

12-21-2021

ELs in a Michigan 9-12 School: Educators' Perceptions and Cultural Considerations

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ELs in a Michigan 9-12 School: Educators' Perceptions and Cultural Considerations

Melissa Lynn Dean

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

December 2021

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Abstract

This research investigates the perceptions of administrators and specialists in one diversely enrolled Michigan secondary school. Particularly, the purpose was to determine to what extent English learners (ELs), especially those of non-Western backgrounds, are being accommodated and considered by educators and policy. To examine this, three participants were successfully recruited- a language acquisition administrator, a language acquisition specialist, and an assistant principal. They were then each interviewed once to learn of their perceptions and beliefs on these topics. This research finds that although administrators and specialists may be knowledgeable and advocate for their ELs in creative and culturally competent ways, various factors such as convoluted policy and precedents, along with pedagogical beliefs held by some mainstream teachers, can impact the learning of ELs. This in turn can impact the goals and intentions of those in administration. This research concludes optimistically that in the future, all educators who are not trained on how to teach and accommodate ELs effectively will be supported by tangible policy and explicit protocol on what to do, as a bare minimum.

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Statement of the Issue

Before my teaching practicum in Cape Coast, Ghana, I was unaware of the large pedagogical and cultural differences that existed between Ghanaian primary/ secondary schools (and non-Western schools in general), in comparison to those same schools in the U.S., which are established on Western educational models. I quickly discovered that while many of the teacher-centered practices I was witnessing, which often focused on perfection the first time, mimicry of the teacher's model, and call and response, were inherent to learning in these non-Western school systems, they could not typically be found in the classrooms or textbooks of the United States. Seeing children thrive from an educational system that not only is different from, but sometimes even opposes that of the West, made me concerned for our EL populations back in the United States that come from countries like Ghana. If Western educators were teaching rules and methods unfamiliar to their EL populations in the United States--such as debate in the classroom, constant participation, eye contact with peers and authority figures alike, and English-only work with no visual or language accommodations--these students (freshly from their home country) would not only have to learn school material, but also learn *how* to learn at their new school upon immigrating to a country with a Western context. This could potentially force them to unlearn the prior methods exposed to them, as well. Even if educators employ their teaching methods with only good intent, if the method is not accommodating to their students, they may not be able to learn. This, in turn, can create the illusion that a student is behind or underachieving when they are unable to grasp the material, when in reality, they are simply lacking either a teaching method familiar to them, or the support they need to comprehend the new teaching presented to them.

What is meant to be helpful to children that are ELs today can quickly become a slippery slope if an educator's perception does not take into account the dramatic cultural differences inside and outside the classroom, between the West and various other regions including parts of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. On top of this, an educator must consider the language accommodations needed for those children in an academic context. Many ELs' opportunities can diminish because of a lack of resources to cultivate their potential for success, or because of unnecessary impositions of placing them in special education.

For various reasons, EL policy in the U.S. has frequently failed to properly accommodate students. One reason is that language policy has historically been used as a way to oppress minority groups, even in schools (Wiley & Wright, 2004). This includes the use of English-only policies that discourage the native language and culture of students, and inhibit their and their families' voices. Another reason is the simple fact that policy makers often lack the experience and training on how to best accommodate students from different cultures. Students from non-Western cultures are especially impacted by this gap because the teaching practices in their cultures differ in many ways from the teaching practices of the U.S. school where they receive formal instruction. Today, this is still true in many districts and states, but policy makers and educators may not even be fully aware of this fact. These same people may also be unaware of the fact that their policy is not just lacking accommodations, but possibly even perpetuates regressive attitudes and practices as well. Policy and the educators who must implement it serve as critical guides for ELs already forced to navigate the intersection of their learning and culture much more intensely than non-ELs (or native speaking students). Though much must be changed to better accommodate ELs, and especially those of non-Western backgrounds, the first positive step to take is to learn about schools' EL policy, and educators' attitudes and perceptions towards

this policy through field research. Educators' insights are a crucial dynamic to understanding the next steps we must take in advocating for our ELs, yet they often remain infrequently voiced.

Background

The United States consistently attracts growing populations of those who do not speak English as their primary language. Still, English is practically the only language seen in overt mediums of power, such as academia and news. Since English is the language of instruction and instrument of power, ELs and their families (across many cultures, social classes, and generations in the United States) generally view its proficiency as a crucial skill for future success in the academic and working world. Since culture and sociopolitical contexts will be recurring themes for discussion in this research, I will use Sonia Nieto's definitions of culture and sociopolitical context to clearly articulate what I mean when discussing these terms. According to Nieto, culture is defined as "the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors (which can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/ or religion), and how these are transformed by those who share them" (Nieto, 1996, pg. 390).

Nieto defines sociopolitical context as something that "takes into account the larger societal and political forces in a particular society and the impact they may have on student learning" (Nieto, 1998, pg. 142). A sociopolitical context considers issues of power and includes discussions of structural inequality based on stratifications due to race, social class, gender, ethnicity, and other differences. It also includes the relative respect or disrespect accorded to particular languages and dialects.

Across Michigan, many ELs in the K-12 school system are immigrants, first generation, and generation 1.5 students. Though generation 1.5 students can be difficult to define, this research considers them as a wide, varying population that has characteristics of both first- and

second-generation immigrants. In relation to education, generation 1.5 students have wide-ranging experiences in both their mother tongue and English, and frequently do not partake in traditional EL programs. Generation 1.5 students do not fall within the definitions of a first or second generation immigrant, hence the term 1.5. Due to their varied experiences, they typically need an individualized plan that considers what they have and have not learned in the classroom, as an English speaker, and on a cultural level as well. Currently in Michigan, Spanish accounts for 43% of the English learner population, between grades 3-8 and 11. The second most populous language is Arabic, which in the same grades, accounts for 27% of the EL population (Whiston, 2017, pg. 9). For society to develop equitable opportunities for all, EL curriculum development is becoming increasingly important, starting at the K-12 level.

Not only do programs need to properly accommodate and scaffold their students, but they need to do so in a way that includes practices that resonate with students from non-Western/collectivist backgrounds. So, with the permission of faculty from one 9-12 school in Macomb County in Michigan, three interviews were conducted, asking about the trainings, policies, and methods employed in EL curricula and their perceptions of them. The district and 9-12 school this research focuses on has a large English learner population, composed of mostly Middle Eastern students, many of whom practice Islam. This research raises important questions on representation of all students in education and policy, equitable opportunity, and pedagogical knowledge of administrative figures in education. This, in turn, will hopefully spark educators and policy-makers alike to coordinate and cooperate to make small, yet key changes, in ensuring clearer, more accommodating education for all.

Review of Literature

Cultural Differences Between Non-Western Societies and the United States

Cultural Dimensions

By utilizing the cultural dimensions explained in Hofstede (2011), one sees the clear cultural differences of non-Western and Western students, especially regarding individualism v collectivism, and power distance. This article, based on his 1980 piece on cultural dimensions of national cultures, describes various dimensions of these cultures. The article continues by showing the research methodology and its conceptual basis that led up to the original piece and emphasizes that the dimensions explained depend on their level of aggregation. He warns against confusing these national identities and dimensions with an individual's values and differences.

Hofstede explains that the determination of a country being either individualist or collectivist is based on “the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups.” Here, it is important to emphasize that this is referring to the degree to which people in *society* are integrated into groups, and not in education. As one will see in the following sections, collectivist cultures, despite being community oriented, typically do not engage in group work in the classroom. This is common in non-Western cultures, most likely because many collectivist cultures have a large distance of power and focus on a teacher-centered learning that is more controlled and lecture styled.

That being said, collectivism generally occurs in economically underdeveloped and non-Western countries, and individualism is more typical of economically developed and Western countries. An exception is Japan, which, although in East Asia, falls in the middle on the individual v. collectivist dimension (Hofstede, 2011, pg. 12). Individualistic countries can be characterized as having an “I” consciousness, right to privacy, personal opinion, and a belief that

speaking one's mind is healthy. They also believe that tasks prevail over relationships, and that an individual is only responsible for themselves and their immediate family. Collectivist countries, on the other hand, have a "we" consciousness, stress belonging, believe that opinions and votes are determined by an "in-group," and believe that harmony should always be maintained. They also place relationships over tasks, and maintain that people are born into "extended communities or clans that protect them in exchange for loyalty" (Hofstede, 2011, pg. 11).

Power distance can be defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 2011). Hofstede determines how great the power distance is in a country by surveying participants from those areas, using a Likert-style instrument with statements that represent either a small or large power distance. Participants selected how strongly they agreed or disagreed with those statements, and then their selections were quantified and averaged into a score. In Germanic and English-speaking Western countries, the power distance index score tends to be lower, while in East European, Latin, African, and Asian countries, the power distance index score tends to be higher. Countries with small power distances tend to have parents that see children as equals, maintain student-centered education, and view their elderly as a people that are neither respected nor feared. Contrastingly, those with large power distances frequently have parents that prioritize instilling obedience into their children, maintain teacher-centered education, and view their elders as a people who are both respected and feared (Hofstede, 2011, pg. 9).

These factors alone have the potential to create cultural misunderstandings between students, families, and educators. If a non-Western student has been raised to show obedience,

listen to teacher-focused lessons (lecture, small participation), and revere their elders, they will be shocked to see the level of consulting and participation expected in Western schools. Students of non-Western cultures may struggle to find a place of belonging within the classroom when the classroom culture varies so much from what they know. While Western students share contrasting opinions and self-formed opinions more easily, non-Western students may be more reserved to share so openly. They may wait to learn what an elder/ authoritative figure believes. Based on Hofstede's explanation of collectivism, it is possible that non-Western students may become reserved in an attempt to be prudent and maintain harmony with their fellow students and educators as well.

What one non-Western student may do to be polite or show respect--such as not making eye contact or debating with the teacher--may be viewed by a Western teacher as a lack of participation, engagement, or even understanding (DeCapua, 2016). The Western teacher may have an expectation that students need to share out their beliefs before they (the teacher) explain their own viewpoint/ knowledge. When this is the case, the non-Western student would be viewed in a negative way either behaviorally or academically, when it is simply a cultural difference that the teacher may not understand.

Common Religious Accommodations

Cultural events within a community of students that are different from those that align with Anglo-Saxon American, Christian events must be acknowledged and/ or accommodated for as well. One example would be considering Muslim's school schedule during Ramadan, where they will be fasting and sleeping at different hours than what is typical for them. Following that, the celebration of Eid being either excused or included on the calendar, or in some way understood by educators, would also be an example of an accommodation that promotes equity.

This would promote equity not just for a religion that is common for non-Western students, but also for any Muslim student at the said school in general. Not only are these holidays important to the students' personal lives, but it demonstrates cultural equity when students of all religions and/ or backgrounds are free to celebrate their religion without repercussions (missing homework, being marked absent, etc.).

Pedagogical Differences in the Education of Non-Western Students

American/ Western ESL Practices

Fu (2009) illustrates the American/ Western EL practices that are becoming common in contemporary teaching. One noticeable teaching method is the suggested process approach. Fu gives many examples of this, including emphasizing drafts of writing on topics that are personal or student-chosen. The idea is that free writing and personal writing gives students control to choose a topic that they know a lot about, thus allowing them to develop more ideas and content fluidly. Adding onto this, students are also encouraged to incorporate and utilize their native language as needed, even if that means the entire drafts are in their native language for a period of time. This ideology is based in part on the theoretical assumption that L1 literacy skills transfer to their L2. This method of instruction may also make the student feel more comfortable, thus enabling the student to learn more easily, without anxiety. The practice of allowing students to write in either language encourages fluidity in expression, and aids in continual thoughts and access to deeper critical thinking towards the topic as well. With time and practice, then, students who practice this can ideally comfortably transfer these skills by developing their literacy skills in their L2, without creating personal negative connotations towards either language.

Wiley and Wright (2004) examine various language policies throughout time, critiquing the policies intentionally put in place to oppress other cultures and languages. Thus, although

native language usage in English classrooms has not always been commonplace historically speaking, much of that practice derives from a colonial and political influence. Many schools have discouraged non-English usage as an intentional attempt to erase students' culture and force their assimilation (Wiley and Wright, 2004). Today, native language usage as a resource and the process approach align much more with the values of individualistic countries with a small distance of power, including developed Western countries like the United States.

