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Capstone: English Language Learners

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**Abstract**

This capstone explores the connections between a personal teaching philosophy and the five domains of the TESOL standards. The philosophy centers around a culturally inclusive, educational advocacy based approach to teaching English Language Learners (ELLs). The subsequent breakdown of the five domains explores how these principles can be applied through teachers' understandings of language, culture, planning, assessment, and professionalism. An emphasis is placed on strategies that best benefit ELL students, including metalingual approaches to designing lesson plans, educational advocacy through community and political engagement, and authentic assessment practices that serve to close current achievement gaps. The concluding reflection aims to bridge these theoretical claims with plans for future practice.

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## **Part One: Teaching Philosophy**

### *Toward Culturally Inclusive Classrooms and Educational Activism*

In the middle of 2015, I took a job teaching English to adult immigrants and refugees at a nonprofit in South Nashville. One of my students – a charming young woman from Egypt – stopped me after class one evening and asked how long I thought it would be until she could speak English perfectly. I responded that I felt she already spoke English quite well but that language learning is a lengthy process. Her face fell and, when I questioned why she had asked, she replied that she didn't want anyone to know she spoke Arabic because she felt it hurt her chances of getting a job. In Egypt, she had had the equivalent of a master's degree and worked for a well-respected company; in the United States, her language skills relegated her to the position of drive-through server at a fast food restaurant.

I remember being so disheartened upon hearing her story; it was then that I realized two things: how vital language is and how intolerant our society is towards those who don't speak the way we believe they should.

My philosophy about the profession of teaching has drastically changed since I began my master's degree program in English language learners, but it is still grounded in this experience and others like it. Through a combination of research and personal experience in the field, I have developed certain beliefs about what it means to be an educator and the power of diversity in the classroom.

Culture is something that, at times, can feel a bit alien to those of us that grew up in mainstream, white American families. On the one hand, when the language you speak, the foods you enjoy, the clothing you wear, and your pastimes are shared by some 77% of the

population (according to the US Census Bureau), it is easy to come to view those things as the “norm.” On the other hand, because so much of “American culture” is a melting pot of small bits and pieces of traditions from other societies, it may sometimes feel as though white Americans have no real culture; we seem to have simply co-opted our favorite traditions from others.

Therefore, it is somewhat ironic that those who stand in what Lisa Delpit (1988) calls the “culture of power” are so protective of what is essentially an amalgam of many different cultures brought together in a country built on wave after wave of immigration over the centuries. And, ironic though it may be, this sense of nationalism has proven to be detrimental to anyone outside of the culture of power. Anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States have had adverse effects on foreign-born residents as a whole; however, as is often the case in instances of injustice, those who tend to suffer the burden of this discrimination the worst are children.

Therefore, my teaching philosophy is centered around the idea that we must be advocates, first and foremost for our students but for the profession of teaching as well. The recent election has left a lot of students and their families (particularly those that we as bilingual educators will be teaching) feeling very uncertain about their futures and whether they are welcome in the United States or not. Now, more than ever it is imperative that teachers unify into one voice which pushes back at policies that attempt to undermine the security or wellbeing of our students. By the same token – particularly with the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education – teachers must stand up for our own profession. Again, while this spans the entire vocation of education, it is particularly relevant for teachers of students outside of the mainstream (ELL, CDC, etc.). We must be

watchdogs for policy that will demoralize our work, take funding from our programs, or (the worst case scenario) make it impossible for us to do our jobs. The idea of being politically active is, undoubtedly, daunting to some teachers and may seem impossible for others. However, advocating for the profession and for our students does not mean risking our job security, nor does it take too much additional time outside of the classroom. It merely means being informed, joining the collective teacher voice (through professional organizations), and voting in the interest of teachers.

As educators, we work within the boundaries of policy: according to the U.S. Department of Education, 91% of children in the United States attend public schools; which means that their teachers work for the United States government. As with most things controlled by federal and state governments, these 3.1 million full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers are bound by the parameters of national and local regulations. Some of these may be viewed as beneficial to teachers and schools; for instance, in July of 2017, No Child Left Behind will be reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act. For teachers of bilingual students, this act upholds “critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students” and requires that the Secretary of Education to award grants for bilingual education programs (S.1177, 2016). This kind of policy benefits educators working with speakers of other languages because it acts as an overhead security blanket to protect diverse classrooms and their occupants. On the other hand, some legislation serves to target culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) student populations. In California in 1998, legislation was introduced and passed that required the elimination of bilingual classrooms and required schools to be “English Only.” Proposition 227, or the “English Only” law, proved detrimental to students who spoke languages other than English: they no longer

had access to materials, assessments, or even educators who could work with them in their native languages. The bill was eventually repealed in 2016, but – at this point – nearly a generation of children had gone without proper supports in their education.

These laws and regulations which may seem like bureaucratic sludge teachers are forced to trek through in order to do their jobs can actually be quite harmful to that population we strive so desperately to help succeed – our students. Therefore, in order for us to truly be advocates for our students, teachers must operate from a framework of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP). While it is important for all teachers to view their students' not only as learners but as people with unique backgrounds and individual stories, I have come to understand how imperative it is for teachers of bilingual students specifically to hold their students' identities in a place of value.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy was first developed in the early 1980s and has taken many forms over the decades; however, my philosophy and beliefs center around definitions provided by Geneva Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings. Gay focuses on the importance of “caring” in academic settings and a “whole child” approach to teaching. She sees CRP as being “expressed in concern for [students’] psychoemotional well-being and academic success, personal morality and social actions, obligations and celebrations, communality and individuality, and unique cultural connections and universal human bonds” (p.48). Ladson-Billings’ identifies more specifically how CRP operates within the classroom by making pedagogy and resources relevant in order to ensure student success. She offers this definition of CRP:

A theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate (p. 469).

My personal philosophy centers so heavily around CRP because I believe it is crucial for teachers to recognize the unique abilities and perspectives that multicultural students bring to a classroom. So much of the discourse surrounding bilingual education in the United States has, in the past, tended towards assimilationist and subtractive views of language: students should learn English as quickly as possible, and maintenance of a first language is not only unnecessary but should be avoided. This can be seen in the aforementioned California bill, Proposition 227, where all languages other than English were banned in the public school system.

My teaching philosophy is one that would resist these detrimental practices in favor of more inclusive, additive views of language. I hope to always speak of my students and my profession in a way that signifies the unique perspectives and cognitive abilities they bring into the classroom. To do this, I will draw on pluralist discourse, which combats the idea of language as a detriment, and rather views diversity not just as a benefit but as a societal norm. I aim to center my teaching practice around several core beliefs about my students: that they have an equal if not greater capacity for learning than their monolingual counterparts in the culture of power; that they deserve access to the same resources as their peers; that language-learning is a lifelong practice which should require them to maintain their native language as well as develop a new one; and that bilingualism and/or multilingualism offers certain advantages that monolingualism does not. According to Viorica Marian and Anthony Shook's 2012 article for *Cerebrum*, the advantages of speaking multiple languages are overwhelming. Principal among their findings was the notion that

speaking multiple languages enables language “co-activation;” that is, while speaking in one language, a bilingual person’s brain is drawing on resources from the other language(s). Marian and Shook argue that, “because both of a bilingual person’s language systems are always active and competing, that person uses these control mechanisms every time she or he speaks or listens” (p. 4). As a result, bilingual persons tend to outperform their monolingual peers on activities which require conflict management. Research suggests that the bilingual brain may be better equipped to process information. Marian and Shook cite this as the reason it is often easier for a bilingual person to acquire a third language than it would be for their monolingual counterpart to acquire a second language (7).

A culturally responsive philosophy extends further than just to the students in my classroom. It also requires an active effort on my part as an educator to engage students’ families and communities in the classroom, and a belief (driven by research) that parents of diverse students want to see their children succeed the same way parents of children in the dominant culture do. Based on the fieldwork I have done while at Peabody, I hope to bring artifacts from my students’ communities into the classroom to aid in instruction. I hope to invite community members in to share what they know in a way that is both academically and culturally enlightening. I hope to involve parents as a way of motivating students to perform at high levels on their class work and as a means of building relationships between the worlds of education and the many diverse cultures represented in my classroom.

Ultimately, I feel my teaching philosophy boils down to a simple phrase which is hopefully a commonly held belief among all educators: regardless of background or circumstance, all children have the capacity to succeed. As educators, it is our job to be

advocates for our students' success both academically and as citizens of a country like the United States. My philosophy centers around the idea that my students – as members of diverse cultural communities – bring unique perspectives and abilities into my classroom; that they will not only learn from me but that I will learn from them as well. I aim to utilize culturally responsive pedagogy as a way to demonstrate this advocacy to my students, to let them know that they are valued not in spite of the diversity they bring to my classroom, but because of it.

## **Part Two: TESOL Standards**

### **Professional Knowledge**

#### Domain 1: Language

Communication is a fundamental part of how humankind functions. Today, it is possible to get in contact with someone by pressing a few simple buttons on a touch screen. However, history shows us that our species has used various methods to communicate for thousands and thousands of years. From the often ridiculed “bow-wow” hypothesis – that humans first began to communicate by copying the sounds of animals – to the earliest written systems of the Sumerians, our desires to be heard, to connect, and to be remembered are evident throughout history (Allan, 24).

Just as humans have evolved, so has the language we use. Yet for all of the years we have used language and had opportunities to implement a universal system which would make it easier for us to communicate, language has become so intertwined with culture we would rather struggle to correspond with one another than give up the ways we speak. This might not be simply based on innate human stubbornness, either – the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that our language may influence the way we perceive the world (Kay and Kempton, 1984). Wardaugh (2002), speaking on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, claims that:

The culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ: because they value certain things and do them in a certain way, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do. (p. 222)

A common example of this is in the way certain languages have more than one word to describe particular activities, objects, or practices which are important to their culture. For instance, according to an article written by David Robson for the Washington Post in 2013,

the Eskimo people have more than fifty ways of saying or describing the word “snow.”<sup>1</sup> You would not find the same thing in, say, Maşri (Egyptian Arabic) given that the culture and geographical location do not lend themselves to think about snow on a regular basis.

If culture and language are so intertwined, then, we should consider being bi- or multi-lingual a remarkable practice. When we teach children who come to us from other countries, we are asking them not only to make room in their brains for a new language, but an entirely new set of cultural norms and practices as well. This particular process of instruction must be handled with care and adherence to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.

### **Language as a System: Acquisition of Second Language Literacy**

The exact science of acquiring a second language is something that has been hotly debated by linguists for many years. Krashen (1982) situates second language acquisition (SLA) within the realm of theoretical linguistics – that is, there is no practical application for the theory of SLA to exist (p. 7). Krashen’s theory of SLA relies on a distinction between *acquisition* and *learning*; “language acquisition is a subconscious process” while learning “refer[s] to conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them” (p. 14).

We may think of school as a place where students will *learn* their second language. In our case, this would be English. They will be taught grammatical rules, sentence structures, and the proper pronunciation of words. Krashen refers to this as “formal knowledge of a language,” and it is what we have come to expect from classrooms centered around WIDA standards, BICS, CALP, and other measurements and ideas about teaching English to non-native speakers.

