focus on a few grade levels. The age scope is one limitation of my project. I do hope in the future to expand my project to additional grade levels. As I processed through what I wanted to create in my project to support this question, it became evident that the best way to support educators

was through quality professional development. The district has been continuously providing professional development on AVID best practices, but my professional development uses the lens of supporting multilingual students. In addition to AVID strategies, the professional development provides more relevant information on the needs of multilingual students, what EL programming looks like in Minnesota and how AVID can be used to meet the needs of ELLs, multilingual students and of course how these strategies benefit all students.

The process of developing this project led me to research the history of multilingual education and what best practices are today, the history of AVID, and how AVID serves students today. There were many different potential research areas that felt relevant for my topic, but in my literature review I had to narrow my focus to AVID, ELLs in schools and Educators and ELLs.

In this concluding chapter, I describe the outcomes of my research project. This includes both personal and professional outcomes. I learned about AVID, WIDA and the many ways to support ELLs, but I also learned about myself as a researcher, writer and as a student. In the literature review section, I describe the major sections of my literature review and focus primarily on the large takeaways including AVID strategies and WIDA and federal requirements. I write about the implications of my research project, the limitations of the research project and the opportunities for future growth in the area of AVID for ELLs. Finally in the communication of results, I briefly summarize the project and how the professional development will be communicated.

Capstone Outcomes

The process of completing this project has been insightful and I have learned many things about myself in the process. Simply the scope of my capstone paper and project completed over two semesters is the largest academic undertaking I have accomplished. From the research for my literature review, to synthesizing and writing, to the development of my professional development, I have learned so much.

As a researcher, I learned how much I enjoy the research process. It was an overwhelming experience, but thoroughly enjoyable. It was very eye opening to see what research has been done on topics of interest, and then going through the process of determining what is relevant and important. In a previous job, my husband was a researcher for law firms, so it was interesting to learn from him how to refine search terms and use different shortcuts to best utilize the massive search engines we have at our disposal. I think the most challenging part of this process was keeping my research organized, including articles, quotes and citations. In undergrad, we had access to unlimited printing so I was in the habit of printing everything and going through and highlighting. Digital organization proved to be much more difficult for me, but through tips from colleagues I managed to create a system that was effective. One point of frustration in my research was that there has not been much crossover between AVID and ELL research, and discovering the limitations of research done around the ELL population (Moore & Kilinger, 2014). Synthesizing of course led to many lessons learned around my writing style.

I have always enjoyed writing, but as aforementioned, I had never previously set out to write something as large as this capstone project. Through this process I learned I

enjoy writing, but struggle with the complexities of academic writing including things like citations and formatting. I became very familiar with the OWL purdue website, and spent a lot of time looking at other capstone projects. I felt very supported by my professors during both semesters. I also really enjoyed having other people review my work which gave significant insight into my strengths and weaknesses as a writer. I had peers, my content reviewer and folks from the writing center all read my work and provide feedback.

As a student I learned how much I value clear rubrics. As I teach kindergarten through fifth grade, I have not always implemented clear rubrics for all of my students but I would like to aim to create and use stronger rubrics for my students. I found that it was important for me to understand exactly what my goals were, even though there were many different ways of achieving the goals laid out in the rubrics. Also on a personal note, I learned how to prioritize my time and balance professional and personal goals. Completing my project as I work towards my masters degree while working full-time and balancing my personal life has been an incredible learning experience.

I learned many different things about myself as a researcher, writer, and learner. Throughout the entire process I maintained my passion for empowering educators to see themselves as language teachers. Like many other initiatives, the largest limitation here is time for teachers to both learn, reflect on and implement this new knowledge. It also requires significant support from the school district.

Learnings from Literature Review

The literature review was important in the formation of my entire project. Entire sections of research in my literature review have been included in my project. The

literature review was helpful both for strengthening my own understanding of the topic and for providing citations and statistics for my project artifact. My literature review has three topics connected to my research question of: *How can AVID strategies be used to support the academic language development of multilingual students in upper elementary content classes?* The three broad topics were AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), ELLs (English Language Learners) in Schools, and Teachers and ELLs.

Section one and two of my literature review both informed the bulk of my project. Section one covered AVID, and section two was about ELLs in schools. I designed professional development to teach educators about how to use AVID to support ELLs in school, so a clear well-researched understanding of both topics was important to the development of my project. Naturally, one of my most utilized resources were several of the AVID textbooks that they have published (Allen et al., 2019; Bennet et al., 2016; Drumright et al., 2016; McKinney et al., 2016). Each volume focuses on a different topic, and includes the history of AVID, modern thought leaders as well as effective instructional practices. I used instructional practices from these different texts in my professional development slides. Most teachers in our district have been trained on AVID strategies, so for this professional development I selected AVID practices that best align with the needs of ELLs. To make the selection of instructional strategies and practices, I also researched the needs of ELLs.