Furthermore, Western practices also commonly employ facilitation, group work, and group discussions in the classroom, either instead of or supplemental to lectures. Since lectures do not offer as much active learning or participation, teachers from Western countries, to create a smaller power distance between them and their students, are often encouraged to yield classroom control to their students in some degree as well. Teachers often see themselves as guides, and step back to let students develop ideas on their own. They may step in for clarification and to assist students, but allow students to respond in their own way, and form ideas largely on their own when possible.

Non-Western Classroom Cultures

While many Western classrooms employ a process approach, many non-Western classrooms, especially those in countries with large power distances, employ a product approach. Gabrielatos (2002) provides examples of what the author considers to be good product strategies in teaching writing. In his piece, Gabrielatos examines two student writings, identifies errors, and then goes on to outline both product and process approaches, which he views as effective approaches. Afterwards, he presents a framework for teaching writing, and discusses desirable outcomes for writing programs. In his outline of the product approach, he includes key traits and characteristics of this method. This approach focuses on correct form and perfection the first

time. Much of this “correct form” is demonstrated or modeled by the teacher. Because teacher modeling and teacher-centered lessons are more common among cultures with a large power distance, many non-Western countries use a product approach. Gabrielatos explains that some of these traits in the product approach may include an emphasis on correct grammar and spelling, as well as a relevant organizational pattern/ layout with a clear focus (Gabrielatos, 2002, pg. 4).

Gabrielatos demonstrates that cultures can also blend these approaches to writing. Western cultures are not inherently set in teaching through a process approach, and non-Western cultures are not inherently teaching through a product approach. Rather, contemporary pedagogy merely illustrates that the process method aligns more so with the values and ideologies of Western countries, while the product method is still favored by many strongly collectivist cultures. Still, many Western teachers teach a product method or some variation of it. Many collectivist cultures and cultures with larger power distances have the potential to teach the process approach as well, though it is just not as likely to be employed to the same extent that progressive, contemporary Western schools choose to do so. In fact, many non-Western educators today are choosing to partially converge towards Western practices for many reasons including exposure to other pedagogy, and also curriculum expectations that represent Western pedagogy.

One sees the perceptions of educators in a more collectivist society in Dull (2004). Dull discusses and analyzes her classroom observations and discussions with colleagues and teacher trainees in Ghana, as she also pulls from written sources such as textbooks, newspapers, and policy documents in Ghana. She seeks to determine if Ghanaian teaching has changed as a result of their 1987 reforms, which mandated an increased emphasis on inquiry and problem-solving teaching methods in training colleges. What she concludes is that although Ghanaians had a

different idea of democracy and discipline, they were ultimately not nearly as strict as many Westerners' stereotypes of "African" teachers.

The teacher trainees she held discussions with believed that democracy in the classroom (associated with more progressive models) was most often associated with expressing oneself by giving one's views on a topic the teacher presents them with. The fact that the teacher chose the topic did not seem inherently undemocratic to the trainees, even when this was pointed out to them. They saw that this freedom to express and discuss as a class allowed for more active learning. One trainee expressed that in all lessons, they wanted to encourage group work, beginning with a story. The idea of group work and storytelling appeared truer to Ghanaian values, not influenced by individualized methods of instruction that are used by many Middle Eastern and European countries. They explained that the teacher-centered classrooms have benefits as well, as they feel more convenient and can maintain order more easily. Maintaining discipline in the classroom was a big priority of the trainees, which aligns with their society having a large power distance.

Dull illustrates that while students from collectivist countries with a large power distance may have an experience that varies dramatically than that of their American classroom, it cannot be assumed that their experience followed specific definitions. One example would include the idea that heavily collectivist countries such as Ghana must do group work all the time because they are community oriented. What Dull reveals is that Ghana actually frequently has independent, teacher led lessons, but teachers are changing their methods in part to appeal to investors. These investors are countries such as the U.S., along with other Western nations and global superpowers that fund the schools in Ghana. Nations such as the U.S., who associate heavily with the concept of "democracy," exert this ideology through pedagogy and education in

the form of “democratic learning” like group work. While teachers cannot make assumptions about a student’s educational background based on that student’s culture, it is important that the teacher understands these differences nonetheless, so that they may be more prepared when a student or family member shares them.

Still, Dull proves that because of many factors at play, including political aims, neo-colonial influences, and cultural beliefs of educators, a classroom is not necessarily representative of the culture of the students within it. They must learn a student’s personal culture, as well as the classroom culture of the student in any previous classes. What this demonstrates also is that just because a country is non-Western, one cannot see their beliefs as a monolith. Though Ghana and Middle Eastern countries are both collectivist countries, their classroom cultures have proven to vary dramatically. Furthermore, although East Asian countries are close to one another geographically, their power distances and methodologies within their societies and teaching also vary greatly. So, while understanding that the national and community culture of a student is very important and may share general traits with those within similar regions, the specific country of origin, along with their specific circumstances, must be learned to truly understand that student’s background.

Research on Cultural Differences between Educators and Students

A considerable amount of scholarship over the past two decades has addressed the increasing diversity of the K-12 student population in the U.S. and the concomitant growing cultural divide between teachers (the majority of whom are white, middle-class women) and their learners. Many ELs come from non-Western cultures, collectivist/ community-oriented cultures, and may have interrupted or informal educational experiences.

DeCapua and Marshall (2015) explore ways to scaffold these students. Due to a variety of factors, those with limited and/ or interrupted formal education must be accommodated for, and are especially vulnerable in the school system. While teachers must be prepared to effectively educate students with interrupted education, policy must also support and consider them. Through their review of literature, DeCapua and Marshall conclude that themes in U.S. education, such as individual accountability and standardized testing, must be addressed. If standardized testing cannot be adapted or written to accommodate ELs, then those students' test scores may not represent their knowledge and true performance ability. Similarly, if the attitude in U.S. education is that of individual accountability, yet ELs do not have the tools needed or the awareness that they can advocate for themselves, then they can easily struggle and fall through the cracks without support. The two researchers also assert that effectively instructing students without sacrificing content taught in the classroom is essential. This principle is part of the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP), which also aims to address cultural dissonance felt by students.

Research from DeCapua (2016), which examines academic success through culturally responsive training, discusses the needs of struggling ELs as well. DeCapua defines an EL as “struggling” based on significant factors such as someone who has low to no literacy skills, or has not been a consistent part of a formal education. In general, it is something that severely disrupts their education and inhibits their ability to learn. These students require unique learning needs. One such factor is the idea that many ELs are part of a collectivist culture rather than a Western/ individualistic culture. ELs, especially those struggling, need an education and scaffolding methods that operate collectively, with relationships and teaching intertwined and more community-oriented. This can be executed effectively by creating a space where a

student's community and family can become involved in their child's education, through utilizing interpreting services and visual aids as needed, and having consistent conferences on student progress with the family. The U.S. typically encourages individualistic learning, which allows students their own space and ability to work independently. For ELs, though, a more interconnected approach to learning may benefit them much more. Some cultures are more focused on orality than orthography to transmit information, and some experiences/ backgrounds of students cause them to focus more on orality as well. This becomes a struggle for these students because U.S. schools focus so heavily on orthography and writing ability to succeed.

Zeichner (1992) addresses mending the cultural gap between student and teacher in a special report examining the main issue of policy in U.S. teacher education. The issue involves the fact that teachers, typically white, monolingual, females, are unprepared to teach students of various and diverse backgrounds effectively, because of their own limited experiences and lack of awareness. The report stresses the dangers of labeling students based on any single membership they may belong to. The researcher concludes that it is important to study the culture of the classroom and the cultures that students bring to school with them. Zeichner's piece supports this research as this interview protocol also examines generalizations and monolithic attitudes towards cultures.

Studies have also specifically examined language policies to see how they can create equity in education. Tollefson and Tsui (2014) reviewed research and policies, beginning with UNESCO's "Education for All," which strives for equitable education. They concluded that it is essential to have a framework in policy that supports students and their mother tongue, since policies in general shape learners' educational achievement. This research aligns with the process approach utilized in many schools in the United States, along with the ideology of

Danling Fu, thus strengthening the assertion that a student's L1 can be incorporated into their education of their L2/ target language.

Tollefson and Tsui also reported successful ways that the mother tongue has been preserved, and with it the students' culture. According to their research, five factors that policy can be used to achieve greater access and equity in education (or five generalizations about medium of instruction (MOI) policies) include self-determination in school administration and MOI policymaking, ideology that supports mother tongue, laws that promote MOI policies for access and equity, historical precedents (indigenous pedagogy), and MOI policies that fill specific, identifiable needs (e.g. child care services) (Tollefson & Tsui, 2014, pg. 208). This preservation of culture can also benefit students psychologically and mentally. Students are able to associate part of their identity (their language and culture) with their learning, thus creating a more comfortable environment for them, and bridging the spheres of home and academics. For cultures with people that focus on community and search for a place within society, even a classroom society/ culture, this could allow students to connect to the material more easily.

Teacher Preparedness to Work with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners

Hansen-Thomas et al. (2016) explored the perceived professional development needs of 159 elementary and secondary teachers across north Texas from 10 rural and small districts through a mixed-methods study that used a Likert-style survey with four open ended questions regarding demographic information and perceived challenges in working with ELs. Similar to the present study, Hansen-Thomas et al. also sought to learn the preparation of participants regarding supporting ELLs, and if there was a correlation between participants' knowledge on ELLs and particular education, trainings, and/ or experience. The researchers found that the biggest challenges the participants faced were students' lack of academic vocabulary, lack of

time, as well as struggle to communicate with students and parents. The study found that many teachers cited communication with students and parents as a major challenge.

Similarly, Malo-Juvera, et al. (2016) investigated in-service elementary teachers' self-efficacy for culturally-responsive instruction. Twenty-six female teachers at four Mid-Western schools completed semi-structured interviews and the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSE). After using Q factor analysis, it was learned that participants felt generally confident in their ability to teach ELs, assess and make cultural connections, and instruct culturally diverse students. Just as this is examining teachers' self-efficacy and perceptions, my research strives to learn of educators' perceptions on how prepared they believe they and/ or their teachers are, and how well they believe their trainings have prepared them.

Another example of attitudes towards teacher preparation is illustrated in Baecher (2012). This research examined attitudes of preparedness in recent graduates of an MA TESOL program that were from a northeastern U.S. university. After having 77 of these participants (who are Pre-K-12 teachers) complete a questionnaire, conducting 10 individual interviews and a focus group interview with 8 participants, Baecher was able to learn what these teachers believed were the greatest challenges in teaching, and what the program could improve on. Baecher found that teachers rated instructing ELs with learning disabilities, reviewing compliance and testing mandates for ELs, addressing the needs of low-literacy students, and planning or co-planning content-based EL lessons as what they felt should be addressed more.

Murri et al. (2012) conducted a review of research regarding how teachers are prepared to teach ELs. This led to a survey that the researchers conducted with 71 participants who were preservice teachers, inquiring about how they viewed the state-mandated SEI (structured English immersion) course that they were required to pass as part of their initial teacher certification.

While the research demonstrated that participants felt most prepared in areas revolving around how culture and language proficiency influence learning, they felt least prepared about how to incorporate a student's native language in the classroom. The research implies that they struggle in part because they lack an understanding of the other languages themselves. Despite their lowest feeling of preparedness with regards to a student's native language, the results demonstrated that participants felt moderately to highly prepared as a result of their learning and preparation. They explain that "the need for teachers to engage in an understanding of families and communities is crucial in creating an optimal learning environment for [ELs]" (Murri et al., 2012, pg. 144). After conducting a survey that asked teachers about how they felt regarding their preparedness and usefulness of their courses, the research indicated that direct contact and experience with ELs shaped prospective teachers' work with ELs significantly.

History of Relevant EL Policies: How Did We Get to Where We Are Today?

Before diving into EL policy, it is first worth mentioning that the right to an education was not part of the U.S. constitution when it was written. It was the responsibility of the states to navigate education (Arias & Wiley, 2015). This helps to explain some lack of consistency in U.S. EL policy and the need for Supreme Court decisions that will be explained. From here, research by Wright (2019) provides a helpful review of main principles of language rights of children, articulated by United Nations documents, realities of language rights in the United States, and an overview of key court cases. This emphasis on children is especially important since this research will focus on a high school setting. To begin, the common schools movement, which gained traction in the U.S. in 1837, led by Horace Mann, asserted that every child could receive a basic education funded by local taxes. This movement occurred decades after the constitution was written, thus explaining why the writers of the U.S. constitution did not feel the

need to include it in federal policy. With time, however, public education slowly became recognized as a need of the people, and it was first addressed by the states. Still, when the states addressed this need varied greatly. This being said, it is only more recently that the federal government has taken any initiative in education and educational policy. Despite pushback from many citizens and political officials, most children were enrolled in government schools by the year of 1900. Still, the main consequence of leaving education for the states to delegate was the decentralized system it created, including over fifty departments of education (Wright, 2019). There was little consistency throughout the nation on standards for majority students, let alone non-majority students and EL policy.