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<sup>1</sup> This idea has sparked a nearly half century debate, but recent evidence suggests that, when dialectal speech is taken into account, the assertion is true.

However, while our students are receiving this formal education in English, they are also constantly *acquiring* language, both inside and outside of school. Social language – the language they use to communicate with their families, their friends, and members of their community – will come much more quickly because it is the language they will need to survive. They will acquire this language quickly because it will be around them constantly: they will hear it on television, see it in advertisements, and learn to decipher it when they go to the grocery store.

The language that remains hidden from many English language learners is the language of school; that is, academic language. According to the Glossary of Education Reform (2013), academic language is defined as follows:

The oral, written, auditory, and visual language proficiency required to learn effectively in schools and academic programs—i.e., it’s the language used in classroom lessons, books, tests, and assignments, and it’s the language that students are expected to learn and achieve fluency in. Frequently contrasted with “conversational” or “social” language, academic language includes a variety of formal-language skills... [and] allow[s] students to acquire knowledge and academic skills while also successfully navigating school policies, assignments, expectations, and cultural norms.

Academic language often serves as a so-called “hidden curriculum” for English language learners. As outlined in my teaching philosophy, advocating on behalf of our students is, I believe, a major part of an educator’s profession. If we are going to successfully act as advocates for our students, we must promote equal access to curriculum for all students.

There is a reason for the achievement gap in American public schools; that is, the disparity

in graduation rates between “mainstream” students and those student populations we see as outliers, such as English language learners. Many educators maintain deficit viewpoints when it comes to students with non-English backgrounds. Not only do they hold these students to lower expectations than they do native English speakers, but many never consider that a student’s first language may in fact offer certain cognitive advantages when it comes to acquiring their second language.

In a recent literature review<sup>2</sup>, I argued in favor of a solution to the “hidden curriculum” for English language learners. This solution takes the form of metalanguage instruction to advance ELL’s acquisition of academic language. As defined by Roger Berry (2005), metalanguage is simply “language about language” (p. 3). In other words, if students employ metalanguage in their speaking or writing, they are demonstrating the ability to talk about the language they use. It stands to reason that EL students continually have to think and make choices about the language they use; this process is known as metalinguistic awareness. Berry argues that metalinguistic awareness can exist without understanding metalanguage; “the vast majority of ‘knowledge’ held by learners of language is implicit (especially L1) and has no terminological manifestations” (12). In other words, explicit instruction is necessary in order to acquire the language needed to talk about our metalinguistic awareness.

Metalanguage, when taught in an explicit, meaning-based way, opens up the doors to academic language acquisition for ELL students. In my literature review, I analyzed a number of studies, but there were three that stood out in particular as proof that this method is successful:

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, part A

studies by Mary Schleppegrell (2013), Meg Gebhard, I-An Chen, and Lynne Britton (2014), and Graeme Couper (2011). I would like to highlight the results of one of these studies here.

Mary Schleppegrell's 2013 article for *Language Learning* argues in favor of the need for metalanguage – in order to be successful – to be taught in a way that emphasizes meaning making. Schleppegrell administered a “3-year design-based project to develop and study an intervention that uses [Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics] metalanguage to support the achievement of curricular goals in elementary ELA in classrooms with English language learners (ELLs)” (p. 157). The results of Schleppegrell's study determined that the specific metalanguage – systemic functional linguistic metalanguage – enhanced elementary grade bilingual students' abilities to take on challenging ELA tasks. It allowed students to differentiate different language patterns and variances in language so they could in turn make carefully considered linguistic decisions about their own language. Use of SFL metalanguage also boosted reading comprehension and supported writing skills in L2 learners.

Schleppegrell's study, along with many others, demonstrates the effectiveness of metalanguage as a practice for developing academic language proficiency in English language learners. Given that academic language is what we consider to be the language of school, it is vital we not keep this part of the academic curriculum hidden from what we know to be an ever-growing population of students. EL students make up 9.4% of students attending US public schools; according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), 4.6 million students are identified as receiving EL services. However, in a 2012 article for *Governing* magazine, Dylan Scott notes that, while half of all states graduate at least 80% of their students, “twenty-four of the 47 reporting states had a graduation rate for students with limited English proficiency that was 60 percent or lower for the 2010-2011 school year.” This means that less than half of states

surveyed were able to graduate more than 60% of their EL students. This achievement gap is clearly detrimental to students, and is an issue we as teachers must take seriously. We should consider language learning the first doorway to successful futures for our students.

## Domain 2: Culture

Culture is something we discuss often in mainstream social media; it has become a particularly germane topic in recent years as more members of minorities begin to address the problem of *cultural appropriation*, or the adoption of certain parts of one culture into another. The most brazen offenders of cultural appropriation are often white Americans, who minority groups accuse of stealing cultural practices (such as renaming cornrows “boxer braids” and pretending as though the style has not been popular in Black communities for generations) or appropriating heritage in mocking or degrading ways (such as dressing as “terrorist” Muslims for Halloween, wearing sombreros and ponchos on Cinco de Mayo, or naming sports teams the “Redskins”).

As teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, it is important that we approach discussions of culture with asset-based mindsets. We must view the cultural and linguistic practices of our students’ as beneficial and having a valuable impact on their abilities to learn. For too much of recent history, EL students have been faced with teachers who take deficit approaches to their education: teachers who believe that students are empty vessels needing to be filled with knowledge that only they, the teachers, possess. Rather, I believe we should take the approach that, regardless of their backgrounds, all students come to us with some understanding of the world they live in; an understanding that will be unique for every student and will provide them with necessary keys to unlock further information in their formal

education. Referring back to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, research shows that it is very likely that linguistic practices are at least in some way (if not very directly) influenced by cultural practices. Therefore, if we aim to be successful teachers of CLD students, we must consider the ways their language acquisition is influenced by the culture and community from which they have come.

As mentioned in my teaching philosophy, I believe the most important practice we can implement in our classrooms is culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). The reality of CRP is that it is not as difficult in practice as it may appear in theory, and does not require as much effort on the behalf of teachers as it might seem. According to Jordan (1985), “it does not mean that all school practices need be completely congruent with natal cultural practices, in the sense of exactly or even closely matching or agreeing with them” (p. 110). Rather, CRP should simply be a guiding principle for teachers. It should act as a model, as a means for teachers to question if what they are doing in the classroom is accessible to students who come from cultures outside of their own.

In other words, in order to effectively implement CRP in our classrooms, we as teachers must simply be aware. We should question our own practices, even down to the language we use when speaking to our students; as Greene (2016) comments:

Discourse is inherently political and rooted in social relationships and social identities with a focus on patterns of power and privilege... therefore, language cannot be considered neutral because it is situated within political spheres with focuses on social, racial, gender, economic, religious influences. (p. 278)

If we are committed to being more aware in our classrooms and to taking a position that the cultural practices our students bring to us hold inherent value, then it is logical that, to begin

with, we should familiarize ourselves with our students' communities. In the fall of 2016, I participated in a community literacies study<sup>3</sup> in the most culturally diverse neighborhood in Nashville. This study involved both online research as well as an excursion into the community to study different cultural practices and, by extension, the linguistic and literary practices of the people in these communities. In order to successfully teach students of diverse cultural backgrounds, I feel this is the best place to start. It not only allows teachers to discover where their students are coming from, but also can inform teaching practice.

For instance, my portion of the study focused on the Kurdish-American population in Nashville. The majority of Kurds living here came to the city as refugees in three waves, across several decades, though many arrived in the 1980s following Saddam Hussein's Al-Anfal campaign<sup>4</sup> which resulted in the "systematic and deliberate murder of at least 50,000 and possibly as many as 100,000 Kurds" (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The Kurdish community in Nashville is now the largest in the United States, and, as such, has manifested its own physical location on Nolensville Pike – situated between Elysian Fields Court and Elysian Fields Road. While conducting the study, I became familiar with all of the major landmarks of "Little Kurdistan" - the Salahadeen Center of Nashville (a mosque and community center), Azadi Market and Bakery, Newroz Market, and Ibrahim Tahir's jewelry shop inside Newroz.

Out of this study of the community, its physical features, literacy practices, and the people living there, I developed conceptual curricular plans that could be used in a classroom to integrate Kurdish culture into instruction. These plans included transnational literacy practices; to begin a unit on writing, for example, I may show students photos of the uniquely Kurdish locations in Nashville mentioned above. I would also show examples of literacy targeted to the

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix, part B

<sup>4</sup> Also known as the Kurdish Genocide

Kurdish community in Nashville, such as a poster celebrating the holidays of Ramadan and Eid. I would then invite members of the community, like the jeweler from Newroz Market or a baker from Azadi, into the classroom to speak to my students. Finally, I would introduce students to online resources for the Nashville Kurdish community, such as the Tennessee Kurdish Community Council or Boombinere (a website designed specifically for Nashville Kurds to ship items back to Kurdistan).

Once I had introduced the Kurdish culture, members of the community, and the community literacy practices into the classroom, I would have students write a narrative about their own experience living within the Kurdish population in Nashville and the importance of seeing their first language within their community. This would accomplish part of W.1-2.3 of the Tennessee ELL writing standards for grades 1-2, which involves having students write a range of different text types. I may also tie in the ELL K-3 social studies standards and have students include recognition of the individuals from their community who we brought into the classroom. This project would, I think, make an interesting cross-curricular unit where we spend several weeks as a class examining different communities and their literacy practices in a way that engages students and informs them of their peers' cultural backgrounds. The goal would be for students to see these literacy practices and the presence of literature unique to their communities as positive aspects of their own identity as it relates to their society.

The interesting thing about this particular community-based instructional practice is that it could easily be modified to fit any culture within a classroom. If there is one thing I realized while carrying out our community literacies study, it was that anytime a community of students from a certain culture exists within a school, there is a wider network of members of the same cultural background in the community at large. With this knowledge and a willingness to

dedicate the time to learning about our students' backgrounds, we can create culturally responsive instructional materials that demonstrate our dedication to promoting the benefits of diversity in our schools.

### Domain 3: Planning, Implementing, and Managing Instruction

Designing curricular materials is one of the most fundamental skills teachers should have; particularly for teachers of English language learners, who often do not have curriculums for their classes. In the district where I will teach this fall, for instance, there is no established ELL curriculum, so I will be designing my own scope and sequence and curricular materials. After the process of planning, it will be necessary to implement these materials in the classroom and then ensure that instruction time runs smoothly through appropriate classroom management techniques.

There are many methods for writing and implementing instructional plans for English language learners. The model used by Metro Nashville Public Schools and many surrounding districts is the Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol (SIOP). Sheltered English instruction is a protocol that focuses on comprehensible input, or the ability of someone to understand language without comprehending every word or the grammatical structure (British Council, 2006). SIOP uses what students already have in their metaphorical "toolboxes" (background knowledge) to help them build new skills and understandings. The model also puts a heavy emphasis on explicit instruction of language objectives – this is in contrast to traditional classrooms where only content objectives are used.

In addition to the SIOP model, many states, including Tennessee, rely on WIDA standards for instruction of ELLs. WIDA – which stands for World-class Instructional Design

and Assessment – provides curricular materials and guidelines for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The standards reflect this mission by breaking down the standards to reflect the educational needs of English language learner students. WIDA measures English Language Proficiency (ELP) at 5 levels: Entering, Emerging, Developing, Expanding, and Bridging.

