

Minding the Gaps: Effectively Supporting Language Learners with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic case study grounded in constructivist approaches reveals the problems, gaps and challenges within one local K-12 school system that prevent consistent collaboration between teachers and specialists to appropriately and sufficiently support dually identified students. A dually identified student for the purpose of this research is defined as an English language learner who is also diagnosed with an identified disability. Qualitative data was collected to help answer the research question, “What conditions do classroom teachers, special education teachers, and English as a new language (ENL) teachers believe allow them to collaborate effectively to appropriately support dually identified students and their families?” Through analysis of semi structured interviews, the existing gaps, themes, and implications are identified in order to better support dually identified K-12 students and their families.

Keywords: dually identified students; teacher collaboration; English language learners; K-12 teaching; special education; teacher preparation programs

The study described in this manuscript was completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a master's degree in education. This publication version of the thesis study is a collaboration between the thesis author and her thesis adviser. Burns is a K-12 English as New Language (ENL) educator in a large, suburban district in Central Indiana. Her thesis work draws upon her direct experiences as an ENL teacher.

From the beginning of her work in ENL, for Burns, there has been a tension that always stood out, and raised many questions for specialists and classroom teachers: the complexity of accurately identifying a language learner who also has a disability, and then properly supporting their needs as a cohesive team. There are many issues related to English language learners (ELLs) and the prospect of diagnosing their disability, including disproportionality in diagnosing and the over diagnosis of certain disabilities; language barriers for students and families; lack of collaboration between teachers and specialists; and absence of coursework at local universities addressing appropriate instruction for dually identified students in teacher preparation programs.

Kangas' (2018) study concludes that because English Learners (ELs) with disabilities represent multiple minority social categories, including but not limited to, first language (L1) background and (dis)ability, they experience multiple hardships as a result of this intersection. The problem of how to ensure consistent and effective collaboration by teachers and specialists to appropriately support dually identified students remains challenging and under researched. The research question which frames and guides this study is, "What conditions do classroom teachers, special education teachers, and ENL teachers believe allow them to collaborate effectively to appropriately support dually identified students and their families?"

Literature Review

Cultural differences, inconsistencies in evaluation, and language barriers make it difficult to identify and to support ELLs with disabilities and their families. Teachers are often not trained to effectively support ELLs with disabilities. Language barriers between educators, students, and families cause difficulties in communicating the specialized needs of students to their families. Language barriers also make it challenging for families to be educated about the services that the student should be receiving. Because students with disabilities in some parts of the world are often not served in mainstream classrooms and schools, some ELL and immigrant families do not expect their students to be eligible for special education services. And even when an ELL is correctly assessed and identified for special education services, too often teachers are not given appropriate training or time to collaborate consistently with all the members of a support team to provide coherent, organized support for dually identified students.

Disproportionality

The disproportionality of ELLs being identified for special education services has been an ongoing concern in the literature. ELLs are sometimes underrepresented, but also are also overrepresented in some areas because of legislative pressures to accurately identify learning disabilities and the challenge of disentangling academic problems resulting from second language acquisition versus a genuine learning disability (Luk & Yamasaki, 2018). Luk and Yamaski (2018) found that ELLs are overrepresented with communication disabilities (CDs) and specific learning disabilities (SLDs) and are underrepresented in being diagnosed with autism. Schools are often reluctant to assess young language learners for a disability due to possible language interference and often choose to wait until they are proficient in English to conduct evaluations and assessments. The expressed rationale purports that the language deficit cannot be

distinguished from a potential genuine disability. Luk and Yamasaki (2018) shared in this sentiment, stating:

Although linguistic background is not explicated and mentioned as an exclusionary factor, children with limited English proficiency are often raised biculturally or from low-resource backgrounds. Thus, in the early elementary school years when bilingual learners are developing English proficiency, educators may be hesitant to recommend them for special education (p. 890).

