

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE IMPACT OF STATE AND DISTRICT POLICIES ON THE ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A Dissertation In Partial Fulfillment Of The Requirements For The Degree Of Doctor Of
Education In Educational Leadership

By

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Abstract

THE IMPACT OF STATE AND DISTRICT POLICIES ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN URBAN SCHOOLS

By

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of state and district policies on English Language Learners' academic achievement in urban school classrooms. At the same time, a goal of this study was to examine whether state and district policies hinder or support the academic achievement of English Language Learners in classrooms.

Latinos comprise the majority of California's school age population. At the same time, they have the lowest graduation rate and highest dropout rate for students in high schools. The education of Latino English Language Learners (ELLs) must be a priority for educators and lawmakers.

The Common Core State Standards require students to use academic language while actively participating in classroom discussions and take the same standardized assessments as their English speaking peers. On the other hand, the English Learner Master Plan requires students with the same English proficiency level to be placed in classrooms together all day for the entire school year. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that English speaking role models are needed in order for ELLs to

gain English language skills and academic vocabulary. Therefore, keeping low-level ELD students in classrooms with peers of the same English proficiency level does not increase academic achievement. The Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms do not support the academic language and vocabulary of ELLs. The ELL students need other English speaking role models such as ELD 5s, Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP), Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), and English Only (EO) students to demonstrate the correct grammar and academic English.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Latinos constitute a critical human resource for California. Indeed, the state's economic health is intimately tied to the productivity of this population of almost eleven million (Catanzarite, 2003). Yet, Latino characteristics and contributions to the state remain misunderstood and Latinos' access to educational opportunities remains low (Catanzarite, 2003). The Latino population is now the largest minority group in the United States and its presence is particularly evident among the K-12 student population where its numbers are even higher. In 2002, Latinos made up 17% of the K-12 student population in the United States; by 2025 that figure is predicted to reach 25% (Fan, 2008). Because a very high percentage—more than 25%—of students in California are English Learners (ELs) (California Department of Education, 2007), any policy that affects these students inevitably has an impact on the entire state education system. Efforts at raising achievement levels for California's students, who currently rank among the bottom in the nation, are held hostage to the fate of English Learners (Gandara & Baca, 2008).

The academic access for Latino students should be a major concern for educators, policy makers, parents, and community leaders (Madrid, 2011). The sense of urgency rises due to the fact that school enrollment of Latino youngsters has increased rapidly in recent years; having nearly doubled from 1990 to 2006, it accounts for 60% of the total growth in public school enrollments over that period (Fry & Gonzalez, 2008). Strangely enough, the young Latinos have the lowest graduation rate and highest high school dropout rate (43%) compared to other student populations (US Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistic, 2006). Moreover, the situation is far worse for

Latino children who are immigrants; as nationally, Latinos remain in the highest dropout group (Jammal & Duong, 2007). As a consequence, the low level of educational achievement places Latino youth at higher risk for poverty, poor health, poor housing, crime, and other negative social conditions. Despite their significant representation, the American education system is failing Latino students (Fan, 2008).

Problem Statement

Latino English Language Learners (ELLs), regardless of their English language proficiency level, must take the same standardized tests as their native English speaking peers to display their content knowledge. In addition, according to the California English Learner's Master Plan, English Learners' (ELs) instruction in this district requires students with the same English language proficiency and English Language Development (ELD) level to be placed in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms all year. This requirement means students in ELD1 and those in ELD 2 may stay in one class all year, or ELD 2 and ELD 3 students may be grouped together in one class all year because there are not enough students to offer two separate classes. The problem of this study was to examine the English Learner Master Plan's classroom organization requirement that English Language Learners be assigned on the basis of their English proficiency level, which segregates them from their English-speaking peers all day for the entire school year. This study, focuses on ELLs' academic achievement in classrooms by examining policies and practices in one school district as well as teachers' and administrators' interpretations of these policies in regard to ELLs' academic achievement.

More so today than ever before, it is critical that educational policies for ELLs target school academic success so that this population has access to post-secondary

education and to insure that ELLs have opportunities to contribute in positive ways to society in general. Latino students fall into an English Language Learner (ELL) or English Learner (EL) category, which poses a complex instructional challenge for educators due to their students' English proficiency levels, literacy in native language, and past educational experiences (National Center for Immigrant Integration Policy, 2010). In the 2009-2010 school year in California, 29% of students who enrolled in public schools were ELLs (Ramos, 2014).

Many of the students who will be expected to meet the Common Core State Standards are English Language Learners (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012). ELLs might have trouble demonstrating their content knowledge because they are unfamiliar with the complex linguistic structure of the questions, might not recognize certain vocabulary forms, or might mistakenly interpret an item literally (Duran, 1989; Garcia, 1991). The expectation of the Common Core State Standards is that every student can, "without significant scaffolding, comprehend and evaluate complex texts across a range of types and disciplines, and can construct effective arguments and convey intricate or multifaceted information" (CCSS) while ELLs have the additional challenge of learning academic content, oral and written language skills, and conversations.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of State and District policies on English Language Learners' academic achievement in classrooms. The instructional program outlined in the English Learner Master Plan requires classrooms to be organized based on the students' English language proficiency levels as determined by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) (Office of Curriculum, 2015).

Therefore, the students with the same English language proficiency level or English language Development (ELD) level will remain together in the same classrooms all year. This requirement poses significant issues for providing opportunities for ELLs to interact with their English speaking peers to learn English and trade ideas and experiences to build schema, as well as limiting their access to socialization and networking with others. This segregation poses educational issues for teachers as well because they become the only English speaking role models for their students for an entire school day. Common Core State Standards clearly requires: “opportunities for ELLs to interact with proficient English Speakers and Opportunities for ELLs to build on their strengths, prior experience, and background knowledge” (Common Core State Standards, 2012). Placing ELLs in classrooms based on their English proficiency level limits their option to fraternize with English speaking students and reduces opportunities for academic success.

Significance

Much research has been done on ELLs’ academic achievement (Ornelas & Solozano 2004; Rivas et al. 2007), but only a few studies have looked at the direct impact of state and district policies on English Language Learners’ academic development and their poor performance on standardized testing in urban schools. An even smaller number of studies have looked at the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding district policies and their impact on the academic achievement of ELLs.

A goal of this study was to explore district policies to ascertain whether they assist or impede the academic achievement of ELLs. An expectation is that members of the education community may use the information acquired to improve ELLs’ academic performance on standardized testing and to increase the overall academic achievement of

this growing, yet overlooked minority population. The researcher will examine these policies to determine whether they positively impact ELL's academic performance on state standardized testing. For many years, fairness was the target issue, but now the focus is the economic survival and success of this subgroup. Therefore, this study will look at how policy decisions affect ELLs' academic achievement, access to higher education, and economic stability and power.

Research Questions

This study will examine the following research questions:

1. What are the teachers' and administrators' perceptions / interpretations of State and District level policies regarding the academic achievement of ELLs assigned to classrooms by their English proficiency level?
2. How does the English Learners' Master Plan classroom organization requirement impact the academic achievement of Latino English Language Learners in classrooms?
3. How do teachers perceive their role in increasing the ELLs' academic achievement in classrooms organized according to the English Learner Master Plan?

As schools focus on preparing students to be college and career ready, "the achievement of English learners is a critical issue" (Echevarria, 2012). Furthermore, understanding the impact of district policies on students' academic language development and academic achievement may help gain insight into why these students' performance on standardized assessments is lower than their English speaking counterparts.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study is social capital theory. This theory, as it is related to education, is based on the work of Bourdieu (1977) and others. His main point is that “social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group” (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu’s concern is how the elites, the upper class, and the middle class maintain their status and power.

James Coleman’s (1988) contribution offers a broader view of social capital. Unlike Bourdieu’s pessimistic description of the eternal self-reproduction of elites, Coleman highlights the usefulness of social capital as part of a potential solution for learners and its importance in parenting for people of any social class.

Although various academic camps provide different characterizations, Stanton-Salazar (1977, 2001, 2011) defined social capital as consisting of “highly-valued resources and key forms of institutional support embedded in one’s network or associations, and typically accessible through direct or indirect ties to people able and willing to act in the capacity of an institutional agent” (p.8). Stanton-Salazar examined Latino students through a racial lens. Identity is the key in his research on why and how Latinos are marginalized and cannot access the social networks that provide them the optimum structure.

Who are English Language Learners (ELLs)?

For some time, California has been a “majority-minority” state with respect to its school-age population (Gandara, 2008). About 10 years ago, 40% of the school-age

population was non-Hispanic White; however, today less than one-third (30%) fits that category. The single largest subgroup of the school-age population is Latino, with 48%, followed by Asians (including Filipino) at 11.4%, and African-Americans, 7.8%. Less than 1% of all students are Native American. Not only is the state ethnically diverse, it is also linguistically diverse. One fourth of the K-12 population is considered not fluent in English “at any one time” (CDE Dataquest, 2014). That is, more than 40% of students enter kindergarten as English Learners (ELs), other ELs enter California schools in later grades, and some are reclassified as fluent in English each year (CDE Dataquest, 2014). Most of these students come from homes in which there is little consistent use of English, so they lack the support and reinforcement in oral and written English that native English speakers have at home. Although many of the world’s languages are represented in California schools, the overwhelming majority of ELs (85%) are Spanish speakers (Gandara, 2008).

According to Diane August (2002), English Language Learners (ELLs) spend less than two percent of their school day in oral language development. Worse yet, when ELLs are speaking at school, it is often not about academic topics or rigorous content. The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (2006) suggests that oral language development is the foundation of literacy. In order for ELLs to become proficient in the basics of English, as well as grade-level academic English, it is imperative that they be given repeated and more complex opportunities to speak about academic topics across the school day. As Soto-Hinman (2011) reports, when students are paired up to think and problem solve (Think –Pair –Share) and when they assume the responsibility of asking questions and finding the answers (Reciprocal Teaching) become

ways for teachers to do their part to increase academic oral language development systematically, which will also raise English skills and apprentice ELLs into academic language expectations (p. 23). The ELLs gain questioning skills and learn how to ask higher-level questions, like their teachers, at a young age.

English Learners are fundamentally learners like all other students and are; therefore, vulnerable to the same social and psychological factors that affect learning. If they come to feel that they are not capable of learning either a new language or a new content area, they will falter. Similarly, lack of confidence in one's skills has been shown to affect test performance as well (Abedi, 2006).

What is English Language Development Instruction?

English Language Development (ELD) is a component of all program options for ELLs, but before students receive ELD instruction they must be administered the State English language proficiency assessment, currently known as the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). Upon initial enrollment, parents complete the Home Language Survey (HLS) section on the District's Student Enrollment Form as required by state and federal law.

The HLS consists of the following four questions:

1. What language did the student learn when he or she first began to talk?
2. What language does this student most frequently use at home?
3. What language do you use most frequently to speak to this student?
4. Which language is most often used by the adults at home?

If the answers to the four questions on the HLS are "English," the child is classified as English Only (EO). If the answers to any of the first three questions on the HLS

indicate a language other than English or a combination of English and another language the child is considered a possible English Language Learner (ELL) and will be assessed to measure his or her level of English proficiency.

ELD instruction must be a priority from the moment students walk into school, although it cannot displace instruction in academic content (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012). ELD is separate from but complementary to English-language arts instruction (English Learner Master Plan, 2012). According to the Master Plan, ELD instruction is research based (CDE, 2010); the purpose of ELD instruction is “to advance English Learners’ knowledge and use of English in increasingly sophisticated ways.” ELD instruction should help students learn conversational norms, but it must also teach the academic language needed for learning and discussing content in math, language arts, social studies, science, and all other curricular areas. Ideally, ELD and content-area instruction will be well articulated so that students have an opportunity to apply the language they learn to their academic tasks (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012).

After taking the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) the ELL students’ English language proficiency is divided into three summary levels (Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced), but descriptions are elaborated into five levels: Beginning (ELD1), Early Intermediate (ELD2), Intermediate (ELD3), Early Advanced but not English Proficient ELD4/5, and English Proficient ELD4/5 (Master Plan, 2012). The low-performing English Learner (EL) or English Language Learner (ELL) students will be placed in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms that are organized based on the students’ English proficiency levels. Students will remain in these classrooms all year and will receive ELD instruction everyday according to their ELD level. The goal of

the structured English Immersion (SEI) program is acquisition of English language skills and access to core content so that ELs can succeed in a mainstream classroom (English Learner Master Plan, 2012). The focus of the SEI program is to accelerate English Language Development in order to minimize academic deficits that may occur, as students are not yet proficient in the language of the instruction. ELLs that are “less than reasonably fluent” are placed in the SEI program (ELLs at ELD 1-3) unless another program option is requested by the parent/guardian (English Learner Master Plan, 2012).

Teachers have specialized training in meeting the needs of ELL students. They have bilingual education or an ESL teaching credential and/or training and have strong receptive skills in the student’s primary language. English Learners are assigned to self-contained classrooms with teachers who have a Bilingual Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (BCLAD) or Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) certification (Gandara, 2003).

Identification of English Language Learners and their English proficiency levels for placements in classrooms and the length of the support program may have a significant effect on the students’ academic achievement (Ragan & Lesaux, 2006). It is important to acknowledge that the achievement of these students represents a challenge to the overall productivity and welfare of a state’s education system (Gandara, 2003).

What is Academic Language?

Academic language or the “language of school,” as it is explained by Schleppegrell, (2004) is often more abstract, more complex, and requires higher demands on student cognition. Academic language means different things to different educational practitioners, from the literate use of English to more specific specialized vocabulary,

sentence structure, and other academic disciplines (Baily, 2010). As Bailey (2008) reports, whether academic English exists and/or can be readily identified at the preschool and early elementary years is currently debated.

August (2004) reports gaining access to the information taught in middle and secondary content area classes requires that all children exit the elementary grades with good reading comprehension capacity. Without this capacity, access to grade-appropriate content knowledge, entry into challenging courses in secondary school, success on tests being required for promotion and graduation, and entry to tertiary education are all unlikely. Ultimately, ELL students are more likely to learn less, drop out of school, and have fewer opportunities for higher education than their non-ELL peers (Gandara, 2005).

Finally, Guthrie & Ozgungor (2002) add that academic language differs from conversational English in that it is more complex and it is not typically encountered in everyday settings. Effective teaching includes planned speaking practice in content classes so that students have both formal and informal practice using academic English.

Overview of the Methodology

This qualitative research study utilized phenomenological methodology to investigate educator views on the impact of state and district policies on the academic achievement of ELLs. The research questions that guided this study focused on (a) the perceptions of teachers and administrators, (b) the impact district policies have on academic achievement of students in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms, and (c) the teacher's role in increasing academic achievement of ELL students in standardized testing.

The study was conducted at four different elementary schools in the Talia-Melrose Unified School District (a pseudonym). The schools' enrollments consist of 500-900 students and are composed of more than 50% English Learners from a total student population that is 90% Latino.

This study used criterion-based sampling to identify and select those teachers to be interviewed. "Criterion based sampling works well when all the individuals studied represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104). The participants for this study included the teachers and principals directly involved with the English Language Learners at the selected schools. Data collection included semi-structured interviews with three teachers and one principal from four selected elementary schools. Detailed descriptions of the setting and participants throughout the data collection will be "followed by an analysis of the data for themes, patterns and issues" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p.137). Themes and codes were developed using the conceptual framework of social capital, the literature review, and research questions.

Definition of Terms

- Academic Language: Refers to the "language of school." It differs greatly from the conversational or social language used outside of the classroom in that it is often decontextualized, more complex, more abstract, and places higher demands on student cognition (Schleppegrell, 2004).
- California English Language Development Test (CELDT): Refers to the test that English Language Learners take to determine their English proficiency level (Master Plan, 2012).

- English Language Learner (ELL): Refers to English Language Learners, the students for whom English is the second language (Master Plan, 2012). Although the term refers to a national-origin-minority student who is limited English proficient, it is often preferred over limited-English-proficient (LEP) as it highlights accomplishments rather than deficits.
- English Learner (EL): Refers to English Learners, and it is often used interchangeably with English Language Learner ELL (Master Plan, 2012).
- English Learner Master Plan: Provides guidance and direction to administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and students regarding the options available to parents and the expectations the district holds for each school and classroom in the district (Master Plan, 2012).
- Fluent (or fully) English proficient (FEP): (Master Plan, 2012).
- Home Language Survey (HLS): The purpose of the HLS is to determine if a language other than English is used in the student's home (Master Plan, 2012).
- Language Proficiency: Refers to the degree to which the student exhibits control over the use of language (Master Plan, 2012).
- Reclassified fluent English proficient (RFEP): Once English language learners are reclassified fluent English proficient (RFEP), they will be placed in mainstream classrooms (Lesaux, 2006).
- Specially Designed Academic Instruction delivered in English (SDAIE): One of the services provided to instruct English to English Language Learners (Master Plan, 2012).

- Structured English Immersion (SEI) Program: Refers to the program whose goal is acquisition of English language skills so that the ELL student can succeed in an English-only mainstream classroom. All instruction in an immersion strategy program is in English. Teachers have specialized training in meeting the needs of ELL students and possess bilingual education or ESL teaching credential and/or training, and strong receptive skills in the students' primary language (Master Plan, 2012).

Limitations

Given the time constraints of this study, the limitations include the following:

The study represented the points of view of only those teachers assigned to SEI classrooms, focused on one student population, and did not represent the points of view of students.