To demonstrate my ability to successfully plan, implement, and manage instruction, I have included two different artifacts. The first is a set of lesson plans<sup>5</sup> and the second is a video<sup>6</sup>. The lesson plans are reflective of my understanding of the SIOP model as well as my attempt to expand on the SIOP model to include a metalingual approach to instruction, a research focus of mine explicated upon previously. The video demonstrates successful management of a short lesson in which all students come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and are at varying levels of English proficiency.

The first lesson plan is a SIOP approach to teaching mathematics to first graders. The focus of the lesson is two-dimensional shapes; specifically, it concentrates on students' abilities to construct and deconstruct two-dimensional shapes, i.e. using multiple triangles to create a square. The lesson is cross-curricular in that it combines storytelling with mathematic instruction. The lesson builds on students' background knowledge by having them first identify shapes they see in everyday life, such as octagonal stop signs or triangular pizza slices. Students are then asked to create different pictures using plastic geometrical shapes. Working collaboratively, they must then develop stories using their newly constructed shapes. For instance, if students put a triangle on top of a square, they might tell a story about someone who lives in a house. After developing them, students will present their stories to their classmates.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix, part C

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix, part D

The lesson concludes by introducing students to the geometrical art of Wassily Kandinsky and having them identify the different shapes in his paintings.

I had the opportunity to actually teach this lesson with a group of first graders in my practicum at J.E. Moss Elementary School. Rather than do whole group presentations, students drew the shapes they constructed on large pieces of chart paper and the class had a gallery walk. The lesson ended up being a success, largely because students felt the knowledge they already held was being valued and used. Students also enjoyed the opportunity to show their finished products to their classmates.

The second lesson is a conceptual piece for a project I completed for a literacy class this spring. The project focused on metalingual approaches to academic literacy for ELL students and the lesson plans were developed as a way to demonstrate the possibility for expanding on the SIOP model to include explicit instruction of academic language through metalingual practices. This particular lesson plan focuses on an eighth grade science classroom and incorporates the SIOP model, metalingual strategies, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods to teach students how to write a lab report.

Rather than focusing on WIDA standards, this lesson uses Tennessee state standards for science and is designed to be accessible<sup>7</sup> to both ELL and non-ELL students. Students have just conducted an experiment in which they built their own electromagnet. For their experiments, students developed individual hypotheses and posed three guiding questions: 1. Does the number

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<sup>7</sup> Drawing on the Universal Design for Learning method, the lesson is designed to provide instruction to the greatest number of students rather than starting with the middle and differentiating for “special populations.”

of times you wrap the wire around the nail affect the strength of the nail? 2. Does the thickness or length of the nail affect the electromagnets strength? 3. Does the thickness of the wire affect the power of the electromagnet? Students have completed the experiment portion of the lesson and are now ready to write lab reports; these reports will explore students' hypotheses, the process of their experiments (what worked/what didn't), answers (if applicable) to their guiding questions, and any revisions they feel they need to make to their original hypotheses, as well as a brief reflection on the process. Because students have not had extensive practice with writing lab reports, they will begin with an interactive writing activity, where they will collaborate with peers to develop rough drafts of their reports. Prior to the lesson, the teacher has worked with students to develop a small lexicon of Socially Constructed Metalanguage (SCM) which will help students in their writing. This lexicon focuses on the academic language features of science which students have previously found confusing (i.e. analyze, hypothesize, interpret). Metalanguage is used to contrast these terms from areas where students may have heard them previously. It also aims to improve student writing by clearly addressing the structure of the lab report (as opposed, say, to a 5 paragraph essay in an English class). The ultimate goal of the lesson is to provide students with content area instruction as well as explicit instruction of specific metalanguage for academic vocabulary.

The final artifact is a video of a short lesson I taught to a group of first graders during my practicum at J.E. Moss this spring. The students featured in the video are all from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds – they speak Spanish, Arabic, Burmese, and Kinyrwanda. The students are all approximately at the same reading level, and the lesson focuses on vocabulary instruction in guided reading. The video demonstrates my ability to successfully implement a lesson which I developed, as well as my classroom management skills. Though this

is a small group, they are in a lower reading group and tend to get off task quickly. Additionally, despite that they are all grouped into the same reading level, these students' overall levels of English proficiency vary. In the lesson, I keep them engaged throughout with a variety of activities and talking points. I also work through the issue of having more proficient students over talk students who are at lower proficiency levels and need more time to consider the material before answering. The result is the students effectively learning their new vocabulary through a combination of SIOP model activities and some CLT-style instruction.

#### Domain 4: Assessment

The realm of assessment is one with which I have always grappled as a teacher. To refer back to my teaching philosophy, I am very much an advocate for educational equity among students. Research confirms that, more often than not, standardized assessments contain cultural and linguistic biases that offer access to some while inhibiting others. For instance, if a standardized science assessment given by the state asks inner city students in Chicago a question about hummingbirds, students may not have the necessary background knowledge to appropriately answer this question. This disparity may not seem like an impactful issue but it can result in some students not meeting benchmarks set by the state. In addition, unbridled over-testing in the United States public school system is taking away months of valuable instruction time as well as putting undue pressure on already overburdened teachers.

By the same token, assessment is clearly a necessary component of the formal education process as it measures student progress. Without testing students periodically, teachers would have no way of identifying how much of their instruction students are understanding. However, our current method of instruction juxtaposed with our current method of assessment certainly

poses a problem: teachers are asked to individualize instruction in order to prepare students for standardized exams. We are led to believe that education is not “one size fits all” – that all students are unique and have unique learning styles with their own strengths and challenges – yet then turn around and demand that students mold themselves to fit the demands of homogenized testing.

A better way of approaching assessment would be to formulate assessment based on what is required from instruction. Christopher Black and Dylan William (1998), authors of *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment*, suggest that “opportunities for pupils to express their understanding should be designed into any piece of teaching, for this will initiate the interaction through which formative assessment aids learning.” In other words, we should consistently be assessing students’ understanding as we teach. These formative assessments should be authentic, or mirroring real-life scenarios (in accord with how we structure our lessons).

To demonstrate my knowledge of designing and implementing effective assessments for English Language Learners, I refer to a project<sup>8</sup> I completed for my Assessment of ELLs class this spring. The project required that I complete a series of assessments with a student from my practicum – a first grade student named Hillary. These assessments spanned different domains, including written and oral proficiency and content area progress.

For the project, I chose a variety of assessments to best illustrate my student’s different academic abilities. I first assessed her oral English abilities using the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM). I compared her results on the SOLOM to her results on her WIDA access scores from the previous year. The access reports ELP in two domains:

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix, part E

Accountability Proficiency and Instructional proficiency; the former monitors student performance annually and the latter is used to determine how students use their language in their current grade level. According to her ACCESS, Hillary's listening skills were her greatest strength: she earned a perfect 6 in the Accountability Proficiency Level (APL) and a 5.9 out of 6 in the Instructional Proficiency Level (IPL). By contrast, her APL for reading was only at a 1.9, yet, for her grade level, this was interpreted as a 5.1 IPL. Her overall IPL was a 4.9, while her overall APL was a 3.1. An average of these two overall scores put Hillary at a level 4 on the WIDA proficiency scale; in other words, she would be considered to have Expanding proficiency across all language domains. The ACCESS score report describes Expanding proficiency as knowing and using "social English and some technical academic language," which accurately described Hillary as a student.

After assessing her oral language abilities, I looked at Hillary's written English proficiency and content area progress. For this, I assessed an ELA writing sample and a cross-curricular, ELA/Science writing sample. In the first sample, Hillary was asked to do a character analysis for a story the students read in class. She first described how a character felt in the beginning of the story, then compared this to how he felt in the end. Overall, she made two spelling errors in this piece, out of a total of 19 words. She also had one grammatical/mechanical error where she forgot to include necessary prepositions. However, she was able to spell advanced level words such as *embarrassed* and *frustrated* correctly. This demonstrated that she was not only on track for a first grade student, but actually managed to correctly produce some more challenging words as well.

In the second sample, Hillary was asked to write about what she feels is an ideal pet. There were two versions of this sample, a rough draft and the final product. This sample – which

was produced earlier in the year than the character analysis – helped to demonstrate Hillary’s growth as a writer. Here, she made multiple spelling and grammatical errors in her first draft. She struggled with end-word consonant sounds (such as using “feet” for “feed” or “can” for “can’t”) and often failed to add “silent” e’s to words (she uses “cag” for “cage”). This contrasted the character analysis, where both Hillary’s overall writing improved and she was able to use more challenging words as well.

This project aided my understanding of how and why we assess students and in what ways the results of these assessments can be interpreted and used. I believe we should tie the domain of assessment to the domain of planning and implementation; though our current system of assessment (at least at the level of state-mandated exams) is somewhat in conflict with how we design instruction, we as teachers certainly have options. We are often told – in so many words – to teach “to the test.” However, I feel that if we are consistently assessing as we teach and then designing coordinating summative assessments that ensure our students truly understand the material we present to them, there is no need to do this. When they reach state-mandated, standardized exams, they will have such a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter that they “one size fits all” nature of the test will not phase them.

#### Domain 5: Professionalism

Perhaps the most important skill teachers can develop is the ability to be professional resources for their students, the parents of their students, and their colleagues. The domain of professionalism binds together all of a teacher’s theoretical knowledge and challenges her to develop a sense of when, where, and how to use this knowledge effectively.

One of my favorite quotes on the power of professionalism comes from Geneva Gay's (2010) *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*:

She routinely begins her classes with declarations to the effect that 'I believe in collaborative teaching and successful learning for all students... We are going to work hard; we are going to have fun doing it; and we are going to do it together. I am very good at what I do, and since you are going to be working in partnership with me, you are going to be good, too. In fact, as my students, you have no choice but to be good.' These declarations are at once a promise and a mandate, an ethic and an action... the message intended for students is 'I have faith in your ability to learn, I care about the quality of your learning, and I commit myself to making sure you will learn.' (p. 47)

This text is so inspiring to me as a teacher that I have it printed and taped to my desk so I can always see it. I believe that with this passage, Gay does something that we very rarely see done in modern society: she legitimizes the practice of teaching. In order to act professionally, we as teachers must believe that we *are* professionals. Too often, we are forced to listen to policy that seems counterproductive; we are subjected to evaluations set up so that we feel we are failing; and we are given the title of "just a teacher." We have to begin to assert that our profession is a legitimate practice – despite what those outside the field of education may say. As I state in my teaching philosophy, we have to advocate for ourselves so that we can in turn advocate for our students and our schools.