However, in the Burns' district, ELL preschoolers often get over diagnosed with speech impairments, in hopes that more specialized services will help their language acquisition since preschool is not serviced by ENL in this district. Damico, Hamayan, Marler, and Sanchez-Lopez (2013) conclude that teachers are likely to choose special education as the source of support for ELLs because it does generate direct assistance, funding for this assistance is more readily available, and even if they know that it may not be appropriate, it assuages their feelings of guilt and satisfies the need for some form of accountability. Evaluating ELLs in hopes of securing an individualized education plan (IEP) with accommodations is sometimes regarded as a "fix" whether or not the diagnosis is entirely accurate.

Kangas (2017) states that for many districts, special education services are revered as legally required, whereas bilingual education/ESL was deemed optional. In districts with low ELL enrollment, special education services are more readily available, have more legal ramifications and provide some form of support and accommodations for ELLs when language development instruction is not provided. In another study Kangas (2018) stated that these beliefs in practice are a manifestation of intersectionality, whereby some minority categories are elevated while others are disregarded as educators view federal policies and laws through the

lens of their own beliefs. The lack of training in the intersection between ELLs and special education diagnoses and services has caused professionals to overly rely more on the training and education they have had about special education law which is often required by states for teacher and administrator licensure.

The third area of disproportionality that exists for ELLs is the disproportionality in assessments. The assessments that are used for diagnosing disabilities are designed for English speakers and are culturally biased. Damico et. al (2013) state:

The first and most significant reason for the tendency to over-identify ELLs as in need of special education is that the assessment of proficiency and academic achievement among ELLs is fraught with difficulty. Assessment as a process is a complex enterprise that requires consideration of multiple factors, including symbolic proficiency, affect, previous experience, cultural and linguistic learning and application, expectations, and contextual variables (p. 2).

The validity of these testing factors is questionable when the assessments are created for and administered by proficient English speakers. Providing assessments in the native language is only possible when school psychologists are available that speak each native language proficiently. Because most US states enroll ELLs speaking more than 100 distinct home languages, finding qualified psychologists or psychometrists who speak all the represented languages is not likely, but even hiring proficient Spanish-speaking psychometrists is extremely challenging, despite the popularity of Spanish in the US. There is an assessment tool that can be used to help determine the validity of an assessment given to an English language learner to determine disability. This tool, the Cultural-Language Interpretive Matrix (C-LIM) (Rodriguez &

Stick, 2019), has been used in Burns' Burnsto determine whether ELLs indeed have a true disability or if the assessment was impacted by a language or cultural gap.

Pre-Service Teacher Education

Another challenge in supporting ELLs with disabilities is lack of attention to dually identified ELLs in teacher preparation programs. Courses in special education law, policy and methods are often required for licensure, and some students may choose to include some ELL methods or second language acquisition courses, but rarely are the two required or integrated. According to a study conducted by Jenkins, et. al et. al (2019), they found "There was no evidence in any of the teacher preparation programs of assessment of candidate knowledge on second language acquisition, sociocultural/political foundations, or assessment practices and accommodations for ELLs with disabilities" (p. 341). Jenkins et. al (2019) continued to say that the specialized evidence-based content necessary to support ELLs with disabilities is rarely included in SPED teacher preparation programs. This leads to significant insufficiency in content and instruction that causing teacher candidates exiting programs without a solid foundation for effectively teaching ELLs with disabilities. The lack of teacher training is likely affecting dually identified students in a negative way because teachers and specialists have not been effectively prepared to support the needs of these students and/or their families specialized language needs.

An analysis of the 2013 Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, (InTASC) standards for preservice teacher education requirements for teaching ELLS with disabilities revealed a lack of attention to ELLs with disabilities. In fact the InTASC standards do not directly require preparation in working with dually identified ELLs explicitly. There is an indirect reference to teaching dually ELLs in Standard 1(g): "The teacher understands the role of

language and culture in learning and knows how to modify instruction to make language comprehensible and instruction relevant, accessible, and challenging” (CCSSO, 2013).