The United Nations -over 100 years after the common schools movement gained popularity in the United States- passed the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declared education as a basic human right for children (Wright, 2019). Nevertheless, the United States did not fully practice what was outlined in this declaration until the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the principles of the U.N. declaration, in the 1982 case of Plyler v. Doe. This case ruled that undocumented children could receive an education under the Equal Protection clause in the 14th amendment of the U.S. constitution. This is especially relevant to this research because many undocumented children are children of migrant workers, immigrants, or refugees, who make up a large percentage of minority groups in Macomb County, Michigan.

The federal government slowly became more involved in education, particularly when issues of segregation and civil rights arose. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court famously ruled in Brown v. Board of education that racial segregation in education was unconstitutional. Less famously, this case and other segregation cases also clarified the fact that English learners could not be separated from their peers in school while masquerading as a method to help ELs learn

English. Schools were expected to give equal opportunities, yet many ELs were placed in mainstream classrooms despite their limited English proficiency. What was equal was also seen as equitable until the Supreme Court ruled in the 1974 case of *Lau v. Nichols* that schools must also provide ELs English language instruction. This was an extremely significant case for ELs, and after this ruling, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights created the Lau Remedies. The Lau Remedies, which were policy guidelines to ensure the education of ELs, were codified into the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) of 1974.

A decade before in 1965, the U.S. Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty (Wright, 2019). This law, which sought to aid struggling learners and address complex challenges for students in poverty, with disabilities, or who need to learn English, authorized resources to support educational programs and promote parental involvement. The federal government provided funds to state and local schools, with the understanding that all who accepted these funds must follow federal education policy. Then, in 1968, Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act (BEA). This legislation gave federal grants to school districts to establish educational programs for ELs. It attempted to address high drop-out rates in Mexican American students, as well as the needs of the increasing EL population.

Recent Federal Policy Regarding ELs in the United States

While President George W. Bush was in office, he pushed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB stayed as federal policy until 2017, and changed EL policy and perspectives on it greatly. There was a strong emphasis on growth and English learning, and some aspects that focused on English learning did not recognize bilingualism as something beneficial as past policies did. Because there was such a strong emphasis on learning English and making progress

in English, the optional aspect of incorporating a student’s native language and developing their native language was often ignored. Despite these policies, the Obama administration sought educational reform and navigated federal policy by passing Race to the Top (RTTT) in July 2009 (Wright, 2019). This policy provided competitive grants to states to begin educational reform, especially emphasizing the allocation of resources that would improve low-performing schools. The Obama Administration also allowed states to apply for “ESEA flexibility” that granted waivers of certain NCLB requirements if these states could demonstrate accountability in other ways.

The ideology in policies today is not necessarily that different from much of the policies that have been approved in the past, as today’s legislation can be recursive or stem from predecessors’ ideology. The fact that policies have historically been used as a means of social control has been discussed even in more recent times (Wiley and Wright, 2004). Racism and linguistic intolerance are often the strongest themes in these policies. Since many of our policies develop with time, there must continually be a clear and intentional focus on combatting racist precedencies. Otherwise, it will be easy for such harmful rhetoric to infiltrate our policies even further.

Michigan’s Contemporary Policies

Entrance and Exit Screening of ESL Programs/ Support. In Michigan, K-12 public schools are required by law to identify all students whose first language is not English, assess their English proficiency, and offer them some form of resources to scaffold their learning. The applicable Michigan legislation is part of Title III. Michigan’s ESSA Title III, Part A, Subpart 1: English Language Acquisition and Language Enhancement requires Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to provide a Home Language survey (HLS) questionnaire to the parents/ guardians of the

student in question, in order to identify students of non-English backgrounds. The Michigan Department of Education expects that the student whose parents/ guardians responded to the questionnaire is screened in a language other than English. Students who identify a language other than English as their home language on the HLS are given a language assessment within thirty days. In Michigan, the test used is the World- Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Screener, “a valid and reliable English Language Progress (ELP) assessment,” (Whiston, 2017, pg. 92). One EL handbook in Michigan, for Warren consolidated schools (K-12 students from Warren, Sterling Heights, and Troy), explains that the WIDA screener is one factor in deciding whether a student will need to receive continued services (Kozlowski, 2019). In Michigan, in order to enter EL programs or receive services, students in grades 3-12 must score below 5.0 on a scale of 6 with 0.5 integers in one or more domains, or be below grade level in reading or writing. In order to exit grades K-12, students “must receive a composite score of 5.0 or higher on the annual WIDA: ACCESS for [ELs]” (Whiston, 2017, pg. 93).

Language Description and Accommodation of Students. Michigan’s ESSA mentions the major language populations of the state, and how this fact impacts policy. Under Title I, Part A: Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational, “Native Language Assessments,” any language other than English accounting for at least 10% of the EL student population is considered significant in the sense that the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) will develop a roll-out plan to create/ add additional resources for that language. As mentioned previously, in Michigan, Spanish and Arabic are the two most common languages spoken among ELs (Whiston, 2017, pg. 9).

Under Michigan’s ESSA, Michigan’s Department of Education prioritizes the inclusion of migratory students, including preschool children who have dropped out of school (Whiston,

2017). The Department of Education also prioritizes the implementation of the state Service Delivery Plan, which includes implementing Common Summer Curriculum and Assessments. This supports English language development in both the regular school year and summer, and coordinates services with local, state, and federal programs.

Goals of Michigan’s ESL Policy Today. Current Michigan policy demonstrates a great deal of open-endedness and vagueness in wording. This should not necessarily be interpreted to mean a lack of accountability, however, as different schools have different needs, funding, and resources. Flexible policy seems essential in some ways, then, to ensure that all schools can enforce policy appropriately. In Michigan’s Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, Section E. Title III, Part A, Subpart 1: English Language Acquisition and Language Enhancement, a “Michigan’s Top 10 in 10 timeline” states Michigan’s Department of Education’s main goals in the upcoming years. Among these goals are to deliver research-based instructional practices in order to develop the literacy and academic language of ELs (Whiston, 2017). Still, though the use of research-based practices for ELs is emphasized, no clear definition is offered as to what the term means. This lack of definition, then, while allowing for flexibility, also allows for practices that are not accommodating to students. There are no specifications or even statements that could gear individual school policies towards ideas that are often neglected or unfamiliar to many educators.

One goal of Michigan’s policy, however, includes providing ELs with extra support and resources during the school year and summer, and coordinating parent and family engagement. This could help mend the cultural differences that teachers may not be fully able to handle. Though these activities are in no way a substitute for accommodating students based on the teaching practices they are accustomed to, engaging families and offering aid in external

situations such as transitions to college and careers (part of this educational plan's goal) is a great step in ensuring their success.

Another goal is to implement evidence-based professional development plans focusing on “second language development and bilingual instruction to support classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators and other personnel to build their capacity and skill set” (Whiston, 2017, p.94). This demonstrates key support to the education of teachers, who become the gatekeepers of education for students. This support to teachers can also help to address biases of various ideological and sociopolitical nature, which is essential when working with minority populations.

According to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Office of Educational Supports (OES) Clarification regarding the Language Assistance Program (LAP) Requirements, ELs have the right to receive support provided by the LAP. This is a requirement in all districts, and Title III supplemental funds are only accessible to districts once they have met this requirement. The LAP focuses on two main components: meaningful access to the core curriculum (e.g. via paraprofessionals, language instructional supports, extra tutoring, etcetera), and direct English language development instruction.

How Policy can Impact Teacher Preparedness

The research conducted by Wiley (2008) explains how language policy impacts teacher education. The researcher examines teacher education and how it needs to accommodate those who speak minority languages. Once again, the needs of the increasing number of students who speak a language other than their language of instruction is stressed. Wiley explores solutions in preserving the minority languages, while stating that policy must accommodate minority speakers. These assertions reinforce the methods and ideologies of Fu (2009), which stray from

English-only educational policies. This means that one way EL teachers can accommodate teaching practices found in non-Western countries is by educating future educators in ways where they can analyze these policies, and discern whether or not they need to take action to change them. Teachers must discern among language policies and their intents, and whether these educational policies promote and/ or accommodate national, official, and community languages, and mother tongues (Wiley, 2008).

Villegas (2011) examines the impact of the demographic and political contexts regarding the need to prepare all teachers to teach English language learners under NCLB. The author believes that the EL policy under NCLB produced “promising signs” that those in power such as policy-makers and educational leaders saw the need for preparation in teaching EL. Still, this does not by any means mean that there is not “a long way to go” in developing a vision for EL that guides “the development of coherent, well-grounded policy and practice” (Villegas, 2011, pg. 49).

Research Questions

In light of the extensive review on language policy in education, and support for EL students, this research seeks to gain insight as to how educational policy and accommodations are implemented at a school and district level. In order to gain understanding of the considerations and accommodations held in one Michigan high school, the following question is asked:

1. To what extent are the cultural and language needs of English Learners (ELs) from non-Western backgrounds accommodated in a diversely-enrolled Michigan secondary school from the perspective of administrators and specialists?

This study hypothesized an overall strong awareness among educators of cultural considerations that must be taken into account for ELs of non-Western backgrounds, given that the school has such a large population of these learners, and has a long history of these populations in their district. Still, this study expects to find that those directly involved in language acquisition over general administrative duties will be more aware of these needs, and how their school addresses them.

Methodology

Participants

Six prospective participants were emailed information about this study. Of these six, three of them consented to be interviewed. The other three, all teachers, did not reply. The three who did agree to participate all held administrative roles within the same high school, grades 9-12, in Michigan. The titles they held were administrator of language acquisition, language acquisition specialist, and assistant principal. I specifically recruited these participants because of their potential knowledge on their EL programs and experience. I was interested in seeing if there were varying opinions among the administrative personnel, as some of their roles dealt more directly with EL than others. I was also investigating as to if their statements and perceptions matched the policy. Still, this recruitment was also crafted based on convenience and the person of contact's idea as to who might have the time and/ or be willing to participate.

Each administrator who participated in the interview had worked for a minimum of two years at the school. They all had some level of understanding or working knowledge about their English learners' teaching programs and strategies, more than a mainstream teacher or average staff member would. These two traits were part of the criteria, so that it would be more likely for the participants to have a working knowledge on/ speak freely on topics regarding ELs. The language acquisition administrator works at the district level, implementing policies and maintaining the department that they work in. The language acquisition specialist advises and coaches teachers in finding best strategies to teach EL students. The assistant principal, among the many responsibilities, is the resource for teachers that are in their sheltered program (a program where EL students are instructed separately). They also serve to assist all teachers who have EL students in their classroom, which is virtually every teacher, and they are the direct

supervisor to the language acquisition specialists. In addition to looking at similarities and differences in responses based on profession, I expected to gain a more well-rounded perspective on the policies in their school overall, because they play different roles in the school's microcosm. They are often responsible to an extent for overseeing how policies are implemented and for managing events and resources that benefit and/or include English learners.

Although I had also planned to interview teachers, I was unable to secure the participation of any of the potential interviewee candidates. This was most likely due to the ongoing pandemic. The pandemic has placed classroom teachers under a constant busyness from trying to navigate the demands of their jobs, often only knowing week-to-week if they were teaching virtually or in a classroom. This uncertainty required constant adaptation and has made it difficult for them to make long term plans. Adding an interview to their schedule was too difficult for their current situation.

Context

I focused on a school district in Michigan that has one of the most diverse demographic profiles in the state. The reasoning for the choice of school here was that a diverse school would most likely need to be ready to accommodate more backgrounds, including differences in English language proficiency. This would most likely prompt a need for a more developed or accommodating EL policy.