Part of this process requires understanding the history of our profession. For teachers of English language learners, it means understanding what challenges bilingual education has faced in the United States and how we have come to the place we are now. To illustrate my

understanding of this topic, I refer to a paper<sup>9</sup> I wrote last fall on laws, court decisions, and policies which have affected ELL students in the United States. This paper covered essentially a timeline of integral policy decisions across several decades, and how these decisions affected the state of bilingual education in public schools. This timelines begins with the fourteenth amendment, which many civil rights advocates point to as a guarantee that United States citizens (defined here as those persons born in the country or having received legal citizenship) receive free, quality education. This amendment has served as the basis for many court decisions affecting bilingual education. One such case was the 1975 *Plyler v. Doe* trial in Texas; the suit was filed in opposition to the fact that state funding was withheld from school districts which educated the students of illegal immigrants. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court and was ultimately decided in a 5-4 vote. The Supreme Court struck down the law saying that, though not citizens of the United States, undocumented immigrants and their children are still people and therefore protected by the Fourteenth Amendment

Another piece of legislation which ultimately served to benefit ELL students in the United States is the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Specifically, Title IV of this act bans discrimination on the basis of race or national origin. Using Title IV, Roy Castañeda took the Raymondville Independent School District to trial in the 1980s on the basis that his children's rights were being violated in what would come to be known as *Castañeda v Pickard*. In the Fifth Circuit, the court ruled in favor of Castañeda and established a three part assessment to hold school systems accountable for meeting the terms of the Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974 in regards to bilingual education. However, these provisions were shaky at best, and ultimately served only to hurt bilingual education programs.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix, part F

Beyond court decisions, policies created at the federal level have had great impact on the state of bilingual education. In 2002, the United States saw the implementation of what has become the most controversial piece of modern education policy. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 – eliminated several previous policy provisions, specifically the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. In *Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners: Research, Theory, Policy, and Practice*, Wayne Wright (2010) explains that, under NCLB, states were required to develop ELL standards and assessments to determine students' English Language Proficiency (ELP). However, as Wright points out, “most of the language proficiency assessments that states and school districts were using when NCLB went into effect did not meet the requirements [put forth by the bill], and thus new statewide ELP standards and assessments had to be developed.” Unfortunately, many states failed to create these by the given deadlines.

The next reauthorization of ESEA was signed into effect in 2015, though it will not be implemented until July of this year. Known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), this policy is aimed at reconciling some of what most people consider to be the failings of NCLB. Specifically, it provides for remedying the issue of systematic over-testing of ELL students with no additional provisions for support. By improving tracking of student progress, increasing accountability for English language learners at the state level, and mandating reporting of long-term ELLs, ESSA, in theory, will offer greater support of English language learner programs in public schools. However, as Kristen Lindahl (2015) of TESOL International points out, several key points of policy are still missing from the new legislation, most notably “that there is still no federal support for the research-backed benefits of bilingual education.”

Understanding these policies allows teachers to be comprehensive resources for their students, their students' parents, and their colleagues. It is of the utmost importance that teachers of CLD students understand the rights of their students – as stated in my teaching philosophy, we must be advocates for our students. However, if ELL teachers are informed about the history of their profession, they will also develop an understanding of how these past decisions affect their practice today.

In addition to understanding the history of ELL education in the United States and considering this a critical aspect of professionalism, teachers should be willing to understand the cultures and linguistic backgrounds of their students and their communities. In this way, ELL teachers can act as resources to their students' parents, who may not be familiar with how the education system works in the United States. Teachers should be willing to make home visits and invite parents into their classrooms.

Teachers of ELL students must also be willing to work collaboratively with teachers of their students' content areas who may not have the professional knowledge needed to appropriately support CLD students. For instance, if a science teacher were to go to an ESL teacher complaining that one of her ELL students consistently failed a certain benchmark, it would be the job of the ESL teacher to effectively explain to this teacher that the student may simply lack the necessary language resources to pass the benchmark at this point in her education. The ESL teacher should also be prepared to provide mainstream content area teachers with tools and strategies to support ELL students outside of the ESL classroom.

The domain of professionalism ultimately serves to assess whether teachers of CLD/ELL students are prepared to be members of their school communities, rather than isolating themselves to just their population of students. It is integral that teachers of ELLs support and

advocate for their students by building partnerships with colleagues and students' parents. Doing so results in better implementation of all previously referenced TESOL domains.

### **Part Three: Reflection**

It is, of course, very simple to write about the practice of teaching; to take research that has already been done and cite it as a means of demonstrating understanding. The true challenge in education is actually being in the classroom. It is doing the planning, implementing it in a classroom, realizing the failures of a plan, and returning to the drawing board. It is taking everything that is learned and acquired in undergraduate and graduate programs and putting those principles into practice successfully.

This fall, I will begin my teaching career as an English as a Second Language teacher at Rocky Fork Middle School. Just outside of Nashville, this is a brand new school – so new, in fact, that the building will not be finished until early July. We will take students from three local middle schools suffering from overcrowding. It is projected that, by the third year we are operating, we will have more than eleven hundred students. An estimated 5-10% of our student population will be ELLs, and I will be the only ESL teacher the first year.

Being a part of a team tasked with opening a new school is at once a thrilling and terrifying concept. Our principal has a wonderful reputation as someone who has gone into failing schools in the past and turned them into level-five schools in a matter of years. He is someone who sees the true value of education and of preparing students for their futures not only in school but in life as well. It is reassuring to work for someone who shares similar beliefs to myself, and I have confidence that he will be supportive of my practice as both a teacher of a special population of students as well as a first year teacher.

As an ESL teacher, my district will not provide me with a curriculum, so I am tasked with designing my own curricular materials. I must also administer the standardized WIDA placement tests to all of my students at the beginning of the year. These are challenges I have

been considering since I accepted the position in February. I know that, conceptually, these will be surmountable; however, as someone who has spent time in classrooms and watched well laid plans go up in smoke, I worry about bridging my conceptual knowledge with actual practice.

The plan I have developed to accomplish this process of connecting relies on every feature I have covered in my capstone. I plan to take approaches to my teaching practice that incorporate my strong dedication to the principle of culturally responsive pedagogy. I have already written a letter to the parents of my students and am working on having it translated into the home languages of these families. I will vocalize to my students that their bi- and multilingual abilities are just that – abilities, not deficits. I will work with my colleagues to ensure that they know how to respond to ELL students in mainstream content classrooms. I will engage with the different cultural communities my students come from, and invite their worlds outside of school into my classroom, to demonstrate the value we should place on culturally diverse learning environments.

I plan to advocate for my students and my profession, by being politically active on a large scale and building in them a confidence in their ability to succeed on a small scale. I will work to ensure academic equity in my classroom by writing lesson plans using strategies – such as the metalingual strategies mentioned in my review of the planning domain – that work to bridge the achievement gap often faced by ELL students. Additionally, I plan to implement authentic formative and summative assessments as often as possible; assessments that align with state and WIDA standards but that also set students up for success, not failure.

It is through these strategies that I aim to take the knowledge I have gained while at Peabody and transition it into my practice. I hope to advance my own education as a professional by continually participating in development that allows me to better serve my

students, including strategies for aiding the language acquisition of students new to the country and ways to successfully plan and implement parent projects (such as a family book backpack). As I transition into my new career, I will use this theoretical knowledge to enrich my instruction and provide the highest quality education for my students that I possibly can.

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APPENDIX

## PART A

### Metalanguage As an Instructional Tool in Bilingual Education: A Literature Review

#### **Introduction**

Compared to their monolingual counterparts, second language learners are arguably far more accustomed to thinking about the language they use. It perhaps becomes a natural (often subconscious) cognitive function to consider how to use language and when to employ the different types language bi- or multilingual speakers have in their metaphorical toolkits. However, recent research suggests that teachers of bilingual students rarely use these metalinguistic practices as resources in the classroom. In a study done by researchers at Vanderbilt and Boston University this year, interviews of approximately twenty, eleventh-grade students – all of whom have first languages other than English – revealed that only a few had ever had a teacher even acknowledge that they had multiple languages (Dobbs et al. 2016). This subtractive approach to linguistic diversity ultimately serves to hurt students over time, as they are made to feel that their second and/or third language is not an asset but a deficit.

It would therefore stand to reason that having students think about the language that they use and generate discourse around it would be beneficial. If what prior research suggests – that bi- and multilingual students already have heightened metalinguistic awareness – is true, then integrating students' awareness into instruction should help further develop their understanding of both their first language (L1) and second language (L2), while capitalizing on their strengths. Furthermore, metalanguage terminology should not comprise a hidden curriculum – teachers should be actively working with second language learners to develop vocabulary and discourse about language. This paper will explore the implications of metalanguage and metalinguistic practices in the classroom through a review of earlier and current research.

## **Part One: Differentiating Between Metalanguage and Metalinguistic Awareness**

Roger Berry (2005) broadly defines metalanguage as “language about language” (p. 3). He argues that the term itself is used too generally, across too many domains, and therefore should be assigned a broad definition. Originally belonging to the field of applied linguistics, the word has been co-opted into the field of education, particularly with regards to “the relationship between language awareness and proficiency in language learners” (p. 3). Berry, attempting to sort out the different ways in which the term has come to be used, makes the distinction between “an entirely distinct metalanguage” (which he argues would not be reflexive) and “a language which contains its own metalanguage” which would be reflexive (p. 6). Berry’s ultimate point in distinguishing these concepts is that, without clear and coherent explanation and definition, no truly distinct metalanguage can exist – it will, eventually, become reflexive, a byproduct of an already existing language.

When differentiating between the ideas of metalanguage and metalinguistic knowledge, Berry claims that the latter is often used as the adjectival form of the former. This is, he argues, a mistake – the adjective form of metalanguage should be metalingual, as metalanguage describes a type of language about language (terminology); metalinguistic, on the other hand, has broader implications and is often used to refer to a general awareness of linguistic functions as a whole, which may include but does not require knowledge of terminology to refer to these linguistic features and their functions.

Therefore, according to Berry, the metalinguistic awareness that so much research suggests second language learners have has nothing to do with metalanguage. “The vast majority of ‘knowledge’ held by learners of language is implicit (especially L1) and has no terminological manifestations” (12). The practice of employing metalanguage terminology as a

way to support thinking about language, then, must be developed through instruction and subsequent activities.

### **Part Two: Push Back Against Metalanguage Terminology as an Instructional Tool**

However, the use of metalanguage terminology in L2 classrooms is not without controversy. Some research has grappled over whether knowledge of metalinguistic concepts and terminology has any practicality in the field of Second Language Acquisition. In a 2011 article for *System*, Guangwei Hu makes the point that, in the recent past, metalanguage and the importance of metalinguistic awareness in the L2 classroom has been marginalized for two reasons: the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), that preferences learner's skill in using language, and the related controversy over metalanguage's usefulness (p. 63). Hu defends metalanguage (which he defines as "terminology used to describe language") and metalinguistic knowledge ("explicit knowledge about language") as vital for L2 instruction (p. 63). In a study of 76 Chinese-English bilingual university students assessed in six target areas of English grammar, Hu found that "students amassed much explicit knowledge of the target structures" and demonstrated "productive knowledge of a large number of metalingual terms" with "a positive relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and facility with metalanguage" (p. 63). Hu also makes the point that metalanguage is most commonly challenged among educators who are not faced with large populations of diverse and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged students – highlighting the socially constructed nature of language as a whole and the significance of metalanguage as a resource for uncovering the so-called "hidden curriculum" of specialized, academic language that is often withheld from L2 learners (p. 63 – 64).

