

THESIS

PERCEPTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE
STUDY

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2023

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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY

This study was conducted as a qualitative narrative inquiry. The purpose of the study was to understand the perceptions of stakeholders on English Language Learners and how this shapes their educational path. By using a qualitative narrative inquiry, we can get a closer look into the life and learning of just one specific student. Data was collected in the form of interviews with the participants. The interviews were guided with a set of questions that were designed to interrogate perceptions and experiences of all stakeholders with regards to language learning in the context of one student. With the exception of WIDA scores that provide information about the language mastery level of the student, all data collected was qualitative. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and the data was coded inductively. This was then compiled in the form of a narrative that described the shaping of the educational pathway of the student. This study does not seek to generalize beyond this context but can provide insight into similar experiences and perceptions of the English Language Learning process. The themes that developed as findings of this study were centered around the disconnects between stakeholders. This presented itself as subthemes like lack of teacher understanding, feelings of isolation, perceptions of English Language Learners, and varying teacher perceptions of their language abilities. There are implications in the teaching of English Language Learners that point to the importance of collaboration between all stakeholders. This includes transparency and clarification of educator roles, parent outreach, and professional development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words cannot express my gratitude to my advisor Ricki Ginsberg for her amazing guidance and consistency in her support throughout this process. I could not have done this without Jacob, my life and adventure partner, being my biggest cheerleader. Special thanks should also go to Bethany, for listening to my complaints and ideas and pushing me to better. I'm glad that fate assigned us an office together. I'm also thankful for my parents who instilled in me a love of learning and teaching.

Lastly, a thanks for all my students, past and present who inspire me every day to be a better teacher and ask the tough questions.

DEDICATION

To my daughter,

“One day, I’ma look in your eyes

Tell you you were made to shine

Tell you to go out and find, out and find

What makes you come alive

One day, I’ma point to the sky

Tell you you were made to fly

When I’m gone, for too long and it’s hard to handle

You know I’m trying to be a good example.”

“Good Example” by Andy Grammar and R3HAB

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Introduction

The perceptions that teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents have of English Language Learning students¹ has an impact on their educational pathway and the opportunities that follow. Their perceptions are shaped by many sociopolitical influences as well as their own personal experiences. The current state of public education and how we deal with linguistic difference begs many questions about the perceptions that stakeholders have and how they may affect the ways that students in English Language Learner (ELL) programming experience their own identities, language, and education in the classroom.

This inquiry follows the story of one student but mirrors many of the experiences I have seen with other language learners that have passed through my classrooms.

There is some existing research on how the perceptions of teachers affect student learning outcomes, how perceptions of counselors, administrators, and even parents on students in ELL programming and language learning, respectively, can have profound influence on students (Barreiro, 2018; Diaz & Karlin, 2016; Kim, 2013). We understand how teacher training and professional development can influence some of these perspectives (Song & Samimy, 2015).

However, we know that while each of these individual relationships exist on their own and affect students, education is about a network of teachers and support staff and their interactions with students as they go throughout their school days. The perceptions of content area teachers can also affect how they approach instructional coaches when they need help with students in ELL programming or how they perceive the ELL teacher and the ELD classes as

¹ I acknowledge the problematic ways that this label is used in referring to students who are receiving L2 instruction of the English Language (Linse, 2013). All students in education are constantly learning various Englishes and the power dynamics contained therein. However, these are the ways that students are currently divided, designated, and segregated within our education system. For the sake of ease of language and the understanding of the terminology that is used in classroom practice, I will use students in English Language Learning (ELL) programming.

capable for offering support for their students. This research attempts to create a whole picture understanding of this web of perceptions.

As I interviewed each participant, the overall narrative seemed to vacillate between a pessimistic perspective on the systemic problems within the education of students in English Language Learning programming and the surrounding community all the way to an optimistic outlook for the future based on interactions within the small community and teachers reaching out to Latino students. My perceptions based on my interviews mirrored the perceptions that educators might also develop as they are teaching students in English Language Learning programming in their classrooms and led me to ask questions about how all of these ideas interacted.

Literature Review

There are growing numbers of students experiencing English Language Learning programming in K-12 education in the United States. From the 2004-2005 school year to the 2014-2015 school year, the number of public students in the United States classified as students in ELL programming increased by nearly 10 percent, or 4.6 million students (MacFarland et al., 2017).

Throughout the past several decades, different terms have been used to classify students such as English as a Second Language (ESL), multi-lingual, emerging bilinguals, English Limited Proficient (ELP), Second Language (L2), or language minority students. The labels that we give to students matter because it can influence the way that they are treated by teachers and other students (Flores Gutierrez, 2021). These changes to terms have attempted to be more

inclusive of students who are speakers of more than two languages as well as trying to focus on language learning as an asset in the classroom rather than a deficit.

There are many misconceptions about students in English Language Learning programming such as beliefs that they won't learn English if they don't speak it in the home or that they need oversimplified curriculum (Gottschalk, 2016). These misconceptions and beliefs about language learning make up the language ideologies held by people. Language ideologies are mostly unconscious and take into consideration assumptions about the value of various languages and the hierarchical perspectives of which languages are more important than others (Basok & Sayer, 2020). English is a construct that reinforces social status either as "elite" or "mainstream" (Menard-Warwick, 2013). These language ideologies are ever present in our classrooms and our students are aware of them.

Students in ELL programming routinely report feeling unwelcome in classrooms or being perceived as unintelligent which in turn can lead to poor self-perception and low academic achievement (Diaz, Cochran, & Karlin, 2016). Schools are failing to meet the needs of students in ELL programming as teachers are communicating low expectations of these students (Daniel, 2014; Kim, 2013). Teacher beliefs routinely have an effect on their instruction of students in ELL programming. For example, some teachers judge higher-order thinking activities as more appropriate for general education students than students in ELL programming (Murphy & Torff, 2019).

It typically takes 5-7 years for a student in ELL programming to acquire native-like English proficiency for academic purposes (Thompson, 2015). During this time period, students in ELL programming may pass through several classrooms in various schools and interact with

many adults at their schools. This means that there are many stakeholders who will have an effect on the educational pathway of these learners.

In recent years, scholars have pushed harder for schools to move from deficit-based to asset-based views of students in ELL programming in the classroom. Tung (2013) writes that we shouldn't view "ELL education as a problem, dilemma, achievement gap, or crisis" but rather an opportunity to educate young students to become bilingual educated leaders who will participate in our globalized society (p. 4). A cross-disciplinary approach to second language acquisition requires that all stakeholders—teachers, administrators, and counselors—play a role in building literacy skills for students in ELL programming (Cook, 2015). Elfers (2013) three facets of specific needs of ELLs: "[1] the extended timeframe necessary for second-language acquisition; [2] the challenge of mastering academic language, and [3] the sociocultural dimensions of the schooling experience." Addressing all of these aspects is the responsibility of all stakeholders in the learning of students in ELL programming.

English Language Learner proficiency in their native language also shapes their educational pathways (Baecher, Artiglieri, Patterson, and Spatzer, 2012). Students who are literate in their native languages (L1) will likely find that their literacy and critical thinking skills are often transferable to their target languages (L2) and they may develop language skills more quickly.

There is often no exit plan in place for students in English Language Learning programming who are mainstreamed or in co-taught classes (Pappamihel, 2012) or when there is, the reclassification requirements are extremely high (Kim, 2013). As it stands, ESL programs in the United States have little impact towards preparing students who have been in English

Language Learning programming long-term for college and the current process does not offer equitable student success outcomes (Callahan, Wilkinson, and Muller, 2014).

ELL Self-Perception

Self-Perception or academic self-concept (i.e. the academic abilities that students' perceive themselves as having) has a profound influence on academic achievement. While some may feel that self-perception is a social-emotional concern that should be prioritized less than language learning, scholars like Niehouse & Adelson (2014) have found that students with social-emotional concerns have lower student achievement.

Students in English Language Learning programming throughout the country are placed into language and content classes based on a wide spectrum of options and resources provided by different districts. One common placement is a "sheltered classroom" where content material is taught in a scaffolded way to a class of students in English Language Learning programming. These students don't want to be thought of as "sheltered" because of a stigma they may feel that they aren't smart enough for the typical material (Dabach, 2014).