The 9-12 public school where I conducted my research at is located in a suburban city and in the 2020-2021 school year had 1,448 students. Of these students, 56.22% are white, 24.45% are Asian, 14.99% are African American, and all other ethnicities (including those who identify as two or more races) make up 4.35% of the school's population. In comparison to the average makeup of students in public schools across Michigan, this school has an especially

large Asian population, most of whom come from the Middle East. On average in Michigan public schools, whites comprise 64.97% of the population, African Americans comprise 17.72%, but Asians make up only 3.53%. There are 314 ELs at this school, which is 21.69% of the population. Of these, 179 are white, 127 are Asian, and less than 10 are Hispanic/ Latino or African American (State of Michigan, 2021).

Participant Recruitment

To recruit prospective participants, I first made contact and communicated with the administrator of language acquisition within the high school's district. This way, I was able to identify the best school possible within the district for the research, and this person was my primary contact for the research conducted. The administrator of language acquisition then made initial contact with potential participants on my behalf by email, informing them of my research project and my interest in interviewing them. This procedure was recommended upon the suggestion that staff would be more likely to read an email message coming from a school administrator, and be more likely to agree to participate in a project that has been officially approved by key school district administrators. Before the documents and invitations were sent via email, this plan was approved by Grand Valley State University's internal review board. The email sent by the administrator, along with the invitation to participate, can be found at the end of this document (Appendix A and Appendix B). The invitation to participate, along with the consent form (Appendix C), was attached to the email sent by the person of contact. To protect potential participants during this part of the research process, all questions regarding the study and consent form were answered prior to the study as they reached out to me.

Study Design

To answer my research question, I designed a qualitative study utilizing one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with select personnel from a Michigan 9-12 school with a large EL population. I investigated the perceptions of two administrators and one specialist, so that I could then compare and contrast them to the EL policy held today.

Development of Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interviews. I conducted one virtual interview with each participant via Zoom. I had planned to meet them in-person, but I had to change my plans due to the pandemic. Meeting participants virtually rather than face-to-face adhered to the then-current Michigan law, the University's revised IRB guidelines, and health procedures suggested by federal and world organizations. At the beginning of each meeting, I reviewed the consent form with the participant, verifying whether they had read, understood, and consented to participate in the study as outlined. I began the interview protocol after receiving participants' verbal consent.

The interviews ranged in length from 15 minutes to over one hour. I utilized the Zoom record option to save participants' responses onto my password-protected computer. This measure was taken to both focus on the interview in the moment, and to later transcribe it for easy analysis. The semi-structured format allowed me to modify the instrument when participants raised issues not included in the original plan. These follow-up questions tailored to the unique viewpoint and experience the participant expressed allowed for more validity and authenticity in the answers of participants, since the questions could deviate to fit issues and topics raised by participants, which they would be more willing to discuss and give fleshed-out answers on. At the end of each interview, I asked participants for any final comments or thoughts. This allowed them to go back to a question, change or modify what they thought before, or expand on a topic in the interview or topics related to the interview.

The responses were naturally in tune to the thoughts and feelings that the educator was expressing, and not limited by any restraints I might have unintentionally created in my methods. This way, I was also able to explore the knowledge that each participant uniquely held towards English learners. Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, semi-structured interviews also allowed me to gather more information in one session, rather than setting up a follow-up interview as originally planned, since many educators' time is immensely scarce. The one-session interviews were more accommodating and manageable for participants, and they removed the potential stress that an additional meeting time may have placed on them.

I designed the interview to have two parts that focused on different themes, depending on the position held (teacher v. administrator). The administrator interview focuses on their knowledge of cultural considerations, examples they have seen, steps they take, and what they may want to see in the future. The protocol of questions for both groups can be found in Appendix D.

First, however, I asked for basic information about their title and job description if it was not previously mentioned in prior correspondence. By asking for this information, I was able to identify each participant easily as I analyzed the data, since each participant's name was replaced with a number during the analysis. Compared to the upcoming questions, these were designed to be easy, objective questions that encouraged the participant during the interview process, so that they remained comfortable as the questions became more difficult to answer. It also allowed privacy for participants, as I was the only one present in my location/ setting during the time of the interview. Again, because of shutdowns of various locations due to this pandemic, choosing my place of residency to conduct this study also allowed for consistency and one less factor that could somehow influence responses consciously or subconsciously.

Data Storage

To further protect participants, specific measures were taken to maintain their privacy, as outlined in the consent form and IRB approval. Every interview was fully transcribed, before coding any part of a response that elicited specific ideology or reasoning towards the instruction and accommodations of ELs. After the data were fully transcribed, the interviews were deleted. For privacy reasons, I also informed the participants that they may delete any emails or information they have accumulated regarding the study as they see fit. Interested participants emailed me with any questions, and then interviews were scheduled accordingly.

Data Coding and Management

Upon completion of transcribing the data, I coded the data based on twelve original characteristics/ categories (see Appendix E for fully coded transcriptions). That data were sorted through content analysis, he by color coding the transcribed texts, and assigning each category a color. Nine of these categories reflect characteristics, phenomena, or considerations that would benefit ELs, while three of these categories reflect critique, shortcomings, and limitations of policies and behaviors within the school. These three categories contain phenomena that could create obstacles for ELs and their education. These responses were then quantified by tallying how many times each participant expressed something that fell into one of the crafted categories. This tallying was done per category, per participant, in order to examine the participants' perceptions of the policies and attitudes of their school and district. In more telling data areas, responses were quantified once again, but separated by whether or not they explicitly mention the high school or another school.

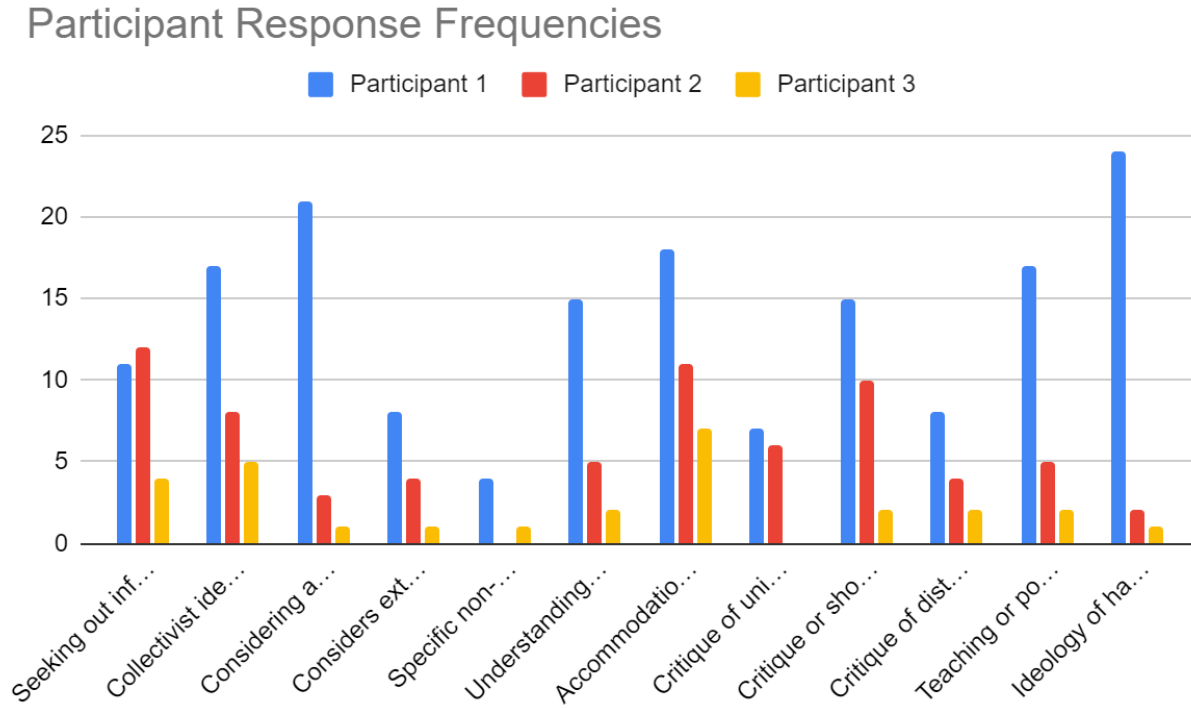
Results

The twelve categories and number of instances mentioned by each participant are illustrated below in Table 1 and Figure 1. First, Table 1 shows a table for all twelve categories to be easily displayed, and then Figure 1 is a chart to examine trends in the following chapter.

Table 1:

Category	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Seeking out information/ education for the benefit of that student (formal education, PD, trainings, self-taught/ personal research, talking to those who know the student/ family)	11	12	4
Collectivist ideologies; family or community involvement	17	8	5
Considering a situation individually, not monolithically; Removing western lens, self-positioning, not making assumptions	21	3	1
Considers external factors, including interrupted education, socioeconomic circumstances, home country in crisis, etc.	8	4	1
Specific non-Western teaching practice or behavior acknowledged/ understood; specific Western differences explained	4	0	1
Understanding a cultural or language difference	15	5	2
Accommodation made in the classroom, or something done specifically for an EL student, in order to create an equitable opportunity	18	11	7
Critique of union contracts and its shortcomings; Critique of unaccommodating policy at building specific level and/ or its limitations	7	6	0
Critique or shortcoming of teachers/ staff members' practices and circumstances	15	10	2
Critique of district curricula/ inaction, state or federal policy; shortcomings and limitations of more overt, larger powers	8	4	2
Teaching or policy suggestion; accommodation they want to see or are working towards; expectations	17	5	2
Ideology of having a cultural richness, encouraging/ enthusiastic about diversity, empathy of situations and students of different backgrounds	24	2	1

Figure 1:



Through the interviews, it was clear that the educators had many roles in this district, so they are also likely to connect the high school to other sources. District resources and links are also granted to entire districts, and typically not just to one building. Non-profits that connect families most likely serve an entire district or set of schools that feed into the high school, not just the high school itself. All this being said, much of the results apply not just to the high school explicitly, but to the district as a whole. That being said, this prompted one category to be examined twice. Below in Table 2 is one category that has been examined twice. The first time, all instances mentioning this critique were counted. The second time, only instances in this category that explicitly mentioned the high school where participants currently work at/ are affiliated with were tallied.

Table 2:

Category	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Critique or shortcoming of teachers/ staff members' practices and circumstances	15	10	2
Same critiques, but only those explicitly mentioning the high school	5	6	0

Discussion and Conclusions

Overview

I hypothesized that participants who had more cultural experiences -especially those that involve experiences with students of non-Western backgrounds- would have responses that more deeply discuss or critique policy, positively or negatively. This stemmed from an assumption that people who have had more cultural experiences would have a stronger, more well-rounded critical lens, because they have been confronted with, and had to reconcile perspectives different from their own. While all educators involved had experiences with non-Western backgrounds, the length of answers given varied greatly, which was seemingly based more on the personality of each participant. The interview with Participant 1 was over 60 minutes long, Participant 2's was a little over 30 minutes, and Participant 3's was approximately 15 minutes. Participants answered nearly all of the same questions, though due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, each interview had slightly unique questions added in real-time as well. Though the interviews varied greatly in length, many of the same questions were given, and each were given follow-up questions of some sort throughout the interview. The length also potentially varied due to the time constraints of each participant. Given the large differences in the lengths of the interviews, it makes sense that the first participant mentioned many more benefits and limitations in the high school and district, that the second participant overall mentioned less, and that the third participant mentioned the least of all. Participant 1 was the language acquisition administrator for the district, Participant 2 was the language acquisition specialist at the high school, and Participant 3 was the assistant principal of the high school studied.

Overall, however, each participant openly and candidly offered both positive and negative instances regarding the teaching and policies surrounding EL students. Also,

considering the brevity of the last participant, all participants still provided a range of examples and instances. Each participant mentioned an example for nearly every category, demonstrating a well-roundedness to the topic. While each participant seemed to be more verbose or favor a particular category, that may in part be explained by their specific job, and how that category impacts that job. For example, Participant 2 criticized teacher practices at a higher ratio than the other two. This makes sense, however, because Participant 2 is the only participant with a role that constantly partners with teachers for the entirety of their work day. So, they see teachers the most, and have the chance to see more negative instances in teaching given their constant contact with teachers.

Furthermore, although this research sought to discover specifically the accommodations being made in the high school, it was quickly made obvious that discussing only the high school, and not its fellow schools, and district as a whole, would be nearly impossible. Due to district wide teacher contracts, unions, and policies, many buildings and departments impacted the high school. There was no single policy or isolated protocol that could discuss just the high school. The fact that this research focuses on the accommodations of collectivist, community-oriented cultures also adds to the links between schools and the community. The high school may connect families with people in the community at other schools, or they may have children at other schools. Like a community, the high school proved to be a place that existed outside of itself, and was influenced by many external factors. Learning and policy are not made unique to the high school. It is shared among schools in the district and made unique by the educators that employ them within their school.