In order to truly facilitate second language learning, metalanguage must be integrated into curriculum and instruction in a "meaningful" way, according to Mary Schleppegrell's 2013

article in *Language Learning*. Simply arming students with linguistic terminology, she argues, does very little to enhance bilingual students' academic success. Schleppegrell focuses on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Michael Halliday's (1978) theory of language as a "social semiotic [which] offers a functional grammar that connects language forms with meaning in contexts of use" (Schleppegrell, p. 155). Based on this theory, using metalanguage terminology in instruction must be "meaning-focused" and highly contextualized in order to truly benefit student learning.

### **Part Three: Significance of Teaching Metalanguage Terminology in Instruction of Bilingual Students**

Instruction that makes use of metalanguage terminology to foster metalinguistic skills has a long tradition in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teaching and has only recently begun to appear in the instructional literature focused on teaching English Learners in U.S. domestic contexts. For instance, Schleppegrell's 2013 article outlines and analyzes data from a "3-year design-based project to develop and study an intervention that uses SFL metalanguage to support the achievement of curricular goals in elementary ELA in classrooms with English language learners (ELLs)" in U.S. schools (p. 157). Instruction was designed to teach grammatical mood by linking it to language function, with four functions identified: "offer, statement, question, and command" (p. 157). The goal was for students to recognize that mood shifts can change the function of language. This concept of language as "multifunctional" is then transferred into literature instruction where language is analyzed as a "system of transitivity, constructing experience into a set of process types" (p. 161). This concept of language as shaping the human experience was observed as part of the process of character analysis in a second grade classroom; "Analysis of classroom interaction supported by the SFL metalanguage has revealed many

instances where misunderstandings about word meaning surface in the context of the functional labeling” (p. 162).

The results of Schleppergrell’s study determined that the specific metalanguage – systemic functional linguistic metalanguage – enhanced elementary grade bilingual students’ abilities to take on challenging ELA tasks. It allowed students to differentiate different language patterns and variances in language so they could in turn make carefully considered linguistic decisions about their own language. Use of SFL metalanguage also boosted reading comprehension and supported writing skills in L2 learners. Ultimately, Schleppergrell argues that metalanguage should be considered a vital aspect of instruction for students whose primary language is not the one being taught in schools – these students are not only in school to learn the dominant language, but they are also there to learn the content of different subject areas as well as their new language.

Another study published in 2014 also tested the concept of Systemic Functional Linguistics as a tool for instruction of academic language in literacy for Spanish-English bilingual elementary school students. This longitudinal analysis by Meg Gebhard, I-An Chen, and Lynne Britton examined the ability of students to produce discourse as well as identify linguistic terminology specific to science and history content areas. Data was collected from standardized assessment results and student writing samples across one school year.

Like Schleppergrell’s study, Gebhard et al. draw on the work of Michael Halliday’s concept of SFL, arguing that the use of metalanguage encourages meaning making in specific frameworks. Given that language learning requires a continuous flow from perception to production, Gebhard et al. argue that “ideational metafunction represents experience; the

interpersonal metafunction enacts self/other dynamics; and the textual metafunction manages the flow of information to make discourse coherent” (p. 107).

This particular study drew on samples of student work from the school where the third author for the paper, Lynne Britton, taught ESL at the time – an elementary school with a highly diverse student population. Half of the students identified as Latino, twenty-five percent as white, twenty percent as African American, and five percent as Asian; seventy percent of the student body was eligible for the free and reduced meal program. Approximately twenty five percent of students were receiving services for and had been identified as English language learners. Three focal students were randomly selected for the study, all of whom were in third grade at the time the project began in the spring of 2010. Student work was analyzed in two specific content areas, history and science, with specific attention to students’ abilities to generate and deconstruct abstract meanings of new terminology. For example, in the context of history, students were introduced to new lexical items, which they defined through graphic organizers; the students relied on their classmates for feedback on their definitions as part of the meaning-making process. However, to further this practice, students were later asked to reconstruct the new terminology in their own words in their writing. This speaks to the idea that metalanguage terminology as an instructional tool must not stop at memorization, but should carry through from the reception of new terms to students being able to reproduce the language in a way that demonstrates their understanding.

Similar to the Schleppergrell study, Gebhard et al. demonstrated that SFL-inspired instruction can successfully facilitate the construction of meanings for new terms for bilingual learners. The integration of metalanguage into instruction “appears to have provided students with concrete tools for deconstructing and constructing disciplinary texts in ways that supported

their literacy development” (p. 112). Perhaps most significantly, the study revealed that – while students made significant progress in the construction of meaning in specific content area literacy – the use of metalanguage also played a role in “general language proficiency and reading comprehension” (p. 112). In other words, while metalanguage serves as a functional tool for helping bilingual learners develop content-specific language in a way that carries through from perception to production, it also benefits their overall literacy abilities in their L2 as well.

Terminology drawn from Systemic Functional Linguistics is not the only type of metalanguage that has proven to enrich L2 learning for bilingual students. In 2011, Graeme Couper studied the effects of critical listening (CL) and socially constructed metalanguage (SCM) on pronunciation teaching for adult ELs. Couper describes these concepts as:

SCM is a term proposed for metalanguage developed by students working together with the teacher using already understood first language (L1) concepts to help in the formation of target language phonological concepts. CL is based on listening and contrasting to learn phonological categories and their boundaries (p. 159).

Contrasting the previously cited studies, Couper analyzed adult English language learners with high proficiency in spoken English. The specific focus of his study was to examine the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching when combined with CL and SCM, with particular attention to “epenthesis,” or the addition of vowel sounds – often the schwa – unnecessarily at the ends of words.

Couper studied four groups of adults with similar levels of proficiency (all considered high intermediate). The groups were divided based on which of the concepts were integrated into their pronunciation instruction: the control group, therefore, was SCM-/CL- (with the “-“ denoting absence); one group tested for SCM but controlled for CL (SCM+/CL-); a third group

tested for CL but controlled for SCM (SCM-/CL+); and a final group tested for both (SCM+/CL+).

For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the results of Couper's control group and his test groups for SCM. The main feature of the SCM+ groups was the focus on using students' L1 knowledge to enhance their abilities in the L2. The overarching idea was to inform students in an explicit way how their production of English sounded to native speakers of the language. Conversely, the SCM- groups focused on the very technical jargon on language, such as English's consonant-vowel (CV) pattern. Feedback was also an integral part for both conditions: for SCM-, students were told to avoid adding additional syllables, whereas SCM+ students were given less specialized feedback, such as to make certain sounds shorter or faster (p. 164).

A statistical analysis of the results of several assessments on the four groups revealed that metalanguage serves as an effective tool in instruction of new terms and ideas. In fact, in the test groups where CL was used but SCM was not, comprehension by learners was not as comprehensive as when CL was tested with SCM – students' perceptive abilities improved but their productive skills did not. Metalanguage proved vital in improving student performance, particularly given that the specific type of metalanguage used (SCM) provided for the social nature of language as a whole; it therefore offered a "cross-cultural" approach to instruction which benefited students in using both their L1 and L2 knowledge (p. 175).

The significance of metalanguage as a tool for L2 acquisition is particularly reflected in the writing of bilingual students. Writing as a practice requires knowledge of specific features and functions. For second language learners writing in English, metalanguage can serve to communicate the specialized knowledge necessary for successful writing practice. Mary

Macken-Horarik and Wendy Morgan highlight this in their 2011 article on using metalanguage as a tool to teach L2 learners strategies for voicing in their writing.

Again pulling from Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics approach, Macken-Horarik and Morgan focus their paper on the work of secondary students in a literary theory class. Student writing is analyzed for how students apply voicing strategies in their own writing based on influences from post-structuralism. The authors make a point of defining the necessity of metalanguage in the L2 classroom as a means of making academic language learning accessible for all students:

This kind of praxis is crucial to the development of a metalanguage adequate to school English. If we have a metalanguage for describing the meanings students can learn to make in conceptually and linguistically challenging contexts, we are in a better position to scaffold these, and thus enable a 'democratic cultivation of a linguistic habitus' in English (Maton, 2006). This is one long-term goal of our project – to enable teachers of school English to develop students' capacities for voicing more explicitly through a metalanguage that is honed through careful attention to students' meaning making (p. 135).

Though their paper ultimately details the implications of applying the theory of post-structuralism in student writing, the authors reveal that – through carefully constructed and explicitly taught metalanguage – students were able to develop voicing strategies and apply them. Thus, metalanguage opens the door for application of more complex strategies and concepts in writing than may otherwise be available to L2 learners in classroom settings where "language about language" is not prioritized.

## **Conclusions and Further Discussion**

Recently, metalanguage and the importance of metalinguistic awareness in the L2 classroom has become a somewhat marginalized idea, particularly with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) becoming a prominent pedagogical method for second language practice (Hu, p. 63). However, based on my understanding of the literature, this may be a mistake. Given that a major facet of CLT is encouraging students to think about both their language and the processes by which they learn that language, it seems metalanguage would coincide perfectly with communicative practice. Given the clear benefits of using metalanguage and recognizing bilingual learner's metalinguistic awareness, these ideas continue to be necessary components of the L2 classroom, and it seems logical that they could be used in conjunction with practices like CLT.

However, analyzing literature covering the integration of metalanguage into L2 teaching practice also raises a question of how and why the "hidden curriculum" exists. I think it speaks to a need for professionals in the field to develop a method of differentiation between academic language that is necessary, applicable, and accessible from the "technical" jargon which may serve to incapacitate second language learners.

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## PART B

## Community Literacies Project

Pel Doski is an American-raised Kurd born in Guam.

Originally from Kurdistan – a cultural region that spans across parts of Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran – Pel’s family was forced to leave in the late 1990s prior to the beginning of the Kurdish civil war. Pel’s father, at the time a high-ranking government official, was given priority and moved from the region to the United States by the government. However, on their way to the U.S., they were forced to stop in Guam so that Pel’s mother could give birth. The family then stayed on the island for six months, before finally arriving in New York. In 2002, they relocated to Nashville, which, at the time, was known as “Little Kurdistan” for the large population of Kurdish immigrants and refugees located here.

“I often feel as though I am too American for Kurdistan and too Kurdish for America.” Pel confesses. “Americans have a very negative perception of the Middle East, but I don’t necessarily think it is a correct perception. They have a misconception about Kurdistan, especially, and often think it is just part of Iraq. Really, the differences between Kurdistan and Iraq are huge. Our culture is different, the way we practice religion is different. In Kurdistan, different religions coexist peacefully. Your neighbors might be Christian, Muslim, Jewish... it’s a huge melting pot of different religions.”

Pel says she especially appreciates how many Kurdish traditions have been untainted by modern society and culture. The costumes and dances are the same as they have been for centuries, even when practiced by Kurdish immigrants and refugees in America. However, she loves the way Americans say “please” and “thank you,” and how they hold the door open for one another.

“I came to realize that there isn’t even a word for ‘please’ in my native language, which is kind of funny.”

As of 2016, the Nashville is home to more than 15,000 Kurds (Tennessee Kurdish Community Council, 2016). Though there were several waves of Kurdish immigrants to the area, the first arrived in the 1970s, many fleeing for their lives from an oppressive government regime. The vast majority of Kurds in Nashville come from the part of the region located in Iraq; many fled their homes in the late 1980s, following Saddam Hussein’s Al-Anfal campaign which resulted in the “systematic and deliberate murder of at least 50,000 and possibly as many as 100,000 Kurds” (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Nashville – with its low cost of living and reputation for friendly neighbors and a safe community – has attracted more than 50,000 immigrants and refugees in the past twenty years (Piven, 2012).