I teach in a WIDA state, so part of my section on ELLs included background on what WIDA is and how the standards they provide inform instructional practices. Teaching in a WIDA state means that Minnesota's ELL standards and assessments are provided by the organization WIDA. Since the organization was

developed in response to the government establishing guidelines for ELLs in the No Child Left Behind act and again in ESSA, using WIDA aligns with federal requirements (“Mission and history,” n.d.). In my research I learned many educators do not receive specialized training on how to teach ELLs, so my research also included a foundational understanding of the history of ELL instruction in the United States (Harklau & Ford, 2022). One important area in my research was describing the litigation and laws that led to modern ELL instruction. Multilingual students have a legal right to access grade level content and appropriate language assistance (“English learner education legislation,” n.d.; Thonrley, 2017). These two sections were both broad, but necessary in my project to provide educators with a solid understanding of why this work is important.

Section three, Teachers and ELLs, was informative for my own understanding of the topic, but the information I researched does not make a strong appearance in my project. I researched this area because I wanted to understand current perceptions of ELLs by classroom teachers, teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. The research compiled in this section informed the importance of my professional development and shaped the information I presented. For example, in my research I found that in one survey, educators indicated that activities with high critical thinking skills or academic rigor were less appropriate for ELLs than general education students (Murphy & Torff, 2019). This understanding led me to continuously emphasize in my project that ELLs are just as academically capable as their English Proficient peers. The process of researching, synthesizing and writing my literature review was incredibly important to the development of my project as well as to my understanding of future implications and growth.

Implications

There are a few implications of my research completed for the literature review and of the project itself. In the literature review, I cited a lack of educator preparation for supporting ELLs (Harklau & Ford, 2022). I also cited the importance of quality professional development (de Jong & Barko-Alva, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2021). This professional development artifact can be used to provide quality professional development to teachers. The goal of the professional development is that educators feel more informed about best practices for supporting ELLs, and feel confident to use AVID strategies to meet the academic needs of these students.

While there are clear policies establishing the requirements of schools and educators, ELLs continue to perform below their peers in academic assessments and participate less in rigorous courses (21-22 English Learner Education in Minnesota report). This ongoing evidence supports the need for continuing to understand and develop the policies designed to protect and support ELLs in schools. Since this gap continues to exist, further development of policy is needed.

Limitations and Future Growth

There are a handful of limitations I identified while completing my project. These limitations do lead to the opportunity for growth and change in the future. One natural limitation is no matter the strength of the professional development, teachers then need to take what they learn and implement it in their classroom. I designed the professional development to include a session on reflection, which they will complete after having implemented at least one strategy. This format requires that educators do take something

from the professional development and try it which will hopefully encourage continuous use of the information shared.

Other limitations are my own. I am not a trained professional development creator, I teach full-time. I am an expert in best practices for ELLs, but not in creating professional development. For my project, I used the ideas presented in *Effective Teacher Professional Development* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Using research based strategies for developing my professional development project did strengthen my confidence in what I created. Since I am a teacher, I will not be able to offer this in person to all the elementary schools. Working with my district's AVID coordinator, I developed this project to be completed asynchronously through Schoology.

Asynchronous information does always leave opportunities for misunderstandings, so I included many sections for questions to be asked directly to me through google forms.

One final limitation is the availability of research on my specific topic. Based on my experiences with both ELLs and AVID I set out to bridge the two topics. During my research I found limited data and sources that made clear connections between these two ideas. While that led me to make connections and inferences between what I was able to research, it shows that there is opportunity for growth in this research area. The conclusions I drew give strong evidence for using AVID to support ELLs and hopefully there will be more research done around this topic in the future.

Communication of Results

The results of my research is a three part professional development series. As it is designed to be shared asynchronously, I will partner with my district to share it as a professional development opportunity in our staff resources page on the website

Schoology. One benefit of the asynchronous design is that it is likely to reach a wider audience than I myself could facilitate. It benefits the profession as it works towards the goal of closing the achievement gap between ELLs and English Proficient students.

Another way I can share the benefits of my project is through online forums. I am a member of several groups of ELL educators nationwide. Since the burden of creating and providing professional development often falls on the EL educators themselves, other EL educators often post in the forums looking for advice or examples of professional development (Harklau & Ford, 2022). Providing my completed slides to other colleagues across the nation would significantly expand the potential impact of this work.

Conclusion

AVID was created and designed to support student success in more rigorous classes. It has grown to include components of growth mindset and culturally responsive teaching. As I learned more about AVID, I naturally made connections between the best practices of AVID and how to support ELLs in schools. This led to my research question: *How can AVID strategies be used to support the academic language development of multilingual students in upper elementary content classes?* Throughout the research process, I strengthened my passion for this question and was able to develop quality professional development to inform classroom teachers practices in the classroom. Through my research, I have affirmed that implementing AVID strategies and scaffolding them appropriately is an excellent way for classroom teachers to support ELLs. It is my hope that when teachers complete this professional development they too will see the immense benefits and make efforts to support their students with these strategies.

Creating this project also sparked my interest in continuing to strengthen my own understanding of AVID and to create a stronger AVID focus in my classroom. By continuing to use and try these instructional practices with my students, I can continue to encourage my colleagues to try them in their classrooms. As my school and district continues to strengthen their AVID schoolwide approach, connecting in AVID strategies to support ELLs benefits the entire district and community.

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