Delimitations

This study did not interview all teachers at the selected elementary schools as the researchers' aim is to explore the English Language Learners' academic development in classrooms organized according to the requirements of the English Learner Master Plan. Teachers with non-ELD instruction experience were not be eligible to participate in the study.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation has been organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, the problem statement, the purpose and significance of the study, the research questions and the summary of the methodology, as related to policies and practices that influences ELLs. Chapter 2 includes the review of the literature and the conceptual

framework. Chapter 3 presents a discussion of the methodology including the design of the study, setting, site selection strategies, data sources, data instruments, and data analysis. Chapter 4 reports the findings in this study. Finally, chapter 5 includes an analysis of the findings, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

The focus of this study was to gain information and knowledge regarding the impact of the CA Master Plan classroom organization requirement on the academic achievement of Latino English Language Learner students. This study explored the policies that negatively or positively impacted the academic achievement of English Language Learners. In addition to policies, this study looked into court cases that informed educational outcomes in regards to English Language Learners education in the American system. This study also explored the English Learner Master Plan and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) requirements to examine the similarities and differences of expectations in regards to English Language Learner students.

Equally important this chapter looked into the empirical studies that provided a context for discussing educational outcomes and ways that educational practice and biases affect Latino English Language Learners' academic achievement such as segregation and standardized assessments. Furthermore, the search through the literature continued to gain knowledge of previous studies and the work of researchers on issues such as teacher-student relations and Latino families' impact on the academic achievement of ELL students.

This chapter reviews and presents the social capital conceptual framework and its relationship to the academic achievement of ELL students placed in classrooms on the basis of their English proficiency level. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of State and District policies on English Language Learners' academic achievement in classrooms.

This study seeks answers to the following questions:

Research Question 1: What are the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of State and District level policies regarding the academic achievement of ELLs assigned to classrooms by their English proficiency level?

Research Question 2: How does the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirement impact the academic achievement of Latino English Language Learners in classrooms?

Research Question 3: How do teachers perceive their role in increasing ELLs' academic achievement in classrooms organized according to the English Learner Master Plan?

Review of the Literature

Research continues to show that Latino students are lagging behind their English speaking counterparts in academic achievement. NAEP (2009) reports that, the education achievement of Latino students, regardless of grade level, is among the poorest of three major ethnic-racial groups. Although there has been some improvement in the achievement of Latinos during the past three decades, their achievement gains in comparison to that of White students has been insignificant (Madrid, 2011).

Impact of Policies on English Language Learners.

This study looked at major policies that have had a major impact on the academic achievement of ELL students for over a decade.

Proposition 227.

In 1998, California voters approved a voter initiative entitled “English for the Children” otherwise known as Proposition 227 that has come to have far-reaching effects on English Language Learner education in the state. The preamble of the voter initiative includes the following language: The public schools of California currently do a poor job of educating immigrant children, while wasting financial resources on costly experimental language programs whose failure over the past two decades is demonstrated by the current high drop-out rates and low English literacy levels of many immigrant children (Gandara, 2003). The reason for these huge achievement gaps is arguable and complex, but there is little consensus that “experimental language programs” (aka bilingual education programs) were either the source of the problem or particularly costly (Gandara, 2003). The passage of proposition 227 in 1998 placed extreme restrictions on the use of languages other than English in California classrooms. Seven years after its approval, Proposition 227 managed to reduce the educational opportunities available to English Learners (ELLs) statewide (Ramos, 2005). It is worth mentioning that a number of teachers still rely on native language instruction to meet the linguistic and academic needs of their ELLs (Alamillo & Viramontes, 2000; Stritikus & Garcia, 2000). The passage of Proposition 227 happened at the same time that a significant number of education reforms were being introduced to California. Some of those important reforms included class-size reduction in primary grades, the accountability movement, standardized testing, and the back-to-basics reading instruction movement. Taken together, these reform measures had an undeniably negative effect on English Language Learners in this state (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Asato, 2000; Mora, 2002). The

achievement gap for the ELLs remained the same or actually became wider, which is contrary to the promises of Proposition 227 (Parrish et al. 2006; Wentworth et al. 2010).

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law took effect in 2002 and it has had a sweeping impact on United States public school classrooms. NCLB refocused the attention on standards-based accountability (Anthes, 2002). It affected what students were taught, the tests they took, the training of their teachers, and the way money was spent on education. States had to set targets for overall achievement as well as for specific categories of students, such as English Language Learners or economically disadvantaged students. These targets determined whether the school made “adequate yearly progress,” or the AYP-federal requirement for improvement each year, which was part of the NCLB requirement as measured by state standardized tests. A school could fail – even if it was making substantial progress for most of its students – if one subgroup of students could not meet the standards. The goal was for every student in public school to be proficient in reading and math by 2014. No Child Left Behind (NCLB Act of 2002) required the states to report the performance of all students, including students in major ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners (ELLs).

Simultaneously, the law mandated that all states have ELD standards and standards-based assessments that had to be used for accountability for NCLB Title III funding of ELD programs. The demographic changes in California have not only been profound but have occurred very quickly. For the past several years, Latinos have been the largest population enrolling in kindergarten. Therefore, it is important that teacher

training and professional development focused on ELL students be given serious consideration. Gandara, et al., (2000) argue, “The reforms have the potential for working at cross purposes for children in general, but especially for English Learners” (p.4). Gandara continues by stating that, “the lack of pedagogical knowledge on the part of inexperienced teachers combined with new state standards and testing as well as the inability of monolingual English teachers to effectively communicate with non-English speaking students and their parents and guardians has created an environment in which English learners do not receive the same level of instruction that their native English speaking counterparts do” (p.4).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Law

On December 10, 2012, President Obama signed the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA), which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The precise meaning and impact of ESSA will continue to play out through regulations, guidance, and implementation over the coming months and years – presenting both opportunities and risks on the federal, state, and local levels for improving education systems and outcomes for all students in the nation.

Looking at the new ESSA as a whole, there are several big points and themes that emerge.

As stated by Senate HELP Committee, the purpose and motivation of ESSA was primarily to “fix” NCLB. This is where bipartisan agreement rested.

As such, ESSA maintains the basic architecture of standards-based reform reflected in NCLB – requiring states to establish standards in reading or language arts,

math, and science along with annual assessments, annual accountability determinations, systems of supports for low-performing schools, etc.

At the same time, the biggest shift in ESSA is that it moves more authority regarding the design of these systems from the federal level back toward states and districts to take evidence-based actions – building on and going beyond state flexibility reflected in ESEA waivers. The bill includes limitations on the authority of the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to regulate or review these system design decisions in several ways.

Importantly, ESSA requires that state standards and thereby other key systems be aligned with college and career ready expectations, while not expressly using this terminology. Further, ESSA makes other clear shifts from NCLB and/or current ESEA waivers, such as expanding support for early learning and prohibiting USED from requiring states to establish systems of educator evaluation.

In sum, the “theory of action” that underlies ESSA and its potential impacts will likely play out further and depend significantly on federal regulations and guidance and especially on state and local implementation. Clearly, ESSA seeks to eliminate NCLB’s focus on fidelity to the law – the belief that adherence to federal law would drive success. The biggest bet in ESSA seems to be around transparency of data to inform evidence-based actions at the state and local levels. This “flexibility,” however, creates opportunities and risks. There are opportunities for “leading” states and districts to enhance their innovations to achieve college and career-ready outcomes for all students. But there are also risks that states and districts that do not have the will, capital, or capacity to take such actions will stall or regress, and that students from the least-

empowered communities will fall through the cracks. The hope is that the shift from federal toward state and local control will promote engagement and inspire systems of innovation, evaluation, and continuous improvement (there is some language in ESSA that could support this shift). But ESSA is a complex law, and its meaning and impact will require continued further analysis, push, and support from state and local leadership.

Major Educational Issues in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

State Standards – ESSA maintains that states are required to set challenging state academic standards in reading or language arts, math and science, and that they may set such standards for any other subject determined by the state. In addition, for the first time, states must demonstrate that their challenging state academic standards are aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the state’s public higher education system and relevant state career and technical education standards.

Assessments – ESSA maintains the requirement that every state has annual assessments in reading or language arts and math for grades 3-8 and once during high school. Also, science assessments are required at least once in each grade span from grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12.

Accountability – ESSA replaces Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and ESEA waiver accountability systems with the requirement that states create accountability systems that include long-term goals, regular determinations of interim progress toward these goals, and annual determinations of student performance and school quality – for the school overall and for each subgroup.

Goals – States must set long-term goals and interim progress indicators for, at a minimum, academic achievement on annual statewide assessments, high school

graduation rates (including extended-year rates, at the state's discretion), and English language proficiency for English learners. These metrics must be developed for all students and separately for each subgroup of students. These metrics are used to show progress on statewide indicators and gap closures over time and are reported on state and district report cards.

Annual Indicators – States must establish accountability and school improvement systems based on multiple indicators and must annually assess and report on student performance, disaggregated by subgroup. These systems would include: high school graduation rates; annual assessments (which may include a measure of student growth); statewide “academic” indicator for elementary and middle schools which may also be a measure of student growth; English language proficiency for English learners; and at least one additional indicator of school quality or student success (e.g. school climate/safety, student engagement, educator engagement, postsecondary readiness).

Accountability Determinations and Identification for Support and Improvement – Starting in the 2017-2018 school year, states must use all annual accountability indicators (#1-5), disaggregated by subgroup, to establish a system to annually differentiate public schools in the state into several categories which require targeted district-led interventions in some schools and comprehensive, state-monitored interventions in others.

States and School District Plans and Continuous Improvement – Similar to NCLB, ESSA requires each state and each school district to develop plans for how to use federal funding to advance the goals of the bill and have those plans approved by USED or the relevant state, respectively.

Report Cards and Data Reporting – ESSA requires annual state and school district report cards (as in NCLB).

Teacher and Principal Quality and Evaluation - ESSA preserves Title II-Part A as a flexible fund to support efforts for enhancing teacher and leader quality, while being more explicit and adding an optional state set-aside for activities focused on principals and other school leaders, and creating a National Activities fund for technical assistance, evaluation, and competitive programs. Basic Title II-Part A grants flow by formula to states and to school districts, as under NCLB although ESSA changes the formula to more heavily-weighted poverty and allows Title II-Part A activities to be carried out in partnership with a non-profit or for-profit entity. Notably, the term "highly qualified teacher" is eliminated in ESSA, with states setting the bar for teacher quality instead (ESSA, 2015).

Court Cases Regarding English Language Learners

Lau v. Nichols 414 U. S. 563 (1974)

Federal law regarding the education of ELL students gained national attention with *Lau v. Nichols* 414 U. S. 563 (1974). In this case, a Chinese-American plaintiff in San Francisco challenged the school system for putting non-English speakers in a “regular” classroom and then ignoring them, thus denying them access to all education. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its defining guidelines required “federally funded school districts to address any obstacles to learning posed by enrolled students' lack of English language proficiency.” Even though California purported to provide “equal” education to all students, the Supreme Court acknowledged that this “equal” education was only nominal when no efforts were made to ensure ELL students could access the

curriculum. The Supreme Court determined that the lack of English language instruction for ELLs violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

Castañeda v. Pickard, 648 F.2d 989 (5th Cir., 1981)

On June 23, 1981, the Fifth Circuit Court issued a decision that is the most important post-Lau decision concerning education of language minority students. The case established a three-part test to evaluate the adequacy of a district's program for ELL students. The test consisted of the following questions: (a) Is the program based on an educational theory recognized as sound by experts in the field or is it considered by experts as a legitimate experimental strategy? (b) Are the programs and practices, including resources and personnel, reasonably calculated to implement this theory effectively? (c) Does the school district evaluate its programs and make adjustments where needed to ensure language barriers are actually being overcome?

Flores v. Arizona, 20 U. S. 1703(f)

A group of English Language Learner (ELL) students and their parents including Miriam Flores filed a class action law suit alleging that Arizona's State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction were providing inadequate ELL instruction in the Nogales Unified School District in violation of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA) which requires states to take "appropriate action to overcome language barriers" in schools.

The school's response to Mrs. Flores's complaint about her daughter not understanding English well enough was in violation of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA). According to this case, the student, Miriam, was denied access to the curriculum due to her teachers not feeling responsible for the

student's academic learning. In fact, the school was responsible to provide equal educational opportunities if they followed the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA). This law provides educational equity to all English Language Learners to have access to core curriculum and compete with their English speaking counterparts in state assessments.

English Learner Master Plan

Currently, the organization of Structured English Immersion (SEI) and Mainstream English (ME) instructional programs requires the site administrators to ensure that all English Learner Master Plan information (ELL student rosters) is regularly updated for ELL students. These Master Plan student rosters are used to organize classes at each grade level based on the student's English proficiency level. For example, the site principal has to determine if there are enough ELs at consecutive overall California English Language Development Test (CELDT) levels within one grade level to organize a full class or classes of two consecutive CELDT levels, starting with the lowest proficiency levels. If the answer is yes, then they must group ELs by two consecutive overall CELDT levels at that grade level (levels 1/2, levels 2/3, levels 3/4 and levels 4/5). These classes will consist of 100 percent ELs (Office of the Curriculum, 2015, p. 4). In schools with a large ELL population, some classrooms may be organized with a high number of ELD level-one students and a few ELD level-two students, or some classes may be organized with a high number of ELD level- two students and a few ELD level-three students.

In summary, the English Learner Master Plan requires that students in grades K-5 in ELD levels 1-5 be assigned to classrooms with students of the same English language

proficiency level all day, which isolates them from their English speaking peers. This is an important policy that impacts the ELL's academic achievement due to lack of learning opportunities with native English peers during instructional activities such as pairing students to collaboratively think and answer questions (think-pair-share), engaging the whole class in constructing viable arguments, or listening to reasoning of others (whole class discussion) prior to writing and math assessment.

Common Core State Standards

The new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) currently being rolled out in 46 states give little specific acknowledgement of the challenges for English Language Learners. The introduction to the CCSS states that identifying the support needed to help ELLs (or any other population of students) is "beyond the scope of the Standards" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010b, p. 6)

Overview of the Standards

The CA CCSS for ELA/ Literacy call for increased rigor of thought and complexity of text. Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010a recommends that schools provide: appropriate instructional supports to make grade-level course-work comprehensible; modified assessments that allow ELLs to demonstrate their content knowledge; additional time for ELLs to complete tasks and assessments; opportunities for classroom interactions (both listening and speaking) that develop concepts and academic language in the disciplines; opportunities for ELLs to interact with proficient English speakers; opportunities for ELLs to build on their strengths, prior experiences, and background knowledge; and qualified teachers who use practices found to be effective in improving student achievement.

The suggested guidelines are reasonable—as far as they go—but are vague at best (Coleman& Goldenberg, 2012).

School leaders and teachers are responsible for making the challenging academic standards accessible to students who must learn rigorous academic content while learning the language in which the content is taught. The ELL student does not have sufficient vocabulary skills to comprehend the academic standards or content; therefore, the ELL student is required to learn the English language while s/he is trying to understand the academic standards and content.

Educational standards describe what students should know and be able to do in each subject of each grade level. In California, the State Board of Education decides on the standards for all students from kindergarten through high school. The California Department of Education helps schools make sure that all students meet the standards. Teachers, parents, and education experts designed the CCSS to prepare students for success in college and the workplace.

Common Core State Standards in grades K-6 have increased academic language demands due to a larger focus on informational text in primary grades (Roberts, 2012). ELLs must have ample opportunities for authentic and functional use of English because learning the elements of a language is important, but without extensive use of the language it is probably impossible to acquire higher levels of proficiency. Instruction in specific elements of the language should be integrated with opportunities to use those elements in meaningful communication.

Students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language, demonstrate independence (CCSS, 2012). The Common Core

State Standards require that students without significant scaffolding be able to comprehend and evaluate complex texts across a range of types and disciplines, construct effective arguments, and convey intricate or multifaceted information. Likewise, the CCSS requires that students independently be able to discern a speaker's key points, request clarification, and ask relevant questions. The students must also build on others' ideas, articulate their own ideas, and confirm they have been understood. Without prompting, they have to demonstrate command of Standard English and acquire and use a wide-ranging vocabulary. More broadly, CCSS requires that students become self-directed learners, effectively seeking out and using resources including teachers, peers, print, and reference digital materials to assist them (CCSS, 2012).

Segregation of English Language Learners

Research shows that children of color (Latinos) are exposed to many disadvantages due to segregation in areas where they live or go to school. "Youth of color generally attend schools in lower-income neighborhoods" (Kuscera & Flaxman, 2012, p.13). The intense segregation that Latino students experience in U. S. schools nearly guarantees that many will not have the opportunity to meet expected academic standards (Gandara, 2010).

Today, Latinos are more likely than African Americans to attend segregated schools. In 2005–06, approximately 78 percent of Latinos attended predominantly minority schools (from 50 to 100 percent minority), whereas about 73 percent of black students attended similarly segregated schools. More than 60 percent of Latinos living in urban areas in the western U.S. attend schools that are hyper-segregated—that is, in which 90 to 100 percent of students are nonwhite (Orield & Frankenberg, 2008). Across

the U.S., English Learners are more likely to attend large, failing urban schools where they are segregated along with other English Learners (Cosentino de Cohen & Clewell, 2006).