Though the immigrant population is spread across the city, a great majority of foreign-born or foreign-descended Nashvillians have settled along what is known as the Nolensville corridor. The main road through this area is Nolensville Pike, a highway which “helps tell the tale of Nashville's vibrant immigrant community, with the businesses acting as gathering places, employment centers and economic drivers as the region continues to develop” (Alfs, 2014). According to the Mayor’s Office of New Americans (2016), nearly twelve percent of the city’s population is foreign-born, and thirty percent of students attending Metro Nashville Schools have a first language other than English.

Given that the Kurdish community of Nashville is the largest in the United States, a physical location in the Nolensville Pike area has become known as “Little Kurdistan.” Situated between Elysian Fields Court and Elysian Fields Road, Monica Campbell of Public Radio

International (2014) describes Little Kurdistan as looking “like a drab strip mall... But it’s far from that.”

The heart of Little Kurdistan is the mosque, the Salahadeen Center of Nashville. It is also the physical center of the neighborhood. This warehouse-turned-worship-center serves more than 10,000 families from both Metro and surrounding areas (“SCN History,” 2014).

Surrounding the mosque are several shops, including the Azadi Market and Bakery, which sells Halal meats and fresh tandoor breads. Next door to Azadi is the Newroz Market. Newroz is primarily a purveyor of international foods, with a focus on those found in the Kurdish region. However, tucked inside the market is a jewelry shop. In her 2014 tour of Little Kurdistan, PRI’s Monica Campbell spoke with Ibrahim Tahir, who sells the jewelry. He told her that Kurds in Nashville prefer to buy gold because it feels safer than putting their money in banks.

Kurdish immigrants are seemingly justified in their fear of losing their money. In a 2010 report for the *Kurdish Herald*, Hero Karimi offered the following analysis of the economic features of the Kurdish community:

Though many Kurds used to have professional jobs at home, they have had to adjust to their new situation and start off in low-paid and unwanted jobs... Despite an undesirable career start and other difficulties, most Kurds are often able to overcome these obstacles and establish their own successful businesses... [Kurds] in America are one of the immigrant groups that are consequently known for a successful integration and contribution to the American society.

One of the most obvious obstacles for foreign-born citizens in any community is learning the dominant language of their new society. In the case of immigrants in Nashville, learning English is an imperative aspect of their integration into their new homes. Kurdish students in

Metro Nashville classrooms bring a wealth of transnational practices. Many – like Pel Doski – are still connected with their homeland in some way. Even those who are young enough that they were born in the United States to immigrant parents often have connections to family members they left behind in Kurdistan. Including literature from these students' community offers an opportunity for students to relate to academic content. As a teacher, I want to ensure that I am embracing the multiple identities my students have, and I believe an important aspect of this is recognizing what they see, hear, experience, and read in their communities everyday. From the perspective of transnational practice theory, “[the children of migrants] may not participate directly but are integrally involved with the flow of economic resources, ideas, images, and contact with people from far away” (Lam & Warriner, 2012, p.192).

To integrate my students' cultural backgrounds into the classroom, I plan to use their community literacy practices. One example of using transnational practices in the classroom may be a unit involving members of the Kurdish community in the classroom. To begin a unit on writing, for example, I may show students photos of different, uniquely Kurdish locations in Nashville. These would include the Salahadeen Center, Newroz and Azadi markets, and the Baklava Café (also on Nolensville Pike though not in the area of “Little Kurdistan”). I would also show examples of literacy targeted to the Kurdish community in Nashville, such as a poster celebrating the holidays of Ramadan and Eid. I would then invite members of the community, like the jeweler from Newroz Market or a baker from Azadi, into the classroom to speak to my students. Finally, I would introduce students to online resources for the Kurdish community, such as the Tennessee Kurdish Community Council or Boombinere (a website designed specifically for Nashville Kurds to ship items back to Kurdistan).

Once I had introduced the Kurdish culture, members of the community, and the community literacy practices into the classroom, I would have students write a narrative about their own experience living within the Kurdish population in Nashville and the importance of seeing their first language within their community. This would accomplish part of W.1-2.3 of the Tennessee ELL writing standards for grades 1-2, which involves having students write a range of different text types. I may also tie in the ELL K-3 social studies standards and have students include recognition of the individuals from their community who we brought into the classroom. This project would, I think, make an interesting cross-curricular unit where we spend several weeks as a class examining different communities and their literacy practices in a way that engages students and informs them of their peers' cultural backgrounds. The goal would be for students to see these literacy practices and the presence of literature unique to their communities as positive aspects of their own identity as it relates to their society.

As educators, I think an idea we often overlook is an awareness of our *own* culture and how this is projected onto our students. Teacher identity is vastly important, particularly today, when so many of our students come to us from such diverse backgrounds. We must be willing to question the society in which we were raised and whether our own practices help or hurt our students. One way this concept may be leveraged in a school setting could be through discourse that we may consider uncomfortable. In a diverse high school classroom including students of Kurdish heritage, for instance, a teacher might have his or her students examine the poster celebrating Ramadan and Eid and then look at the most recent draft of Tennessee history textbooks, which have had any mention of Islam or the "Islamic World" stricken from them. This could develop into a conversation between students from diverse backgrounds about culture and identity, and how literacy practices of the dominate culture affect members of communities

from subordinated groups. As Jim Cummins (2000) explains in *Language, Power and Pedagogy*:

Change requires that educators become aware of, and be willing to challenge, the power relations operating in the wider society and in the school as a reflection of that society.

When they fail to problematize their own identities and the structure within which they operate, educators inadvertently reinforce the operation of coercive relations of power. (p. 252)

Requiring that teachers challenge their own identities and become well-informed on the cultural backgrounds of their students is a progressive way of ensuring that classrooms are equitable and conducive to learning for all students.

In conclusion, we should consider it a great gift to live in a city like Nashville, where examples and artifacts of community literacies are so readily available to us. Bridging the divide between what students bring into a classroom and what knowledge it is determined they should leave the classroom with can be accomplished through culturally responsive pedagogy. As Geneva Gay (2010) stresses, “teachers must be *involved* in students' lives... and teach knowledge and skills students need to negotiate in the society that currently exists, and to construct a better one for the future” (p. 52). Allowing students to utilize information from their own, diverse communities is not only pedagogically advantageous, but a hallmark of the teacher who truly cares about the many identities of his or her students.

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PART C

\*see attached PDF documents

PART D

\*See attached video

## PART E

### Analysis Project

#### Part 1

For my analysis, I observed Hillary, a first grade ELL student. Hillary is seven years old and attends J.E. Moss Elementary School. Hillary's parents are from Guatemala and Honduras but she was born in the United States. Spanish is the only language spoken at home, but Hillary and her sister both speak English at school. Hillary is bright for her age and picks up new concepts quickly. Her English learning is supplemented by her teacher, who recognizes her abilities. For instance, while the other students are working on writing simple sentences, Hillary's teacher provides her with new words and structures she can use to make her sentences more complex. When I talked to Hillary to establish her English Language Proficiency (ELP), she told me that her favorite subject in school is math. According to her ACCESS, Hillary is currently at a level 4 proficiency level, or what WIDA refers to as "Expanding." Through observing Hillary, I hope to gain a better understanding of how to support high achieving English language learners in heterogeneous classroom settings. In order to do this, I used several measures to assess her different types of language proficiency.

I observed and interacted with Hillary in her first grade classroom at J.E. Moss. JEMES serves grades Pre-K – 4 and is part of the Antioch cluster. The school has a large population of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students who speak over 20 languages. In fact, 85% of students enrolled at JEMES are considered minority students, and 63% of the population identify as Hispanic. In Hillary's class, all 18 students are second language learners: 16 students speak Spanish as their first language, one student speaks Kinyarwanda, and one student understands but cannot speak Burmese. The school offers a wealth of support for CLD students,

particularly in the areas of language learning and mathematics tutoring. In the class where I observed Hillary, students are encouraged to use their first language in order to support their English education. Some students are pulled during ELA time for additional English language tutoring. Classroom instruction is developed around the SIOP model and all lessons include both content and language objectives.

To further analyze the school's attention to the diverse population at JEMES, I used Herrera, Cabral, and Murry's (2013) rubric for assessing sociocultural environment (p. 122 – 124). Through my observations in the past months, I found that JEMES meets the criteria for the majority of the factors, particularly those of culture, language, and families/community. The school demonstrates respect for and attention to cultural and linguistic diversity through posting signs and sending home information to families in multiple languages. Parents play a large role in the school environment – I have yet to have been at the school when I didn't see at least one family eating lunch with their student.

Academically, the teachers I have observed have a definite understanding of the importance of L1 to success in both learning English and content area knowledge, but I have seen few instances of teachers doing what Herrera et al. describe as “articulat[ing] the relationships between L1 and L2 learning” (p. 123). I have occasionally seen teachers content English vocabulary words to Spanish words, but this alienates those students who do not speak Spanish as their first language. I have yet to observe any instances of teachers allowing students to demonstrate connections (and, by extension, their own background knowledge) between their L1 and L2.

## Part 2

Given that she was born here, Hillary has only attended schools in the United States, so she has not had any formal education outside of the country. Metro Nashville's intake process requires that students submit a home language survey at the beginning of each year. This survey asks a variety of questions, but only the first three require answers:

1. What is the first language this child learned to speak?
2. What language does this child speak most often outside of school?
3. What language(s) do people usually speak in this child's home? ("Home Language Survey K-12")

Parents/guardians are not required to answer the subsequent 8 questions. If a student were to respond to the first three questions with "English," they would not be recommended for EL services. In Hillary's case, the answers to these first three questions were all "Spanish." She is therefore qualified for EL services.

When a student is identified as potentially needing English language services, she/he must go with their parents to the Metro EL Office. Here, students are assessed using the WIDA ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT). This assessment determines ELP and what types of services students will need once they begin school. It is likely Hillary took the W-APT before starting kindergarten, though I do not have access to these scores.

Despite that all students must submit the home language survey, it is not required that they receive special services. Parents can refuse these services for their children by requesting a waiver. However, "[parents] are always given the option of re-entering their child into the EL Program," even after they have refused ("The Identification Process"). Additionally, regardless of whether students are ultimately placed in ESL services, they will "have to continue to take the

state mandated exam each year until s/he shows proficiency in English” (“The Identification Process”).

On December 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA is a reauthorization of President Bush’s 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA), which was a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“The Every Student Succeeds Act,” p. 1). ESSA attempts to reconfigure the parts of the NCLBA that many people considered detrimental to the American public education system. Of particular interest (and debate) are the new provisions and mandates for bilingual education.

ESSA addresses bilingual education in several ways. First and foremost, under the new act, states will have to demonstrate that they have “adopted standards for English-language proficiency for English learners that are aligned with the state’s academic standards” (“The Every Student Succeeds Act,” p. 2). Previously many states failed to implement standards for EL students. In addition to the aligned standards, ESSA mandates English proficiency and math assessments for all English language learners. This is not particularly new or noteworthy except for the footnote which stipulates that students’ ELP assessments may be administered in the students’ home languages for up to five years. This is important given that states like Tennessee, which is still considered “English only” as far as assessment goes, will have to provide the option of native language testing for students.