Beneficial Considerations for EL Students

Specific Accommodations Found Within the School

While there were nine categories coded for positive impacts on EL students, only two of those categories had 5 or more instances recorded from each of the three participants. These two categories were “accommodations made in the classroom, or something done specifically for an EL student, in order to create an equitable opportunity” and “Collectivist ideologies; family or community involvement.” Both of these maintained a high frequency across all three interviews. Beginning with accommodations, this research was able to learn what sort of services and actions were being taken to support EL students in the high school and throughout the high school’s district.

Participant 1 (P1) often expressed broader accommodations that can be made not just in the classroom, but at a building and district level. They explained that at the district and administrative level, specialized graduation plans were made for EL students to keep them on track to graduate at the same time as other students their level. They also stated that in their programs, they work to ensure that EL students are able to have the same opportunities as mainstream students such as AP classes, which can impact university decisions and post-graduation plans. They later explained that giving opportunities and equity through plans like these are important, because when given the support needed to succeed, EL learners were often in the top 10 of their class at graduation. Participant 2 (P2) voiced a similar opinion, explaining that they often work with teachers to help them understand the situation with every EL student, so that they are able to provide equitable education. They explained that they suggest accommodations such as modeling and visuals to assist students so that EL students are able to receive the same level of education as other mainstream students. The goal, P2 explained, is not to limit or lower expectations, but rather to allow them the same opportunities and experiences as other students. These sentiments and statements together show P1 and P2’s clear belief and

understanding that EL students can not only succeed, but flourish when given proper supports through equitable programs.

P1 also explained that there is a lot of research and conversation regarding “mirrors and windows,” where students are able to find themselves in the characters and see representation. This not only is a consideration they are making, because inspiration can also be felt from seeing a character like oneself in a novel, thus impacting a student and at times motivating them in school. It may also help these students find a sense of identity or allow them to discuss their life more easily, which in turn can impact academic performance and feelings towards academia. P2 adds a different perspective by suggesting that literature relevant to the student is an accommodation that impacts more than representation and identity because much literature known by people in the U.S. is due to a common curriculum. P2 explains that teachers should find literature that is relevant to the student so they can connect to it more easily, but also so they can engage with it the same way that Western students may be able to. Teachers cannot expect a student to know a particular book, because many books that are commonly read in the United States may be uncommon or irrelevant in the curriculum and/ or culture of an EL student. Though P2 understands and advises teachers to make this accommodation, it is unclear if teachers frequently follow these suggestions. As P2 explains, their school’s teachers were often split on who tried to learn and employ these accommodations, and who remained rigid and stuck to their old methods of teaching.

Regarding a sense of identity, P1 also told of large instances where students’ culture was considered in relation to their education and their school setting. Since much of this district has a large population of students that practice Islam, they saw that their sleep and work schedule for Ramadan could impact their learning greatly, since their school schedule did not match up to

their religious practice and celebration. Since Ramadan includes a time of fasting, and many Muslims stay up late through the night during this time, P1 explained that they worked so students did not have to take exams their first period of school. They considered the fact that their atypical sleep schedule and different eating time could impact their ability to perform on tests in the morning. They also considered that it may feel uncomfortable or isolating to sit in a cafeteria during lunch when they were fasting. P1 explained that students were given an alternative space during lunch to play games, chat, or work on homework. They also stated that at a sister school, a building wide event was held early in the morning before school, where a feast was provided for their Muslim students. In both of these instances, one being a singular event and one being recurring during Ramadan, students were shown that not only are their culture and beliefs important, but that they deserve to be honored and acknowledged by the staff at their school. Through this cultural knowledge, staff within this district was able to accommodate the schedules of students, as well as go a step further to promote identity and strengthen relationships at the school. These events and practices went beyond the classroom, and in turn promoted a sense of community and identity within the school for these EL students, and Muslim students in general.

Other small accommodations were mentioned that involved a clear cultural understanding of non-Western students, particularly those of their student populations from the Middle East. P1, for example, explained that they enter a situation with no assumptions of a student in even small tasks such as which direction to write in or what way to make a piece of paper face. They explain:

Like don't take for granted that your students are going to read left to right. You need to show them wherever you want them to start on their paper, and not penalize them. You

know, there's some teachers that are very... can be rigid and like they want the heading in the right corner and you know, I guess that's kinda how I grew up. You had to have your first and full last name, the hour, the date, and you kinda had that all in the right corner, and the holes of the paper had to be on the left side, but if you are a student who's coming from a country who reads right to left, you might not realize that your paper is upside down, and to you it's not upside down.

P3 stated something similar, identifying plagiarism as a particularly strong difference in U.S. school systems that they frequently see. P3 explained, "Whereas it may be very common for [ELs] to copy verbatim something from the internet and hand that in... obviously that's not allowed here [in the U.S.]." Thus, what is considered plagiarism in the U.S. is often not considered that way in other countries, and so teachers and staff in general must be patient and understand that they have to inform students of this change in perspective. Since plagiarism is such a heavy topic in U.S. academia, it is especially important that EL students understand this difference, or else their academic futures have the potential to suffer greatly.

All participants also mentioned the use of language services, particularly Language Line. Though P3 stated that it can be somewhat of a "pain" to use, P1 and P2 praised this source as a way to assist students when needed. This proved to serve as a strong accommodation, which is further explored in the following section.

Collectivist Ideology Found Within the School and District

The fact that collectivist ideology was found in many instances and mentions across the three interviews not only showed a cultural understanding of the many non-Western students in the district, but it also showed a concerted effort across the district at an administrative level. Inclusion of family, community, and collectivist attitudes is also immensely important for the

Middle Eastern cultures that were frequently mentioned in this research, because they are collectivist and highly community oriented. For parents of mainstream students, how a school functions is often a given because they most likely experienced a similar situation. For students who have parents of non-Western cultures or who are from schools unlike those in the U.S., it can be difficult to find the intersection of academic support and family support.

P1 demonstrated an understanding of education outside of the classroom and building itself when they explained that in some cultures, parents are not involved in the school, and it is seen as separate from the home. They explain that they teach parents how to show involvement and assist their students, which in turn demonstrates an understanding of the important hierarchy and dynamic between parent and child. This also demonstrates an understanding that learning does not happen in a vacuum, and that factors such as parental support can impact students greatly. This is further discussed when P1 explains that even if a teacher has students from Western backgrounds like themselves, it does not matter if they cannot connect to the students in front of them, and understand their own privilege in factors such as having additional resources and strong parental support. They explain that if teachers in those instances cannot understand their students and those factors, then those students will not find the success that they otherwise could.

P1 also spoke of the intersection of special education services and their EL students in regards to family. P1 expressed how in some of the families' home countries, or local area of the home country, there were not resources or supports for students who had special needs. They explained that in some cases, suggesting a child has special needs can insult the family or penalize their family name. Some families felt like conditions or behaviors that required special plans or assistance came with a stigma, and should be avoided. P1 expressed how in these

situations, they have to work with the family to show them how the U.S. operates differently, and that in their school system, students with special needs will be given an IEP, and families can be involved in a child's education. They also explain that a student will be receiving an education in the first place, and that the school has the means of caring for their child.

This highlights a few important factors in relation to education and culture. P1 first demonstrates an understanding of how non-mainstream learners in other countries may have been treated or viewed because of societal or external reasons. They also work to show the families that not only will the child receive an education, but they will receive an equitable education that the family is allowed to be a part of. These are all factors that are very uncommon in many non-Western schools, for many reasons including ones listed earlier (lack of resources, strong separation of home and school in society, etc.). The fact that P1 incorporated the family and explained these differences to the family so thoroughly, all the while understanding that the family may not agree or respond to what was being said, shows that P1 understands the importance of family and how it can impact a student's education. Not only does this reflect a collectivist ideology which links the home and school together in support, but it also provides a sort of accommodation as far as educating both the child and parents in the family on the school system when needed.

This being said, such strong communication that P1 described was often handled through their translation service, LanguageLine. P1 mentioned LanguageLine many times, especially regarding calling parents and families about their child's education and progress. Once again, the accommodation of language services in the first place also ties in heavily to the inclusion of family. They are able to introduce parents to the school district and classrooms properly this way, and P1 explains that being able to communicate is the first step they take when meeting a

new family, especially one with a background they might not know. P1 explained that not only do they give this tour, but they also allow parents to call back and ask questions, and they encourage them to do so. When not able to learn of strengths and weaknesses about the family through the school, P1 also stated that they reach out to the community members and/ or non-profit organizations that are familiar with the family. This interest and effort in learning about the family and giving them enhanced services so that they can communicate with one another easily, demonstrates that at the district level, collectivist ideology is acknowledged and supported in regard to a child's education. Through this interview, there were multiple layers and angles of how family was tied in to a child's education, thus also showing the desire of the district to provide equitable opportunity for their EL students in this instance.

P2 further explained the benefits of LanguageLine in regards to family when discussing parent/ teacher conferences. The translators are provided in order to give all parents an equal chance to be involved in their child's education. P2 also explained that more parents are likely to go to conferences when they know that translation services will be provided. What this illustrates is that not only P2 is aware of the importance of family and community to these students, but also that parents are responding and want to be involved with their child's education. It is explained that parents at times feel intimidated by the school, so services like these not only assist the student, but they allow parents to be parents and have control and participation in their child's education. This strengthens the family dynamic, which in non-Western countries where power distances between parent and child are typically greater, this may be especially important. It allows the family to maintain the culture and dynamic they are accustomed to, thus giving stability and consistency to the child as well.

Still, this is not a perfect system, as P2 also explains that having Arabic speaking translators for families does not help the families who speak other languages such as Bengali or Vietnamese. Even within this accommodation, there are still flaws and shortcomings. While it is undeniably beneficial to provide these translation services, P2 shows the nuances and difficulties of providing these services to such a diverse school. This is also true regarding how teachers learn cultural differences and about the families. All participants discussed how the level of accommodations received by a student depends on the teacher, and how much knowledge they have and want to put into considering that student. P3 also explained that cultural learning on families is largely anecdotal, demonstrating both the importance of listening to families and communities of a student, but also that teachers must be invested and ask questions to learn about a student's background. It is not required, so it depends largely on the personality of the teacher, and their view regarding what they must learn about a student to ensure their success. Further demonstrating the importance of these stories and family connections, P3 stated that they always "harp on parent contact."

Critiques

Each participant critiqued parts of the educational process openly. Given the length of the different interviews, it makes sense that P1 offered the most total critiques (30), P2 the second most (20), and P3 the least (9). When asked about accommodations and cultural considerations in the school, both Participants 1 and 2 unpromptedly criticized union contracts. P1 and P2 mentioned union contracts nearly the same amount (7 and 6 times, respectively), while Participant 3 did not at all. While any lack of response from Participant 3 could be from the brevity of their responses in the interview/ the brevity of the interview, it is still interesting that Participants 1 and 2 mentioned it so frequently. P1 is a language acquisition administrator and P2

is a language acquisition specialist, while P3 is an assistant principal that is consulted on matters regarding ELs. P1 and P2 both discussed the fact that they did not have the supports built into their union contracts for ELs, that other non-mainstream learners, such as special education learners, do have. They most likely mentioned it more because they are impacted by it daily. P3, however, has many roles in addition to being a consultant for teaching ELs. After all, P2 is a specialist in that same building and most likely advises teachers much more frequently. It is interesting that P3, despite being in the same district as both, did not see the power of their union contracts as something worth mentioning. This echoes the ideas of P1 that unless someone is deeply involved with ELs, a person may not know what is missing. P1 expressed their criticism of a shortcoming they see as far as accommodating ELs. In comparison to accommodating other non-mainstream learners, such as those in special education, they express the difference in ideology with teaching ELs. They describe how in regards to accommodating ELs, many teachers view it as “a mindset, like it’s almost a choice. Like “yes, I need to accommodate them, but maybe I’m accommodating on a test.” And it’s not about the test. It’s about your delivery of instruction.”