Being an English Language Learner in K-12 schools often means being labeled as such on documentation, in classes or registration, and even by other students. While the term ELL doesn't necessarily come with a negative connotation, students often recognize that this singles them out, and the harm has the potential to increase as students move into secondary education and they have been labeled as ELLs for a longer period of time (Flores Gutierrez, 2021). Misael Flores Gutierrez (2021) asserts that the "ELD class functions as an apparatus that wields power and control over human bodies and is the primary source for the production of stigma." With the ELL label and placement in ELD classes, this follows a model of stigma that leads to stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Educator Experiences and Perceptions

Teachers in the classroom today are posed with the challenge of balancing the diverse needs of all of their students, including students in ELL programming (Hogan & Hathcote, 2013). However, the demographics of secondary teachers is predominantly white and female. When the average teacher differs from their students in language, ethnicity, race, and culture, culturally and linguistically diverse students may feel like their teachers are too different from them and cannot help them in their educational pathways (Julien, 2019). In general, teachers lack formalized experiences with and training on how to work with students in English Language Learning programming (Aguinaga, 2017)—especially in the context of their own classrooms in a combined setting with ELLs and native speakers. (Song & Samimy, 2015).

Teachers don't know how to integrate differentiated instruction, especially for students in ELL programming, in their classroom (Baecher, Artigliere, Patterson, and Spatzer, 2012). Often teachers differentiate inappropriately by using curriculum with content below grade level when teaching students in ELL programming because of a belief that language is a barrier to content understanding (Gottschalk, 2016).

While some teachers have positive perceptions of students in English Language Learning programming and their experiences, some teachers also have negative ideologies. Some teachers may even deny educational opportunities to students based on discriminatory practices (Riley, 2014). Second language acquisition is frequently seen as a barrier for inclusion (Barreiro, 2018; Umansky et al., 2021). When teachers have bias and consider some students to be more capable than others, they use problematic pedagogical practices and teaching behaviors that students can detect easily (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010). These students then live up to teacher expectations and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2010; Callahan & Shifrer,

2016). Educators are often unintentionally translating “Limited English Proficient” (LEP) into limited academic ability.

The problem is often perpetuated by teacher educators who have not had adequate instruction for teaching students in ELL programming in their schooling or experiences. Educators then teach the way that they learned in their pre-service courses and experiences (Roy-Campbell, 2013). Short term professional development does not have the same effect on teacher beliefs about students in ELL programming as long-term teacher education programs (Song & Samimy, 2015). These long term opportunities should focus on content and include active participation from teachers in order to increase their cultural understanding of students in ELL programming and their families (Fasciana, 2019). However, professional development generally does not change teacher perceptions outside of their existing epistemology (Gleeson and Davidson, 2016).

Teachers often express that they feel like they do not have adequate support and resources to be effective as teachers of students in ELL programming (Aguinaga, 2017). In order to strengthen inclusion and support of English Language Learning, teachers need to address unconscious biases, collaborate, and understand instructional strategies that will benefit students in ELL programming (Fasciana, 2019).

We know that Teacher motivation and behavior influences students in ELL programming, their motivation, and behavior (Moskovsky, et al., 2012). Teachers need to frame the ELLs’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds as assets rather than deficits to be overcome during group tasks (Case, 2016). Teachers perceive the support of family members to be an important factor in increased motivation and positive behavior outcomes in students in ELL programming (Barreiro, 2018) but often feel that parents of students in ELL programming are not willing to participate

(Gottschalk, 2016). However, we see some of these beliefs begin to change and teachers feel more comfortable working with students in English Language Learning programming when they are able to understand the individual needs, experiences, and culture of their unique students rather than visualizing them as a homogenous group (Kolano et al., 2014).

When ELD teachers are co-teaching with content teachers, general education teachers are often reluctant to share classroom time, control of the classroom, or to even see the value and contributions of their co-teaching partner (Beninhof & Leensvaart, 2016). Secondary teachers don't identify ESL specialists as a place to find support for their students in ELL programming—either lacking knowledge about what ESL specialists do or because they feel that they are too busy and overwhelmed to offer resources (Elfers et al., 2013). There is an uneven division of labor where teachers of students in ELL programming usually resort to the “one teach, one assist” model (Peercy, Ditter, Destefano, 2017). There is an importance to teachers having defined roles in the school and in the classroom (Peercy, Ditter, Destefano, 2017). This may be due to the mistake of presenting language learning as a side topic rather than a central focus in pre-service teacher education—equally important to teaching the content. Work needs to be done in creating educational support for building intentional structures that allow for opportunities for content and ELD teachers to interact and collaborate together for the benefit of students in ELL programming.

Students in ELL programming are more likely to behave well in school and demonstrate higher intrinsic motivation if they feel appreciated, valued, and perceived as intelligent and capable in the classroom (Barreiro, 2018). The perceptions teachers have of the proficiency of students in English Language Learning programming is more important to their education than

their actual proficiency. This perceived proficiency is played out in interactions between students, peers, and teachers (Martin-Beltran, 2010).

ESL teachers often see themselves as advocates as well as facilitators between their students and society as they develop the language necessary to experience the world (Fogle & Moser, 2017). They also often feel that part of their job is to track down other teachers to make sure they are supporting students in ELL programming and to educate their colleagues about the needs and experiences of these students (Fogle & Moser, 2017). There is a tension between perpetuating the dominant language of English and helping students achieve diverse personal goals through differentiation (Menard-Warwick, 2013).

In addressing the needs of students in ELL programming, teachers also have a responsibility to move the language learning of their students beyond simple grammatical structures and communication to cultural pedagogy that addresses ideologies held by themselves and their students (Menard-Warwick, 2013). This critical view empowers students in their language learning to examine their world views and take ownership of their education, rather than just learning the structures and assimilating in a new language and culture.

Models like the Language-Based Approach to Content Instruction (LACI) Framework have been created to successfully facilitate the instruction of students in ELL programming within general education classrooms like social studies (Honigsfeld et al., 2017). This is an example of the rigorous education that can be offered to students in ELL programming within the ELD class and the content area classroom that does not sacrifice their learning in order to learn the language.

Educational leadership also plays a crucial role in offering supports and defining the roles of teachers, ESL specialists, and families in the education of students in ELL programming

(Elfers et al., 2013; Torres, Clark & Chrispeels, 2022). Much of the experience that administrators have with students in English Language Learning programming is when it comes to discipline. This can influence students and their educational pathways.

Administrators may influence many factors that facilitate or hinder learning experiences and outcomes for students in ELL programming (Baecher et al., 2013). One challenge to successful leadership of students in ELL programming might include approaching their education as “business as usual” where students must fit into the existing school structure and are marginalized at the edges of education—rather than language learning being the forefront and the school adapting to student needs. Another challenge to leadership is the marginalisation of students in ELL programming and the teachers of these students in the classroom. (McGee et al., 2015).

School counselors should work with classroom and ELD teachers to achieve the individual educational needs of students in ELL programming through reviewing assessments, monitoring progress, and offering additional supports that students need. Collaborating with parents also allows school counselors help build literacy skills for students in ELL programming (Cook, 2015).

Household Lingualism

Caregivers can play a large role in language acquisition. Schools often fall short in their inclusion and interaction with parents of students in English Language Learning programming who may also be non-native speakers of English, be unfamiliar with educational systems in the United States, or have socio-economic factors that limit their ability to be involved with their children’s school (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014). Parents who are not native English speakers may also struggle as their children develop new identities surrounding language (Gonzalez et al.,

2013). Higher levels of school support for students in ELL programming are also connected to higher levels of support from their families (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

Teachers sometimes express frustration with the families of students in ELL programming for lack of participation or traditional communication with teachers (such as phone calls, emails, or attending parent-teacher conference) (Gottschalk, 2016; Fasciana, 2019) and sometimes even identify families as the biggest obstacle to learning for students in ELL programming (Rivera, 2012). These biases against families of students in ELL programming are problematic because some educators may believe that their students and their families do not care about their language acquisition. The wide range of strategies families use for connecting with their child's school or education may not be reflected in general assumptions that match white middle or upper class families methods (Gonzalez et al., 2013). Families of students in ELL programming, which may include immigrant or working-class families, may be finding other ways to participate in school communities that mirror their values and work schedules.

