Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Teaching-Learning Processes

Barbara A. Doerfler

M.Ed.in Secondary Education, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2015
B.S. in Elementary Education, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2002

Long-term English Learners in Middle School:
Perspectives on Growth in Language Acquisition and Academic Learning

Date: July 19, 2022
Time: 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Place: Remote

Abstract
Middle schools in the United States today have a large population of English learners, and many of them have been educationally labeled as long-term English learners (LTEls). In some middle schools, over half of the English learners in seventh and eighth grades meet the criteria for classification as LTEls. This is especially concerning as these students will shortly be moving on to high school with limited English proficiency, which will continue to affect their academic performance and may limit their choices in higher education and career paths. This study explored the educational experience of LTEls in middle school by seeking out their perspectives regarding their academic and linguistic learning. Student perceptions of learning have a significant impact on achievement, self-esteem, motivation, and performance (Roeser & Eccles, 1998).

Using their own voices, LTEls shared their perceptions of what they believed they needed to grow linguistically and academically, during semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations revealed how LTEls responded to instruction as it was taking place. An analysis of English proficiency test scores indicated there was no significant difference between LTEls and English learners not classified as long-term, as measured by the test scores. The results of the study indicated that LTEls already possess strengths and assets for content and language learning, and dual-language competencies that could be used to enhance their educational experiences as bilingual and biliterate learners. They form relationships with teachers and peers that are central to their learning experiences (Cummins, 2000) and reflect Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural perspective in the way they learn through the medium of social interactions. They require a safe, welcoming environment to overcome anxiety and conflicted feelings about learning, as well as scaffolding of learning tasks to ensure they are able to interact meaningfully with instruction and meet the language demands of the content being taught.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Chairperson, Kim Song, Ed.D.
Committee Faculty Member, Cody Ding, Ph.D.
Committee Faculty Member, Rebecca Rogers, Ph.D.
Committee Faculty Member, Alina Slapac, Ed.D.