Regarding union contracts, both P1 and P2 expressed that the union in their district is very strong, and impacts things such as calendar holidays, and the power a teacher has in a student’s education. For example, regarding accommodating a student’s religious holiday that is not the typical Christian holidays already granted in most schools in the United States, P1 explained that providing this time off on the calendar was discussed in the union contract. This impacts students of non-Western cultures since many practice religions like Islam, which has many involved holidays that students miss school for in order to participate. This can impact anxiety about missing instruction time or exams, which P1 mentions through a story they told of

a student writing a letter to the district about this matter. This raises an important question that is similar to that of translation services, where one wonders to what extent can every child be equally accommodated? In such a diverse school, it seems unfeasible to give days off for every holiday, unless there was perhaps a policy change regarding absences and religious holidays. Like translation services, if there are many languages in the school, but the school cannot secure an in-person translator for the less frequently spoken languages, resources and practicality clearly become an issue in plans for accommodation.

P1 also criticizes how other non-mainstream students such as those in special education classrooms have a strong precedent of accommodations in contracts, such as classroom caps for student to teacher ratios. They stated that classrooms for ELs have no cap at all, and that at times 180 students could be assigned to one teacher. These are clear issues that even mainstream students do not face, and can impact the time given to these students by teachers, thus impacting performance. What this demonstrated was that although administrators were aware of both the policies impacting EL students, and the accommodations EL students needed, the policy-making decisions were outside of their power to control. Though P1 made accommodations towards students themselves, such as creating building wide events to celebrate important holidays, giving special spaces to students for religious reasons, advocating for and utilizing translators, partnering with the family and community of a student, and advocating for pedagogy to support EL students, P1 expressed their limited control over how teachers and the district support their EL students. Still, this administrator demonstrated a rich, diverse set of knowledge on ELs, specifically on the main cultures found within their district.

P2, on the other hand, explains more specific, classroom examples as to how union contracts prevent accommodations to EL students inadvertently at times. P2 mentioned how the

union contract grants teachers the power to decide how to teach, to the extent that they are not forced to provide accommodations for EL students. P2 explained that some older teachers did not want to change how they have taught for many years, and that includes learning ways to accommodate students. These accommodations included things that they believed were simple for any teacher to do such as providing visual aids, simplified language, and simplified texts. P2 also described one story of how an EL student nearly failed a class because a teacher failed to provide any sort of accommodation to that student. In the end, P2 intervened and was able to convince the teacher to provide an alternate assignment so that the student could pass the class. Still, P2 emphasized that if the teacher had not agreed to that, the student would have failed. As P2 explained, “when an administrator is telling me “yeah, I’m going to ask this teacher to allow for something else, but she has the final say,” and administration can’t do anything about it, that tells me yeah, the policy is weak.”

The examples given by P2 demonstrate a need to normalize and create accountability for teachers regarding their EL students. This is further supported when P3 states that there is no requirement or compliance piece that teachers know or learn of cultural differences within their students. Not learning of cultural differences directly impacts a teacher’s ability to determine and utilize scaffolding methods that support their EL students. P3 also acknowledged that some teachers were better at accommodating students, and some chose not to. Like P1 criticized, there is an issue in ideology where accommodating EL students feels like a pedagogical choice, and not a necessary requirement.

Regarding the critique of district, state and federal policy, and curricula required, each participant criticized these higher authorities an equally distributed amount of times. P1 with a 60-minute interview mentions it 8 times, P2 within 30 minutes mentions it 4 times, and P3 within

15 minutes mentions it 2 times. This equal distribution could indicate that no participant had a particularly strong emotion or experience tied to these laws. Common themes of this critique across all participants were a scarcity of resources to provide for students (aides for teachers and translators easily accessible) and lack of explicit policy for ELs (EL class caps, explicit protocol/accountability, etc.).

The third critique, which either criticized or identified the shortcomings of teachers and/or their circumstances was one of the more interesting findings of this research. P1 mentions 15 instances regarding this category, P2 mentions 10, and P3 mentions only 2. Still, what makes this so interesting is that only the high school was explicitly critiqued in this category. No other grade level or school was explicitly critiqued at all, in any category. Other specific grade levels and buildings were praised, but never critiqued. Moreover, the high school was not just explicitly criticized, it was also frequently criticized. More specifically, P1 criticizes the teachers' methods, behaviors, and/or circumstances of not knowing enough information about ELs 5 out of 15 times, or about 33% of the time. P2 does this 6 out of 10 instances, or 60% of the time. A majority of their criticisms towards teachers and their circumstances are directed specifically towards the high school. P3 does not do this at all, though they only ever expressed teacher shortcomings twice. Therefore, as a total, when the participants criticized the shortcomings of teachers and/or their circumstances, the high school's teachers were mentioned explicitly 11 out of 27 times, or about 41% of the time.

Again, the roles of the participants could account for these frequencies. P3 being an assistant principal at this building, not working only with EL students, and not in the classrooms of teachers every day, might not have seen these shortcomings as something that is happening directly in their own school. Their identification of shortcomings shows a knowledge that they

exist in general, but they clearly did not feel strongly enough about it being a problem to mention in their own school, the high school. P1, however, deals with many schools, and still specifically picked out secondary institutions as more problematic with teachers providing ELs with accommodations and having the trainings/ experiences needed to help them. They, along with P2, even compared the high school to lower grade levels, explaining that teachers of lower grade levels are more willing to work unitedly and provide proper accommodations for their EL students. While both make disclaimers that there are good teachers at every building, it was clear that they saw many obstacles for ELs at the high school level. P2 criticized the high school teachers at a much higher frequency than the other two participants, most likely because they work with the teachers every day. While P1 and P3 have administrative jobs that are somewhat isolated, away from instruction, P2 is meant to advise and guide teachers on teaching ELs. This can either indicate that P2 is biased against the teachers who do not accommodate as much as they would like, or it can indicate that because they work with the teachers all day, they have a much better grasp on what teachers at the high school are actually doing to accommodate their students. While the judgement on this can be subjective, based on the specific examples provided by P2, which include layers of supports and various faculty, I am more inclined to believe that they had more to say about the high school because they see more of how teachers interact with their EL students. Though there may be a bias, it does not appear to be the main reason for them having such a high frequency of critiques towards the high school, especially considering the fact that P1 lists very similar critiques as well. The critiques that P2 listed were supported by either real instances or examples of how they have seen the policy function. In this way, it is more tangible, and not less likely to be an ill-informed opinion of theirs.

Considering the Pandemic

Cultural differences were tangibly viewed in some ways because of the pandemic as well. As P1 explains, teachers have been able to literally view the inside of students' and families' homes, and are able to see the tangible differences between lifestyles and cultures. This technology, along with navigating technology, has highlighted a few differences that EL students have in their homes. Regarding family, staff are communicating with family and explaining technology to ensure that students are logging into class and doing online assignments. Since teachers are not seeing students in person to motivate or encourage them, it appeared that parents were frequently called.

Furthermore, regarding not just the cultural differences, but also socioeconomic differences between staff and their EL and mainstream students alike, staff is learning how students may not have reliable internet services or electricity, or may not be able to focus as well because they share a room with multiple siblings/ use the living room to sleep. So this being stated, staff was able to learn of many external needs that intersected with many of their EL students as well. Ideally, this will prompt more action to be taken in the future, and for more considerations to be made towards EL students. The schools have utilized special support staff to contact families more than ever, and a concerted effort is clearly being made per the participants' statements. P3 in particular explains the strong attempts being made regarding communication, which is especially difficult to achieve during such an unprecedented time with such limited resources. Still, it is difficult to see if this communication will persist, and if it will persist across the entire school district in the future.

Moving forward, it is hopeful to see that administrators made a concerted effort to learn and understand their students. Still, administrators are not the ones in front of students every day, and as the interviews demonstrate, they cannot force a teacher to employ accommodations. They

are also not our policy makers, and find themselves somewhere between the two, advocating for EL support on both an instructional and policy level. Though it is hopeful to see people in power having such a strong passion and understanding for EL students of non-Western backgrounds, it is also disheartening to learn that it is often from their own experiences that they learned these things, and then sought them out. P1 discussed this when they said of cultural learning and preparation:

There's a lot of equity work that's happening the last few years. So there's definitely trainings out there that are addressing this issue. My biggest concern is it's not getting to the people who need it. It's getting to the ESL people who already have this open mindset.

This reflects the phenomenon that only the teachers and educators who are already interested and somewhat self-aware take these classes. They hope that in the future, this will change. Hopefully in the future, all teachers show a strong level of understanding and ability to accommodate. Then it would follow that administrators would not have to disclaim that there is no policy to hold teachers accountable for utilizing EL scaffolding practices, and that they cannot force a teacher to consider EL students in the classroom. This is seen when P2 explains one teacher that considers and accommodates EL students greatly. They explain "everything she does is with excitement and enthusiasm, with visuals, with pictures," thus echoing the idea that personality and personal convictions of educators currently determine if EL students in their classroom will be accommodated.

Limitations of the Study

There is a limitation in that my person of contact volunteered to be part of this research, and was therefore already invested in it potentially. Restraints caused by the pandemic such as

failing to interview teachers also limited this study greatly. This research shifted to the administrative and specialist perceptions exclusively without the involvement of teachers who have direct contact with EL students under various guidelines and policies, which could easily have contrasted greatly from the teachers. Their perception of the truth varies, as it would with any participant, so we cannot draw conclusions about the school with certainty based on these three participants' responses alone. Moreover, the fact that policies and rhetoric that supports EL students was a part of so many layers, including union contracts, made it very difficult to organize and determine how ELs were being represented on paper. Again, this knowledge was learned through the perceptions of the participants, so no definitive statement can be made about the high school and district's rhetoric on ELs and their learning.

This cultural understanding and clear effort to accommodate students by multiple educators demonstrates a clear awareness of the needs of EL students. This also demonstrates that perhaps the large number of criticisms and shortcomings mentioned are not an inherently bad thing. Rather, the criticisms and shortcomings demonstrate an awareness and a desire to improve within their own building and district. The instances mentioned that were beneficial for EL students demonstrate that despite shortcomings within the high school, the administrators and specialists in the high school, and overall district, still have a good understanding of what the needs of EL students are. It is a great benefit to EL learners that these more authoritative figures have such a knowledge, yet based on the attitudes of the participants, it seems that many mainstream teachers at the high school and throughout the district still need to reach this level of awareness also.

Appendices

Appendix A: Email for Recruitment (Sent on Behalf of This Research)

Hello everyone,

I was contacted by Grand Valley State University and it was approved by [redacted] for us to participate in a Master Thesis Research Proposal. Melissa Dean is the graduate student conducting the interviews via Zoom. Her research was IRB approved, which means she cannot share any personal information, identifying factors that would lead back to [the school district], [the high school], or anyone she interviews. You are receiving this invite due to the role you play with teaching or supporting English Learners at [the high school]. For those who I do not normally work with, I did reach out to building administration for some recommendations to create this contact list.

Please see the Letter of Consent and the Invitation attached. If you wish to participate, you will contact Melissa Dean and do not need to include anyone else from [the district] in your reply. Keep this confidential. If you choose not to participate, that is totally fine but please contact Melissa so that we can support her in next steps. I will not know either way if you choose to participate. Melissa will simply reach out to me if she needs more teacher names. I will not hear your responses and am simply the third-party contact to connect Melissa to our staff.

I just finished my interview, it took less than an hour (although I am a chatter and extended it a bit 😊) but I know that her committee is very respected and wants to hear from those in the trenches.

This is completely voluntary and any questions you may have should also go to Melissa as she plans her research.

Thank you all and hope you have a great first week of March.

Appendix B: Invite for Recruitment



INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

I am Melissa Dean, a graduate student in the MA-Applied Linguistics program at Grand Valley State University. I'm currently working on my thesis project, which is why I write today.

I'm interested in finding out how public secondary schools in Michigan are accommodating their rapidly growing population of English learners (ELs). To find out, I want to talk to teachers and administrators who work in the secondary school context. I've selected Warren Mott High School (WMHS) as a research site because it is in one of the most demographically diverse districts in the state. Thankfully, the administrators of Warren Consolidated Schools have granted me permission to conduct my study here.

What would the study involve?

I would like to interview several teachers and administrators at WMHS about their experiences working with ELs. While I want to include faculty whose work focuses on ELs, I also want to include those whose focus is *not* English learning—that is, faculty who specialize in various content areas (e.g. English, history)—as ELs appear in courses across the curriculum.

Interviews would be conducted virtually, via Zoom, and would involve meeting with me once for about 45-60 minutes (date/time to be arranged).