Parental self-efficacy and their beliefs surrounding their own abilities to learn and help their children can cause lead to a hesitancy to get involved with schools (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Panferov, 2010). Efforts to connect with families need to be culturally sensitive and aware of the educational experiences of the parents (Panferov, 2010). Academic language development and literacy depends on access to books, structured time for studying and homework, and exposure to reading and writing in the home. Households where these opportunities are not accessible will not foster the same level of second language development as those that do.

Collaboration for English Language Learners

A strong support system for students in ELL programming comprised of parents and teachers while offering a wide variety of learning opportunities aids in the acquisition of a

second language (Winsler et al., 2014). While co-teaching is known to be an effective model of collaborating for the benefit of students in ELL programming, in many instances what ends up happening is the content teacher dominates while the ELD teacher is an underutilized resource who sits in the back of the classroom (Beninghof & Leensvaart, 2016).

Collaboration about the education of students in ELL programming is frequently hindered by various problems. For example, collaborative planning time is often used to discuss standardized test scores, which leaves no time for discussion of English Language Learning. Seeing students in ELL programming as a shared group of learners versus “my students” or “your students” makes teachers feel more invested in collaborating on student differentiation (Martin-Beltran & Peercy, 2014). Collaboration between general education content and ELD teachers creates the environments and circumstances needed for students in ELL programming to acquire new language in authentic ways (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2021).

There is a lot of discussion in scholarship about how teachers might collaborate with parents and how teachers can collaborate with each other and administrators, but less about how students in English Language Learning programming themselves might become involved in the collaboration process and participate in shaping their own educational journeys. We need to begin thinking about ways that the stories and narratives that students in English Language Learning programming tell about each other and themselves can be utilized by educational stakeholders to help everyone become partners and teammates in supporting English Language Learning.

The goal of this research is to begin to move beyond the individual problems and existing research that we have identified in various individual stakeholders and their jurisdictions within language learning and into a larger picture where we note how the lines of interaction influence

each other and the ripple effects it has on language learners along their educational pathways. The research questions for this study were: How do the stakeholder's relationships and perceptions of each other inform the educational paths for middle school students in English Language Learning programming? What are stakeholder's perceptions of English language learning for middle school students in English Language Learning programming?

Methods

Positionality

As the author of this study, I am a white native English speaker who taught in the intermountain west in a secondary school with a population of only 14% Latino students. I speak Spanish and received my endorsement in Teaching English Language Learners (TELL) during my second year of teaching. During the last 10 years since I learned the language, I've had the pleasure of interacting with and teaching many students who have communicated with me in English and Spanish. My experiences as a teacher in secondary schools for 3 years in teaching and collaborating with other teachers about our students in English Language Learning programming as well as the lack of educational supports for these students led me to this thesis topic.

As as teacher, when I had discussions with other teachers, I often felt like teachers were underestimating English Language Learning students and their abilities based on their personal experiences, biases, and stereotypes rather than leaning on educational and professional development resources that would better prepare them to handle the students in English Language Learning programming entering their classrooms. Content area teachers are often ill-prepared to know how to address the diverse needs of students in English Language Learning programming while still providing them with grade-level appropriate content.

A qualitative case study gave opportunities for teachers and parents to speak about their experiences and allowed for me to examine their stories. A desire for this type of study was firmly rooted in my own experiences and positionality. In terms of methodology, working with a small case study sampling rather than a large scale study made this examination of stories and individuals more manageable. In addition, because of the small scale of this research as a qualitative case study, the findings are simply transferable and not generalizable.

In my own opportunity to learn Spanish, I was also interacting with many Spanish speaking adults who were learning English. Having some of these experiences with adults who have limited English proficiency made me aware of the necessity of speaking English in the United States. It helped me see some of the ways that they are alienated within society and can't participate fully. However, because of my privilege as a white, native English speaker, I am still an outsider within this context and body of research. While I do have experience as a learner of an L2 language, I am not a native speaker of Spanish and will never experience some of the stigma that exists in our country for immigrants and L2 learners of English. This means that while I can sympathize with some experiences shared by Oscar and his mother, I can not fully experience it because I am an outsider. This is reflective of the fact that the majority of teachers that are working with students in English Language Learning programming are also white and native speakers of English.

This led me to myriad questions as I considered learning more about this topic. Some of these included, does the same thing happen in our classrooms? Are teachers pushing students in ELL programming to the peripheries of the classroom—either because they feel they aren't capable or they don't know how to help? How can we help classroom teachers and ELD teachers collaborate better?

Methodology and Data Sources

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the question: How do stakeholder's relationships and perceptions of each other inform the educational paths for middle school students in English Language Learning programming? Narrative inquiry allows researchers to examine the life and learning of one specific student from many perspectives.

Narrative inquiry is a fitting way to conduct research about the stories told by students, teachers, educators, and parents about the experiences they have with English Language Learning and the ways in which they intertwine to shape the educational pathways of those students in English Language Learning programming.

In order to craft this narrative, data were collected in the form of interviews with the participants. The interviews were guided as semi-structured interviews with a set of ten questions that are designed to interrogate perceptions and experiences of all stakeholders with regards to language learning in the context of one student (See Appendix A). With the exception of WIDA scores that provide information about the language mastery level of the student, all data collected were qualitative. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the data examined through open coding of themes. As an adult researcher in a middle school setting, I acknowledge the power dynamic that existed in my interviewing of the student as a minor in the school. Since I was not an educator at the school, he was not familiar with me. However, there is still a power structure that exists as an adult researcher asking to hear his perceptions that may have affected the interview with the student. This was then compiled in the form of a narrative that describes the shaping of the educational pathway of the student. This study does not seek to generalize beyond this context but can provide transferrable insight into similar experiences and perceptions of the English Language Learning process.

As part of the data, I received a copy of the WIDA scores for the student from the previous school year (since the study took place before the WIDA test was taken for the 2022-2023 school year). This data was used as a comparison tool with the stakeholders' expectations of proficiency for the student's grade level as well as compared to Lexile level expectations for his grade. These data were included to provide a baseline understanding of proficiency levels.

School Context

The location of Mountain Town Middle School (all names are pseudonyms) is somewhat unique in that it is a fairly isolated tourist town in the intermountain west with a population of fewer than 10,000 people. This creates a close knit community with a small student population at the middle school of fewer than 300 students. Approximately 27% of the student population is Hispanic or Latinx. There has been a turnover in administration as well as the English Language Development staff in the past few years which could have potentially had an impact on the student in English Language Learning programming.

An additional consideration might be that the landscape of teaching has been entirely changed by the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020. The capacity for schools and teachers to address the needs of teachers and students has shifted and all research conducted in schools currently is affected by this.

Student Background

I was specifically seeking a secondary student enrolled as an English Language Learner who spoke Spanish, and I recruited the student through the school by referral from the principal. While the school had students in ELL programming who spoke other languages, I chose to work

with a Spanish-speaking student to facilitate easier communication with the student and their parents.

Due to preference of scheduling of the interviewees, I interviewed all of Oscar's teachers, his principal, and his mother before I met him. This result meant that I had a mental picture and perception of him based on their perceptions and stories about him. This order of interviews most certainly had an effect on my interview with Oscar since I could ask him some questions that were influenced by the answers of the other stakeholders.

Oscar was a middle school student in seventh grade who is Latino and was identified by the school district as an English Language Learner. He is from Mexico and has been in the United States for about 10 years. He attended a school that is roughly one-third Latinx students but had very few Latinx or even Spanish speaking instructors. He had one older brother who attended the high school in the district and who was also designated as an English Language Learner. He primarily spoke Spanish in his home with his parents and when he visited Mexico with his extended family. He loved playing baseball but decided that this year it was time he gave basketball a chance.

As part of the data collected during this case study, I was able to look at Oscar's World-wide Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) scores from sixth grade to gain an understanding of his proficiency level based on the test. The proficiency level scores are based on a scale of 1 to 6. Oscar scored 4.2 in listening, 3.5 in speaking, 2.7 in reading, and a 3.0 in writing. At a 3.5 in speaking, Oscar's speech is mostly fluent and comprehensible but he may still search for needed vocabulary in technical areas. A 2.7 WIDA score in reading translates to roughly a 500 Lexile level which is the reading level of the average second grader in the spring. A 3.0 in writing shows that he can write with comprehensible simple sentences that occasionally

show an emerging complexity. His higher levels in listening and speaking has the potential to mask some of his reading and writing abilities in class.

Other Stakeholders

I attempted to interview all of the stakeholders who have a direct influence on the language learning of students. This includes teachers, the principal, other educational support staff, and the student's parents.