Standard 2(i) states that: “The teacher knows about second language acquisition processes and knows how to incorporate instructional strategies and resources to support language acquisition” (CCSSO, 2013). These standards are very clear in stating that a teacher should be prepared to teach and accommodate English language learners. University-based teacher education programs for pre-service teachers are therefore obligated by InTASC 2013 to require coursework on ELL teaching methods and second language acquisition. This coursework needs to explicitly encompass teaching dually identified students and future versions of InTASC need to be revised to explicitly require attention to dually identified ELLs.

Language Barriers

One of the most consistent issues for the dually identified population is that because these students and families communicate best in languages other than English, communication, assessment, implementation of services, and the family’s ability to feel adequately informed regarding the progress and the rights of their children can be challenging (Cioè-Peña, 2017). Communication techniques within schools tend to assume that everyone speaks English, with translation provided inconsistently or unevenly (Cioè-Peña, 2017). In addition, the use of special education jargon and unfamiliar terms complicate communication for everyone, but especially for ELLs and their families. As Cioè-Peña (2017) states,

Compared to white middle-class parents, non-English speaking parents are at a disadvantage when it comes to navigating through an English based system.

These disadvantages are magnified when a child is absorbed into the special

education system, greatly limiting parental participation, which is detrimental to parental advocacy (p. 9).

Language barriers cause difficulties for teachers, students, and families. Sending home paperwork in the family's native language is challenging and the use of an interpreter to make phone calls on behalf of a teacher or administrator can feel cold and impersonal. In our experience, this communication disproportionality makes it difficult for families of dually identified students to communicate and understand their rights. Cioè-Peña (2017) advocates for home language support for families:

This focus on disproportionality leaves unanswered questions regarding how best to meet the academic needs of bilingual students with disabilities once they have been identified as being in need of SPED services. This need to provide home language support is crucial for the social emotional and academic services of all bilingual students with disabilities including those that are wrongly identified (p. 2-3).

Having monolingual English speaking teachers and administrators makes providing adequate and equitable services and support in the various home languages a significant challenge. These language barriers can also affect the school's ability to appropriately communicate and to obtain accurate academic data records and education history.

Teacher/Specialist Collaboration

As Damico et. al (2013) indicate, "Effective content-area instruction is characterized by strong cross-grade coordination. To complete this coordination, time and resources must be reserved for content-area experts from all grade levels, ESL/bilingual teachers, and administrators to come together to work" (p. 96). This speaks to the most apparent issue in many

schools: the difficulty of finding the time, and/or the resources to be able to effectively and consistently collaborate as a team of experts to best support dually identified students. Kangas (2017) summarizes this struggle when she states that service provision did not reflect intersectional practices because disability and language proficiency were conceptualized as divorced, as not intersecting, and as not mutually influencing one another (p. 20). The lack of consistent, inclusive teacher collaboration greatly impedes supporting dually identified students and their families effectively. As Cioè-Peña (2017) concludes,

In order for the settings to be successful, steps must be taken to adequately train teachers on working with different learners as well as engaging in school wide conversations that deconstruct the ideas behind notions of the good, normal and successful learner. This is absolutely necessary if we truly believe that inclusion is a right rather than an option (p. 10).

Some of the challenges of teaching dually identified students can be directly linked to inadequate teacher preparation as Cioè-Peña indicates, but it is also clear that adequate time and professional resources are also two issues that are impeding collaboration and cross-specialty area coordination. Resolving time and resource obstacles will require advocacy and a sincere commitment from administrators and policy makers to ensure that dually identified students and their families are well served. Rectifying the gaps in teacher preparation must be pursued by teacher education advocates, professional educator associations like Indiana TESOL (INTESOL), and state education policy makers. In addition, the literature review conducted for this study revealed the large gap in the existing research and published knowledge base. The gaps in teacher preparation and research could best be addressed concurrently through robust

collaboration between teacher practitioners and teacher education-based researchers in K-12 schools and with ELL and immigrant families.