In the Supreme Court's *McLaurin* decision, a higher education decision that was a key precursor of *Brown v. Board of Education*, "the very act of setting plaintiff apart from other students in the same room because of the racial origin of the plaintiff was held to deny plaintiff equal protection." (*Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 1973). A paramount requisite in the American system of public education is social equality. The Supreme Court's *Lau* decision requires that appropriate language instruction be provided to EL students. In *Brown v. Board of Education* it was found to be unlawful to segregate students, which is currently happening to Latino students because they compose the largest population of ELs (Gandara, 2010).

Research on the effects of segregation on students follows two lines: (1) segregation by schools; and (2) segregation by classroom in which the students are separated from their peers for the purpose of instruction that results in segregation along racial, ethnic, and linguistic dimensions and effects the quality of curriculum and instruction to which they are exposed (Gandara, 2010). A recent study of mathematics achievement in the United States, which reanalyzed all of the major federal longitudinal studies of student achievement over the last three decades concluded that although the increase in the average education and income of Latino families over this period should have produced a significant closing of the nation's achievement gaps, those gains were basically cancelled out by the damage caused by increased segregation (Berends & Penaloza, 2010).

Another study underscoring the critical importance of segregation for the academic outcomes of English Language Learners compared achievement outcomes on the National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP) between ELL students in New Mexico and Texas (states that offer bilingual education) versus those in Arizona, Massachusetts, and California (English-only states). It was found that there were larger gaps in achievement between English Learners and native English speakers in those states with English-only instructional policies. However, after assessing the impact on student achievement outcomes via a variety of state and local factors, the researchers noted an even more important factor that influenced achievement outcomes: Segregation (Rumberger & Tran, 2010).

Rumberger and Tran (2010) concluded that the variable that explained the greatest amount of variance between ELL and Non-ELL students was the degree of segregation experienced. Therefore, they recommended that the most important policy that could be enacted by states to increase the achievement of ELL students would be to reduce the segregation they experienced in their schooling (Rumberger & Tran, 2010).

Research on desegregation has established that minority students who are schooled in desegregated settings tend to have better occupational outcomes and overall life chances (Wells & Crain, 1994). Gandara (2003) argues that the concentration of English Learners in classrooms and schools in California limits their opportunity to receive an education that is comparable in quality and scope to that of their non-EL peers for many reasons including: (a) lack of peer English role models, (b) lack of high achieving student role models, (c) segregated classrooms and unequal resources, and (d) lack of highly qualified teachers (p. 34). Research has shown that the academic

achievement of peers influences other students' own academic achievement, in part, because students learn from each other (Hanushek, Kain, Markman, & Rivkin, 2001; Hoxby, 2001). ELLs' language limitations begin to impede their progress most noticeably as they move beyond the early stages of reading, usually beginning around third grade, when vocabulary and content knowledge become increasingly relevant for continued academic success (Goldenberg, 2008). Therefore, the concentration of English Learners in California's schools and classrooms not only makes learning English but also academic achievement more difficult for them (Gandara, 2003). Linguistic isolation refers to more than just segregation (p. 12). The U.S. census reports a household is linguistically isolated when no adult (person over 14 years of age) in the family speaks English very well and the home therefore may lack access to basic services such as medical or disaster assistance. The 2000 census also reported that close to 1.5 million Spanish speaking children lived in such households (Arias, 2010). Consistent opportunities for oral interaction around formal academic language can facilitate more specialized uses of the academic register of formal writing and speaking (Echevarria, 2014).

On the other hand, there is research that supports the grouping of ELLs according to their English proficiency levels. "Although ELLs should not be in classrooms segregated by language proficiency levels, grouping by language proficiency specifically during ELD instruction is likely to be effective as long as instruction is carefully tailored to students' language-learning needs" (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012, p. 50).

Assessment

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB Act of 2002) required that states report the performance of all students including students in major ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners (ELL). ELL students have historically lagged behind their English proficient peers in all content areas, particularly academic subjects that are high in English language demand.

Students who lack proficiency in the language of a test consistently perform at lower levels, and changes in the language of a test can result in changes in student scores (Aiken, 1971, 1972; Cocking & Chipman, 1988; De Corte, Verschaffel, & De Win, 1985; Jerman & Rees, 1972; Kintsch & Greeno, 1985; Larsen, Parker, & Trenholme, 1978; Lepik, 1990; Mestre, 1988; Munro, 1979; Noonan, 1990; Orr, 1987; Rothman & Cohen, 1989; Spanos, Rhodes, Dale, & Crandall, 1988). Similarly, reviewers of standardized achievement tests have expressed concerns about administering these tests to ELL students because the norm groups for the tests are not representative of the ELL population.

Navarrette and Gustke (1996) expressed concerns that assessments were “not including students from linguistically diverse backgrounds in the norm group, not considering the match or mismatch between a student’s cultural and school experiences, and not ensuring for English proficiency,” resulting in “justified accusations of bias and unfairness in testing” (p. 2). Policymakers should be held accountable to develop an assessment system that is responsive to the needs of English Learners, and in the meantime, teachers especially those who speak the language of the students should be supported in developing good informal assessments (Gandara, 2003).

There are many issues to fulfill the NCLB's mandates in regards to ELLs' assessments. Abedi, (2004) reports there are six ELL assessment issues as they relate to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reporting. He reports that:

1. States have different guidelines for the classification of students.
2. States have different number of ELLs.
3. The ELD 5 students become reclassified and no longer count as ELD students.
4. The academic achievement tests are constructed and normalized for native English speakers, so they have lower reliability and validity for ELLs (Abedi, Mirocha, 2003).
5. Schools with a higher ELL student population have greater responsibility to help students learn specific subject content.
6. Schools with a higher ELL student population are responsible for assisting students to become proficient in English so that they can follow directions and understand test requirements, and ultimately, score "proficient" in all content areas.

Abedi (2004) concludes that in order to improve ELLs' academic progress and proficiency in English, there are a few critical needs, such as improving the classification assessment, improving monitoring the progress, improving teacher capacity, and considering re-designated ELL students as part of the EL subgroup. This last step allows the progress of re-designated students to be counted toward subgroup progress (p. 12).

Findings from several studies recently show the impact of language factors on the assessment of ELL students (Abedi, 2006a; Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord 2004). These findings suggest that unnecessary linguistic complexity may hinder the ELL students'

ability to express their knowledge of the content being measured. The results of a series of studies on the impact of language on assessment of ELLs resulted in two major conclusions: (a) reducing the linguistic complexity of assessment tools helped ELL students to perform significantly better because it reduced the performance gap between ELL and non-ELLs, and (b) the process of reducing linguistic complexity of test items did not alter the construct under measurement. Therefore, by reducing the linguistic complexity of assessment tools the validity of assessment was not compromised (Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker, 2000; Abedi & Lord, 2001).

These studies suggest that reducing the impact of language factors on content based assessments can improve the validity and reliability of such assessments for English Learners, resulting in fairer assessments. Furthermore, the findings suggest that various language-related accommodation strategies should be developed to minimize the impact of language and thus reduce the performance gap between English Learners and others (Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker, 2000; Abedi & Lord, 2001).

Therefore, the issue of allowing accommodations becomes another topic to look into in regards to English Language Learners. All students—including many English speakers—could benefit from reduced linguistic complexity and the great majority of students instructed in a language other than English (Spanish) could be tested more meaningfully (Gandara 2006).

Teacher-Student Relationships

This section examines how teacher-student relationships impact the implementation of policies. Teacher-student relationships figure more noticeably in the pattern of Latino students' performance in the classroom. For Latino students, teacher

relational support is more psychologically important because they view the teacher role as an extension of the parental role (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor & Bamaca, 2006). School programs that take into account students' lives outside of school and their impact on both teaching and learning in a context that is caring are considered important for successful academic engagement and relation (Gibson & Bejinez, 2002). Unfortunately, the lack of appropriate culturally relevant connections between teachers and students is the norm and usually means that minority students are blamed for their low academic performance rather than helped to raise their academic performance (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Lack of teacher-student relationships in classrooms may result in school becoming the source of risk for Latino students (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002). A study that examined cross-cultural differences in an urban southeastern school district found different traits and attributes in European-American teachers' explanation for the causes of school problems among African-American, European-American, and Hispanic-American 5-11 year olds. For European-American children, teachers tended to use situational explanation of a problem such as the "child has a problem at home," while for African-American and Hispanic-American students teachers tended to use personal explanations of youth problems such as "the child becomes disrespectful, hostile and aggressive and is not taking responsibility." Thus, these different attributes pointed out the hidden assumptions that produce and reproduce social inequalities (Jackson, 2002).

The issue of whether or not a student's ethnicity affects the manner in which a teacher perceives the student is crucial to understanding the nature of the achievement gap between Latino and White students because it implies that a student could be denied access to an equal educational opportunity simply on the basis of race. Many teachers

believe that being a minority is a disadvantage (Madrid, 2011). Some teachers also fail to realize that a student's academic failure could very well be indicative of deficiencies in their own teaching (Madrid, 2011). Several studies have been done on teachers and their impact on students' academic achievements. The research indicated that if Latino culture is valued it can be used to increase student achievement (Gandara, Hopkins, & Martinez, 2011). Teachers and counselors who value the Latino students' culture and language can build on these strengths to support their success in high school and transition to post-secondary education (Aldana, et al. 2011). At the same time, teachers who expect their students to go to college improve their students' chances for a successful transition to college by increasing their opportunities to learn (Oakes, et al. 2004). High expectations directly affect the motivation of students, who learn to see themselves as college-bound (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Therefore, it is extremely important that the teachers of ELL students value their students' culture and language and tie their academic development to culturally relevant responsive education.

Impact of Teachers on English Language Learner's Academic Achievement

This section of the literature review discusses the impact of teachers on the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs).

According to Dubner (2008), teacher effectiveness is essential to academic growth and achievement. He states, "good teachers can actually close or eliminate the gaps in achievement" (p. 6). It is estimated that today about 80% of teachers in California have ELs in their classrooms (Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, 2005). Thus, the great majority of the state's teachers, too, are affected by policies that target ELs. Haycock (2001) found that many minority and low-income students are being

taught by incompetent and poorly prepared teachers. However, access to qualified teachers is one of the most inequitably distributed educational resources among poor and minority children, and this lack of access contributes to the achievement gap between students of color and White students (Darling-Hammond and Berry, 1999). Additionally, family support plays an important role in academic achievement of all students (Altschul, 2011; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Jasis, 2013; Jeynes, 2012).

The Role of Latino Families

This section focuses on the role of ELLs' family support and the impact on their academic development.

For many years, parents have been an overlooked resource for English Language Learners. The theme of family involvement as an important contributor to student academic achievement is noticeable in educational literature and public opinion. Supple, Ghazarian, Frabutt, Plunkett & Sands (2006) found that families' ethnic socialization had significant positive academic outcomes, positive identity exploration, and serves as a protective factor for Southern California adolescents of Mexican and Central American heritage. Ibanez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, & Perilla (2004) surveyed 129 Atlanta Latino adolescents and found that a sense of school belonging and parental involvement was positively related to achievement motivation, especially for more highly acculturated students. For Ibanez and colleagues, the findings highlighted the value that Latino culture has collectivist and affiliated socialization goals that influence achievement.

Conceptual Framework

This section examines the conceptual framework of social capital, which guided this study.

When considering how policies and school practices influence the outcomes of Latino students' academic achievement, one must consider the work of Bourdieu (1977). Bourdieu believed that schools must evenly draw social and capital resources from the members of society. He argued that the structure, language and authority patterns of the norm culture (white middle class culture) are unfamiliar to newly immigrant and low-income families, and this lack of American cultural experience for the low-income and immigrant students makes it difficult, if not impossible to experience academic development and achieve academic excellence (Bourdieu, 1977). In another study, Bourdieu (1986) explains social capital as resources that people can develop through participation in social networks that benefit them. A person must invest in cultural capital in order to receive social capital, "that is, one must demonstrate membership through appropriate use of cultural resources and knowledge to gain entry" into these social networks (Monkman, Ronald & Theramene, 2005, p. 13).

Numerous researchers like, Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003) explored social capital and its impact on children's success by looking at parent networks. Parents who have the ability to gain consistent access to resources, aid, and existing social ties are seen as ones with high stocks of social capital (Horvat et al., 2003). Developing social and cultural capital is very important to many Latino families, especially to recent immigrants, because of the cultural and social limitations and isolations they encounter upon entering the American society (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez- Orozco, 2001; Lawson &

Alameda-Lawson, 2011). Nearly all of these parents often lack the resources and information needed to navigate their children through the highly culturally biased educational system. In many cases, they do not have knowledge of the location of the social contacts to find support. Quite frankly, many Latino students find themselves in classrooms where the “linguistic and cultural milieu in which they live is not given equal respect” as that of the dominant culture (Garcia, 2008, p. 296). White middle class culture is typically used as the standard because it represents the “accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society” (Yasso, 2005, p.76). Yasso also believes that Latino students and their families bring rich cultural experiences from home that offer students an alternative form of social and cultural capital that can be tapped into by educators as background knowledge for teaching rather than being atypically dismissed or considered irrelevant.

The primary function of social capital is for students and their families to gain “access to human, cultural, and other forms of capital as well as to institutional resources and support” (Perna, 2005, p. 488).

In the 1980s, James Coleman developed the concept of social capital to conceptualize social patterns and processes that contribute to the ethnic disparities of student achievement. Coleman argued that educational expectations, norms, and obligations that exist within a family or a community are important social capital that can influence the level of parental involvement and investment, which in turns affects academic success.

At the family level, parents’ cultural and financial capitals become available to the child only if the social connection between the child and the parents is sufficiently

strong. Youths from single-parent families or with larger numbers of siblings are more likely to drop out of high school due to eroded social capital associated with the nontraditional family structure. At the institutional level, disciplinary climate and academic norms established by the school community and the mutual trust between home and school are major forms of social capital. These forms of social capital are found to contribute to student learning outcomes in East Asian countries such as Singapore, Korea, and Hong Kong. They have been shown to have a significant impact, not only on creating a learning and caring school climate, but also on improving the quality of schooling and reducing inequality of learning outcomes between social-class groups.

Although various academic structures provide different characterization of the concept of social capital, Salazar (1977, 2001, 2011) defines social capital as consisting of highly valued resources and key forms of institutional support embedded in one's network or associations, and typically accessible through direct or indirect ties to people able and willing to act in the capacity of an institutional agent. He refers to institutional agents as: "The key forms of social support that function to help children and adolescents become effective participants within mainstream institutional spheres, particularly the school system" (p.9). Such support enables young people to become successful consumers and entrepreneurs within the mainstream marketplace, to effectively manage the stresses of participating in mainstream settings, and in general, to exercise greater control over their lives and their future.

Empowering permanent social relations, where ties between students and teachers are extremely important, not only affords students academic support when needed, but also enables minority and immigrant youth to develop lasting forms of resiliency. Spina

(1998) describes resiliency as a contextually “optimal” response to stress. When posed with a significant problem or challenge, resilient youth learn to quickly assess the resources in their network and effectively use those resources in resolving the issue (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In addition, Salazar argues that in contrast to children and youth privileged by their class and race, many low-status young people are by and large embedded in social webs defined by the lack of social capital, and that schools with a high proportion of minority students and immigrants are socially organized or structured in ways that thwart access to social capital, including high-status funds of knowledge that are taken for granted by middle and upper-middle-class youth (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). In accordance with Salazar’s argument, we as educators must imagine a school environment that is socially structured in such a way that teachers and other school personnel are able and fulfilled by their potential to manifest their roles as institutional agents for students and colleagues in and where relations between students and teachers are organized to generously provide access to social capital and to key forms of social and emotional support.

In support of Salazar’s social capital theory for minority and immigrant students, the task must be to create an organization structure whereby students and teachers have true opportunities to forge meaningful and lasting relationships or ties; some of them “weak ties” similar to adults’ casual relationships with well-regarded acquaintances, and some of them “strong ties” or relationships with teachers that are reliable, are defined by trust, and serve as regular resources of emotional, social, and informational support (Stanton-Salazar, 2013).

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter addressed topics related to Latino English Language Learners (ELLs) and the factors that impact their academic success in schools and studies as well as theories on social capital perspectives. For Latino students to succeed academically, substantial and significant changes in the educational system must take place, especially changes in what is taught, how it is taught, and the condition of the schools in which the Latino students are enrolled (Madrid, 2011). There are numerous research studies about Latinos and their achievement gap compared to other student populations. The literature revealed the factors that positively impact closing the achievement gap for ELL students; however, few investigations have been done on the impact of policies such as the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirement on Latino English Language Learners' academic learning and achievement. Therefore, this study addresses this gap.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the study's methodology and includes discussions of the following: rationale for the research approach, descriptions of the research sample and setting, overview of the research design, methods of data collection, analysis and synthesis of data, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of state and district policies on academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs) in classrooms. A goal of this study was to increase the limited knowledge regarding the English Language Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirements and their impact on the academic achievement of ELL students.

The findings of this case study may improve the implementation process of policies that are critical to ELLs' academic achievement and performance on standardized testing.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of state and district level policies regarding the academic achievement of ELLs assigned to classrooms by their English proficiency level?
2. How do the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirements impact the academic achievement of Latino English Language Learners in classrooms?

3. How do teachers perceive their role in increasing the ELLs' academic achievement in classrooms organized according to the English Learner Master Plan?