The educators interviewed ranged from teachers who had only a few years of teaching experiences to those who had taught for decades. They came from a wide variety of pre-service programs across the United States. Only one educator interviewed was also Latinx and he is engaged as a cultural liaison rather than a content instructor. The homogeneity of the teachers interviewed generally reflects the demographics of teachers in the area but does not necessarily reflect the demographics of their students. I also interviewed the principal of the school. Many of the educators had arrived at their positions in non-traditional ways. A few did not study education as undergraduates and received licensure following the completion of their bachelor's degrees.

Pseudonym	Subject Area	Years in Education	Languages
Mr. Alvarez	District Cultural Family Liaison	20 years	Spanish English
Mrs. Baker	English Language Development	39 years	English
Mr. Barnes	History and World Cultures	10 years	English Spanish
Mrs. Charlton	English Language Arts	22 years	English
Mrs. Corbin	Math	7 years	English

Mrs. Graham	Principal	25 years	English
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Data Collection

The interviews helped me explore the perceptions that the English Language Learner as well as stakeholders had and how it affected the student's educational pathway. Questions addressed topics such as perceptions of students in English Language Learning programming, teacher and parent collaboration, training and professional development experience with English Language Learning, and perceived roles and barriers in English Language Learning. Each individual was interviewed once: the student, his parents, four of his teachers, the principal of his school, and one educator in the district all who play a role in the learning of students in ELL programming and their cultural connections to the community (See Appendix A for interview questions).

The interviews ranged from approximately 35 to 90 minutes. All of the interviews with the educators and with the student were conducted in English. The interview conducted with the student's mother was in her native language of Spanish. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. This transcription was then coded with focus on the perceptions of the stakeholders on the individuals and process of language learning.

As I began analyzing the interviews, the range of responses received from the interviewees ebbed and flowed between negative and positive outlooks on the state of the education of students in English Language Learning programming.

Data Analysis

After reviewing the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews and focus group, the qualitative data was manually coded for open themes that were able to be constructed into narratives or overarching stories told by the participants about their experiences.

I read each interview multiple times and identified initial codes. The codes were then grouped into categories and then these categories were grouped into themes aligned with the research questions: How do stakeholder's relationships and perceptions of each other inform the educational paths for middle school students in English Language Learning programming? What are stakeholder's perceptions of English language learning for middle school students in English Language Learning programming?

For example, one piece of raw data from the interviews was: "I think, overall, I don't feel super trained of like what to do. I mean, that's just me but, like, we're kind of on our own" (Interview 4). My initial code identified this as a feeling of isolation. Then once I had made my first pass at all of the interviews, this was placed under the category of "feelings of educator isolation. Ultimately, this piece of data was grouped under the overarching theme of isolation between stakeholders.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how the perceptions of stakeholders in an English Language Learning case study context interact with one another and in turn, affect the student's educational pathway and experience. The major theme that emerged was a disconnect between stakeholders.

Disconnect Between Stakeholders

Data demonstrated that a disconnect can occur between stakeholders in the language learning process. The reasons behind this disconnect included a lack of teacher understanding, feelings of isolation, feelings about English Language Learners, and perceptions of proficiency.

Lack of Teacher Understanding

Teachers expressed an understanding that they should reach out for help or should use the English Language Development (ELD) teacher as a resource but were unsure about the types of help they should ask for. Mrs. Charlton said, “I don’t know how to use [the ELD teacher]. I don’t know what I’m supposed to ask for.” Teachers are not always aware of the purpose of the English Language Development (ELD) class or how to utilize the ELD teacher as a resource, and without this knowledge, they may not seek support for the affected students.

Some of the tasks that teachers say they felt ELD teachers should help with were the creation of graphic organizers and pre-teaching vocabulary. Even when the teachers did have an understanding of the purpose of the ELD class or have a task that they wanted help with from the ELD teacher, they expressed that they felt like it would be faster to do it themselves or that they had the necessary experience to work with students in ELL programming after teaching for a long period of time. Mrs. Charlton said, “I kind of already have that in my repertoire like how to make things simplified in their amount of English. So a lot of it, I already kind of have so I don’t feel like I need them as much.” Thus, Mrs. Charlton, like many other teachers, completed the tasks that they wished the ELD teacher would support them with.

While it is seemingly simple to understand the types of instruction and learning that happens in a content area class like math or science, it is not necessarily as straightforward for teachers to understand the instruction that happens in an ELD classroom. This could be attributed to the fact that the majority of the teachers have never been in an English Language Development class. For instance, Mrs. Charlton said, “I’m not even sure what they learn in their classes.” This lack of understanding from teachers about what happens in the ELD classroom has

the potential to impact the student's development, as the teachers are not communicating about the learning that happens in their classroom spaces.

The principal, Mrs. Graham, shared that this misunderstanding, “Creates an idea that the ELD teacher is the one that teaches the English stuff” and an “expectation that that person will do all the modification and accommodation—” This was a clear separation of roles expected by teachers. The principal also felt that in the district's various trainings and communication with staff that “It's been pretty clear that the Gen Ed teacher responsibilities are these...” The principal shared that roles and expectations were communicated through professional development and other trainings. But the teacher comments reflected that the ELD teacher responsibilities remained unclear to the teachers.

Oscar, the student in the ELD class, didn't seem to understand what the difference was between ELD and his more traditional English Language Arts classroom, either. He saw it as unnecessary since he “already speaks English,” but he didn't share the same belief that his English Language Arts class was superfluous. He only expressed that his English class is much more difficult for him, “five times as hard,” because there are so many more tasks required. “Read fourteen pages. Talk about it, write about it, and then move on to something else, to a different assignment.” This fast paced work may be the reason other ELL students struggle with their content classes.

The ELD teacher, Mrs. Baker, described offering the tools and resources to teachers that she wished she had when she was teaching in elementary school and then later Language Arts. “When I started the year, I thought to myself, what would I have wanted from the ELD teacher?” However, only two teachers accepted her offer to help with differentiation and pre-teaching vocabulary. She shared that she didn't how helpful that was “because [they] never got back to

me” and she did not receive feedback about how the students did. She felt that if she was successful at her job as an ELD teacher, her students would be successful in all of their classes. She said, “I want them to have the vocabulary and the skills to be able to be successful in their other classes independently.”

Mrs. Baker shared her frustration that she felt that she was sometimes seen as just a tutor who was supposed to help students accomplish their homework and tasks from other classes. She described another way that she felt she could’ve been helped when she was a Language Arts teacher. “The biggest thing I thought would help is if I could just have had someone who would say to me, ‘Well, this assignment isn’t going to work this way for this child, but I could give you an assignment that would be very similar that they could be successful in.’” She recognized this issue when her students were assigned assignments that she felt were too difficult for their current stage of language learning. “This assignment that isn’t really meant for these kids. Anyway, I can help them finish it and turn it in and that might help their grade, but will it help them be successful on the next assignment?” She wished that she could discuss with teachers ahead of time whether or not their assignments were appropriate for students in ELL programming in their difficulty level and whether they really addressed the skills the students needed.

Mrs. Baker shared that she felt like she talked with the students often about the importance of the class and why they were placed in an ELD class despite their feelings that they didn’t need to improve their English. Yet she said that Oscar complained about his own skills. She said “He doesn’t see the connection between the lack of skill and me trying to help him build that skill.” This disconnect correlated with Oscar’s comments (shared previously), that he deemed the class to be unnecessary for his development.

Feelings of Isolation

Another subtheme that emerged from the data collected from interviews was a feeling of isolation amongst stakeholders.

Mrs. Graham shared that she felt like there was a lack of administrative oversight in the district. She said, “There’s a lot of value for teacher autonomy in this district and I think for many years it was like, ‘Here’s the standards. Now do what you want.’” This has the potential to allow teachers to differentiate their lessons according to their students’ needs.

However, this teacher autonomy became problematic when the teachers felt like they were left to their own devices or not provided resources to teach students in ELL programming on a daily basis. Teachers shared this with statements like, “I think it’s a little bit like, well...’Figure it out.’” (Mrs. Corbin) or Mrs. Charlton, who, speaking for herself as well as other teachers, said “We felt very on our own.” The teachers felt that they were given training during professional development meetings, but the day-to-day experience of teaching students in ELL programming in the classroom felt difficult when every students’ needs were so different from each other.