Methodology

Anderson et. al (2007) state that the core of ethnography is its concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand (p. 173). Creswell and Poth (2018), explain that ethnographers study the meaning of the behavior, the language, and the interaction among members of a culture-sharing group (p. 68-69). These descriptions of ethnography speak to the tension within this research and the perceived need to do more for dually identified students and their families. Looking deeply into these issues, constricts and the ways that cultures, languages, and their interactions shape and guide teachers' actions, which can provide insights into how educators can create a more effective and appropriate environment for dually identified students and their families.

There are nine participants, including Burns Burns in this study. The participants were all female educators and each works in some capacity with dually identified learners. The research design is a qualitative ethnographic method of inquiry, allowing the researcher and the participants to interact in the day-to-day working environment. This study adopts semi-structured interviews as the approach to explore the research question. The interview questions are designed open ended, allowing participants to fully respond to interview questions without being limited in their responses and in hopes of not influencing their responses in any particular direction.

A constructivist approach was selected to better understand the frustrations, gaps, and inconsistencies reflected by professionals working with dually identified learners and their families. A constructivist paradigm allows for collaboration between the researcher and the participants, which in turn lends itself well to exploring the research question while identifying

future implications for researchers and policymakers. This approach also allows for some flexibility of decision-making within the research process which supports the ethnographic research design. As Mertens (2020) indicates, “Reality is socially constructed. Therefore, multiple mental constructions can be apprehended, some of which may be in conflict with each other, and perceptions of reality may change throughout the process of the study” (p. 18).

Constructivism also allows for there to be a human interaction aspect in which experiences guide articulation of ideas and knowledge. The unpacking, noticing and naming of the experiences that teachers have with students and families hold rich potential for determining what approaches, practices, and/or policies hold the most promise for dually identified students, for their families, and for the educators who teach them.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study include three classroom teachers, one special education teacher, a school psychologist, a school counselor, a speech language pathologist, an ENL instructional assistant (who is also a licensed Indiana teacher), and Burns herself acting as the researcher. The classroom teachers and specialists have varying amounts of teaching experience and years of teaching, ranging from one year to twenty years. At the time of the study (Spring 2021) the classroom teachers and the speech pathologist had worked with Burns directly for one year to three years; the school psychologist and school counselor had worked with Burns for seven years. The ENL assistant and Burns had been working in the same building for 4 years. All of the participants are female. Burns is aware of her positionality within these relationships and of the potential for biases in interpretation, but also sees the benefits of her insider access and the trust built over time in these relationships as assets to the study.

Setting

The main setting is the Avonlea Elementary School (pseudonym) located in a suburb of a large Midwestern city. Due to COVID-19 (CDC, 2021), all interviews were conducted via Zoom. Zoom is an online platform that offers simplified video conferencing and communication across any device as advertised by Zoom US (2021). This online platform allowed Burns to safely conduct the interviews and also provided live recording and transcription of the interviews.

Data Sources

Data were collected using fifteen to thirty minute, semi-structured interviews. The interviews consisted of seven questions (Appendix A). Participants were interviewed individually. The interviews were transcribed through the use of the online platform Zoom. Samples of the transcribed interviews can be found in Appendix B. In addition, short informal oral conversations occurring throughout the school day also served as data for this research with the participants' knowledge and consent. The data collected from these informal, ad hoc conversations was recorded and analyzed in Burns' personal research journal.

Burns archived personal research reflection journal data using a process referred to as "memories as data" (Maclean & Mohr, 1999, p. 38). As interview responses are collected and transcribed, reflection and meaning-making can quickly become an overwhelming task. The "memories as data" process created by Maclean and Mohr (1999) allows researchers to reflect upon the themes and ideas that emerge as interviews are conducted. Her own memories of conversations, experiences, and insights as she analyzed interview transcripts allowed Burns to clarify and refine early ideas and findings along the way. To organize her memories and her thinking, Burns created a chart in which she documents themes and makes notes related to those

themes based on interview answers, short conversations, and reflections. Burns revisited these emerging themes iteratively throughout the process to refine and clarify connections between data sets and to keep track of early findings as they emerged from the analysis and reflection process.