Why have I received this message?

You've been identified as a potential participant by the WCS Administrator of Language Acquisition, Dr. Christina Kozlowski. Please note that while Dr. Kozlowski has helped me identify you as a potential interviewee, she will not know whether you participate—or what you say in response to questions if you do. Participants' identities will be kept confidential and their responses will remain anonymous throughout the project and in all presentations of findings.

What if I'm not sure about participating?

To better help you decide, I've attached the informed consent form for participants, which provides more details about the study and the rights of participants.

If you have any questions you'd like to discuss before deciding, please feel free to contact me at: deanmel@mail.gvsu.edu

What if I am interested in participating?

If you are interested in participating, please read the consent form fully, then write back saying you would like to participate. (If you have questions before agreeing to participate, just email me). I will then contact you by March 15 to schedule a mutually agreeable time for the interview. To be clear, the consent form does not have to be signed, but rather fully read and understood. While your arranging to do the interview implies your informed consent, I will also ask you to verbally consent to the interview at the start of our virtual meeting.

Thank you. I realize how busy educators' lives are, and I appreciate your taking the time to consider my request.

Sincerely,
Melissa Dean, MAAL Student



1. **TITLE** ELs in a Michigan High School: Educators' Perceptions and Cultural Considerations
2. **RESEARCHERS**
Principal Investigator (PI): Colleen Brice, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Project Coordinator: Melissa Dean, Graduate Student
Authorizing Official: Ashley Shannon, Head of Department of English
3. **PURPOSE** To learn how English learners from non-western backgrounds are accommodated in a secondary school in one of the most diverse districts in Michigan, Warren Consolidated Schools. To answer this question, I plan to review applicable school policies and interview representative teachers and administrators.
4. **PROCEDURES**
 - If interested in participating after reading this consent form, participants will reply to the researcher, who will then arrange a time to meet virtually for an interview.
 - The interview will be conducted via Zoom, and your responses will be audio-recorded.
 - The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes.
5. **RISKS** Responses will be collected and/or stored for this research project. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there exists a minimal risk that data could be lost or stolen.
6. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU** Participating in this study may help you identify practices you have found effective in working with ELs.
7. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SOCIETY** As someone with your career, you offer a unique perspective that will give insight into your school's policy and ESL practices. This can potentially influence future policy and research, especially in Michigan.
8. **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION** Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate. You may quit at any time without any penalty to you.
9. **PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY** Your name will not be known to anyone other than the researcher. All information collected from you or about you is for the sole purpose of this research study and will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by law. In very rare circumstances specially authorized university or government officials may be given access to our research records for purposes of protecting your rights and welfare or to make sure the research was done properly.
10. **PERSONAL DATA** Personal data to be collected in this study includes: your name and email address. Sensitive personal data will be handled and processed only by researchers conducting this study, or by specially authorized university or government officials to make sure the research was done properly.

11. **DATA TRANSFER** All data provided to the researchers must occur while you are physically in the United States.
12. **DATA SECURITY** GVSU is committed to keeping your data secure. We have put in reasonable physical, technical, and administrative data protection measures for this research. If you suspect a data breach has occurred, please contact the Vice Provost for Research Administration at GVSU, 1 Campus Drive, Allendale, MI. Phone: 616-331-3197. E-mail: rci@gvsu.edu.
13. **DATA RETENTION** Personal data will be retained for two months following completion of the project.
14. **WITHDRAWING CONSENT** You have the right to withdraw your consent to the collection and processing of data at any time. If you would like to withdraw from participating in this study, please contact the lead researcher: Melissa Dean, email: deanmel@mail.gvsu.edu. If you would like to request that your personal data be removed from this study, please contact the Vice Provost for Research Administration at Grand Valley State University, 1 Campus Drive, Allendale, MI. Phone: 616-331-3197. E-mail: rci@gvsu.edu.
15. **AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE**
By replying to the email this form was sent from, you are agreeing to the following:
 - The details of this research study have been explained to me, including what I am being asked to do and the anticipated risks and benefits;
 - I have had an opportunity to have my questions answered;
 - I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in the research as described on this form;
 - I am voluntarily agreeing to have my personal data used for this study and acknowledge that I must be in the United States during the interview;
 - I may ask more questions or discontinue my participation at any time without penalty.
16. **CONTACT INFORMATION**
If you have any questions about the study, you may contact: Melissa Dean at <deanmel@mail.gvsu.edu>

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance & Integrity at GVSU. Phone: 616-331-3197. E-mail: rci@gvsu.edu.

This study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Grand Valley State University (Protocol #21-155-H).

Teachers:

1. What do you know about the cultural context of teaching and learning (or schooling) in the non-Western cultures of your students? Can you give some specific examples?
2. How did you learn about those cultural differences?
3. If the teacher knows about specific cultural learning differences: How do those cultural differences inform how you teach students from those cultures? In other words, do you accommodate the cultural learning needs of your students?
 - a. Do you modify activities you plan for your classes, taking specific consideration of students from non-Western cultures? If so, what does that look like?
 - b. If you don't modify or accommodate, do you scaffold the activity for those students? If so, what does that look like?
 - c. Have you ever had two or more non-Western cultures in the same classroom? If so, do you have to consider each culture separately, or do non-Western cultures fit a general template you have created?
4. If the teacher does not know about specific cultural learning differences: Have you noticed a difference in how your students from Western cultures versus non-Western cultures engage in different kinds of activities? Can you give some examples?
5. Do you have any examples of good teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who did take cultural differences into account?
6. Do you have any examples of problematic teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who either did or did not take cultural differences into account? In other words, considering culture, do you have any examples of when a teacher considered it and the teaching didn't go well, or when they didn't consider it and the teaching didn't go well?
7. How has your training and/or experience prepared you to understand the cultural aspects of learning that your students experience?
8. Do you incorporate the family/ community into non-Western students' learning? If yes, explain how, and if no, explain why not.
9. If you have a student from a background you are not experienced with, what steps would you take to ensure their education?
10. Are there any accommodations or practices that you would like to employ in your classroom, but are unable to? (This can include accommodations you wanted in the classroom prior to COVID.) If so, describe these accommodations and how you would like to see them implemented.

Administrators:

1. Do your teachers know about the cultural context of teaching and learning (or schooling) in the non-Western cultures of your students? Can you give some specific examples?
2. Do you have an expectation that they either know about or learn about those kinds of differences?

3. Do you expect that their teaching activities take cultural differences into account? Why or why not?
 - a. If yes: Do you have classrooms where students of two or more non-Western backgrounds are in the same class? If so, do you expect that teacher to consider both of those cultures separately and create something cohesive, or do you expect them to have a generalized template they can apply to any EL student?
4. Do you have any examples of good teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who did take cultural differences into account?
5. Do you have any examples of problematic teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who either did or did not take cultural differences into account? In other words, considering culture, do you have any examples of when a teacher considered it and the teaching didn't go well, or when they didn't consider it and the teaching didn't go well?
6. How has your training and/or experience prepared you to understand the cultural aspects of learning that your students experience?
7. Do you encourage and/ or expect teachers to incorporate the family or community of non-Western students' learning? Could you give some examples of how?
 - a. Do you incorporate the family/ community into the student's learning? If so, could you give specific examples how?
8. If you have a student from a background you and/ or the school is not experienced with, what steps would you take to ensure the student's education?
9. Are there any accommodations or policies you would like to make available or employ in the school, but are unable to? (This can include accommodations you wanted in the school prior to COVID.) If so, describe these accommodations and how you would implement them.

Appendix E: Interview Transcriptions

Interview 1:

Researcher: Do your teachers know about the cultural context of teaching and learning (or schooling) in the non-Western cultures of your students? Can you give some specific examples?

Participant: Before I answer that, can I just ask if you can elaborate on the cultural context of non-Western.

R: So for non-Western I am talking about anything that is a culture that is outside of the United States, North America, or is European, or that more individualistic kind of culture typically. And then for cultural context, how those cultures then pertain to the students' schooling and learning.

P: So that's a very large question. I would say that the teachers who are in the EL department, so the department that I oversee, have a very good understanding of the different cultures of their students. If they get a student from a different cultural background or a different background than what they've served in the past, they do a good job of getting some research, talking to the family, and then at the same time, trying not to over stereotype. So just because you get a student from Iraq in the Middle East doesn't mean their story is the same from another student in Iraq in the Middle East. So even within a family, you know, each generation of student might have a different situation.

For example, we get a lot of refugee situations, so depending on the role of the family, their son might not be in school. They might be working or supporting the mom, but then two of the younger siblings are in school. And so, even within a family context, you might have a student who comes over with a different role in that family, and a different situation in society where they might not have transcripts for example because they had three years of, you know, no school. So, I feel like the EL department is really good about getting to know that situation. I think our counselors are doing a nice job of educating themselves. I think there's a counselor [at the high school] that I probably talk to weekly who is really trying to think outside the box, and really help different situations with students, as far as academic context and trying to get them on a graduation plan.

There is definitely a gap, or some misconceptions I think out there when it comes to maybe religious celebrations, or how do you honor... for example we have a growing number of Bengali students and a growing number of students who practice Islam, but we don't have a calendar that reflects their holidays. So how can we create a system in school when they're here during Ramadan for example, or they're, maybe taking the day off for Eid. Or two days off for Eid, depending on the celebration. But we don't necessarily have it off in the calendar, where we get Good Friday and Easter off for example. Well, Easter off sure, but good Friday we get off traditionally, and so those are conversations we have at the district level of how can we, when we go in... and that's a union contract. So, our union contract is tied to the calendar- the school calendar that gets negotiated. So, this year is the first year in nine years that our district actually has a contract that's being- that the calendar's going to be open.

So those are conversations that people above me are having on can we advocate on the calendar side to help naturally support some of those cultural experiences that are outside of our, you know, American typical Christian calendar. I would say that the generic- if I was an English 9, freshman English teacher, or a math teacher, that they might not have as large an understanding unless they have sought to have gained that information with the counselor or the

EL teacher, or have a really large, like have a relationship or a connection with the student. I think it's more on an individual basis at that point... we do include some training, but not necessarily on- you know we have 70 languages and many different cultures, so we haven't had a mass training across the district, but we have some schools that are heavier in our Bengali and Muslim populations who have done some training.

So, a group of teachers and a principal, or administrative team may have gone to some trainings to learn more about Arab Americans, or Muslim students, and how the myths [are] about that background. And then I would say... this might not be "tied" to this question, but we are doing a lot of studying and work at a district level right now, on having diverse texts. So, a lot of literature and research out there about having "mirrors and windows." So being able to see myself in the books that I am reading, but also have a window into somebody else's life. Just because I might not be at a diverse school doesn't mean I shouldn't be reading about diverse characters. And so, we are starting small with some of our lower el(ementary*) because we have some grant money, from the state on kindergarten, first, second, third grade grant money that we are using the opportunity to start getting some diverse texts into our curriculum for those teachers.

But we're taking that approach ideally up through the higher grades, as we start looking at curriculum reform, and being more equitable in our curriculum. That's going to be a larger project. But to me, if you're a teacher who's teaching a subject for a long time, or you're used to using the same novels or texts to teach a concept, you might not have the opportunity to go learn about another culture, because it's not within the context of your teaching, if that makes sense. So what can we do to infuse it into the work so that it's not an isolated, separate conversation, but it's really infused into being curious about your kids and about the students that are in front of you. So obviously we are getting better at it, but we definitely- I can't speak to every teacher having a great knowledge of those different cultures

R: Do you have an expectation that they either know about or learn about those kinds of differences?

P: So the teachers that I work directly with, we really do spend a lot of time of making sure we're doing best practices and not taking something for granted that a student would know a certain concept and, you know, honoring their traditions and what more they can bring to it. I think where there's some work to be done too is... I would say there's administrators like this and some EL teachers, and other teachers. I just think there's a very fine line to making sure you're really embracing that culture and that understanding versus sticking at a surface level for example. So you know, black history month is a really great example of that. If you only celebrate black history in February and you do it by celebrating food or reading an author one time, you're staying at the surface level. You're not really embedding it into what you do. So there are some buildings who like to do cultural nights, or ethnic food night, or bring in- every kid picks a country and gets to study their background, which is great, but to me I feel like that still sits at like surface or compliance, like I'm checking off a box, even if you don't have bad intentions, because if you truly honored that culture, you would infuse it into everything you're doing. Right?