Mrs. Corbin shared how she had worked out a system in her class where she had been given a few ELL students in different class periods and it was working well. Then one day, all of her ELL students arrived in the same class period with a schedule change which had not been communicated to her ahead of time. She then had to figure out different solutions for instructing the students, all of whom were at different proficiency levels. “It just really threw me off and a little bit of a lack of communication. I was initially really upset.” These were feelings of frustration and isolation because she had not been part of the decision-making process.

Teachers felt overwhelmed when they had multiple students in ELL programming with multiple proficiency levels in a variety of class periods. Mrs. Graham voiced some of the concerns that teachers have: “I have these kids who don’t speak English in my class and I don’t know what to do, and no one pushes-in to help, and I don’t have a translator.” They are offered strategies that work for students in English Language Learning programming that “work for everybody.” These feelings of frustration, spoken here by this principal, had been voiced to her over the years during her experiences as both a teacher and administrator.

When asked about pre-service training, none of the teacher participants could point to specific classes or instruction that would help them support students in English Language Learning programming. Mrs. Graham felt that newer teachers demonstrate more openness to diversity and understanding than in the past but newer teachers don’t necessarily have more skills or preparedness for teaching students in ELL programming than before. Mr. Barnes spoke about the district-level trainings about teaching students in ELL programming and said, “My takeaways with trainings like that frequently are, ‘Well, this isn’t just good for ELD students, I should do this with everybody.’” Other teachers admitted that they had received professional development opportunities through the district but they struggled to implement the things they learned because of time.

Teachers did not feel prepared to address the wide variety and specific needs of their students in English Language Learning programming when first put into the classroom and have only developed these skills across years of experience in the classroom.

Oscar’s mother also expressed some feelings of isolation. She said that she wished that parent-teacher conferences were more personalized and that there was more time for each student. “It’s like we are here but someone else is next to us waiting. It’s so quick. I know we

aren't all the same and who knows how many students there are...I wish it was more focused at times. So nobody is pressuring you." She understood the limitations when there are so many students and only a few hours but felt that she would feel more comfortable having more time and personalized experience in talking about her sons' progress. This disconnect between parents and teachers may have an impact on their interactions and ultimately, student learning.

The language barrier between Spanish-speaking parents, teachers, and students can also be seen as contributing to feelings of isolation. The teachers and district felt that using a translating app, such as Talking Points, when they want to communicate directly to parents and guardians, solved some problems. Mrs. Graham said that "That's broken down a lot of barriers." However, Oscar's mother felt that so often her interactions with the school felt impersonal. Texts and announcements came through the application but she felt that she wanted more face to face time with her son's teachers. She recognized the limitations of scenarios like parent-teacher conferences.

While the app translates text conversations, if a teacher wants to have an in person conversation with parents then they have to have a mediator through the family cultural liaison. Mrs. Charlton felt that this was a barrier sometimes because "you don't always get to the heart of [the conversation with a third person]." This means that the focus wasn't always where the teacher wanted it to be.

Oscar's mother appreciated the translators the school had provided in the past for parent-teacher conferences. Previously, they had one person who acted as interpreter for the whole district but had recently increased that to one translator per school. But what happened when there weren't enough translators? "Sometimes it's like I'm here and the translator is there, there, there." This was a barrier for participation. She also described how it can be very noisy so

you can't understand or hear very well and there were a lot of people. "So sometimes we don't go because of this." These are some of the barriers in communication between stakeholders that contribute to feelings of isolation for the parent.

One of the teachers had a very optimistic outlook and hoped that the district was moving in a positive direction. Mr. Barnes said, "I want any parents who if they're first language is not English, I want them to understand that is not a hindrance for the school. The school maybe needs to take more time to welcome you and probably doesn't understand everything from your perspective, because I know we don't, but we want to learn and I think the school's working on that." This optimism has the potential to help teachers recognize the needs of parents and what needs to be done to welcome diverse families into their schools.

Students are also left feeling alone when they are asked to do work that is above their abilities when there is not enough scaffolding and teacher support. Even when teachers try to help a newcomer student participate, Mr. Alvarez estimated that "70% of the time [they're] alone." This isolation amongst stakeholders is just one theme that emerged as participants explored their perceptions about language learning.

Perceptions of English Language Learners

A third subtheme that emerged surrounds feelings about students in English Language Learning programming. The responses and sentiments that teachers expressed about students in English Language Learning programming varied widely. They could be categorized simply as positive and negative feelings.

Some teachers felt awestruck by their students in ELL programming and said things like, "It's amazing to me that they pick it up so quickly." They recognized that their students were at an age where they could learn English quickly when immersed in their classrooms. Mr. Barnes,

who speaks some Spanish, said, “It is remarkable to me that they can do all this work and then filter it through another language and then and then do the work and I really think that’s extraordinary.” They also expressed a desire to engage with students in their language and culture. Mr. Barnes said, “If I like would see kids in the hall, they’re speaking Spanish. I would try to speak a little bit of Spanish with them, just as a way of showing like, ‘okay, you know, speak what you want to speak, but try your best and learn like I’m doing that.” Most teachers felt that the increased diversity in their classroom was a benefit to all students.

Other teachers had negative perceptions of the students in ELL programming. Specifically talking about Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, Mrs. Charlton described “feeling sorry” and having feelings of pity for them. “I just feel so bad for those kiddos honestly, because he’s lost both [languages] like I feel like he’s not in either one like it’s so hard because he’s not proficient in either one necessarily.” This teacher continued, “It just breaks my heart a little.” The teacher referenced feeling this way towards not only Oscar but all of her LEP students. These perceptions have the potential to impact the teacher’s instruction and positioning of students in English Language Learning programming in their classrooms.

Oscar’s mother, however, viewed her children being bilingual as extremely important for their future success. “You are worth two people. Bilingual. You are worth two. It’s cool. That you can understand, write, read. It’s an opportunity. It’s an opportunity for them. Maybe help them for better work. It can open a lot of doors. For the fact of learning another language or knowing another language.” This is an asset-based attitude toward language learners.

Mr. Barnes, admitted that his previous tactics with students in ELL programming were perhaps not very beneficial. “In years past, to my immense regret, I would try to show compassion and patience to students who were learning English. I would try to make it clear that

I was willing to change assignments to help them because what I wanted was for them to be comfortable and understand whatever [they] feel like [they] can take from this.” Ultimately the students in his class struggled to learn across the year because he was simply just trying to help them through, sometimes through translation by another student. “That meant that there were kids in history class all year with me who were really getting nothing.” Later, as a teacher, he understood that it is of more benefit to the students to maintain the same level of rigor while using other resources to adapt the language.

Mrs. Graham shared that they had attempted to transition to change the terminology in how they referred to the students in ELL programming in their school based on literature that is increasingly moving away from deficit based terms due to the potential negative effects. She said that, “We started a shift towards using ‘emergent bilingual’ and there was push-back against that.” They received pushback from teachers who felt that the change was confusing. In the end, the district stuck with the original terms of limited English proficient (LEP) and non-English proficient (NEP). In one of our conversations, the teacher kept gesturing to two different tables in her empty classroom. She shared that in her mind, she had grouped the NEP and LEP kids and was visualizing their location in her classroom while we talked. This kind of separation has the potential to impact students’ experiences or perception of themselves in the classroom and in their learning.

A few of the teachers felt that they might be lacking in their ability to teach and connect with students in ELL programming because they didn’t speak the language. Mr. Barnes discussed his progress with Spanish language learning saying that he is “trying to learn Spanish and I can barely use it socially. I certainly couldn’t use it academically.” He said that he felt it helped him connect with his students and their parents. Others expressed regret that they didn’t

speaking Spanish but admitted that they were not making any efforts to learn the language. The district's cultural liaison, Mr. Alvarez, felt that this was a critical piece in having stronger cultural ties and teaching students in English Language Learning programming. "That's a problem if you don't understand the language, so the school should push people to learn more Spanish." He added that while it is not a requirement to speak the language of all a teacher's language learning students, it can be helpful to have a shared experience of what it takes to learn a language. This has the potential to show a student that their home culture and language are valued by the teacher.