However, as Corey Mitchell (2016) of *Education Week* points out, ESSA has its shortcomings. Most notably, it “remains silent in addressing the value of bilingualism and biliteracy;” furthermore, the act fails to make the continued success of EL students a priority. For a student like Hillary, this could have serious implications – while the act does do more to address English Language Learners and bilingualism as a whole, it seems to miss the mark on

making this practice (of bilingualism) the norm not only for EL students but more mainstream, native English speakers as well.

### **Part 3**

To determine Hillary's English Language Proficiency (ELP), I used her kindergarten ACCESS scores and compared them to the results from a preliminary SOLOM assessment. The access reports ELP in two domains: Accountability Proficiency and Instructional proficiency; the former monitors student performance annually and the latter is used to determine how students use their language in their current grade level. According to her ACCESS, Hillary's listening skills are her greatest strength: she earned a perfect 6 in the Accountability Proficiency Level (APL) and a 5.9 out of 6 in the Instructional Proficiency Level (IPL). By contrast, her APL for reading was only at a 1.9, yet, for her grade level, this was interpreted as a 5.1 IPL. Her overall IPL was a 4.9, while her overall APL was a 3.1. An average of these two overall scores puts Hillary at a level 4 on the WIDA proficiency scale; in other words, she would be considered to have Expanding proficiency across all language domains. The ACCESS score report describes Expanding proficiency as knowing and using "social English and some technical academic language," which I think accurately illustrates Hillary as a student.

The ACCESS is reported as having high reliability – for kindergarten, the assessment's reliability coefficient falls at .972. Across all grade levels, it remains consistently above a .90, with the lowest being a .928. WIDA supports this data with the assertion that "scoring scales are designed to be as straightforward as possible for use in operational scoring, with the goal of maximizing rater reliability" ("Interpretive Guide," p. 23). In other words, because ACCESS rubrics are objective, reliability is increased.

The ACCESS is also seen as a valid form of assessment. The Annual Technical Report (2010) provides a detailed look at the different type of validity the assessment adheres to; these

include the assessment's purpose, its relation to standards, and its content validity. As the Technical Report states, the purpose of the assessment is to determine students' levels of English language proficiency. The report also outlines the five major standards the ACCESS is aligned with: English for social/instructional, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies purposes. Given these standards, a panel of 75 participants (primarily teachers) was asked to rate the ACCESS on a scale of 1-4 (in ascending order of validity) how well they felt that the assessment achieved its goal of placing students at their appropriate ELP. Across all tested areas (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and all cuts (levels of proficiency), scores were consistently >3 or nearing 3; the lowest scores were for higher cuts and typically fell above a 2.80. Furthermore, a study into content validity revealed that the ACCESS does a good job of complementarily assessing the four domains of language. Given this information, it appears the assessment has both high reliability and validity.

For the SOLOM, I felt Hillary fell somewhere between a 4 and a 5 overall, though she was certainly leaning towards being a 5. Her comprehension reflects her ACCESS scores in that she rarely struggles to follow along or understand what is being said. She comprehends instructions given to her without the need for clarification. Her fluency is occasionally interrupted when she trips over verb conjugations or sentence structures, but she is more than capable of self-correction. As mentioned above, she uses grade-level appropriate vocabulary and is often able to work at a higher level than her peers when speaking or writing. She has occasional mechanical and grammatical errors, but nothing that obscures the meaning of what she is attempting to say. The only area where I felt Hillary needs improvement was in her pronunciation, simply because she does have a very slight accent. Her speech is always intelligible, but she sometimes mispronounces words or pronounces English words with a

Spanish accent. In our first interview, I ask her about her favorite foods and she responds that she likes spaghetti, but accents both syllables of the word, rather than just the latter. Overall, however, my observation of her proficiency seemed in line with the results of her ACCESS scores – she is able to use both social and academic language comfortably, and her acquisition of the latter is rarely hindered.

While I question the reliability and validity of the SOLOM for many reasons, I worry that with this particular assessment, student reliability may not have been very high. Despite using multiple prompts and trying to elicit more feedback in a variety of ways, I found it difficult to get Hillary to speak. She does not have any difficulty comprehending and we were sitting in a hallway alone, so she was not distracted. It may simply have been that, given this was our first interview, she felt nervous; in the future, I hope to have more feedback to analyze.

#### **Part 4**

As a first grader, Hillary receives content instruction in all areas from the same teacher, except for in math. First grade math instruction is differentiated for higher and lower learners, so she is sent to another classroom with a different teacher during this time. Given that she has been identified as an English Language Learner, I thought it would be most valuable and relevant to analyze her performance in English Language Arts.

Hillary participates in guided reading every morning during ELA time. In total, students spend about an hour at different centers during this time. Part of this includes guided reading with either the classroom teacher or the ELL aide. Because she has been identified as an ELL student and requires services, Hillary receives additional support from the ELL aide during this time. The aide often conducts formal assessments of Hillary's reading comprehension through the use of running records, which will be discussed further later in this analysis.

Hillary's teacher uses a leveled text model for guided reading. Students are formally assessed at the beginning of the year and assigned a reading level; levels begin at A and students progress through the alphabet, with texts becoming gradually more difficult with each subsequent letter. Levels B-I are typically seen as being kindergarten/first grade texts. As of the beginning of April, Hillary has been reading J level books, putting her in the second grade category. This means that, as a reader, Hillary is above grade level. This is particularly interesting considering that, when she entered first grade, she was reading on a C level – technically barely at grade level.

To further assess her reading, I looked at several running records kept by Hillary's teacher and the ELL aide. These records analyzed Hillary's reading progress over a period of several months and commented on areas where she both excelled and needed additional support. In the first record, Hillary's progress was charted from August to November. In this time, she moved from C level texts to F level texts. Her running record puts her in the instructional level for both, with 95% accuracy in her C level reading and 93% accuracy in her F level reading. However, her teacher notes for both that Hillary needs to work on her fluency.

In another running record, Hillary was asked to do an oral reading of the story "Anna's New Glasses." In this reading, Hillary demonstrated 93% accuracy across all measures. She had 3 visual errors: rather than "new," she said "now;" rather than "shoes," she said "shows;" and instead of "Anna," she said "Ann." This last error was also marked as a meaning error, as it demonstrates that Hillary missed a key component of the story (the name of the title character).

Overall, across all running records analyzed, Hillary demonstrated strong comprehension. Given that she has now progressed to J level texts, it appears that she continues to grow in her reading abilities.

Another area of ELA content that I wanted to analyze was Hillary's writing abilities. For this, I assessed an ELA writing sample and a cross-curricular, ELA/Science writing sample. In the first sample, Hillary has been asked to do a character analysis for a story the students read in class. She first describes how a character feels in the beginning of the story, then compares this to how he feels in the end. Overall, she made two spelling errors in this piece, out of a total of 19 words. She also had one grammatical/mechanical error where she forgot to include necessary prepositions. However, she was able to spell advanced level words such as *embarrassed* and *frustrated* correctly. This demonstrates that she is not only on track for a first grade student, but actually managed to correctly produce some more challenging words as well.

In the second sample, Hillary has been asked to write about what she feels is an ideal pet. There are two versions of this sample, a rough draft and the final product. This sample – which was produced earlier in the year than the character analysis – helps to demonstrate Hillary's growth as a writer. Here, she makes multiple spelling and grammatical errors in her first draft. She struggles with end-word consonant sounds (such as using "feet" for "feed" or "can" for "can't") and often fails to add "silent" e's to words (she uses "cag" for "cage"). This contrasts the character analysis, where not only is Hillary's overall writing improved, but she is able to use more challenging words as well.

### **Part Five**

After conducting this analysis on Hillary, I think the best thing for her both instructionally and assessment-wise will be to ensure that she is receiving the proper supports for a student who demonstrates such rapid growth. Often in class, I have observed that Hillary finished her work before her peers. When this happens, she is either asked to act as a peer tutor to her classmates or told she may spend the remainder of the time coloring.

I feel that this is failing Hillary in a sense. I believe these moments should be taken as an opportunity to further her academic growth; instead, content is being replaced with mundane tasks that may bore or frustrate Hillary. Though she is quick to help her peers, she is not being in any way academically stimulated by this work.

Therefore, my first instructional recommendation is to provide Hillary with some enrichment during these times when she is able to finish her work more quickly than her peers. Additional activities or extensions of the activity at hand could help her to further excel. She is clearly very bright and enjoys her education, so it is my belief that we as teachers fail her if we do not capitalize on this opportunity. An example that comes to mind is when students were recently asked to write sentences about animals in certain habitats. The minimum requirement was three sentences. Hillary finished this fairly quickly and was then told she could color. What I would have liked to see happen instead would be for Hillary to be provided with a list of more descriptive, expressive words and find ways to add these in to her sentences about the animal she chose. Hillary is already a successful writer, so we should provide her with the tools to meet her full potential.

For an assessment plan, I would like to see Hillary eventually test out of needing ELL services and potentially be screened to receive services for giftedness. As a student who has come to the United States not knowing the language, she is on track to become literate in both English and Spanish. Her rapid growth in the classroom, I believe, indicates that she may have great academic potential and could benefit from a gifted program. Therefore, I would like to develop daily, weekly, and quarterly measures of assessing Hillary to ensure that she stays on her current path.

For daily assessments, I think the continued use of running records will work well for her development in ELA. These provide very clear evidence of where Hillary is succeeding and where she is in need of additional supports. They are also a good measure of when Hillary is ready to “graduate,” as it were, to the next level in her guided reading texts. There is also time built in to each day for these assessments to occur, especially given that Hillary has the added help of her ELL aide who can assist with these.

For weekly assessments, I would like to see Hillary produce some form of written sample that can be analyzed. For being in first grade, her writing is very good but there are – of course – areas where she can improve. I think giving Hillary opportunities to write about both content area materials and her own interests may serve her well. A two-way journal might be the best route for this form of assessment. Hillary would be given time and a prompt each day and then turn her journal in each week. The teacher could provide some direct feedback for very specific elements in need of correction, then keep notes for herself on where to offer additional supports for Hillary in class. This will also help to prepare Hillary for state mandated assessments, where writing is becoming a much bigger part of how students are assessed under common core.

Finally, for quarterly assessments, I feel the best route would be a mix of authentic assessment and something more formal and standardized. For the authentic assessment, I think that if the journal were implemented, combining this with Hillary’s running record and perhaps writing samples from other content areas may provide a nice portfolio; this could be assessed for growth across several months. For the more formal assessment, it could be beneficial to provide Hillary with a mock version of a state writing assessment. This would allow the teacher to better

prepare Hillary for something she will eventually have to take and provide a very clear idea of where Hillary stills requires support.