Research Design and Tradition

This qualitative research used a phenomenological case study to align the research questions, research purpose, and research methodology to examine the impact of the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirement on the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs). This phenomenological research is an in-depth inquiry into a topic with a small number of homogeneous participants (Glesne, 2011). The purpose of phenomenological research is to investigate the meaning of the lived experience of people to identify the core essence of human experience or phenomenon as described by research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The richness of phenomenology is found in communicating about this “thing in itself” (Morse, 1994). Morse’s research and interview questions in phenomenology go on to focus on meaning (What is the meaning of an experience?) and analogy (What is it like to experience?). In order to properly address this purpose, this phenomenological study explored teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions and used them as evidence to draw conclusions based on their lived experiences.

In this study, the researcher sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of each participant, and to examine similarities and differences across cases (Glesne, 2011). In addition, through the use of a case study as a form of methodology for this research, “generalizability was not the goal, but rather transferability -- that is, how (if at

all) and in what ways understanding and knowledge could be applied in similar contexts and settings” (Creswell, 2012).

Research Setting

The setting for this qualitative case study was four selected elementary school sites located in the Talia-Melrose Unified School District (a pseudonym). The schools are among the largest elementary schools in the district and at least two of them have recently been converted from year-round schools to single-track traditional schools. The schools enroll approximately 500 to 900 students with a 50% ELL rate of which 85% to 95% are Hispanic in origin. The majority of the students at these four elementary schools are of low socio-economic status and receive free breakfast and lunch. All four schools scored lower than the district’s average on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) in the 2014-15 school year. Also, each of the schools had Academic Performance Index (API) scores of 750-780 in 2013. Additionally, each of the selected school sites has been identified as a Program Improvement School for the last eight to ten years due to the students’ low test scores on Standards Testing (CST). The student characteristics of these four elementary schools made them ideal sites for this study.

Site Selection Strategies

A criterion sampling strategy was used to select the sites for this study in which specific prerequisites of the site were considered (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The criteria included the schools’ large population of ELLs and the fact that schools with high populations of ELLs are required to follow the English Learner Master Plan guidelines to organize their classrooms. This means that all ELD levels 1 and 2 must be placed in one classroom and ELD level 2 and 3s in another. In order to create the Structured English

Immersion (SEI) class, the low performing ELLs were placed in that classroom. Each grade's SEI class was taught by a teacher with a CLAD or BCLAD certificate. ELD levels 4 and 5, English Only (EOs), Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), and Re-designated Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) were allowed to be mixed together in classrooms to fulfill the Master Plan requirements. Therefore, it was extremely important to be at a site with the teachers and administrators that deal with the impact of these policies on daily basis. Every effort was made to inform the administrator and the gatekeeper of the goals of this study and obtain their permission for this research.

Suggestions regarding possible teacher selection and access were obtained by consulting with the bilingual coordinators, who are part of a strong network with administrators, teachers and parents, of the four elementary schools. As the "gatekeepers," their involvement was useful in helping to recruit potential participants from the pool of SEI classroom teachers. An invitation for participation flyer with a brief description of the research and incentives for participation in the study was placed in the teachers' lounge. Next, the researcher arranged a meeting with the principal to explain the research, participants, and criteria of this study. After interviewing the principal, potential teachers were selected for interviews.

Data Source and Sampling

This study used mixed criterion and networking strategies for selecting data sources. Teachers and administrators served as data sources via personal interviews. In order to address teachers' and administrators' voices, the researcher conducted sixteen semi-structured interviews of 45-60 minutes with three teachers and one principal from each of the four selected elementary school sites.

Criterion-based sampling was used to identify and select the teachers to be interviewed. “Criterion based sampling works well when all the individuals studied represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104). The criteria for teachers to participate in this research study was to have experience teaching ELLs, and concurrent with the time of the study, be teaching the Structured English Immersion class of low ELD level students. In order to inform and market the study to potential teachers to participate, the researcher included a brief summary of the study and the compensation offer in the invitation to participate. The researcher interviewed the teacher participants who met the criteria for inclusion. After the eligibility screening of the participants through email exchange or telephone calls, each participant was contacted to arrange a date and an after-work time for the interview.

All interview data was audio recorded and transcribed as a “recording device provides a nearly complete documentation of what has been said and permits easier attention to the course of the interview” (Glesne, 2011, p. 116). All participants were assigned a pseudonym. This process was explained in the participation flyer that was placed in the teachers’ lounge during the recruitment process. Creswell (2012) states that in order to be ethical, assurances of confidentiality should be included in the invitation letter. Any information obtained during interviews that could be identified with the participants or location remained confidential. All data was stored electronically in a computer that was secured with a password. Only the researcher had access to this data, which will be destroyed after two years.

Ethical Issues

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that a study is conducted in such a way that creates the least amount of risk of harm to participants. Therefore, the confidentiality of all participants was guaranteed. The identity of the participants was protected by using pseudonyms throughout the data collection process. Simultaneously, the researcher protected the participants by informing them of possible minimal psychological harm from the interview process. These measures are in agreement with the Belmont Report (1979) that “the principle of respect emphasizes that people should participate through voluntary and informed consent and that those with diminished autonomy to give their consent should be protected.”

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The instruments utilized for data collection included semi-structured interview protocols for teachers (Appendix A) which guided the interview with teachers. The interview protocol for administrators (Appendix B) guided the interview with administrators at each of the four elementary school sites. The interview questions for both the teachers’ and administrators’ individual interviews were constructed around the main research questions and the literature review. The researcher wrote down individual interview responses to gain a richer, deeper understanding of the participants’ views on different issues. Collecting data from a variety of school sites provided abundant and diverse data for this study.

Interview Protocols

Prior to the start of the interview, each participant was handed a consent form, general guidelines including the right of participants to walk out during the interview, information regarding the confidentiality of the data collected, the anonymity of the participant's identity, as well as the permission form to audio record an interview of approximately 45-60 minutes. In order to make each prospective participant comfortable, the researcher initiated some discussion regarding the reason for participating in the study.

Teacher Interview Protocol

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to interview the twelve teachers (Glesne, 2011) in grades three to five. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was derived from the research questions and includes both open-ended and probing questions. It also includes a brief introduction about the researcher as well as a short summary of the research. The researcher asked the teacher participants for demographic information such as the number of years of their service with the district, the number of years of teaching ELD classes at the school, and the type of credential they hold. The researcher then moved to a few warm-up questions to make the participants feel comfortable.

Principal Interview Protocol

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B) to collect data from the principals of the four elementary school sites. The questions focus on the impact of district policies on the ELLs' academic achievement. The researcher included a number of questions about the role of district policies in ELL students' classroom placement, the creation of Master Plan class rosters that follow the district

guidelines, and the support that district policies provide for Structured English Immersion (SEI) classroom teachers when dealing with discipline issues. Including the discipline issue questions were essential; if a student meets the standards as an ELL, behavior (or lack thereof) is not taken into consideration during classroom placement.

In all of the interview protocols with teachers and administrators, the researcher made sure to avoid leading or biased questions. Lastly, the interviews were completed by debriefing the participants in order to make sure all questions had been answered and to offer participants an opportunity to add any additional information (Creswell, 2012).

Rationale for Instruments

The interview protocols were designed using open-ended questions allowing participants to share ideas, thoughts, and perceptions. Therefore, it was expected that this instrument would yield rich data with powerful quotes and plenty of narrative. Since the goal of this study is to shed light on the impact of policies on ELLs and the factors that impede their progress in increasing their academic achievement, an interview protocol is the most appropriate approach to conduct this study. To ensure thoroughness and efficacy, the researcher connected the research questions to the opinions and perceptions of the teachers and the administrators through the interview protocols.

Interview Procedures

Upon approval of this study by the Talia Melrose School District Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher visited the schools and met with the principal and the bilingual coordinator. The researcher notified both the principal and the bilingual coordinator that the study had been approved and sought their permission to begin recruiting potential teacher participants. In order to inform possible participants, the

researcher placed flyers in the teachers' lounge discussing the study. Using a networking strategy, the gatekeeper and the researcher selected the teachers who met the criteria for the study. The interview was conducted at a place convenient and comfortable for the teachers, such as their classroom, a coffee shop, or an outside neutral location. After the date and the time had been established, the researcher met and greeted the teacher participants and provided them a brief summary of the purpose of the research.

Prior to the interview, the researcher reminded participants that their participation was voluntary and asked them to sign a consent form. At this point, the researcher reminded the participants that they could opt out of being audio recorded. Once the teacher had informed the researcher of his/her wish to participate, the researcher then began the interview. A "grand tour" question was utilized to aid the participants' comfort with the interview process (Glesne, 2011). Next, the interview protocol (Appendix A) was used to conduct the interview with open-ended questions followed by appropriate probing and clarifying questions (Glesne, 2011). Finally, the interview was completed by asking the teachers if they had any additional information to share.

Following the questioning of the teachers, the principals of the four elementary school sites were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. A separate interview protocol was used with them (Appendix B). The interview was conducted at a place convenient and comfortable for each of the principals, such as in their office, a classroom or conference room at the school or an outside neutral location. The researcher used the interview protocol (Appendix B) to guide the interview by asking open-ended questions followed by appropriate probing and clarifying questions (Glesne, 2011). Lastly, the interviews were finished by debriefing the selected principals to make sure all

questions had been answered and to offer them an opportunity to add any additional information (Creswell, 2012). The researcher reimbursed participants (teachers and principals) with a gift card to show appreciation for their time and contribution to the research.

Rationale for Procedures

The interviews were performed by using the same protocol for each data source to ensure reliability and consistency of the research. The researcher used the semi-structured interview approach (Merriam, 2002) and a uniform set of open-ended questions to obtain participants' perceptions and experiences for the purpose of improving policies that impact English Language Learners' academic achievement. Open ended questions were used throughout the interviews to encourage participants to respond freely and openly to queries (Bogden & Biken, 2003). Probing and/or follow-up questions were used, when necessary, to encourage participants to elaborate on or clarify a response (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Data Analysis

According to Glesne (2012), reducing a large amount of data into something meaningful is the process of analyzing it. This study analyzed the data collected from teachers and the principals of four different schools through interviews. Qualitative analysis is a form of intellectual craftsmanship. There is no single way to accomplish qualitative research, since data analysis is a process of making meaning. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this case, not only means understanding the ways administrators and teachers perceive the impact of the English Learner Master Plan on academic achievement of ELLs, but also identifying the patterns

that emerged from that meaning making process. Qualitative data analysis, then gives meaning to first impressions and final findings.

Preliminary Data Analysis

Upon completion of data collection, the researcher had all audio recordings transcribed. A transcription service was retained and instructed to transcribe the data in a question and answer format, which allowed the researcher to follow the conversations and recall the order of the responses. In the preliminary phase of the data analysis, the researcher relied heavily on interview transcripts. To eventually yield interpretations, the researcher looked through the data collected, organize and analyze it using codes such as teacher relation, CELDT testing, behavior issues, family influence, segregation, assessment, frustration, Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms, role models, teacher assistants, academic language, resources, and policies. “Examining each piece of information and, building on insights and hunches gained during data collection, attempt to make sense of the data as a whole” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 139).

The researcher used coding to organize the interview data by assigning labels to phrases and key words from the literature review, the conceptual framework, and the research questions to the quotes within transcriptions. Coding the information provided the opportunity to see linkages across data sources as they are applied to the purpose of this research (Glesne, 2011).

Participant confidentiality was ensured during this phase of data collection by scanning the transcripts for identifiable data. A separate list of this identifiable data was stored on another device with a protected password. The original interview recordings were destroyed soon after the transcriptions were completed.

Thematic Data Analysis

“An important characteristic of thematic analysis is to separate the data into categories by codes or labels” (Glesne, 2011, p.184). Therefore, in the process of coding data, the researcher searched for new patterns that were essential to connect the impact of policies on ELLs’ academic achievement to the literature review and to the conceptual framework or research questions. Regarding phenomenological research, (Morse, 1994) reports that data analysis is a reflective process and involves a sensitive attunement to opening up to the meaning of experience both as discourse and as text. Conversely, qualitative research focuses on the language of the participants or text and requires the researcher to identify words within this information that will contribute to the themes and patterns being researched (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). As per this foundation of qualitative research, themes and codes were developed based on the research questions. Therefore, while analyzing the data, the researcher looked for patterns or themes within the transcripts to ensure that characteristic words and phrases were preserved and coded as emic codes.

“Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can figure out what you have learned and make sense of what you have experienced” (Glesne, 2011, p.184). As a researcher, what this meant was that I had to be careful to take comprehensive notes during my interviews because they could shed some light and be used during my analysis in some capacity. Upon completion of the data analysis, the researcher interpreted the results by assembling the data to see if the findings answered the research questions and how they related to the literature or framework (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The goal of this analysis was to describe patterns found in the data,

interpret the meaning of the data, connect to the work of others, and make recommendations.

My dissertation chair and committee members were given drafts of my interpretations to ensure that no theme was overlooked or personal bias involved. These drafts were also shared with some participants to ensure accuracy, and to edit if necessary, so that additional details could be added.

The Role of the Researcher

In order to increase the trustworthiness of this research, the researcher employed a variety of techniques while collecting, analyzing, and reporting data. The researcher was aware that, as a teacher, she had extensive experience with ELLs and first-hand knowledge of the unequal opportunities and flawed policies found in ELLs' academic development. Such biases could have caused the researcher to overlook the results that were contrary to the norm (Glesne, 2011); therefore, in order to remain neutral, the researcher did not bring her preconceived beliefs into this study.

Researcher Bias

The researcher has also seen colleagues and teachers whom she worked with in different schools suffer from state and district- made decisions in regards to their daily classroom instructions; accordingly, the researcher aimed to conduct respectable research by providing abundant, comprehensive, and detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher was aware that her role as a teacher could influence her interviews, her questioning strategies or even the types of questions she asked. The researcher was also aware that she may be unwilling to publish unwanted results which fail to validate her hypotheses.

Not only could such bias affect the topic setting and subjects, but the researcher's reactions during interview could affect the participant's response. The role of the researcher is to set aside any bias or prejudice such as advocacy for ELLs as well as not allowing connections and feelings as a teacher to affect data collection and data analysis. In order to make certain that all biases were in check, the researcher used strategies that would keep the research grounded in data that participants provided so as to ensure the credibility of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Many strategies were developed and used during data collection to minimize or eliminate bias. Data was gathered in more than one school to maintain or increase the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher had to overcome personal bias that could interfere with the representation of information regarding the ELLs' placements in classrooms with peers of similar English language proficiency level all year. For example, the researcher being an opponent of classroom reorganizations under the English Learner Master Plan requirements could have influenced participants toward thinking that the policy is flawed and does not help the ELLs' academic development. In addition, the researcher's own experience and passion on the subject could have led to misinterpretation of the participants' response (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In order to avoid such concerns, the researcher was extremely self-reflecting during the data analysis process. She remained neutral regarding her views of this study so that participants would not sense biases, which might have influenced their views.

Knowing subjectivity could shape questioning and data collection, the researcher did her best to minimize any partiality when soliciting, recording, and interpreting during data collection and data analysis.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to explore the impact of district policies on the academic achievements of English Language Learner (ELL) students, through the perceptions of teachers and administrators. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) submitted, for example, that the intent of qualitative research is, through in-depth examination, to illuminate and better understand the rich lives of human beings and the world in which they live. This qualitative research was based on the interpretations, perceptions, and experiences of educators working with English Language Learner (ELL) students.

This qualitative research involved an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world of the teachers and administrators of ELLs. The researcher believed this phenomenological research study explored the experiences of the teachers and administrators participating and tried to make sense of their experiences.

The knowledge gained from this study may improve state and district policies impacting ELL students, which in turn may improve their overall performance on state assessments and increase their opportunities for higher education and economic power.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter reveals the findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews, which were used to collect data in the fall of 2016. Also included in this chapter is a brief description of the purpose of this study, an overview of the methodology, the setting and participants, and the conceptual framework used by the researcher. The findings of this study allowed the researcher to answer the research questions that guided this study.

Three research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: What are the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of state and district level policies regarding the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs) assigned to classrooms by their English proficiency level?

Research Question 2: How does the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirement impact the academic achievement of Latino English Language Learners in classrooms?

Research Question 3: How do teachers perceive their role in increasing the English Language Learner's (ELL's) academic achievement in classrooms organized according to the English Learner Master Plan?

Study Context

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of state and district policies on English Language Learners' academic achievement in urban school classrooms. At the

same time, a goal of this study was to examine whether state and district policies hinder or support the academic achievement of English Language Learners in classrooms. Social Capital Theory, which is based on the work of Stanton Salazar and is the focus of the third research question, is the conceptual framework used in this study. This framework considers the work of teachers and administrators in elementary schools as advocates for English Language Learners’ social and academic success as well as their preparation for college and career readiness.

A series of open-ended interviews were conducted with administrators and teachers in four elementary schools in Talia Melrose School District (pseudonym). These participating elementary schools were selected based on their students’ low performance on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and their large population of low socioeconomic English Language Learners (ELLs).

Table 4.0 Research Participants

Role of Participants	Number of Participants
Teachers	12
principals	4
Total Participants	16

Data Analysis

This qualitative study design utilized semi-structured interviews at four different elementary schools. Three teachers and the principal at each site (16 total participants) were interviewed using two different interview protocols. Each interview was

approximately 45-60 minutes. In order to protect the identity of the participants and the schools, pseudonyms were given by the researcher.