Varying Teacher Perceptions of Their Language Abilities

None of the teachers referenced Oscar's actual WIDA scores but spoke about how they felt that they had an understanding of his proficiency levels in English based on his participation and performance in his class. They frequently referenced his ability to verbally communicate with peers—in both English and Spanish. Mr. Barnes said, "I don't see any kind of barrier between himself, Hispanic students or non Hispanic students where language might be a factor in their relationship."

Some felt that he had less proficiency than might be expected. Mrs. Charlton said, "I find that his Spanish isn't as good as he thinks." Others described this lack of native language proficiency as a hindrance for teaching because they couldn't simply translate terms or knowledge into Spanish. Mrs. Corbin noted that, "Sometimes they don't know the words in their original language either." Teachers identified this as a problem because decreased literacy in their L1 has the potential to lead to slower progress in developing an L2.

Mrs. Charlton also correlated the English language abilities of the parents of her students in ELL programming to their ability to help their children. She said, "I would say, most of the

ELD kiddos do not have parent support for English. Most of them don't speak English. I mean they're, support is 'I want them to do good in school. How are they doing in school?' But the actual support part isn't there." She pointed out that the parents of students in ELL programming who do speak English had an astronomical level of language growth compared to their peers.

The WIDA test is the primary determining factor in quantifying student language proficiency in their L2 and placement in ELD classes. Oscar, when asked to talk about what the WIDA test entails, talked about the four sections of the test: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Teachers are provided copies of the scores for all of their students in ELL programming.

Even with the WIDA scores, Mrs. Charlton described herself as often wondering "How much does he really not know?" She felt that having this diagnosis of proficiency would be helpful in the classroom but that the test was unable accurately diagnose Oscar's proficiency. This has the potential to lead to content area teachers having their own perceptions of language proficiency rather than working off a common definition of what the students' abilities are.

Oscar's mother also expressed her mixed feelings about his proficiency. Speaking about both of her sons, she said, "In English, there are a lot of things they don't understand. In Spanish, there are a lot of things they don't understand. It's difficult...sometimes I've told [the school] I'm worried that they won't understand either of the two languages." The cultural family liaison for the district, Mr. Alvarez, shared that this reflects the concerns of a lot of families that their home languages will be weakened, and their children's move toward English and away from their home language could create rifts in their families.

When asked explicitly if she felt that her sons were losing their Spanish abilities, Oscar's mother said, "Sometimes, yes. It seems to me, yes." She attributed this to her sons being around

English primarily at school, with friends, and even at home where they will respond primarily in English. She felt that she was somewhat to blame for this because she believed that she was “not very good at teaching them in Spanish.” Mr. Alvarez said that this was a common phenomenon he has seen. “Many Latino kids, maybe they keep Spanish for certain many years, but they don’t know how to read and write in Spanish. So they’re not bilingual anymore.”

The perception that stakeholders have of student proficiency is important for pedagogy because teacher expectations shapes their curriculum and classroom management. When teachers do not feel like students' skills are at a certain level that they seek, they often adapt their curriculum, for good or bad. Mrs. Charlton said, “I’m teaching such high-level skills...because they don’t [speak English] they can’t be learning what we’re learning.” This teacher held this belief that the skills she was trying to teach to her class were out of reach for the newcomer students due to what she perceived to be a lack of adequate language proficiency to access the content.

Teachers have perceptions of proficiency based on their in-class observations and interactions. While some teachers, like Mrs. Baker and Mrs. Corbin, felt that Oscar struggles in both Spanish and English, Mr. Barnes felt that “he has a mastery of spoken language.” There appeared to be some discrepancy in how teachers identified and defined student proficiency based on their own observations.

Specifically, Mrs. Baker, the ELD teacher, felt that other teachers “have a very wrong perception of what their [students] are able to do.” She said that the teachers pretended that Oscar had the same proficiency level as other students. She felt that this gave Oscar (and other ELD students) the false impression that the only thing standing in his way was the test (i.e. test scores) instead of the actual academic language learning that needed to happen for him to

succeed. She described LEP students as “at a standstill because they think they are done.” She perceived an inability for them to progress forward if they did not understand their own abilities and what they still need to work on. This has the potential to affect their motivation in working towards passing the WIDA test and developing the skills necessary to be successful in their other classes.

In interviewing Oscar about his classes, he shared a lot about his motivations. Oscar said that his history class with Mr. Barnes was enjoyable but hard—specifically when he was given a writing task. He said that he “never [knows] what to write about.” He also shared that he hasn’t talked with his parents about his goals of going to college. When asked how he would make changes to the ELD program if he could, Oscar admitted that he would probably keep it the same. “Honestly, I think I’d just keep it there...for me [it’s a waste of time] in my opinion...but for other kids, of course, other kids, that speak Spanish, of course.” He felt like it was helpful and beneficial for newcomers and students who still primarily speak Spanish. He differentiates between himself and other students in ELL programming who he feels need the class more than he does. This demonstrates some of the self-perception he has.

Discussion

Findings from this study support the importance of strong collaboration and connections between schools and the parents of students in ELL programming. The disconnects found between stakeholders can be resolved through continued efforts towards training teachers with the skills and resources they need to teach students in English Language Learning programming placed in their classrooms (Fasciana, 2019). The themes that emerged from the data connect to other experiences that have previously been shared by teachers of students in ELL programming.

Lack of Teacher Understanding

The education system for students in English Language Learning programming functions under the assumption that teachers and the administration have an understanding of the nature of the English Language Development class and the role of the English Language Development teacher. It seems that students and teachers all readily recognize the importance of the ELD class and direct instruction from the ELD teacher when the students are newcomers and primarily speak Spanish. However, the same stakeholders don't seem to understand or see the importance for students who are long-term students in English Language Learning programming but have never developed the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALPs) necessary to graduate from the program.

When teachers do not understand the purpose of the ELD class, the activities students are doing, the skills students are learning, and the role of the ELD teacher, this may have an effect on students as it trickles down into their attitudes about their English language learning. The messaging that teachers send out based on their understandings and opinions on the ELD class and students in English Language Learning programming may have an impact on the perceptions that students have about the class and about their language learning. Students may then feel isolated in their classes and get a sense that each of their classes, including ELD, is a separate entity and that the skills and resources they develop in one class shouldn't be used in others.

Content area teachers recognize that they should ask for help but, along with having a general misunderstanding of ELD, are unfamiliar with what resources or help they should ask for. This not only has an effect on students but also can have an effect on the pedagogy and feelings that the teachers themselves have about teaching students in ELL programming. The teachers who do know what help they could ask for sometimes have the attitude that it is just faster or easier to do it themselves, or that they are adequately prepared by their years of

experience teaching to teach students in ELL programming on their own. This seems to be a common mentality of more experienced teachers that have often dealt with situations where they are left on their own and are not provided adequate resources so they have to adapt.

While teacher experience is invaluable in the classroom, explicit teacher training like endorsements in teaching English Language Learners is critically important in addressing student needs. ELD teachers should be seen as experts in language acquisition in their schools. This belief that the ELD teacher is simply a support for a content teacher or tutor may lead to a perpetual cycle of learned helplessness for students. The ELD teacher shared that using their skills in this way is not supportive of independent long-term English Language learning. Much confusion surrounds the ELD program in general.

The confusion surrounding the purpose of the English Language Development class and how it fits into the educational pathway of the student is particularly meaningful considering the fact that the district has an ELD plan. The district plan lays out the goals for the district in professional development surrounding ELD, the responsibilities of the ELD teacher, general education teachers, and family cultural liaison. The extent to which this plan has been directly shared with teachers is unclear. It is obvious that more discussion needs to happen.

It is critical that the discussion becomes more about “our students” rather than “your students” and that the skills being taught in the language learning class are carried over into all their learning throughout the day. While it is important to clarify, separate roles for ELD and content area teachers, it should be understood that all teachers bear the burden of modification and accommodation for ELL student success. Language learning then becomes a team effort.

If this misunderstanding and confusion can be resolved, then perhaps more content teachers would take the support offered by the ELD teacher and work in a coordinated effort to

ensure that their assignments and instruction are appropriate for students in ELL programming and the level that they are at. The student lack of understanding may be solved as an ancillary benefit once teachers have a better understanding of what is expected of students in ELL programming and how to help them. Once students in ELL programming are provided with assignments and instruction that accurately addresses their needs and learning, they will be more motivated to do the work when they feel they can be successful. Scaffolding in all classes will provide them with better skills and tools to enable long term language learning and success in their classes.