Context

Burns teaches in a suburb of Indiana. The district is a large suburban district enrolling more than 21,000 students (InView, 2021). At the time of this study, Burns was the English as a Second Language teacher for grades K-4 and has taught in Avonlea Elementary School for more than seven years.¹ Burns carries approximately 50 students on her caseload representing 15 different languages and she works closely with a classroom assistant. There is a diversity of identities and language proficiencies among ELLs including native-born, others born outside the US, and some of the ELLs are proficient in three or more languages. Avonlea Elementary has approximately 686 students enrolled, with a racial minority percentage of 36.7%, 20.3% of students qualify for free lunch, 6.9% are ELLs, and 12.2% are students with disabilities (InView, 2021). Burns and the classroom assistant work with students in 14 different classrooms each day, all grade providing 100% push in instructional services.

Much of Burns's time is typically spent "pushing in" to provide services to her students in their mainstream classroom environment in the form of co-teaching (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018). Different models of co-teaching (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010) are used as needed within the various classrooms and grade levels.

From her ELL caseload, Burns identified five dually identified students. Here dually identified indicates that these students are both language learners and special education students.

Two of these students, Jesus¹ and Ivy² have severe autism diagnoses. The third student, Natalia², is diagnosed with a language impairment and has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for speech services only. The fourth student, Jeffrey³, is diagnosed with a mood disorder and has an IEP to receive services from the special education teacher and the instructional assistants. The fifth student, Vance⁴, is diagnosed with a developmental delay and receives services from the special education resource teacher and the instructional assistants.

Because each classroom in which these students are enrolled differs in teaching style and classroom management style, one of Burns' challenges is to learn how to effectively support the different teaching styles and management styles within the different classrooms. To this end, Burns works with three special education teachers, two different special education instructional assistants, a speech language pathologist, an occupational therapist, a school counselor, the ESL instructional assistant, and a school psychologist. This team does its best to collaborate as a cohesive group to provide appropriate support for these students and their families.

Limitations

Themes from this research align with the literature from previous research within this topic of study. However, the results are limited by the case study size, by the local context, and the time constraints. Due to the nature of the research question, the sample size (number of participants), and time limitations, this research is not meant to be generalizable. The sample size was small due to several conditions, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the time limits created by the thesis assignment. The interviews did lead to a sample of diverse case studies

from which themes and conclusions were drawn. The study findings do identify issues and obstacles in appropriately serving dually identified students and their families in K-12 schools.

Findings

Analysis of the interviews, short informal oral conversations, and researcher reflections point to several themes and to gaps in the existing body of literature. The collected responses yielded clear similarities across the different roles and specialties of the study participants. From the analysis three areas of concern were identified. The first area of concern is the lack of time to effectively and consistently collaborate as a whole team for dually identified students and families. The second area of concern is the lack of pre-service teacher preparation training in supporting dual exceptionalities. Lastly, the third area of concern is the absence of continuing professional development within the school and/or district. All of these areas of concern are worthy of future qualitative and quantitative research and evaluation beyond the scope of this thesis study.

Time/Collaboration

The first concern was about time or lack thereof, and the ability to collaborate as a team. Time is always a topic of debate in a school and school district, there always seems to be a lack of it in any school setting. When asking the participants questions about time constraints and lack of whole team collaboration the answers were very consistent and similar. The question that produced responses about time and collaboration was, “To what extent, and how, do special education, ENL, and general education teachers collaborate with each other to support dually identified students?” Here is a sampling of responses:

Response from classroom teacher #5:

I think it's on the fly and in the moment. Or maybe a quick email or conversation. It's at the case conference when you get a lot of information. I think I need to take more time to read their IEP intentionally, not just at the beginning of the year, but I need to revisit it. I need more time and materials (personal communication, March 16, 2021).