Detailed perceptions were collected using two interview protocols. Analysis of the data was ongoing throughout the research study. The researcher transcribed interviews within a day of the interview taking place so that analysis could begin immediately. The transcribed data was analyzed using categories, codes, or labels to identify common themes as well as similarities and differences.

Many themes were identified in the teachers’ and principals’ interview responses regarding the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirement’s impact on the academic achievement of Latino English Language Learners. The researcher narrowed the findings into three major categories and associated themes which are displayed in Table 4.1

Table 4.1 Major Categories and Themes

Categories	Themes
Teacher and Principal Perceptions of State and District Policies	English-Speaking Role Models Behavior Issues SEI Classrooms CELDT Home Language Survey (HLS)
The Impact of Master Plan Classroom Organization Requirement Based on Student’s English Proficiency Level	Academic Language ELD Curriculum
Teacher’s Role in Increasing English Language Learners’ (ELL’s) Academic Achievement	District Expectation Teachers’ Classroom Strategies Advocacy

Research Question 1: Findings

The first research question, “What are the teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of state and district level policies regarding the academic achievement of ELLs assigned to classrooms by their English proficiency level?” was asked indirectly through the interview questions to examine the teachers’ and principals’ perceptions and

opinions about assigning students to classrooms based on their English language proficiency level.

Many themes emerged after the interviews with teachers and administrators in regard to student placement in classrooms based on their English Language Proficiency level or English Language Development (ELD) level. The following major themes (Table 4.1) defined the teachers' and administrators' perceptions: (a) role models, (b) behavior issues, (c) Structured English Immersion, (SEI) classrooms, (d) CELDT, (5) Home Language Survey (HLS).

The principals were divided in their opinions about students' placements based on their English proficiency level. The teachers believed strongly that their opinions must be heard because they work with these students daily and experience first-hand their successes and challenges in the classroom.

Role Models.

In response to Question 12 (Q12) on the Teachers' Interview Protocol, which asks the teachers about what changes they would make to the Master Plan classroom organization requirement, Teacher 3 at School D responded:

I think I would have mixed groups of students in each classroom. A major reason is that it is a lot of work for the teacher with all ELD students. The teaching and the grading takes a lot of time because everything is difficult for the students. The most important reason is the kids need English-speaking role models. They need to hear English from someone else. They need that opportunity to hear from other students. Kids learn from each other.

In response to Question 12 (Q12), Teacher 2 at School B brought up a sensitive topic:

ELD instruction is for one hour. During the rest of the day there should be English-speaking role models for the ELD1s in the classroom. If the ELD1s only have each other all day, they cannot help each other because they do not have the English skills they need. Therefore, they do not progress like the English-speaking students. Their academic achievement is stifled and this is largely due to tracking, which isolates ELD1 students from their English-speaking peers.

Teacher 2 at School A emphatically agreed regarding English-speaking role models in classrooms.

He responded:

I do understand constraints. The constraints are you just can't have two levels in every classroom. You don't know what numbers you are going to get. Ideally, they have to limit the span of students and obviously they should ensure that these students are mixed during the day so they can speak with English Only (EOs) and Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEPs) whenever possible. I believe that mixing must be across all academic areas not just physical education and art. Just being with native English speakers during physical education is not enough time for the ELD1s to understand what is being said in English.

When asked Question 3 (Q3) on the Principal's Interview Protocol, which was about their experience with the English Language Learners (ELLs) placement requirement under the Master Plan, the Principal of School D responded :

Yes, in the past we used to run the Master Plan roster for ELs and monitor their needs for reclassification. Now there are no portfolios. They are placed by their CELDT level. We run the Master Plan roster to see their levels and cluster them

in classrooms, but I don't fill up all classrooms with ELLs. I try to put some others like RFEPS, EOs, and IFEPS in there. Of course they still need that designated ELD time so they move to other classrooms. They need to hear academic language. All English learners need English-speaking role models in classrooms.

The researcher asked the principals about their experiences as an administrator of a school with a large population of ELLs, Question 2 (Q2) on Principal Interview Protocol.

The Principal of School D responded:

It is quite a challenge! It is a challenge to provide support for ELLs. They want us to cluster them according to their CELDT level as much as possible. I am hesitant about placing the EL students in one classroom. We feel like they need ongoing peer models. They don't have that role model if you cluster them the way the district wants them.

To answer the same question (Q2), the Principal of School B responded:

I have been with this district for 24 years and each school that I worked at had almost 1,000 students with a high population of ELLs. This school is no different. The District's initiatives come and go but we still have the ELLs. So we have to make sure the ELLs are mixing with other students, so they can have English-speaking role models. Currently, with the District's new policy, they are organized based on CELDT, ELD levels. We are lucky we have a large population and I can make EL groupings better than other schools. But at the same time there are drawbacks. There are a lot of second language learners

developing language skills who are from low socioeconomic homes. They have several social emotional issues that create hurdles and barriers to their learning.

Table 4.2 displays the responses of principals in regard to following the Master Plan classroom organization.

Table 4.2 Responses of Principals in Regard to Following the Master Plan Requirements

Principals Follow the Master Plan		Principals Hesitant to Follow the Master Plan	
School A Principal	School B Principal	School C Principal	School D Principal
It is a good process. Especially if they don't speak English and they don't have the academic language. It would be great if they had the academic language in their native language, so the teacher could tap into their prior knowledge from their country. Having a teacher who speaks their native language would be a positive experience for ELLs, especially lower ELD students.	My opinion is that grouping of all the students by ELD level is not the most beneficial strategy for the students. My opinion is, a highly skilled teacher can push them to higher level. I do understand the difficulties. When a student is new to the country, there is a huge education gap that needs to be filled and bridged. My personal vision is all students must reach their full potential. For some they are just learning English, for others they have the skills, and they can move up faster. I wish my hands were not as tied as they are. It is hard to see uneducated people are in classes and they are making all laws. They should let us do what is right for our students. Educators are smart people. The system must have more trust in them.	I think I am ok, with it. It is instructionally sound. I think they need to cluster the children based on their language proficiency so they can process the language until ELD 4 and 5. They must be taught using SDAIE methods with support. I do believe it nurtures and helps the child by giving more time to acquire English proficiency. Hopefully they will also develop critical thinking skills. Learning a new language cannot happen overnight. The students are trying to process English skills while learning the language.	It is good because it ensures all low ELDs are targeted and taught what they need. On the other hand when they are in a class with similar low ELD level peers in 4 th and 5 th grade, they need peer role models. Here, at our school, we cluster by CELDT but we throw in sprinkles of ELD 5, EO, and RFEPs. We have to be careful because they need to change classes so they get targeted instruction.

Behavior Issues.

In order to answer the first research question which is about teachers' and administrators' perceptions on state and district policies regarding the academic achievement of English Language Learners assigned to classrooms based on their English

proficiency level, the researcher asked the teachers about the classroom organization requirement and its relationship to student behavior, Teacher 1 at School B responded:

They have behavior issues. They are giving me the kids who hate reading. They are reading below grade level and they do not pay attention to what they do not like to do. If we did not group them this way we would not have this issue. They talk because they do not understand the vocabulary words or the reading.

A similar response was given by Teacher 2 of School B who said:

I like all ELD 5s and ELD 1s and 2s together, but no behavior though!

The Principal of School D responded to the issues of the Master Plan classroom organization requirement saying:

Fortunately I don't see any discipline because I cluster the students differently from the Master Plan requirements.

When asked about the behavior issues, the Principal of School B responded:

I like to refrain from saying that the placement creates problems, but the Master Plan classroom organization sure makes it difficult to manipulate placement to alleviate the problem. When placing the students, teachers say don't put Johnny and Bobby together in one class next year because they both have behavior issues.

Guess what? Johnny and Bobby are both EOs and they must be together in one class because we have only one EO classroom. It practically affects the whole school. The Master Plan placement elevates the problem.

He continued,

This year I have one misbehaved student in a class that does not get along with the other students so I have to move this student from EO classroom to ELD. If I

do this, I will be out of compliance with the Master Plan requirement. So I let the parents know. I notified them to sign a waiver based on the student's safety. To help reduce a discipline issue, other issues surface that ties our hands.

Structured English Immersion (SEI) Classrooms.

The goal of the Structured English Immersion program as it is mentioned in the English Learner Master Plan (2012) is the acquisition of English language skills and access to core content so the ELLs, including those with disabilities, can succeed in a mainstream classroom. SEI is designed to ensure that ELLs develop English proficiency and receive appropriate supports to make grade level content standards accessible. High-quality ELD instruction and scaffold content instruction is provided with primary language support for clarification SEI is the designated default placement for ELLs who are "less than reasonably fluent" (ELLs at ELD 1-3). Since the interviewed teachers were teaching SEI classrooms at the time of the interview, this theme emerged immediately. The researcher asked Question 3 (Q3) of the Teacher Interview Protocol, which asks teachers about their experiences with low performing ELD students in SEI classrooms. Teacher 2 from School D answered:

My experience is total frustration. The students are pretty low! Day after day it is frustration. It is hard to explain everything. If I finish everything then I can slow down and have fun with them. Every sentence is a Close Read. Every paragraph needs background knowledge. The SDAIE is working full core here. When I am explaining the lesson I cannot go too far back but I have to slow down and explain to make sure that students understand. The reading must be meaningful but the students lack vocabulary to understand the narrative. I can slow down and use

lessons from the 2nd grade level; however, the students have to take the 3rd grade level standardized test.

He added:

I haven't had the experience of having students who perform at grade level for the last 15 years. The students are coming with less and less background knowledge and fluency these days.

In response to Question 3 (Q3) of the Teacher Interview Protocol, which asks how the teacher would describe his/her experience teaching all lower ELD1s and 2s in his/her classroom. Teacher 3 at School B responded:

They lack vocabulary. Many of my 5th grade ELD students don't get my jokes, phrases, or idioms. I said, "For Pete's sake" and they asked, "Who is Pete? What are you talking about?"

Teacher 1 at School C explained the hard work behind the scenes of teaching the SEI classroom. She responded:

It takes a lot of preparation! Honestly they don't know the words a native speaker may know. There are no native speakers in the class. In our math instruction the word problem was about population. I had to scaffold the vocabulary before the students could understand the word "population." The math and science lessons take forever because the students lack academic English skills and vocabulary.

Another theme emerging from the questionnaire responses was the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The researcher included the interesting and varied opinions about the timing of the CELDT because of the effect of the test and its results on the ELL population.

California English Language Development Test (CELDT).

The placement of English Language Learners in classrooms is based on the CELDT results. Teacher 1 at School C responded about CELDT saying:

I would change the Master Plan classroom organization requirement that is based on CELDT results. This is the test the students take at the beginning of the year, and then they use the same test result to place them in classrooms for the next year. Don't you think the kids learned more and grew after a year of instruction? I would change the time frame for the CELDT to be administered. I would give the CELDT at the end of the year to assess academic growth and to make a more accurate classroom placement for the next school year.

The Principal of School B had a lengthy response to Question 6 (Q6) of the Administrator Interview Protocol, which refers to how principals respond to SEI classroom teachers' major requests and complaints concerning instruction for ELD1, 2, and 3 students. He responded to the question regarding the SEI classrooms and shared his opinion about CELDT testing as well:

As I stated, it is like a double-edged sword. If we group lower ELs by ELD level in one class and they make no academic progress from K to 5th grade, it may be the result of learning difficulty issues. Teachers request that low level ELD 1s, 2s, and 3s in higher grades not be placed in their classrooms because of learning difficulty issues. If teachers have second language learners, one hour of designated ELD instruction is required. Teachers say there is no support. If the student does not know what the computer monitor is, then how can he/she work on the computer? A second complaint is that grouping these students together

year after year is tracking, which does not help them academically. The teachers have heavier workloads as the paperwork has increased. Teachers used to keep folders for each student, but now teachers must have a Student Progress Form (SPF) for each student and two scores on report cards, one for core standards and one for ELD grades. Also teachers working with ELs must attend additional professional development. These teachers lose instructional time at the beginning of the year to complete CELDT testing. CELDT testing is completed one-to-one between the teacher and the individual student. In the upper grades, a portion of the CELDT can be completed with a group of students. The teachers have requested to do the CELDT testing during designated ELD instruction to have additional time.

Home Language Survey (HLS).

During the interviews, a directly related to the English Learner Master Plan preliminary requirement for classroom placement theme emerged from teachers' and principals' interviews. This theme indicated the parental frustration with the rules for reclassification which includes: (a) pass the CELDT test, (b) score benchmark on reading fluency test (DIBELS), and (c) acquire a grade of 3 or above in all subject in report card, while they were placed in SEI classrooms. Therefore, parents were reluctant to be completely honest on The Home Language Survey that is sent home. These issues were reflected in the interview responses.

Teacher 1 of School A responded this way to Question 7 (Q7) of the Teacher Interview Protocol, which was about keeping the low ELD students in one class all year:

It is impossible! What happens is that the children do not have a true English-speaking role model to look up to. As a result, they don't pick up much instruction. In the beginning, they are shy and they really do not know how to speak the language. They only talk with head gestures. Parents do not have conversations with them at home. They do not look at the speaker, they do not smile and they do not know all the rules for discussion that we do naturally. Everything must be taught. In my groups, there is always a talkative student. Their ELD levels do not match their ability. For the parents, the Home Language Survey (HLS) is misleading. The parents are not sure what to write for the question that asks "If another language is spoken." There is a child who is an ELL, but the parents do not want the child to go through the process of re-designation, so they were not honest on the (HLS) and said that the child is English Only (EO). Because the parents were not honest on the survey, their child is not assigned based on his/her true ability. That is why these students are reserved and quiet in class. These students lack English skills and cannot communicate with their peers. I show the parents at Back to School Night what a day in my class looks like. I tell them this is why your child is in this class.

Teacher 2 from School A addressed the Home Language Survey as well:

Parents never ever ask me why my child is here with ELD1s, and 2s. They assume that it would be best for them and the language they need. They believe the school knows best. This is the population. Other schools have issues to the point that some parents are not honest on the Home Language Survey because they indicated that the language is English only (EO). Some parents know that

ELD is like tracking and their children will not exit the ELD program unless they are successful in meeting the criteria for reclassification. Parents whose older children have been in ELD programs do not want their younger children to be enrolled in this program.

The Principal from School B addressed the Home Language Survey by sharing:

Teachers talk to parents during parent conferences. They talk about CELDT and the type of assistance that parents can provide to their children to help them pass the test to re-classify. Some parents are not happy. They say they filled out the parent survey but they want their child to get out of the ELD program. The parents understand if the students remain in the ELD program here in elementary school they will go to junior high school still in the program, which means no elective classes and extra English classes.

Research Question 2: Findings

Research question 2 asked: How does the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirement impact the academic achievement of Latino English Language Learners in classrooms? As the question clearly shows, this research question focused on gathering information about the impact of the Master Plan classroom organization requirement on the academic achievement of Latino English Language Learners in elementary classrooms. Two major themes, academic language skills and the ELD curriculum emerged from teachers' and administrators' responses.

Academic Language.

Academic language differs greatly from conversational or social language used outside of the classroom. It is more complex, more abstract, and places higher demands on student cognition (Schleppegrell, 2004).

In order to examine the impact of placing the ELLs in SEI classrooms, the researcher asked Question 7 (Q7) of the Teacher Interview Protocol, which asks about the teachers' perceptions of keeping the low ELD students in one classroom for the entire school year.

Teacher 1 at School C responded:

My opinion is that the students should not be kept together in the same class for the entire year. These students are not going to be ready if their English skills are low in 4th and 5th grades. In their communication, reading, vocabulary, and writing, the students' low skills make it difficult for them to catch up to their English-speaking peers. They lack academic language, which includes simple steps to learn but takes a long time to master. If they are ELD 1s and 2s in 4th and 5th grade, it means they have difficulty passing the CELDT. Therefore, I take the sentence frames out for them and never call on them until they are more comfortable with the content. I then call on them so they can participate with their peers. These students need to communicate with others on a daily basis.

Teacher 3 of School B responded this way:

It is a good idea for the low ELD students to be grouped together in one class for the entire year. They do not get frustrated being in that class all year. However, everyone is the same, they have very low English language skills and they do not

learn from each other. There is no academic progress. The students do not move forward.

She added:

I use a lot of videos. I give them the definition of the vocabulary words so they know what the words mean in the text they are reading. It is very hard for them when they do not know the vocabulary words. I have to slow down and show them many pictures while explaining everything in academic vocabulary because students do not have the academic language skills in their own language.

Teacher 3 of School B offered a unique opinion about the academic language of the students in her class. She responded to Question 5 (Q5), which was about the differences between having all low ELD students in one classroom or having a mixed student population. She responded:

Unfortunately, my students do not quite have Spanish and don't quite have English. They do not get Spanish at home. For many, the parents do not know how to read and write, so they do not see how the Spanish works. Also, since they are not speaking in complete sentences, they do not have academic English at home either.

Finally, the Principal of School B responded to Question 5 (Q5) of the Administrator Interview Protocol, which was about identifying the major issues in classrooms organized on the basis of the student's English proficiency level:

The major issue for their low performance is not due to language. It is poverty of vocabulary. We are a highly Hispanic Latino culture. Most of the students are speaking Spanish. The population is slowly changing. Many Middle Eastern

students are speaking Farsi and Russian, and other languages. These students pick up the language fairly quickly compared to Latino second language learners. Maybe at their home they speak deeper and richer vocabulary. Many of these students are exposed to at least 100,000 words but the Latino students are exposed to 1,000 vocabulary words. How come students in Canada can learn three languages at school? Poverty and low socioeconomic status can be an issue. Parents are working 12 hours a day. They come home, they are tired and they do not talk to the kids. This has a lot to do with poverty of vocabulary.