Feelings of Isolation

Sometimes teachers are excited by the prospect of not having every move dictated by the administration or school district so that they can focus on teaching. Unfortunately, too much teacher autonomy isn't helpful when the teachers struggle to know how to help their students in ELL programming and they have minimal training in working with language learners (Aguinaga, 2017).

Teachers received minimal training in their pre-service programs and felt that it was difficult to implement some of the strategies that they have been encouraged to use. Some of these include strategies like Total Physical Response (TPR), word walls for vocabulary, and having school-wide common classroom routines are encouraged because they are supposed to "work for everyone." However, it seems this attitude then becomes that "whatever is good for everyone" is good for students in ELL programming, and then the targeted tier 2 instruction is lost. Sometimes teachers expressed the idea that Tier 1 teaching strategies that work well for students in ELL programming and are frequently recommended in professional development settings are also tactics that work well with other students. However, this could be interpreted as

an excuse that lumps students in ELL programming back in with their peers rather than giving them differentiated individualized instruction.

The lack of pre-service training for teachers leaves especially new teachers vulnerable to feeling isolated when they are left in the classroom to teach without the full tools needed to support students in English Language Learning programming. This becomes most obvious when there is a lack of communication surrounding changes in student schedules or new arrivals coming to the school. Helping teachers feel prepared for having students in ELL programming in their classrooms has the strong potential to support both teacher and student success. Teacher prep programs need to confront the reality that they are sending large groups of educators into a system that they are ill-prepared for. Teacher preparation programs have not yet fully grappled with the homogeneity of the teaching force and the need for teachers who can meet the diverse needs of students, including students who are receiving language learning programming.

There is a general lack of preparation when it comes to handling the diverse student populations that teachers will be teaching in their classrooms (Aguinaga, 2017). None of these teachers have experienced learning in an L2 in a formal education setting. Teachers in the study reflected on their pre-service experiences and could not recall explicit training on how to teach students in ELL programming. Teacher preparation programs are obviously lacking in offering instruction on working with students in English Language programming overall, but especially within the context of their content area classrooms. Teachers may feel frustrated and isolated if they believe that they should be able to handle teaching and classroom management after their education classes.

Other teacher experiences highlighted the isolation teachers feel when they receive no communication about student placement in their classes and then are left to deal with the

aftermath of schedule changes. The fact that teachers are often teaching multiple students in English Language Learning programming who are at different proficiency levels can also intensify the overwhelming feeling that teachers have that they cannot reach out for assistance.

Reducing the feelings of isolation that parents have in terms of their children's school is also critical. Based on the numbers of students that teachers and administration interact with daily, it is difficult, at times, for parents to have a personalized experience. However, an effort can be made to reduce the pressure or rushed feelings that some parents feel when they attend parent teacher conferences. Providing an adequate number of translators can also go a long way. The applications that teachers can now use to communicate with parents directly can also be beneficial in creating connections between stakeholders. Schools need to continue to do better about addressing the needs of the parents in their communities, no matter what language they speak.

Perceptions of English Language Learners

The types of feelings that educators have based on their interactions with students may have some bearing on the pedagogy of teachers in how they approach the teaching of their students in ELL programming.

These negative and positive feelings connect to the idea of looking at language learners through an asset-based approach vs. a deficit-based approach. This seems to be partially contributed to by the language used by educators. The labels that the school district uses for two categories of students in English Language Learning programming are non-English proficient (NEP) and limited English proficient (LEP). These stem from a deficit focus rather than thinking of these students as multilingual with a "superpower." The pushback from teachers in changing the

terminology may just come from the teachers desiring to use the terminology that they've used in the past and having difficulty wanting to embrace the new terms like "emergent bilingual."

The pity and negative feelings expressed by some teachers can often be perceived by students as they recognize that their teacher has lower expectations for them than they do for other students. They may begin to see accommodations as being a negative thing that sets them apart from their peers rather than a scaffolded support.

The positive perceptions that teachers have can also have a positive impact on students if they are shared with students. If teachers encourage students to continue their language learning and utilize their entire linguistic repertoire in the classroom, students may begin to realize the asset that being multi-lingual can be for students in their long-term education.

Oscar's mother's belief that her children learning English and Spanish will benefit them in the future can have a more positive influence on her sons and their attitudes toward their language learning. However, her feelings about her own abilities to help her sons learn and maintain their language skills may also lead to her feelings of isolation and lack of connection with the schools.

Some of the teacher's beliefs stem from their own personal experiences in learning another language. Others have no experience learning a language. Those who have learned or are learning a language of their own seem to have more empathy and understanding for students and a positive growth mindset for them than those who are not learning a language. The teachers who have a familiarity with Spanish also seem to have a better understanding of Latinx/Hispanic culture that allows them to connect with students.

The experiences teachers shared about differentiating for students is consistent with the literature about how teachers often differentiate inappropriately by providing instruction well

below grade level or believing they are doing students a favor by not requiring much of them (Gottschalk, 2016). Providing teachers with direct instruction about appropriate differentiation and accommodations for language learners is critical in combatting this.

General teaching experience and short-term professional development efforts are not sufficient to make changes in teacher attitudes and pedagogy. These are the majority of the experiences that teachers have had about instructing students in ELL programming in their content area classrooms. Teacher preparation programs as well as school districts need to offer long-term teacher education programs that allow for educators to receive training that will benefit students in ELL programming.

The terminology that teachers use to refer to the students in English Language Learning programming seems to be connected as well with negative perceptions of students in ELL programming. LEP and NEP are both using deficit language whereas the more positive terms like “emerging multilingual” present the learner as more asset based. The fact that teachers at the school were resistant to changing the terms might be an indicator of teachers being slow to change but may also indicate more about their overall perceptions about students in English Language Learning programming.

Varying Teacher Perceptions of Their Language Abilities

Teacher perceptions of a student's proficiency level has a greater effect on their educational pathway than their actual proficiency does. Teachers enact their expectations of students and their abilities based on what they perceive their proficiency to be (Martin-Beltran, 2010).

The fact that none of the teachers reference Oscar's actual WIDA proficiency scores but instead rely solely on submitted work and observations brings into question the validity of the

WIDA test and whether or not teachers believe that it accurately reflects their students' abilities, especially when this WIDA proficiency test is what is used to determine student placement or their advancement out of the ELD program. Without a working common belief about what the student's language proficiency is, the student will continue to receive different accommodations and rigor in different classes based on each teacher's perceptions. This will not allow students to receive the help they need or be accurately challenged to allow for growth.

The teachers expressed their impressions of his language proficiency not only in English but also in Spanish. This assessment may not be accurate since the large majority of them do not speak Spanish themselves but based their opinions on the interactions they saw between Oscar and some of the newcomers or the fact that the resources offered in Spanish were not useful to him. Teachers are aware of the fact that when students don't have strong literacy skills in their native language or had gaps in their education because of refugee status or living in rural communities, they may struggle to develop literacy skills in their L2.

This thought seems to mirror many misconceptions about students in ELL programming that they can't participate fully in the classroom community or meet the same learning standards as their peers. Content teachers and ELD instructors should be collaborating together to think of ways that they can increase rigor while still helping students access the material at their language proficiency level (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2021).

One teacher also shared a belief that parents also need English skills in order to fully support their student in their learning. Anecdotally, she believes that the students whose parents speak English with them at home have a higher level of language growth in school. This belief may reflect a negative perception of parents who don't speak English in that they can't provide all of the help that students in ELL programming need with their schoolwork.

Parents have a better understanding of the proficiency of their students in their native language. There is often a concern that students who speak Spanish at home that they will gradually lose their language as their connections with friends and school continue to develop. Many parents hope that they will maintain their native language while also becoming fluent in English which will allow them to be bilingual. However, sometimes what occurs is that their English develops really well and as they only communicate with their parents at home in limited Spanish, that they lose that native language.

Implications and Further Research

The implications of this study in the classroom point to the importance of collaboration between content area teachers, ELD teachers, and administration for the benefit of the student. More needs to be done by teacher preparation programs and school districts to provide teachers with resources or assistance in teaching students in ELL programming so they do not feel isolated. This includes teacher preparation programs for pre-service teachers and coaching and professional development for current teachers with time for implementation. More needs to be done to address the wide variety of teacher attitudes toward students in ELL programming. This might include school districts providing incentives for teachers to work toward an endorsement for teaching students in English Language Learning programming or taking Spanish language courses. Without these incentives we will continue to have a homogeneous work force of native English speakers who do not address the needs of their students in English Language programming.