Burns works directly with this particular classroom teacher daily. This teacher services one dually identified learner and two other English learners. At the time of this study, the special education teachers, classroom teachers, and ENL specialists had not met as a team at any time during the academic year aside from an online annual case review for the dually identified student. The team had managed some impromptu hallway conversations or on the spot accommodation conversations, but there is a clear desire to be more intentional and consistent in communication and in collaboration.

Response from speech pathologist participant #2:

I think that through the IEP and talking with you, you know those accommodation pieces come into play. However, I don't think it's everybody working together. Independently it's more of, I have to follow these accommodations because this is what it says and this is my job...It's little to none. I think I come and collaborate with you on specific students that you and I share. But I don't know that collectively as a whole for the well-being of multiple students that we do a very good job of that (personal communication, April 1, 2021).

The speech pathologist and Burns shared two students and had collaborated on IEP goals so that the goals aligned with the student's English language development goals.

However, they were not able to collaborate with the special education team, the classroom teacher, and the speech pathologist as a cohesive team. As a result of analyzing this response, Burns realized that not only do these educators not meet as a team, but there is also no expectation to do so from building or district administrators. And because there is no administrative expectation, there is no time allotted for collaboration by the team during meetings.

Pre-service/Preparatory Training

The second theme identified during the interview analysis process is that teacher preparation programs are not preparing future educators for work with English learners with special education needs. The interview question that generated responses was, “What did your teacher education program teach you about ELLs with special needs specifically?” The responses from this question were nearly identical, though some participants provided additional detail and insight into their answers. Some selected responses are provided below:

Response from educator #1: “And I mean there’s like, not much of anything. I mean everything was kind of broad based and so it’s really been learning as you go” (personal communication, April 7, 2021).

Response from speech pathologist #2: “It’s probably nothing. Right? Yes” (personal communication, April 1, 2021).

Response from participant #3 (special education teacher): “Nothing” (personal communication, March 24, 2021).

Response from participant #5 (classroom teacher): “I think it just hit more on special needs and didn’t really put the two together, to be honest” (personal communication, March 16, 2021).

The participants all had similar responses whether they were recent graduates or veteran teachers/specialists. This information was surprising because Burns assumed that older teacher programs lacked training for these exceptionalities and that younger educators would have experienced more, but all respondents reported having the same gaps, which suggest a continuous problem that across time had hardly been addressed. Some of the participants recalled completing a special education course, but those with special education reported taking no ENL methods courses, and no respondents completed any courses in which the two exceptionalities were studied together. What seems to be missing from teacher preparatory programs is required ENL coursework and coursework that merges methods for supporting English learners with special education training. Additionally, there is an absence of explicit requirements in the teacher education standards that address dually identified learners which perhaps explains an absence of this type of training and/or coursework for K-12 licensure candidates, including for ENL licensure candidates. The lack of adequate teacher preparation is a real concern and must be addressed in order for K-12 educators to support dually identified students appropriately and effectively.

Based on the analysis of the 2013 InTASC standards, university teacher preparation programs rarely require pre-service teachers to complete coursework that prepares them to work with English language learners and there is no expectation of completing methods courses for teachers of English language learners diagnosed with a disability. The lack of exposure to second

language acquisition theory and methods makes it difficult for classroom teachers and special education teachers to effectively support the special language needs of a dually identified student. Robust, research-based, comprehensive, and mandatory specialized courses must be developed in teacher preparation programs if dually identified ELLs are going to be successful in their educational endeavors.

Continuing Education/Professional Development

The third and final concern is the lack of continuing education and professional development opportunities offered within a district or individual school. The interview question that generated responses leading to this finding was, “What professional learning opportunities are available in your school or district that are focused on how to teach English learners with special needs?” All of the responses for this question were very consistent across all of the interviews that, and here are some examples of responses from the interviews:

Participant #2 (speech pathologist): “None, not to my knowledge” (personal communication, April 1, 2021).