ELD Curriculum.

In order to discover more about the impact of the Master Plan requirements on the academic achievement of English Language Learners, the researcher asked the teachers which kind of classroom organization they preferred and why. All teachers were asked Question 6 (Q6) of the Teacher Interview Protocol, which asks about the type of classroom organization they prefer to teach.

Teacher 2 at School D responded:

I like to teach the upper ELD levels, RFEPS, IFEPs, and EOs. Because no matter which group, we have to get them through the same standards. It is difficult for low level ELDs and the teacher. It takes time to teach Common Core Standards. They do not have academic English and the adopted curriculum is difficult for them. Teachers have to go back and get re-trained on ELD standards. We go to ELD trainings and I just do not know what to make of the training. I am supposed to teach verbs and noun phrases. Where are we going with verbs and nouns? Looking at the standards, it is not such bad idea to use transitions. I get it. Why do

they use such complex language to teach it? They use information writing a lot more for analyzing language. It is not much different with Common Core. Before we had ELD portfolios, now we are emerging, expanding, or bridging, but we are still giving 1-5 scores. The district says no more 1-5 scores for ELD. The district office personnel need to provide more support for us before they give us new materials to use.

Teacher 3 from School B shared her concern about non-Latino students in classrooms organized under the Master Plan requirements. She responded to the significance of pair-share (students are paired up to think and solve problems, Think-Pair-Share) for students:

Pair-share is great for them. They get ideas and the vocabulary they need to speak. When the group shares their ideas, then I ask someone to translate the whole thing for my ELD1s. They really can benefit from pair-share. Sometimes they speak in Spanish. That is OK, too. My Middle Eastern ELD 2s or 3s get lost sometimes, but for some strange reason, they learn the content faster than the Latino students do.

She added:

I need a program on the computer to help my Newcomers.

In answering Question 13 (Q13) of the Teacher Interview Protocol, Teacher 3 at School C discussed what she likes to see happening in classrooms organized under the Master Plan. She said:

I like to work with a complete program so that I do not have to spend hours and hours looking for instructional resources from other places. The program that we used before had all the instructional materials that I needed. Everything was in a

binder and I had access to instructional contents and lessons. Now, they are developing the ELD program. We have not been trained and requirements are changing. This is for everybody. They are in the midst of developing the ELD program, and they added this conversation, then they added more to it. You just cannot have a verbal response you must have all the other parts like, reading, writing, and intervention in this program.

The Principal of School D responded to Question 10 (Q10) of the Administrator Interview Protocol, which referenced how the principal would improve the Master Plan classroom organization requirement. He shared:

The classrooms need to be organized so they have a mixture of all the students. Obviously, that does not mean they do not provide designated English. They move during ELD time and they exchange classrooms. During designated instruction they learn English. I believe it was a major mistake that the Master Plan requires classrooms to be organized based on the CELDT level of the student. I know that there are compliance issues and that we can be audited by someone from the Office of Civil Rights. I think the administrator must be held accountable to make sure designated ELD instruction is happening. It may be messy at the beginning, but they have to do it.

Research Question 3: Findings

The third research question asked, “How do teachers perceive their role in increasing the ELL’s academic achievement in classrooms organized according to the English Learner Master Plan?” This question was aligned to the Social Capital conceptual framework that guided this study. In order to better understand how the teachers and

administrators perceived their role in improving the ELLs academic achievement, it was important for the researcher to examine the issue from their perspective. Among the themes that emerged from the interview findings were: (a) district expectations, (b) classroom strategies, and (c) advocacy.

District Expectations.

Teachers shared their instructional practices and the types of scaffolding they provide to increase their ELL students' academic language. At the same time, the teachers complained about the District's high expectations and the lack of ELD curriculum. Therefore, the researcher decided to connect this emerging theme with the teacher's role as an advocate for ELL students to ensure exposure to the networking components of social capital. Teacher 2 at School C responded to Question 14 (Q14) of the Teacher Interview Protocol, which asks about the teacher's preference for teaching Structured English Immersion (SEI) or English Only (EO), Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), and Reclassified Fluent English proficient (RFEP) classrooms:

I crave to be able to do certain things with my ELD students. Right now, I cannot because the students lack the vocabulary skills to understand the lessons. This is why I choose to teach the higher ELD groups or mixed classes. Completing the folders, the Student Progress Forms (SPFs), and the paperwork for reclassification is too much work and takes a lot of time. The District has too many expectations!

Then, she added:

I would like to say that the paperwork is not efficient. It is not helpful. The program was rolled out with new standards and forms but there was no training for teachers. The district did not help the teachers with the implementation. As a

teacher, I found some of the conversational pieces of the curriculum to be good, but other components are not efficient. The Common Core Standards and the ELD curriculum need to work together. The district was not ready and it was frustrating for teachers to do the Student Progress Form (SPF) at this school. I do not have sufficient time to cover all of the instructional materials for my ELD students.

The Principal of School B responded to Question 6 (Q6) of the Administrator Interview Protocol, which asks for a description of the experience with ELLs' placement in new classrooms:

We often get Newcomer students in February. In fact, we just received a 5th grader coming from the Middle East this week. He just has a first name. We placed him in a classroom with ELD 1s, 2s, and 3s. He is nine years old. Imagine the culture shock. He was pulled out of his home and country and now all he hears around him is Spanish language. Second, a mother and her two children were running away from something and came here. The mother works 12 hours a day and the children are left at home to take care of themselves. The Newcomer issue is a significant challenge for schools. We welcome them and we have a Title III Coach who helps Newcomers. The Title III Coach teaches them the Basic Interpersonal Communication (BIC) skills. The district wants the Newcomers to learn English in 2 to 3 years, which is not always possible. To learn a second language takes a longer period of time, closer to 7 years for most individuals.

The Principal of School B answered the Question 9 (Q9) of the administrator interview protocol regarding his challenges leading a school with large population of English language learners:

My challenges in this school are different from other schools. They have no EL students or they have a very small population. However, they have parent challenges. They have more lawyers coming at you. The parents here do not tell me how to run the school. Our parents are very appreciative. They want to help. One big challenge is that we are consistently at the bottom in the items of assessment data. We are one of the schools with the highest population of ELLs. Our scores are similar to schools like ours. We all performed low on SBAC testing. Our parents ask why our scores are so low. We cannot tell them students at this level of English proficiency perform low. Another challenge is the perception of outsiders regarding my teachers. I do not want them to think we are not working hard. If I had to swap the teachers with other schools that do not have the same population, other teachers won't be this effective here. Learning is a process. It takes time. If the students did not know their alphabet by age 5, how can they read, think and write about what they are reading? They keep on changing tests from CST to SBAC or the standards. There is no solution because if there was, it would have been done by now.

The Principal at School D added:

Other schools do not have the challenges we have. Their parents and the location of the schools are different from ours. Their scores are super high. We have the highest population of ELLs and they are economically disadvantaged. Other

schools do not spend the time we spend on CELDT. It takes away from instruction. Also, our students are just learning and struggling to learn English.

Classroom Strategies.

In order to answer research question 3, which asks how teachers see their role in increasing the ELLs academic achievement, it was important to know what teachers do to increase academic achievement of ELLs. Therefore, the researcher asked Question 11 (Q11) of the Teacher Interview Protocol, which asks about what strategies teachers use to prepare students for standardized testing (SBAC). Teacher 1 at School C responded:

I try to slow down and spend more time on topics so that the students understand the vocabulary and language. The low level ELD students have a difficult time to catch up with native speakers and understand the text because they lack academic language. We are fortunate to have the online achieve 3000, which we use twice a week, including the stretch articles associated with the program. I use the non-fiction articles at the students' lexile level. Students take the online assessment until they get the right answers. I also use the articles related to SBAC, but they are very difficult for second language learners to comprehend. It takes a lot of time and repetition before the students begin to understand the content of the articles. They need the academic language skill to do well on SBAC.

Teacher 2 of School B said:

To get the students ready for the assessment, I model Close Read. It takes a lot of time. The students do not have the academic language or the background knowledge they need to do well on the assessment. We practice using multiple sources and then compare answers, similar to what is done on the assessment.

The Teacher 1 at School A responded to Question 11 (Q11) this way:

The SBAC demands paired reading (reading two different texts to compare or contrast) and the kids do not have the stamina to do this type of reading because they have a difficult time reading the passage. The students do not have the necessary vocabulary to understand the reading, let alone answer the questions. Some of the students just pick answers so they can finish the test. They are frustrated and run out of energy. They do not read each question carefully so they just click and answer. I also teach a lot of paired reading. I teach them how to take notes from the videos and explain why this part is important. I do use different resources as well.

Finally, Teacher 2 at School A reinforced what other teachers had to say by sharing the strategies she used to increase ELL's academic achievement and standardized test scores and her concern for summer vacation and its impact on ELLs' English language skills:

Over the summer, the students forget a lot of what they learned the previous year. No one speaks English at home. We spend a lot of time teaching academic English, vocabulary, and additional language skills. We work on writing skills and following directions. We have to spend extra time with the students because they struggle to understand vocabulary words. We do class activities, small group activities, and partner activities to keep the attention of the students.

Advocacy.

Research question 3 of this study is directly related to social capital theory based on the work of Stanton Salazar (2011), highly valued resources and key forms of institutional support are embedded in one's network or associations. The teachers seemed

to go above and beyond their responsibilities in their classrooms. As an advocate for the students, and in most cases, being the one and only educated adult in their students' lives, it was not unexpected to see this theme emerge from the findings of Research Question 3. Teacher 2 at School D responded to Question 11 (Q11) which was a probing question. It could include anything the teacher wanted to discuss and share.

I tell my students that they need to work hard so they can exit the program and be in regular classes. I encourage the students to take responsibility for their learning. I tell them I will always be here for them. Parents appreciate the work that we do here. The parents are not able to help their children to learn English because they only speak Spanish. They struggle to earn a living. The students lack school supplies, such as pencil and paper. I put pencils in their backpacks.

Teacher 2 at School C added:

I inform the parents if their child does not pass the CELDT by 5th grade, in junior high school there will be no elective classes. I tell the parents their children will have to take additional classes for reading, writing, listening, and speaking until they become proficient in English.

Teacher 1 at School B responded to Question 11 (Q11) of the Teacher Interview Protocol which was about those strategies they use to prepare the students for the mandatory standardized assessments:

Again, I use pictures and other visuals to show the students what we are doing. I explain to them that we will be using the Language Curriculum to help them with their vocabulary, reading, and writing skills. Students know that they are identified as ELs but I let them know that they can learn like the other students at

this school. In conversations, we talk about going to college and becoming successful. The students come from different backgrounds and they realize that their parents work hard to support them. Students recognize that their parents work hard and this encourages them to do better in school. In math lessons, we talk about wages and paying for rent, food, and gasoline. The students were surprised at how much it costs to have a place to live and food to eat. I also know that my students are sometimes the most educated person in their family. They have to interpret for their parents because most parents do not speak English.

The Principal at School D added:

Well, our communication with parents starts at the very beginning in our first Advisory Council meeting. We tell the parents this is what your child has to do and these are the requirements for reclassification. If they do not reclassify here in elementary school they will not be able to take elective classes in junior high school. We tell them that if their children do not reclassify they will have to take writing and English classes in junior high school. It is not going to be as much fun as taking elective classes. We tell the students dropping out of school is not acceptable. We have many conversations with the students and their parents about the future. We want the students to be successful and to stay in school.

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, the researcher presented the findings of the study. These findings are based primarily on analysis of sixteen interview transcripts.

Findings were discussed in three categories that correspond with the major themes that emerged from the data.

The first category of the findings was based on the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the state and district policies regarding the academic achievement of ELLs. Five major themes emerged from the data: (a) Role Models. The findings demonstrated that the most important theme that emerged in this study was the need for English-speaking role models in all levels of ELD classrooms. A few teachers shared that the placement of ELLs in their classrooms based on their English proficiency level is a form of tracking and segregation. They believed that a student's English proficiency level should not be used to segregate the student from the larger school population of native English speakers. Teachers preferred to teach mixed classes which include a few Reclassified Fluent English Proficient RFEPs, English Only EOs, and ELD5 students who would be great role models for the low level ELD 1s and 2s. (b) Behavior Issues. Student behavior issues were of great concern to the teachers. Low-performing ELD 1s, 2s and 3s in upper grades, have behavior issues due to their frustration with not being able to understand the curriculum nor having any English-speaking role models to communicate with during the day. The findings indicated the behavior of students in SEI classrooms became problematic for teachers because they lacked vocabulary, as well as struggling to write words, numbers, or sentences. The principals indicated that these children do move up together and acquire social behavior. Findings indicate that the placement of ELD students with behavior issues, based on their English proficiency level becomes more complicated under the Master Plan classroom organization requirement and creates compliance issues for the school leaders. (c) SEI Classrooms. The SEI classroom teachers were aware that the students were not receiving English language assistance at home because their parents were Spanish-only speakers. The findings

suggested that the teachers believed, if the child is already in 4th or 5th grade and had not yet passed the CELDT, he/she may have a learning deficit. The teachers expressed that teaching in SEI classrooms was one of the most difficult experiences in their entire teaching careers. The findings of this study indicated that teaching basic concepts in SEI classrooms took a much longer time because the teachers were continually scaffolding and re-teaching, due to the students lack the background knowledge and vocabulary to understand the text. (d) CELDT. Teachers and principals were critical of the timing of the CELDT assessment. Taking the CELDT at the beginning of the year did not allow sufficient classroom time to teach the students basic skills and concepts. Teachers favored giving the CELDT at the end of the year, so it would more accurately measure the growth of the students' English Language proficiency. Also, the findings suggested that at the beginning of the year the classrooms with ELL students lose instructional time due to CELDT testing. (e) Home Language Survey (HLS). Parents were frustrated by the reclassification rules and requirements for exiting the ELD program. Parents also knew that without re-classification, in junior high their children could not take electives but would be required to take additional English classes until they met reclassification criteria. Therefore, in order to prevent their children from being required to continue in an ELD program, parents were reluctant to be completely honest on the Home Language Survey (HLS). The findings revealed that the lack of an honest response on the (HLS) played havoc in assigning students to classrooms based on their true abilities.

The second category of the findings was based on the impact of the Master Plan classroom organization requirement based on students' English proficiency level. Two major themes emerged from the findings: (a) Academic Language. Teachers were

discouraged with the number of incoming 4th and 5th grade ELL students without the appropriate academic language. They were concerned that their students would not be ready to take the SBAC assessment due to their lack of academic language skills. The findings demonstrated that teachers slowed down their daily instruction to show videos and pictures to their students to build more understanding of the concept (schema). They believed that is why they were behind schedule most of the time.

The findings of this study stressed that the Newcomers in upper grades were lost without additional time for instruction. They needed support from RFEPs, IFEPS, EOs, and ELD 5s to help them with their grammar and to model academic language. In a surprising twist, the findings pointed, in some ELD classrooms, the Middle-Eastern students did not benefit but rather became confused by the teacher's use of Spanish language to explain the content to Latino students. (b) ELD Curriculum. Many teachers and principals were in favor of a solid ELD curriculum with ELD standards for every instructional component so that teachers would not have to spend time looking for lesson plans and/or curriculum from other sources. The majority of teachers indicated the need for additional professional development and training, so they could correctly implement the ELD standards.

Additionally, the teachers were concerned and questioned whether pair-share would be beneficial for low performing ELD 1s, 2s, or 3s. The teachers were in favor of mixed classes that included English Only (EOs), Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEPs), Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEPs), and high ELD level students as role models during pair-share. The principals believed that assigning students to classrooms on the basis of their English proficiency level was a mistake because it limited the ELLs'

access to native English speakers. This study revealed that the teachers and principals believed that the system must have more faith in their educators' knowledge and capabilities to choose the best placement for the ELLs.

The third category of the findings was based on teachers' role in increasing ELLs' academic achievement. Three major themes emerged from the data. (a) District Expectations. This study indicated that there is a lot of resentment and frustration with the District's expectations for ELD students. Principals were concerned with the District's high expectations for reclassification. The principals were uneasy about reclassifying students too early and felt the students would be more successful if they reclassified at their own pace.

There was common agreement among the teachers who teach low level ELD students or teach in SEI classrooms that the Common Core Standards and the SBAC present other types of instructional issues for ELD students because they lack academic language. The assessments require students to read different informational text, compare, contrast, and analyze. The teachers were concerned that if the 4th and 5th grade students in SEI classrooms could not read more than 40 words a minute then how would they be able to read, analyze, and answer the test questions? Collectively, teachers expressed that learning a new language takes time. They disagreed with the District expectation that a child who comes to the U.S. in the third grade should be expected to take the SBAC assessment the following year. (b) Classroom Strategies. Teachers openly admitted to spending a great deal of time providing background knowledge and going over the same topic so that their students would understand the concept. The findings disclosed that teachers used the SBAC released practice questions to teach the academic language of the

test and modeled Close Read for their students. (c) Advocacy. The findings of this study indicated that, in addition to their roles as academic providers, both the teachers and principals have taken on advocacy roles to assist their students and their students' families in navigating through the educational system. The teachers spoke to their students more often about the importance of reclassification and exiting the ELD program so that electives would be an option when they entered junior high school. The data showed that teachers routinely reached out to parents to provide them with resources and assist them with school issues. The teachers believed that their students were not socially mixing in school due to the Master Plan classroom organization requirement. Therefore, they stepped forward to be an advocate for their ELL students and their families.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, methodology used, and summary of major findings. The discussion section will follow and provide an analysis of the findings. After the analysis section are the implications for policy and practice, followed by suggestions for future research. The conclusion ends this chapter.