Having highly qualified ELD teachers as well as content area teachers who have an endorsement for instructing students in ELL programming will benefit students in English Language Learning programming in all subject matter. It also helps increase teacher awareness

of culturally responsive teaching surrounding other important collaborative measures like assessment and parent and community involvement.

Transparency and clarity might also help strength connections between administration, ELD educators, and content teachers. This may involve real-life observations of ELD classrooms to support content teachers in seeing these tactics in action. Inviting ELD teachers or cultural family liaisons into content classrooms for co-teaching could also be really effective in identifying additional methods and ways to support newcomer students in ELL programming as well as long-term ELLs with their academic language learning.

Another key step in transparency and resolving the disconnect among teachers is for there to be a clarification of roles so that educators understand the role of the ELD teacher and the ELD class for the students, especially those who have been long term students in English Language Learning programming and need a specific focus on CALPs. The fact that the school district has a district-level plan for students in English Language Learning programming is an excellent first step. However, there needs to be more direct communication from school districts to communicate the needs and requirements for teachers at the classroom level. Having frequent collaboration between ELD and content area teachers could be very beneficial in this area.

Offering Spanish for native speakers or heritage language classes can be beneficial for helping students maintain their native language and help strengthen their literacy skills in their L1s which in turn benefits their development of their L2 (van der Velde Kremin et. al, 2019). It will also strengthen families if school districts could work with the community to encourage English language classes for parents that are consistent and provide the support for parents to learn English so that they can communicate with teachers, schools, and their own children.

Another way for schools to connect more with the parents of students in English Language Learning programming would be to have yearly meetings between all the stakeholders—parents, teachers, administrators, and student. Similar to an IEP meeting for students with disabilities, this would function as an opportunity for progress updates, discussion of language accommodations, and future goals for students. This would help keep communication open between all stakeholders and offer personalized connection for groups of parents who often are not connected well with the school community.

Ultimately, this study attempts to answer the questions: How do the stakeholder's relationships and perceptions of each other inform the educational paths for middle school students in English Language Learning programming? What are stakeholder's perceptions of English language learning for middle school students in English Language Learning programming?

The experiences shared in this study are transferable to what others experience across the country in an ELD context. A phenomenological study into the experiences of teachers in terms of perceptions of students in English Language Learning programming and especially its impact on their instruction and interactions with students in ELL programming would help spur more action towards assisting teachers and students alike. The perceptions of English Language Learning will continue to evolve and change as more students in English Language Learning programming continue to be placed in classrooms. There continues to be a need for educators of all types—administration, content, and ELD teachers to have an understanding of how collaboration can inform their pedagogy.

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Appendix A

Interview and Focus Group Questions

Questions for Parents:

1. What ways have you seen teachers/the school support your English Language Learner?
2. What experiences do you have with language learning?
3. In what ways do you think that teachers could improve their support of ELLs?
4. What goals do you have for the language learning of your child?
5. How do you support the English learning of your student at home?
6. How does the school communicate with you about the progress of your student?
7. What is the biggest barrier you have in interacting with the school and participating in your child's language learning?
8. How important is it to you that your student continues to speak their native/home language?
9. Can you share a positive English learning experience that you've seen your child have?
10. How do you think the school community views English Language Learners?

Preguntas para los padres:

1. ¿De qué maneras han visto que los maestros/la escuela apoyan a su estudiante del idioma inglés?
2. ¿Qué experiencias tienen con el aprendizaje de idiomas?
3. ¿De qué manera creen que los maestros podrían mejorar su apoyo a los ELL?
4. ¿Qué objetivos tienen para el aprendizaje de idiomas de su hijo?
5. ¿Cómo apoyan el aprendizaje de inglés de su estudiante en casa?
6. ¿Cómo se comunican la escuela con usted sobre el progreso de su estudiante?
7. ¿Cuál es la mayor barrera que tienen para interactuar con la escuela y participar en el aprendizaje de idiomas de su hijo?
8. ¿Qué tan importante es para ustedes que su estudiante continúe hablando su idioma nativo/del hogar?
9. ¿Puede compartir una experiencia positiva de aprendizaje de inglés que hayan visto tener a su hijo?
10. ¿Cómo creen que la comunidad escolar ve a los estudiantes del idioma inglés?

Questions for Teachers:

1. How do you perceive the ELL as experiencing English learning in your class?

2. How do you collaborate with the ELD teacher to adapt your lesson to the needs of English language learners, especially _____?
3. How do you interact with parents to make connections and assist in the English language learning of _____?
4. How do you work with guidance counselors and administration in support of ELLs?
5. What experience or training do you have in terms of English Language Learners?
6. What barriers do you perceive in working with other teachers in collaboration for ELLs?
7. What barriers do you perceive in working with families of ELLs?
8. How do you perceive your role in the education of English Language Learners?
9. How do you perceive the role of _____ in the education of English Language Learners?
10. How does your content area affect/form your knowledge and understanding of teaching ELLs?

Questions for Student:

1. How do you view yourself as an English Language Learner?
2. How do you think that other people see you as an English Language Learner?
3. Where do you feel like you are in the process of learning English?
4. What do you think is the job of teachers in your English Language Learning?
5. What is your goal for English Language Learning?
6. How does English Language Learning help you with other classes?
7. How does your family feel about your English learning? How do they help with it?
8. What do you feel like is your job when it comes to English learning?
9. How do other adults in the school help with your English Language Learning? (for example: counselors, principals, etc.)
10. What do you think that the school could do differently to help English Language Learners?

Preguntas para el estudiante:

1. ¿Cómo te ves a ti mismo como estudiante del idioma inglés?
2. ¿Cómo crees que otras personas te ven como estudiante del idioma inglés?
3. ¿Dónde sientes que estás en el proceso de aprender inglés?
4. ¿Cuál crees que es el trabajo de los profesores en tu aprendizaje del idioma inglés?
5. ¿Cuál es tu objetivo para el aprendizaje del idioma inglés?
6. ¿Cómo te ayuda el aprendizaje del idioma inglés con otras clases?

7. ¿Cómo se siente tu familia acerca de tu aprendizaje del inglés? ¿Cómo ayudan con eso?
8. ¿Cuál sientes que es tu trabajo cuando se trata de aprender inglés?
9. ¿Cómo ayudan otros adultos en la escuela con su aprendizaje del idioma inglés? (por ejemplo: consejeros, directores, etc.)
10. ¿Qué cree que la escuela podría hacer de manera diferente para ayudar a los estudiantes del idioma inglés?

Focus Group Questions:

1. What perspectives that have been previously discussed do you think the whole group could benefit from?
2. How are you supporting _____ as an English Language Learner in your own sphere of influence?
3. How do you feel we could better support _____ and other English Language Learners at the school?
4. What goals do we have for _____ as an English Language Learner?
5. How could parents offer better support for English Language Learning in your classroom?
6. Is there anything the student would like to share about how they think we could help them as an English Language learner?
7. What outside resources can we provide that will help _____?
8. How could teachers offer better support for _____?
9. What, if any, additional questions or comments do you think this group could benefit from?
10. Can you share a positive English learning experience you've seen with _____ in your class?

Preguntas del grupo de enfoque:

1. ¿De qué perspectivas que se han discutido anteriormente cree que todo el grupo podría beneficiarse?
2. ¿Cómo está apoyando a _____ como estudiante del idioma inglés en su propia esfera de influencia?
3. ¿Cómo cree que podríamos apoyar mejor a _____ y otros estudiantes del idioma inglés en la escuela?
4. ¿Qué objetivos tenemos para _____ como estudiante del idioma inglés?
5. ¿Cómo podrían los padres ofrecer un mejor apoyo para el aprendizaje del idioma inglés en su salón de clases?

6. ¿Hay algo que el estudiante quiera compartir sobre cómo cree que podemos ayudarlo como estudiante de inglés?
7. ¿Qué recursos externos podemos proporcionar que ayuden a _____?
8. ¿Cómo podrían los maestros ofrecer un mejor apoyo para _____?
9. ¿Qué preguntas o comentarios adicionales creen que este grupo podría beneficiarse?
10. ¿Puedes compartir una experiencia positiva de aprendizaje de inglés que hayas visto con _____ en tu clase?