Participant #4 (school psychologist): “I don’t know that I have opportunities in my district. I don’t think I do have any opportunities for that. It would come through professional conferences that I would attend outside of my district” (personal communication, March 25, 2021).

Participant #6 (classroom teacher): “None that I know. I could probably seek out opportunities, but none that are widely available and or known to me” (personal communication, March 30, 2021).

Teachers and specialists are expected to meet the challenges presented by students and families, with little to no professional support offered. And within these responses, an underlying, hidden theme began to surface during analysis: Educators noticed that the district did not provide training opportunities, but in addition, educators did not know how or where to access trustworthy, high-quality training that would support them whether within or beyond the district's offerings. This lack of access to professional development opportunities, when coupled with the previous concern regarding teacher preparation gaps, leaves educators with little to no pre-service or professional development education on the topic of dually identified learners once they are working in a professional K-12 setting.

Continuing education and professional development opportunities are vital to an ever-changing landscape of teaching technologies, pedagogical methods, student population, and state and national expectations of K-12 schools. The lack of professional development offerings on the topic of dually identified students is indeed troubling, however, the blame for this absence cannot rest solely on districts and schools. Teachers, teacher educators, and ENL and SPED specialists also have a responsibility in advocating for themselves and their students to ensure that their students are effectively supported through access to high quality, meaningful, and accessible professional development.

One unexpected finding is that the presence of students with dual exceptionalities in the school is well known by interview participants and has largely been ignored by the school. Interview analysis revealed evidence that most building educators already know where the gaps are for dually identified students and know where the need is, but there is a palpable lack of expectation that this condition can or will be changed. Participants telegraphed a complacent or

resigned view of managing large student caseloads, of tolerating the lack of professional development, of working around the lack of designated collaboration time, and of settling for working in isolation rather than insisting on a change in working conditions. Based on all findings, this resignation to such conditions is perhaps most troubling of all.

Implications

The future implications of this research are consistent with existing research and point to the urgent need for additional, more comprehensive research studies. Some future implications that exist are:

- Educators need fresh energy and a renewed commitment to advocate for the cultural and linguistic needs of ELLs in SPED when writing ILPs and IEPs, and when designing appropriate instructional activities and assessments;
- University-based teacher preparation programs must create and require coursework that prepares teachers to support language learners with disabilities;
- Districts must create or pursue high quality professional development which provides meaningful, relevant and actionable professional development for educators that addresses current needs; and
- Administrators need to allocate and protect designated collaboration time for mainstream, ENL, and SPED teachers and specialists to design instructional plans, to analyze student evaluation data, to brainstorm meaningful interventions, and to evaluate progress toward IEP and ILP goals by dually identified students. .

There is a call here for change for educators, for universities, and for school districts. The needs and the rights of our exceptional students are too significant to be ignored.

Conclusion

In conclusion there were three themes identified within this research study. The first theme was pre-service, university-based teacher preparation programs and the lack of required coursework supporting English language learners with disabilities. This preparation gap stems from the lack of professional standards for educators which explicitly address teaching conditions for dually identified learners. The second theme was a lack of time for consistent and cohesive collaboration between specialists and classroom teachers in order to effectively and appropriately support dually identified students. The third theme was the need for improved access to high quality, relevant and meaningful professional development available within school corporations to improve teachers' knowledge of English language acquisition methods and methods for teaching dually identified English learners with disabilities.