Problem Statement

English Language Learner (ELL) instruction in Talia-Melrose Unified School District (pseudonym) is directed by the English Learner Master Plan, which requires students with the same English language proficiency or English Language Development (ELD) level to be placed in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms all year. Students experiencing an entire year without sans appropriate English-speaking role models will not learn the English skills necessary for required standardized tests.

This research explored the experiences and perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding State and Talia-Melrose Unified School District (pseudonym) policies that effect the academic achievement of English Language Learners.

According to Colman & Goldberg (2012), many of the students who will be expected to meet the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are English Language Learners (ELLs) who are challenged because they do not have the necessary English skills to comprehend the (CCSS).

Purpose

Latinos make up 17% of the K-12 student population in the United States; by 2025 that figure is predicted to reach 25% (Fan, 2008). Because a very high percentage -- more than 25% -- of students in California are English Learners (ELs) (California Department of Education, 2007), any policy that affects these students inevitably has an impact on the entire state education system. Efforts at raising achievement levels for California's students, who currently rank among the bottom in the nation, are held hostage to the faith of English Learners (Gandara & Baca, 2008). Understanding the impact of state and district policies on ELLs' academic achievement may provide additional information for policy makers regarding the reasons that these students' performance on standardized assessments is routinely lower than their English speaking counterparts.

The purpose of this research study was to examine the academic achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs) assigned to classrooms based on their English language proficiency level as required by the English Learner Master Plan. The data sources -- those principals and teachers responsible for meeting compliance requirements -- were selected from four elementary sites.

The design of the research instrumentation and protocols used in this study were structured so the researcher could gain a better understanding of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of whether the English Learner Master Plan and its state and district policies have assisted or impeded the academic achievement of ELLs. The research questions guiding this study were:

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of state and district level policies regarding the academic achievement of ELLs assigned to classrooms by their English proficiency level?

Research Question 2: How does the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirement impact the academic achievement of English Language Learners in classrooms?

Research Question 3: How do teachers perceive their role in increasing the English Language Learners' (ELLs') academic achievement in classrooms organized according to the English Learner Master Plan?

Methodology

In this qualitative phenomenological research, the researcher set out to understand the experiences and perceptions of each participant (Glesne, 2014). The phenomenological elements of this study created a lens through which the researcher gained a greater understanding of the experiences and perceptions of teachers and administrators who work with ELLs on a daily basis.

The study's participants included 12 teachers and four principals from four low-performing elementary schools with large numbers of English Language Learners in Talia-Melrose Unified School District (pseudonym). The A, B, C, and D Elementary Schools were selected because they performed lower than the District's average on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) for two consecutive years. Semi-structured interviews of 45-60 minutes that were audio recorded were done with each participating teacher and administrator. Data from semi-structured interviews was

electronically recorded and transcribed by the researcher within a day of the interview being conducted. The researcher provided each interviewee with a copy of the interview to insure accuracy and for the purpose of member checking. The themes that emerged from the data were coded and aligned with each of the research questions. Three teachers from each elementary school and the school site principal (16 total) served as data sources, which ensured validity and reliability for this study.

Discussion

The first research question of this study looked at administrators' and teachers' perceptions of state and district level policies regarding the academic achievement of ELLs assigned to classrooms by their English proficiency level. The responses of the principals and teachers to the open-ended and probing questions of the interviews identified several key themes related to ELLs' academic achievement. Among the themes identified were: (a) role models, (b) behavior issues, (c) Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms, (d) CELDT, (e) Home Language Survey (HLS).

Summary of the Findings and Discussion

Category 1: Theme (a) Role Models

Teachers and principals recognized that role models were essential to English Language Learners' (ELLs') academic achievement. As referenced in chapter 2, having English-speaking role models in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms allows students to learn from each other and promotes ongoing interactions between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers. Gandara (2010) argues that isolation because of language presents a particularly thorny problem as it is difficult to learn the language of

the land if a student is never exposed to native English speakers, has few friends, or does not have neighbors who speak the language well. As Gifford and Valdes (2006) noted:

“Our analysis of the hyper-segregation of Hispanic students, and particularly Spanish speaking ELLs, suggests that little or no attention has been given to the consequences of linguistic isolation for a population whose future depends on the acquisition of English ... For ELLs, interaction with ordinary English speaking peers is essential to their English Language development and consequently to their acquisition of academic English” (Gifford & Valdes, 2006).

Comments from the teachers and principals during the interviews confirmed that having other English-speaking role models like native English speakers, Re-classified Fluent English Proficient (RFEPs), Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEPs), and ELD 5s helps students to learn and use the proper sentence structure and grammar in their speaking and writing. Teacher 3 at School C responded:

Well, these students encourage each other and they need someone with English skills. If everybody is ELD1 and making the same mistakes by not speaking Standard English, then there is no progress. I like mixed classrooms with all English proficiencies. English Learners (ELs) need role models. The ELD1s need to hear English from their English-speaking peers as well as their teacher.

The Principal at School A responded:

Yes, I try as much as I can to follow the Master Plan. Here, we try to the best of our ability to find the appropriate setting for the child, which means my classes may not be in compliance with the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirement.

These comments confirm that English-speaking role models, in addition to the classroom teacher, are essential to the successful academic achievement of English Language Learners. Regardless of the level of the ELL students, both teachers and administrators were unanimously in favor of having English-speaking role models in these classrooms.

Further, a few of the teachers believed that the placement of ELLs in classrooms based on their English proficiency level is a form of segregation. They believed that a student's English proficiency level should not be used as isolation from the larger school population of native English speakers. Separating ELL students because of language deficiencies does not permit them to access the same kinds of educational opportunities that their native English speaking peers do. Previous research refers to students in segregated schools as less likely to live and work in interracial settings when they become adults (Wells & Crain, 1994). Segregation has strong and lasting impacts on students' success in school and later (Gandara, 2010).

Teachers confirmed that not having native English speakers, ELD 5s or Reclassified Fluent English Proficient RFEP students in low ELD level classrooms is a total disservice to the academic achievement of English Learners. The teachers preferred to teach mixed classes in classrooms with Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEPs), English Only (EOs), Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), ELD 5s, and low ELD 1s, 2s, and 3s, so their low ELLs could have some role models in the classroom. Principals, on the other hand, had different opinions about following the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirement. Some principals reported that they placed the ELLs in classrooms that were mixed with native English speakers, RFEPs,

and IFEPs because they believed that these students needed to interact with their native English speaking peers.

The teachers were not happy about having low performing ELD 1s, 2s, and 3s in third through fifth grade classrooms because they had to slow their general instruction to provide background knowledge and vocabulary, which many teachers believed would not leave them with enough time to cover the required content before giving the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), which is given to 3rd to 5th grade students. The findings of this study substantiated those of researchers from the literature review who believed that ELLs benefit from interactions with their native English counterparts on a daily basis. According to Rumberger and Tran (2010), the greatest amount of variance between ELL and non-ELL students was the degree of segregation they experienced. Thus, they recommended that the most important policy change that could be implemented by states is to change the classroom organization requirement to eliminate segregated classrooms. The findings of this study support English Language Learners being integrated with the entire school population on a daily basis, which would eliminate segregation practices and allow ELLs access to all educational opportunities.

Behavior Issues

Teachers believed that behavior issues resulted from assigning students to classrooms based on their English language proficiency level. They believed this was true for classrooms with English Only (EO), Re-classified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP), Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), and mixed ELD level students. Teachers believed that having all of the low performing ELLs in grades 3, 4, and 5 was difficult because the students lacked English language skills and background knowledge.

Therefore, dealing with behavior issues stemming from the students lack of understanding of English language skills added to the teachers' frustration.

Teacher 2 at School D simply summed up the issue this way, "If they mix the ELs up with high level ELs and native English speaking peers the behavior issues will diminish."

On the other hand, principals did not seem to believe that the behavior issues were a direct result of the Master Plan classroom organization requirement, but they did not completely reject the idea either.

In regard to discipline and behavior issues the Principal of School C responded: The discipline issues are not related to the children's ELD level. As a matter of fact the ELD 1s and 2s are very sweet and focused little kids. We may have discipline issues in EO, RFEP and IFEP classes but we can't say that it is because of their English proficiency.

According to the principals' comments, the Master Plan classroom organization requirement made it difficult to move the students to other classrooms and still be in compliance. This study suggests that organizing the classrooms according to the Master Plan classroom organization requirement may not cause behavior issues, but it limits the principals' and teachers' authority because moving the disruptive EL students to mixed or EO classrooms or vice versa, jeopardizes compliance with the Master Plan requirements.

The researcher agrees with those school principals who would like to move misbehaving students when necessary so that student safety is guaranteed and there is no further disruption to academic instruction.

Category 1: Theme (b) SEI Classrooms

The next theme to emerge from teachers' and administrators' responses was the effectiveness of SEI classrooms. For some SEI teachers, their classrooms characterize a major weakness of the Master Plan's flawed classroom organization requirement, which assigns students based on their English proficiency level. This study found that the Master Plan required schools to assign low-performing ELLs to Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms. The results of this study found that these students lack academic language and vocabulary in addition to having low reading fluency levels. For teachers in SEI classrooms, their teaching experiences were much more difficult and frustrating compared to their peers in regular classrooms. Therefore, the researcher felt that this was an important theme to explore.

Teacher 1 of School B responded:

I think the class I have this year is low-performing. This class has no English-speaking role models, which would encourage the ELDs to speak and answer questions asked by the teacher. The students cannot speak in complete sentences. They only have me to model the English language. The kids are learning from each other. These students need someone else to model English and because this does not occur, it is very difficult to teach.

Teacher 1 of School A responded to (Q3) which asks about teachers' experiences in teaching only ELD students in SEI classrooms:

Yes, it takes me much longer to get through what I have to do, much longer than other classrooms because I have to spend an extra 2 or 3 days to teach each learning component. I will not water down or simplify my instruction because I

want these students to comprehend language structure when they get to middle school. For this to happen I have to spend more time teaching the learning components to these students.

According to Ream (2005), racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities are also very likely to be poor. The SEI classroom teachers were aware that their low socioeconomic ELLs were not receiving English language assistance at home because their parents only speak Spanish.

The findings of this study confirmed that when it was time to take the SBAC, the students in SEI classrooms were not ready to take the assessment. Rather than try their hardest to be successful, these students lacked stamina and reading skills to stay focused on the assessment and elected to randomly guess to complete it more quickly. Findings indicated that teachers were continually scaffolding and re-teaching, which took an incredible amount of time away from teaching the grade level content. From an instructional perspective, ELL students may not only miss the requisite content material if they are schooled in SEI pullout or sheltered English content (e.g. Francis, Lesaux, & August, 2006), but may also miss the opportunity to be exposed to the challenging language of content area instruction to the same degree as their non-ELL peers (Martinez, Bailey, Kerr, Huang, & Beauregard, 2010). Therefore, the researcher can conclude being in SEI classrooms organized under the Master Plan classroom organization requirement, which assigns all low performing ELD students together with no English speaking peers may be a reason why the Latino ELLs underperform on state standardized assessments.

Category 1: Theme (d) California English Language Development Test (CELDT)

The findings indicated that both teachers and principals believed that CELDT testing deprived classes with ELD students of valuable instructional time at the beginning of the school year. In the primary grades the assessment is given one-to-one between the teacher and student. In grades three and above, the assessment is broken up with a group component as well as a one-to-one component. The findings from this study indicate that the teachers believed that too much instructional time is lost at the beginning of the year. If the teachers did not have to give the CELDT, they could spend more time teaching their students the rules and expectations of their classrooms similar to all other classrooms at the school site.

Teacher 2 of School B responded:

I have lots of opinions about this test. It is ridiculous for the students to take the CELDT at the beginning of the year after the students have spent the summer months at home only speaking in their primary language (Spanish). They need to have a whole year of instruction, and like the SBAC, take the test at the end of the year. I would change the timing of the CELDT from the beginning of the year to the end of the year so that the students would have the benefit of one full year of instruction.

Finally, the Principal of School D shared:

All of our TAs are bilingual Spanish to provide that additional support when they push-in to classrooms during CELDT testing or small groups to differentiate instruction. But unfortunately, having a bilingual TA who speaks Spanish does not help those students who came from Russia, Armenia, or other parts of the

world. We work with a large population of ELLs who are also economically disadvantaged. Other schools don't spend the time we spend on CELDT. It takes away from instruction. Our students are just learning and struggling to learn English.

These comments clearly show that conducting CELDT testing at the beginning of the year without support greatly reduced the amount of instructional time for the ELL students. In no other classes throughout the school did students lose instructional time. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher suggests that the CELDT assessment be administrated at the end of the year to more accurately measure the ELLs' progress in learning English. At the same time, the findings suggest that the principals should add additional personnel, such as Teacher Assistants, to maintain content instruction during administration of the CELDT.

Category 1: Theme (e) Home Language Survey (HLS)

Each year, when parents complete the Home Language Survey (HLS), many are reluctant to respond honestly to the home language question. Parents of first-time CELDT-takers believe that an honest answer will result in their child's assignment to an SEI classroom, whereas parents of students who have repeatedly failed the CELDT fear SEI placement as well. Student placement becomes problematic because the parents elect to be misleading in their responses to the HLS, which results in students' being deprived of English language support or proficiency services.

Teacher 3 of School A responded:

More and more parents come to school and ask for advice. The parents understand the requirements to exit the ELD program, yet they still question. The parents

believe they should not have responded to the HLS that the home language is Spanish. This is the parent of a student reading 30 words a minute. How can you tell this parent your child needs help with the English language or how can you explain that he needs to comprehend what he is reading in order to write his ideas. I tell the parents their children need to be here in ELD classrooms. Our school is an extension to the outside community. We had the older siblings of these students. Parents understand the ELD program and they know what they have to do to get their children out of particular classrooms. We just send the letter home saying that your child is in ELD because of his/her score on the CELDT. Some parents refuse to sign the letter because they want more information about SEI classes.

The findings suggest that the Home Language Survey HLS form's language must be clarified so that parents understand the impact of their responses on their child's classroom placement and the services that will be received.

Research Question 2 Findings and Discussion

The second research question focused on the impact of Master Plan classroom requirements based on the student's English proficiency level. Therefore, the researcher took a closer look at the two major themes to answer the second research question.

The themes identified to answer the second research question were: (a) Academic Language, (b) ELD Curriculum.

Category 2: Theme (a) Academic Language

Teachers in this study deem the ELLs in the SEI classrooms incapable of taking the SBAC assessment. Sibold (2011) reported that English Language Learners who struggle with academic vocabulary can have difficulty comprehending reading materials and class instruction unless they have English-speaking role models. These teachers agreed, expressing their continuing frustration with having to review and re-teach vocabulary and core content due to the students' lack of academic language prior to taking the SBAC.

Teacher 2 from School B responded:

Well, with ELD 1s, if they are Spanish speaking, I try to support them in their primary language. It is difficult to get them to the skill level that they need to be at. Students have to read multiple articles, read multiple sources and write their opinions on the information pieces for each question when taking the SBAC assessment. If they cannot read at Benchmark level, it is almost impossible. It is tough to get them to the core program. When I taught the 6th grade class, they had a difficult time with foundational skills and writing a simple sentence without grammatical errors. It was impossible for the students to do their work and the district was aware of the students' hardship. The assessment created by the district required students to describe the structure of the text. The students read the text over and over and still did not understand what they were reading. Even the gifted students had difficulty with the text, which prevented them from answering the questions. I felt that the content was way above the students' abilities and it was an injustice to expect them to do well.

The teachers reported that the SBAC did not take into consideration the ability of the ELL students to comprehend text like their English-speaking peers. In addition, for students without the foundation of academic language, it would take a longer time, perhaps another year of instruction, to understand the grade level text. According to Soto-Hinman (2011), this lack of academic language practice is detrimental to the acquisition of English as well as to access the grade level content material (p. 21). Abedi, Hofstetter, and Lord (2004) reported efforts must be made to modify assessment tools to make them more relevant to ELL students while not altering the construct being measured (p. 4).

Teachers unanimously said that they slow their instruction to show videos and pictures to their students to build schema. The teachers admitted that lessening the rate of instruction put them behind schedule and possibly prevented them from covering all of the required grade level topics and standards prior to SBAC assessment. An example of another delay is in the acquisition of academic language. SEI teachers are compelled to alter their instruction in order to attempt to achieve proficiency. This has been confirmed by previous research and the findings of this study, which demonstrated the importance of students having mastery of academic language in order to comprehend reading text and other kinds of subject matter. Indeed, the examination of some of the SBAC assessment practice questions and answers by the teachers and administrators revealed that the Master Plan classroom organization requirement that assigned students to classrooms based on their English proficiency level without English-speaking role models negatively impacted the academic achievement of ELLs by slowing their English language learning. Additionally, showing videos and pictures to create schema and background knowledge slowed down the grade level instructional pace in SEI

classrooms. The researcher can conclude that the major reason that many ELLs are performing below average in the state standardized assessment is the fact that by the end of the year the teachers could not cover all the required grade level standards due to the students' lack of background knowledge and the slowing of the grade level instructional pace.