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## PART F

### An Analysis of Political, Legal, and Judicial Implications for ELL Education

#### **Introduction**

Politicians in the United States often like to discuss the implications of immigration policy for the nation. This is not a new concept, although rhetoric surrounding the issue in the current presidential election has reached a fever pitch. Historically, the United States has been a racially and ethnically diverse country, particularly given the many waves of immigration (some voluntary, some forced) seen across several centuries. Prior to 1882, the country maintained an Open Door Policy on immigration, making it relatively simple for foreign citizens to migrate to the U.S.

This idea – that the nation is so ethnically and racially diverse – has propelled the platforms of both major parties in United States politics. Those who uphold traditionally conservative values argue that immigration hurts our economy and jeopardizes our sense of nationalism. On the other side, more liberal constituents maintain that immigration actually *helps* the U.S. economy and that it is unfair to force out children who were either born in the States or had no voice when they were moved here. Both sides base their assumptions, arguments, and reasoning on this idea that the United States is overwhelmingly diverse, continues to become more diverse, and the immigration is always steadily rising.

However, the idea that propels this rhetoric may not be grounded in fact. According to a Pew Research study from 2013, the United States is not one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world; the Harvard Institute of Economic research published a paper in 2002 with similar findings on ethnic diversity. Both studies reveal that the U.S. falls somewhere in the middle in terms of diversity, and Rich Moran (2013) of the Pew Research Center states that

“Canada and Mexico are more diverse than the [United States].” And despite claims that we are constantly being flooded with migrants, a study published by the Migration Policy Institute in 2014 established that we have actually seen a fairly consistent decrease in immigration since 1991.

Given that this research invalidates much of the rhetoric used by today’s politicians, why is immigration such a hot button issue? More importantly, how are the opinions on immigrants held by those in power negatively reflected back into the school system?

### **Overview of Federal Policy and Key Judicial Decisions for ELL Education**

As previously mentioned, one commonly held belief in the United States is that immigration is detrimental to our sense of nationalism. And for many people, national identity, culture, and language are all wrapped up in the same package. We have all heard stories of immigrants being told “you’re in America now, learn English.” While it is one thing for everyday citizens to make bigoted remarks such as these, it is entirely a different matter when elected officials use their power to make life more difficult for immigrants, as – all too often – those most harmed by these policies are school-aged children.

Arguably the first piece of legislation ever passed that has any bearing on ELL education was the Fourteenth Amendment. This amendment to the Constitution asserts that any person born in the United States is a citizen of this country and therefore afforded all the rights associated with citizenship. The Fourteenth Amendment also established due process, or the idea that all people must be afforded the same legal rights. This has been the basis for several court decisions protecting the rights of children of undocumented immigrants, such as *Plyler v. Doe*, which will be discussed later in this analysis.

Another piece of legislation which ultimately served to benefit ELL students in the United States is the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Specifically, Title IV of this act bans discrimination on the basis of race or national origin. Using Title IV, Roy Castañeda took the Raymondville Independent School District to trial in the 1980s on the basis that his children's rights were being violated. Castañeda argued that his daughters were being treated unfairly by their teachers because of their ethnicity, a practice that is prohibited by Title IV. He further accused RISD of failure to provide his children with bilingual education programs. Initially, the district court ruled in favor of RISD, but Castañeda appealed the decision. In the Fifth Circuit, the court ruled in favor of Castañeda and established a three part assessment to hold school systems accountable for meeting the terms of the Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974 in regards to bilingual education. However, these provisions were shaky at best, and ultimately served only to hurt bilingual education programs.

An important intersection between immigration law and judicial decisions affecting English language learners occurred in the early 1980s with the *Plyler v. Doe* case. In 1975, Texas law was revised in a way that allowed state funding to be withheld from school districts that educated the children of illegal immigrants. In 1981, *Plyler v. Doe* was filed on the basis that the revision to the law violated the Fourteenth Amendment. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court and was ultimately decided in a 5-4 vote. The Supreme Court struck down the law saying that, though not citizens of the United States, undocumented immigrants and their children are still people and therefore protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. Given that the revision to the Texas state law denied these children an education in a way that was not supported by any convincing motive, the Supreme Court demanded it be overturned. Interestingly, the implications of this ruling can still be seen today. In her October 12 lecture,

Adrienne Kittos of Justice for Our Neighbor explained the details of how the Fourteenth Amendment works – that even if their parents are undocumented, any child born on United States soil (with some rare exceptions) is a citizen of the United States. It therefore does not make sense to punish children who are legal citizens simply because their parents are not documented. Furthermore, as Adrienne explained, not being a legal citizen does not mean not paying taxes. Even if you are an undocumented immigrant, you may still obtain a tax code in order to pay taxes to the IRS. This demonstrates not only a flaw with the original Texas policy revision, but also a massive misconception by the general American population about immigrants.

Laws and judicial decisions only account for one aspect of policy affecting English language learners. Educational policy – both federal and on the state level – often more directly affects students in the classroom than anything else. The first of these modern policies affecting ELL students was the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (BEA). According to Gloria Stewner-Manzanares (1988), “[BEA] is noted as the first official federal recognition of the needs of students with limited English speaking ability (LESA).” Though this piece of legislation seemed, from an outward perspective, to support bilingual education, the provisions of the act can actually be seen as detrimental to teaching English Language Learners. Notably, the funds allocated by the BEA were allocated for English-only programs, with an arbitrary 3-year cap on transitional programs.

The next significant piece of ELL policy was the Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA), which was essentially a clarification of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as a response to the recent *Lau v. Nichols* judicial decision. *Lau* ruled that school districts must take affirmative action in response to instruction for bilingual students. Fearing that this mandate

would not be taken seriously, the Office for Civil Rights began what James Crawford (1994) refers to as “an aggressive campaign to enforce the Lau Remedies.” Out of this movement to recognize and reform bilingual education programs (as well as issues addressing other marginalized groups in the American public school systems) sprang the Equal Education Opportunities Act. The original text of the act reads: “all children enrolled in public schools are entitled to equal educational opportunity without regard to race, color, sex, or national origin.”

Additionally:

No State shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by— (a) the deliberate segregation by an educational agency of students on the basis of race, color, or national origin among or within schools; (b) the failure of an educational agency which has formerly practiced such deliberate segregation to take affirmative steps, consistent with part 4 of this subchapter, to remove the vestiges of a dual school system.

The EEOA further specifically addresses bilingual education in Clause F, which reads:

[No State shall deny... by – ] the failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs.

The mandate of the Equal Education Opportunities Act – in theory – served to ensure equitable instruction for second language learners in American public schools.

In 2002, the United States saw the implementation of what has become the most controversial piece of modern education policy. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 – eliminated several previous policy provisions, specifically the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. It also

transitioned much of the burden of accountability off of the federal government and on to state governments, a trend we continue to see in the current decade. The most controversial aspects of NCLB included this new form of accountability, with opponents arguing it put too much undue responsibility on teachers and individual schools. Other controversial issues included school improvement and annual testing, the latter having great implications for English Language Learners. In *Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners: Research, Theory, Policy, and Practice*, Wayne Wright (2010) explains that, under NCLB, states were required to develop ELL standards and assessments to determine students' English Language Proficiency (ELP). These standards must meet 4 points of criteria: 1) students, upon initial assessment, must be given a label to identify proficiency, i.e. beginner, intermediate, etc; 2) a description to define each level of proficiency; 3) an explanation of what students at each proficiency level should be able to accomplish; 4) a correlating assessment score to determine when students move up to the next level of proficiency. However, as Wright points out, "most of the language proficiency assessments that states and school districts were using when NCLB went into effect did not meet these requirements, and thus new statewide ELP standards and assessments had to be developed." Unfortunately, many states failed to create these by the given deadlines.

The next reauthorization of ESEA was signed into effect in 2015, though it will not be implemented until July of 2017. Known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), this policy is aimed at reconciling some of what most people consider to be the failings of NCLB. Specifically, it provides for remedying the issue of systematic over-testing of ELL students with no additional provisions for support. By improving tracking of student progress, increasing accountability for English language learners at the state level, and mandating reporting of long-term ELLs, ESSA, in theory, will offer greater support of English language learner programs in

public schools. However, as Kristen Lindahl (2015) of TESOL International points out, several key points of policy are still missing from the new legislation, most notably “that there is still no federal support for the research-backed benefits of bilingual education.”

### **Implications of Policy on ELL Instruction and Connections to State Policies**

The very unfortunate fact of the educational policy world is that, more often than not, those writing legislation that will be handed down to states and school districts often have no experience actually working in schools, nor do they have backgrounds in educational research. This has significant implications for almost everyone involved in education, from teachers to students to parents; however, it does seem to always have the most negative consequences for marginalized groups within the system. Not surprisingly, students whose first language is something other than English often fall into this category and it is rare that policy is written which truly benefits ELL students.

In Tennessee, for instance, English-only instructional policies bar the use of any language other than English in instruction in classroom settings (with limited exceptions). Additionally, any assessments given by the state (standardized tests) are only provided in English, though there is currently a policy in place which says students new to the United States do not have to take standardized exams until they have been in the country for more than 18 months. However, in a recent press-release from The Civil Rights Project reports that English-Only Policies in public schools are actually proven to fail. Based on studies of policies in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts, the report shows that:

[T]he promise that restrictive language policies made – that English learners would close the achievement gaps with English speaking students and more rapidly acquire English – have not been realized. Moreover, the studies suggest that such policies may violate

English learners' right to an education equivalent to that of their English-speaking peers as mandated by the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA).

This is not an isolated occurrence. Decades of policy revision have demonstrated that a substantial amount of legislation written with regards to English language learners actually has detrimental effects on their education. Policy often seems to reflect the mentality that language is a deficiency rather than an advantage or as capital. In another, more recent case, the city of Nashville filed a case against the state of Tennessee for failing to provide ample funding for ELL instruction, despite the large number of English language learners in Metro Schools

On the federal level, however, there is some hope that reform is moving in a direction that will have positive implications for instruction of English language learners. ESSA in particular seems to raise the bar in terms of how states are held accountable for ELL instruction by giving specific provisions rather than just requiring states to "do something." It is therefore at the state level where the most comprehensive reform must take place. Garcia (2005) makes the claim that social class "has become increasingly more important in today's policy context than race, ethnicity, national origin, or English-speaking abilities in determining access to opportunities, power, and privilege in American society." If this is the case, then we must consider what legislation is being made outside of the sphere of education as well as within it. Educators of second language learners have a duty to act as watchdogs and be politically involved in order to protect the rights of their students. This may require a more thorough knowledge of our government and political system than just what is occurring in the world of education. Given that this is our profession, ELL educators must be prepared to act not only as teachers, but as political advocates for our students as well. The implications of poor policy targeted at ELL students are not just that they do not have access to the resources that they

deserve. In the long run, if we allow English language learners to continually have their education hampered by restrictive policy, we run the risk of an increased drop out rate, which ultimately hurts the economy and our society as a whole. It also becomes a civil and human rights issue – by not ensuring equal educational opportunities for all of our students, we are sending a message that we view certain groups as less than, purely based on their language abilities. This is not, in my opinion, the moral ground upon which our country was built, nor does it align with the basic principles that come with having a public education system. In 1848, Horace Mann declared that “education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men.” If this is true – and I believe it is – our policy should reflect this principle. As it stands, however, I believe we have a long road of reform ahead of us before the parents of English language learners can feel confident that their children will be educated equitably in American public schools.

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