Each theme is worthy of significant future research to gain a better understanding of the gaps and to develop new approaches for addressing these gaps. But like the educators working in isolation in this study, simply exploring each theme in isolation will not suffice. All of these concerns must be addressed in concert and must include all stakeholders, including ELL families, in order to produce real change and significant improvements in outcomes for students. Districts, policy makers, schools, and higher education systems need to work together to reevaluate policies, practices, expectations, standards for pre-service teachers, professional development offerings, and educator collaboration to ensure effective instructional design, appropriate classroom supports, and culturally relevant learning conditions are provided for all dually identified English learners with disabilities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What do you know about teaching ELLs with special needs?
2. What did your teacher education program teach you about ELLs with special needs?
3. What professional learning opportunities are available in your school or district focused on teaching ELLs with special needs?
4. What professional learning opportunities have you participated in for teaching ELLs with special needs?

5. How do your special education, ENL, and general education programs support your ELLs with special needs?
6. To what extent and how do special education, ENL, and general education teachers collaborate with each other to support ELLs with special needs?
7. What kind of supports would you need from the district or from within our building to be more successful in supporting dually identified students?

Appendix B: Sample Interview Transcripts

Interview Sample One (speech pathologist):

What do you know about teaching emails with special needs?

Um, I think especially just in my specialty area.

We did get a lot of training with again looking for the language differences versus deficits.

So, I know that you have visuals and repeated directions, like those accommodation pieces are so helpful for EL students, as well as language impairment, but the difference would be if I sit down and teach you exactly how to do something.

Chances are, my EL students would do so much better in a short amount of time with fewer prompts than my LI students, for example, who it is a deficit for. And even though I've taught I have to support a lot, and that's where that difference lies.

As well as from the speech side of things, knowing the differences of.

If you don't say the sound in your, you know native language, then being mindful of that.

What did your teacher education program teach you about ELs with special needs specifically?

I think that's a little harder to answer as well.

It's probably nothing. Right. Yes.

I, I always have a hard time answering teacher teaching questions, because I don't know that we were ever taught how to teach versus what we do in our field. And then, kind of, Oh, since you work in a school.

I'm figuring out how to do the collaboration piece, right. So, um, yeah I'm not sure about that one.

What professional learning opportunities are available in your school or district that are focused on teaching ELLs with special needs?

None, not to my knowledge.

What professional learning opportunities have you participated in for teaching ELs with special needs?

I think.

I'm going to say one.

However, I don't believe that it was driven directly for ESL students. It was more talking about the relevance right now, of our black students and thinking about the cultural differences that way, as well as representation in testing and materials.

But I wouldn't say specifically for our English learners, it was more from a cultural standpoint as well as the prevalence for example of experience, and how not to dock them, if they get it right or wrong, based on.

Oh, you didn't know this was skiing well if you've never been skiing, you know, all the things, but again not specifically English learners. So, to answer your question, you can answer, probably not.

How do your special education, ENL, and general education programs support ELLs with special needs in your building?

I think that through the IEP, and collaboration for example with you.

You know that those accommodation pieces come into play.

However, I don't think that it's so much, everybody.

Independently it's more of, I have to follow these accommodations because this is what it says and this is my job. So, kind of with our telling and teaching that that's how they're being supported in that way.

And I don't know if I can think of a specific example of us meeting collectively. I know that in an ideal world, right about caseload size is a huge factor, aka number of classrooms, number of teachers to collaborate with.

And the time and understanding of each other's roles that that would be that ideal situation of.

Yeah, knowing when to refer and ask for help with all of our different areas, or even being able to be together and observe another profession, helping and picking up on those strategies to be able to use with our learners.

All right. To what extent and how do special education, ENL, and general education teachers collaborate with each other, to support these ELLs with special needs?

I guess a little bit of a ditto from my last answer. Yeah, in a perfect world, we would be able to do that, weekly, I think right now. It's little to none.

I think that I come and collaborate with you on specific students that you and I share. And I think the same goes for me and another classroom teacher.

But I don't know that collectively as a whole for the well-being of multiple students that we do a very good job of that.

Agreed.

What kinds of supports, would you need from either the building, or the district to feel that we could all be more successful in supporting the needs of EL students and families?

I mean, again, caseload size.

But that's never a thing because we need to service all the students.

So, in that aspect, more help.

Thank you.

You're Welcome.