The findings of this study suggest that schools should place ELL students in mixed classrooms with EOs, RFEPs, IFEPs, and ELD 4 and 5 students, so they can learn and hear the academic language required for successful standardized testing. The findings also suggest that non-Latino Newcomers should avoid placement in SEI classrooms with Latino ELL students as the teachers' use of Spanish translation caused the students getting "lost sometimes". Teacher 3 at School B responded:

My Middle Eastern ELD2 or 3 students get lost sometimes, but for some strange reason, they pick up the language faster than the Latino ELD students.

Category 2: Theme (b) ELD Curriculum

The teachers voiced their displeasure with the ELD curriculum, describing the standards as ambiguous, lacking in instructional resources, requiring labor-intensive additional paperwork (Student Progress Forms) as well as proving useless at producing English-proficient students. The findings suggest that the Talia-Melrose Unified School District's (pseudonym) ELD curriculum lacks elements conducive to the intensive, strategic, and benchmark learning needs of ELL students. More professional development in the implementation of the ELD standards would yield a more robust, coherent ELD curriculum more beneficial to ELL students.

The Principal of School C responded:

The teachers' major request is for more planning time to work together to enhance their curriculum. They would like to see teaching strategies modeled to support the integration of Common Core curricular issues. They would like more ELD materials and lessons from the district. They would like more Teacher Assistant time during the day, and specifically, during designated ELD instructional time.

Another aspect of the ELD curriculum is the value of the important issue of pair-share (students paired up to exchange ideas or to solve problems) in classrooms. Pair-share is a strategy to encourage students to organize and share ideas with one another. Currently, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) requires students to speak to a partner prior to writing and math tests. Soto-Hinman (2011) refers to pair-share as a powerful technique for academic oral language development. The teachers in this study reported that using pair-share provided students with opportunities to learn new information and come up with different ideas to enhance their writing. Although pair-share is a commonly accepted practice in the ELD curriculum, the teachers in this study disagreed with its efficacy in SEI classrooms. Teacher 1 at School B responded to Question 9 (Q9) about the importance of pair-share:

Pair-share is not an effective practice for students in SEI classrooms. The students lack academic language skills. In pair-share activities, the students are not capable of sharing correct information with each other. They are usually off topic and I have to re-teach what they should be talking about. Rather than pair-share activities, these students should be listening to native English speakers or ELD 4s and 5s who can model the English language for them. On their own, the students

just keep saying “I see this, I see that” because they lack vocabulary and language skills to adequately discuss the content that they should be talking about.

The findings of this research suggest that even the great practices like Think-Pair-Share is ineffective in SEI classrooms organized by the Master Plan requirements due to ELLs’ lack of academic vocabulary and background knowledge to participate in meaningful discussions.

Research Question 3 Findings and Discussions

The research question three focused on how teachers perceive their role in increasing the ELL’s academic achievement in classrooms organized according to the English Learner Master Plan. Therefore, it was extremely important to explore how the teachers helped their students and their families to navigate through the education system. Equally important was to understand the district’s expectations of the teachers and administrators of the ELL students. Finally, the themes identified to answer the third research question were: (a) District Expectations, (b) Classroom Strategies, and (c) Advocacy.

Category 3: Theme (a) District Expectations

The Talia-Melrose Unified School District’s expectations to reclassify the English Language Learners thoroughly contradicted the opinions of the principals and teachers in this study. The principals questioned the district’s high expectations for reclassifying students. The Principal at School C responded:

Reclassification is a tremendous issue! That is the major challenge here. We prematurely reclassify these children before their English language skills are in place. These students exit the program and do not do well academically when they

are mainstreamed. We have to be careful that when these students meet the reclassification criteria and exit the program that they will do well academically in a regular classroom. The district puts too much pressure on us to reclassify students. Other schools without ELLs do not have these problems and issues.

There is no pressure to deal with the reclassification issue

The principal's concerns were legitimate. In some cases the RFEP students fall behind and cannot meet grade level expectations. According to Ragan & Lesaux (2006), leaving the academic achievement of RFEPs to the mainstream classrooms is a specious and misleading practice because the necessary learning supports such as academic language and content knowledge from the classroom teacher may not be there. In addition to reclassification, the Common Core State Standard (CCSS) of requiring the reading of text in a "staircase of complexity," asking students to read literature at or above grade level by the end of their school year" (Papola-Ellis, 2014) challenged the SEI teachers. The state and district assessments require students to read, then compare, contrast, and analyze different informational text. Teachers were concerned about the students in SEI classrooms in grades 3-5 who read below the benchmark. They questioned how these students struggling to read could comprehend, analyze, and answer the SBAC questions.

The researcher concluded that the Talia-Melrose School District's expectations are unrealistic. Although the teachers believed the district placed too heavy a burden on them to reclassify ELLs, they also believed that the reclassification process must take its own natural pace. According to earlier research, the necessary learning support in academic language or content knowledge may not exist for RFEPs in mainstream

classrooms. In addition to the pressure to reclassify students, the teachers believed that most of the students in the SEI classrooms could not keep up with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) expectations for reading informational text, writing, and mathematical knowledge.

Another questionable supposition is that schools with large ELL student population can be fairly compared to schools with few ELL student populations. Teachers and principals believed that high performing schools do not have the same challenges associated with schools with large populations of low socioeconomic English Language Learners assigned to classrooms based on their English proficiency level. Therefore, the academic performance of these schools should not be compared with high performing schools with very different student demographics. The research also suggested that the schools with large population of ELLs could benefit from the additional support of skilled and well- trained out- of- classroom personnel, such as coordinators, coaches, and teacher assistants to help reduce the ELLs' achievement gap.

Category 3: Theme (b) Classroom Strategies

Due to the students' lack of English language proficiency SEI teachers routinely provided extra support for instruction and slowed down to re-teach background knowledge, vocabulary, and other English skills to ready students for the standardized assessments. Teacher 1 at School C responded:

I try to slow down and spend more time on topics so that the students understand the vocabulary and language. The low level ELD students have a difficult time catching up with native English speakers. If they do not understand the

vocabulary and they do not have the English skills, these students will not be ready for the SBAC assessments.

The findings also suggested that students tended to skip reading the passage on the tests, an action possibly connected to the students' lack of reading stamina due to having reading skills lower than the grade level benchmark and low performing on standardized assessments.

The researcher realized that the Common Core Language Standards do not include “the full range of supports appropriate for English Language Learners” while they state: All students must have the opportunity to learn and meet the same high standards if they are to access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post-high school lives (CCSS, 2012). The CCSS have created high expectations for schools and teachers but do not offer personnel, curriculum, and professional development support.

None of the findings showed that teachers were teaching the foundational skills, morphology, or phoneme blending to their Newcomers and low performing ELD students. Therefore, this research suggests, there is a need to increase the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the importance of basic foundational and morphological skills by providing training in the foundational skills, blending, morphology, phonics and decoding to utilize in tandem with grade level core content with their students. Also creating a temporary remedial class in elementary schools to teach these fundamentals to all Newcomer students and low performing ELLs in grades 3-5 will increase their chance of success and readiness for standardized testing.

Category 3: Theme (c) Advocacy

As it happens, the teachers and principals found themselves extending their roles as academic providers to include being student advocates. In addition to striving to meet the many academic and social needs of their ELL students, teachers stressed the importance of reclassification to their students throughout the school year. They tempted their students with descriptions of the electives open to them in middle school if they passed the test and exited the ELD program. The findings indicated that the teachers reached out to parents and offered their services whenever necessary. Writing in reference to working class minority youth and their relationship with school personnel, Stanton Salazar (2011) defines institutional support:

“We can say that a group of students are empowered through their regular access to social capital, through personal connections to particular teachers and counselors, who activate their role as an institutional agent, and engage in whatever actions are necessary to either transmit to students highly-valued resources or provide important forms of social support (p.9)”.

The researcher’s data from this study supported the work of Stanton Salazar on social capital by demonstrating the teachers’ and principals’ strong advocacy for students’ academic success. The teachers took their responsibilities seriously as they advocated all year for the rights of ELLs and their families.

Implications

Based on the analysis of the collected data, the researcher recommends that SEI classrooms organize by mixed English proficiency level students as follows: Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEPs), Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEPs), English

Only (EOs), high ELD level students (ELD 4s and 5s) and low ELD level students such as ELD 1s, 2s, 3s. The researcher believes keeping the low performing ELD students in one classroom all year limits their opportunities to interact with high-performing English speaking students, neglects the learning of academic English, as well as the use of proper grammar. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concludes that the English Learner Master Plan does not increase the academic achievement of ELLs due to the lack of English-speaking role models. The researcher concludes that Latino ELLs perform lower than their English-speaking counterparts on standardized tests because the teachers spend too much time re-teaching core program basics due to the ELLs lack of academic language, vocabulary, and background knowledge.

In addition to the trepidation regarding mixed classrooms, the participating educators were concerned about the placement of non-Latino ELLs in SEI classrooms taught by bilingual/Spanish speaking teachers alongside Latino ELLs. They believe that teachers re-teach, explain, and provide background knowledge to Latino students and Latino Newcomers in Spanish causes confusion for non-Latino students. Therefore, it is recommended that Newcomer, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern students not be placed in all-Latino ELL classrooms with bilingual Spanish-speaking teachers.

It is recommended by the researcher that the Talia-Melrose Unified School District provide the classroom teachers with well-prepared lessons and ELD curriculum aligned with the assessments and the grading system. In addition to a solid ELD curriculum, it is recommended that more training and professional development in implementing the ELD Standards are needed.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this research study were limited to four low-performing schools in the Talia-Melrose Unified School District in Southern California. The four participating school sites were located in an urban area with a large population of low socioeconomic English Language Learners (ELLs). A total of 16 participants were involved in this study. The research participants were three teachers and the principal of each school site. At the time of the interview, the three teachers were working in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms. Restricting the interviews to only the teachers of SEI classrooms excluded the perceptions of those classroom teachers with mixed or English Only (EO) student populations. Therefore, caution must be exercised in generalizing the findings of this study regarding other groups of students.

The researcher stayed neutral throughout the research. The researcher also served as a teacher and Intervention Coordinator of the Talia-Melrose School District where the study occurred.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study identified the importance of English speaking role models to the academic achievement of English Language Learners. Meanwhile, based on the findings of this study, the non-Latino Newcomer students succeeded in learning the English language much more quickly than their Latino peers in the same classrooms without English speaking role models. Further studies are needed to explore the type of expectations, interactions, and affective support that the non-Latino parents provide for their children to be successful at school. It is also strongly recommended by the

researcher that a similar study be conducted in Talia Melrose School District (pseudonym), to compare the academic achievement of ELLs in classrooms organized by Master Plan requirements to the academic achievement of ELLs in mixed classrooms with Reclassified Fluent English Proficiency RFEP, Initially Fluent English Proficiency IFEP, English Only EO, ELD5s, and ELD 1s, 2s, and 3s.

Conclusion

Latinos comprise the majority of California's school age population. In addition, they have the lowest graduation rate and highest dropout rate for students in high schools. The education of Latino English Language Learners (ELLs) must be a priority for educators and lawmakers.

Since the Common Core State Standards require students to construct viable arguments and critique reasoning of others (CCSS math practice 3) as well as using academic language while actively participating in classroom discussions, the practice of placing of ELLs together without English-speaking role models runs counter to this expectation. The English Learner Master Plan's requirement that students with same English proficiency level to be placed in classrooms together all day for the entire school year is the root of this dysfunctional practice. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that English-speaking role models are needed in order for ELLs to gain the necessary English language skills and academic vocabulary. Therefore, keeping the students with low ELD levels in classrooms with peers of the same English proficiency level does not increase academic achievement. The Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms do not support the academic language and vocabulary of ELLs. No matter how exceptional and well-intentioned the teachers of these classrooms may be, the ELL

students need other role models such as ELD 5s, Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP), Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), and English Only (EO) students to display the correct grammar and academic English. The teachers of SEI classrooms need support from the principals, such as providing teacher assistants to meet the language needs of the students in small groups.

The findings of this study contradict the Master Plan's classroom organizational requirement that places ELL students in classrooms based on their English proficiency level. Isolating ELLs from communicating with native English speakers in classrooms prevents access to ongoing English conversation, which impacts the ELLs ability to succeed academically. Therefore, the researcher suggests modifying the classroom organization requirement of the English Learner Master Plan to include English speaking role models placing RFEPS, ELD4s and 5s, and EOs in the same classrooms. Without an English-speaking role model, the instruction for ELL students -- every strategy, every technique -- is weakened, and the end result is a catastrophic loss of academic achievement of the students.

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Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol

Welcome:

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today. Before I begin the interview, I would like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research form.

Ground Rules:

- There is no right or wrong answers and your opinion is very important to my research.
- Whatever you say in this room will stay here, so you can feel comfortable in sharing your opinion.
- I will be tape recording this interview so I can capture everything you have to say.
- I will not identify your by name in my report or anywhere else and I assure you that you will remain anonymous throughout the research.

The interview will last between 45 to 60 minutes. Is there any question before I start?

Questions

1. How long have you been a teacher at this school (or District)?
2. Have you had experience teaching an all mixed (EO, IFEP, RFEP, and ELD5s) classroom? If yes, tell me about your experience.
3. Would you describe your experience in teaching the SEI classroom (low performing ELLs) Classrooms (like the classroom you have right now)?
4. What are your qualifications to teach the ELD classrooms?

5. What are the differences between teaching a classroom with mixed English proficiency level students and a classroom you have right now?
6. Which classroom organization you prefer to teach? Please elaborate your preference.
7. Tell me about keeping the low ELD students in one classroom all year. What is it like?
Probe: If you don't mind, please share a story about how they participate in classroom discussions.
8. How much scaffolding you have to provide for them in order to get them actively participate in classroom discussions?
9. Tell me about the significance of the pair-share before writing or math projects.
Probe: How is it like?
Probe: Can they communicate and benefit from the pair- share?
10. What strategies you use in order to provide schema for your ELLs?
11. What strategies you use to prepare your students for standardized testing (SBAC)?
12. If you had a chance what would you change about the Master Plan classroom organization?
13. What would you like to see happening in classrooms organized under Master Plan requirements?
14. If you had a choice, would you pick to teach a mixed English language proficiency class (Eos, RFEPs, IFEPs, and ELD5s) or all ELD1s and ELD2s classroom? Please elaborate.

15. Before I end the interview today, is there anything that I missed?

Probe: Do you have anything else to add at this time?

Probe: If there is anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

Probe: Would it be okay for me to call you with any follow up questions that may come up as I look through the information? May I get your phone number and your email address?

Appendix B

Administrator Interview Protocol

Welcome:

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today. Before I begin the interview, I would like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research form.

Ground Rules:

- There is no right or wrong answers and your opinion is very important to my research.
- Whatever you say in this room will stay here, so you can feel comfortable in sharing your opinion.
- I will be tape recording this interview so I can capture everything you have to say.
- I will not identify your by name in my report or anywhere else and I assure you that you will remain anonymous throughout the research.

The interview will last between 45 to 60 minutes. Is there any question before I start?

Questions

1. How long have you been the administrator at this school or District?
2. Please tell me about your experience as an administrator of this school?
3. Have you had experience with ELLs placement under Master Plan requirement?
4. What is your opinion about the English Learner Master Plan classroom organization requirements?
5. What are the major issues (if any) in new classroom organizations based on students' English language proficiency?

6. How would you describe your experience with ELLs' placement in new classrooms?
7. What is it like to explain to parents about their child's placement in SEI classroom in the new school year?
8. Tell me about your experience in regards to students discipline in classrooms?
Probe: Are there discipline issues in all ELL, all EO, RFEP, IFEP classrooms?
Probe: Why do you think these discipline issues arise?
Probe: Are there more discipline issue in mixed classes? Why? Why not?
9. What are the challenges of being an administrator at this school with high ELL population in compare to other schools with low (or no) ELL population?
10. If you had a chance, how would you improve this policy?
11. Before I end the interview today, is there anything that I missed?
Probe: Do you have anything else to add at this time?
Probe: If there is anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.
Probe: Would it be okay for me to call you with any follow up questions that may come up as I look through the information? May I get your phone number?



Appendix C

VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

The Impact of District Policies on Academic achievement of the English Language Learners

Are you teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) in your class? I am conducting a research study about how state and district policies impact the English language learners' academic achievement.

Hi, my name is Sima Navid and I am an educator like you. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of the policies from the district on English language learners' academic achievement in classrooms. I need volunteer teachers with almost all ELL students on their classroom rosters from grades two to five to conduct 45-60 minute interviews.

If you are selected for interview, you will receive a \$25 (Starbucks Gift Card) to compensate your participation.

This research is conducted under the advisory of Dr. Jody Dunlap at CSUN Education department.

Please call at 818 723-3227 and leave a message if you like to volunteer or send an email to sima.navid.758@my.csun.edu . I will contact you immediately to set up a time that works for you to interview or observe if you were selected to participate in this research study.

I like to thank you for what you do on daily bases and I am looking forward to use your knowledge and expertise in my research.

Sima Navid 818-723-3227 or sima.navid.758@my.csun.edu

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