So it's not... for some of our teachers, it's just, it's again, modeling. Like don't take for granted that your students are going to read left to right. You need to show them wherever you want them to start on their paper, and not penalize them. You know, there's some teachers that are very... can be rigid and like they want the heading in the right corner and you know, I guess

that's kinda how I grew up. You had to have your first and full last name, the hour, the date, and you kinda had that all in the right corner, and the holes of the paper had to be on the left side, but if you are a student who's coming from a country who reads right to left, you might not realize that your paper is upside down, and to you it's not upside down.

So, you know, being curious and asking those questions I think is really important, and again, our EL teachers are very much in tune to that, and then they kind of play that leadership role within their buildings, to help those conversations start, and the more experience someone has with diverse kids, the more they're gonna learn from it. I would say you can see a difference in some of the classes that always will have entry- like newcomer students for example. So, if I was a student who came in as a middle school kid from another country and got to high school, I'm gonna get through the typical high school classes so 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade English for example, and by the time I get to 11th and 12th grade, my teacher might not even realize I'm an English learner, or I might have strong enough English that they might not realize that's a problem, and, then you have kids who come in as a freshman or sophomore, who are in our entry level classes, and move on to like, let's say English 9, 10, or 11, and if you're an English 11 or 12 teacher who might not have as much experience of getting more newcomers because they never get to your level of class, then you might not have as much experience to pull from, and so, you know, I'm at the district level, so we talk a lot about access and support.

So, first you wanna make sure that your program allows kids to have access to those higher classes, or AP curriculums or opportunities that other kids who were born here have. So then, okay getting them into an English 11 or English 12 class, a higher level class, so that they can continue to grow and have that curriculum. But, at the same time, if there's not support in that class, it doesn't matter if that student got the access. They still need to be able to be supported. So, we spend a lot of our efforts in the academic supports because that is a lot of mindsets in secondary- is that it's about student effort, and it's not always about student efforts, it's about what language supports or what other accommodations would you need to give to them to help them reach whatever your standard is for that class. So, it's hard.

I don't think you can talk about culture without talking about the systems you have in place, and the policies you might have as a district, and the curriculum that you may have, because if your population of students is changing, then you need to make sure that your curriculum is supporting them, and the mindset of your teachers is supporting them. So as much as I want to, you know I don't, we don't necessarily have a "we're going to teach you about this culture today" because then it's like an isolated event, you know what I mean? It's not necessarily built into everything we do. So we have buildings that are doing a very good job of that. So, for example, we have a high school and a middle school that [have a] very strong Bengali population for example. And we don't really have an in-house interpreter for that. We do have an online support interpreter that's over two hundred languages, so we use that all the time.

But we know that we need to accommodate them because, for example, during Ramadan, we don't want them hanging out in the cafeteria when we know they can't eat. Or we don't want to expect them to be up ready to go for a test first hour, when they were up you know, let's say, well depending on the time of year, but let's just say they just got done breaking their fast, and they're gonna go back to sleep, and then they're gonna go back to school, so, it's going to be interesting this year, with some of our kids being in person and some kids are still virtual of what that might look like, but our schools have been really accommodating to that. And having an extra place for them, can they go down the hall, is there a teacher that can supervise them? Can they do games, or have like a study hall, or a place where they can just read so that they feel

respected? Is there a place they can go pray in their school if they're practicing? So our schools have been doing a good job of thinking outside the box that way, which is really what you want. You want things that organically happen to meet the students' needs too, you don't necessarily want someone top-down saying you must do x, y, and z, because then there's no "why" behind what you're doing. I feel like we're doing a pretty good job with that, I don't know if it's, like I said, crossed into the curriculum expectations and academic expectations yet. But I think we're doing a good job of belonging and having a good diverse group of kids be honored for their accomplishments.

R: Do you expect that their teaching activities take cultural differences into account? Why or why not?

P: Yes so I would expect that, however, the challenge is I am also- I am not the curriculum director and I don't get to write the curriculum. I do get to advocate for my students and really help people understand that there's gaps in our curriculum to reach the populations that we have. I feel like those are some critical conversations that we've been having at the district level. But it's- I think a lot also depends on your structure of your district, and what your union contract allows you to do or not do. So, it's a fine line to dictate some of those things because there's some things in the teacher contract that are tied to curriculum and academic freedom. But a quality teaching situation would be that you include students' life experiences just like you would for a Western culture, right? So if I, you know, to think of an example that would've crossed cultures, I grew up in a two parent household, but I have half siblings and they lived with me, so if I was doing a lesson, and I didn't honor non-traditional families, I might miss out on some of my students who come from divorced families, or some of my students who have single parent homes. So, I think people are very comfortable in understanding the nuances in an American culture and making sure, "okay, I need to make sure that if I have a mixed-race family, or if I have a single dad or a single mom, that I want to be inclusive, not make things seem like it's only the mom that can play this certain role." So I feel like we do a better job at that at gender, and we do a better job at that in you know, different American nuances that might be in a family, versus naturally understanding the roles of a culture that is outside of yours. And I don't think that's intentionally done, but I think at this point if you're an educator, none of your undergrad or master's really trains you in that, unless you're going into the field of ESL, or TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages), or bilingual education, it's really not infused into the program's- in the masses, as much as I'd like to see it done.

So, I think the coaching we have, and the conversations the coaches are having with teachers to expand their understanding is key, but I do know that, at the same time, our coaches do get very frustrated because they feel like the empathy is not always there, for some of the high school kids particularly, because they (teachers) have very high expectations but not understanding, you know, how to meet the needs of those kids. So it's not that I don't think the standards should not be there, I think it should. I think that making sure it's happening at all levels, like from a curriculum content level and delivery of lessons is really through your PLC (professional learning community) work, and through your building, and through your collaboration with teachers. And it's not, we don't have something at the district level here, as much as I'd love to see it, I think it would fall into some of that equity and curriculum work that we're kind of in the middle of getting started on, but we're behind in that aspect of making sure we offer, you know, unique classes.

We have you know, world religions are infused into our classes. We did some trainings with seventh grade teachers last year on incorporating different religions, and some really great resources. Well I shouldn't say last year. Two Junes ago. Incorporating some seventh grade, cause that's [when] world history happens- so we incorporated some of those resources and I know that that curriculum coach uses it with the high school I think it's in tenth grade they get world history, so infusing it that way into, when you're learning about different cultures, but again that's like a topic in itself. I don't know if it's necessarily infused across, I don't think it's infused across the masses. I think there are some key people who are really good about making certain people feel like they belong, but I feel like there's a lot of teachers at the secondary level, and it depends on the school culture. I think if you're a school who's really embracing belonging and really embracing connecting to your students, and really embracing getting every kid to feel like they're connected to your building, that you're doing a really nice job at making sure all cultures are feeling represented. You know we have some schools where you walk in and every single, every flag of one of their students' home countries is on display. And they have a diversity club where they might list all the languages that are spoken in their school, and kind of embrace those different cultures that way. But again, getting that into the academic content teachers, in their approach to learning and to your question about like teaching strategies, that is definitely not something that is a strong point, in my opinion, yet.

R: Do you have classrooms where students of two or more non-Western backgrounds are in the same class? If so, do you expect that teacher to consider both of those cultures separately and create something cohesive, or do you expect them to have a generalized template they can apply to any EL student?

P: So we definitely have schools that have multiple cultures within a newcomer class. So it depends on each year. This year it happens to be that our one class of level ones, like our brand new newcomers all speak Arabic, but they all come from different experiences, so a few are refugees, a few, a couple are in their second year in America, from I believe Lebanon, then one has been in America for a few years, but has switched school districts so much that she still needed that support. So that just happens to be that there are, there's one language, but even within one language, there's so many different cultures. And we have, I can't speak to that group of six, I wanna say that one of the students in that group is Muslim. So that could be a different culture within that room too.

But a lot of our schools are mixed classes, like we have a high Arabic and Chaldean population, and we are growing in our Bengla speaking families. But we have, every building probably has between 30 and 40 different languages, so you could have a class where you have some, you know, Vietnamese, Mung, Thai, Christian-Iraqees, Muslim-Iraqees, Lebanese, Saudi, a variety of students in your class. When it comes to language content, we really try to focus on the strategies to make your language comprehensive and do what's best practice in the EL world if that makes sense. We always remind students that we want to honor their first language, not, you know, we do not want to have someone walk into a room and see it says English only, and to isolate that student's native tongue by any means. But we also know that it's also not realistic for a teacher to try to translate every word in five, six, seven languages to get their point across, at that point, you know, you're going to lose comprehension. So we have coaches at two of our high schools.

But at the same time, if you're a teacher who is not getting to know your kids, you wouldn't even know there's cultural differences because you can't assume someone walking in

is different, other than you know, some people might assume if they hear an accent, they might guess where that student's background is. Or they might, you know, if a girl is wearing a hijab they can make an assumption, but that doesn't mean that defines that culture. Right? So you want to be very careful about that.

I think the other piece that might be interesting to talk about is we know certain populations are harder to help mental health wise. Like there's without stereotyping a group of people, we also know that... For example, I work very closely with the Chaldean- well and I want you to... can I make a sidenote? Don't use the word Chaldean, because that's like very much targeted to us (Westerners)- so Iraqi, or I don't even know if you want to say Iraqi, but like refugees in general, situation. But anyways, because that's something that will tie very easily to our area, but community non-profits that serve a certain population of kids- they do a really nice job of reaching those families, so we have a really good situation where if we have a student who speaks a certain language and practices a certain belief, and we are worried about them, to connect that family to a non-profit outside of the school who could provide the services they might need. Whether it is mental health, groceries, job applications, trainings for their parents, ESL classes, all these different pieces that are outside of a school, we have a community organization who is wonderful at that.

But we don't have that for all of our cultures, so I'm actually having a harder time connecting with, finding a Bengali resource like that, so I'm trying to find a group to kind of get in, to make that connection and get in to help support that group, and actually, most recently is our Vietnamese population. There's a lot of Vietnamese families who might not understand the importance of talking about some of these mental health concerns that their students are experiencing during the pandemic. And they're very private, and they don't necessarily want to you know, for lack of a better word, spill their secrets to a non-Vietnamese family, right? So we are making really good connections with counselors, when a counselor connects with a student, they're getting the information they need. If we ever have a severe situation, where we need to then recommend they call for support, that's where we're kinda having a harder time getting the momentum going because they might not feel comfortable calling someone who doesn't have an interpreter or doesn't understand their culture, but wants to help their child, if that makes sense. So not even within the school, but like, the next step if it's something beyond school, that is something.

I wish, I would like to see more of- connections between schools and county wide ISDs with those community resources, like those non-profits, like the temples, or the mosques, or the non-profits that service that group of immigrants, that they could make those connections with the schools. And I know that's a hard line to cross over, and once you have it, it's fantastic. We definitely don't have that for you know, every single situation or culture in our district. But we are really hoping that... and you know, I can speak to that from my just personal life, my family. My husband's parents are from Poland, and Hamtramck is a very large Polish community in Michigan, and they all kind of stick to themselves, right? Like they go to the Polish store, they- my father in law works at the Polish credit union, everyone kind of sticks within their own community, so I don't know how you can non-characterize that, but just as an example. So communities tend to stay within each other, and so if they don't- if they haven't made that cross over, or a school hasn't gotten to the right connection to trust us to help service them, then you might not ever make that bridge, right? So, what are ways we can go outside of just school to get those community connections to help them. And I saw some really good efforts this past year with the census, but then the pandemic hit, and so some of the census work that was really active

in March and April, you know, sizzled a little bit at the same time, because we were all being quarantined and isolated at that time.

R: Do you have any examples of good teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who did take cultural differences into account?

P: Oh gosh, I'm sure I could come up with some examples. I don't have anything... you're looking for curriculum type example, like a lesson, or a school environment?

R: It can be either or, and if you also can't think right now, we can come back to that

P: So I would say a school environment would be one of our middle schools, who, they ended up having about 100 kids during Ramadan, where they would come down to the media center, provided games, and a place for them to study or read, and just honor their religion so they didn't have to be in the cafeteria. And they would talk about different cultures, and the way they celebrated Eid, and just what that time of the calendar year meant to them. And then as a district we celebrated those students and their advocacy for their religion and their beliefs, by once when Ramadan was over, we were able to do like a special lunch for them. So myself, and the assistant super intendent for curriculum, we went over there with the principal, fed them lunch, and really just wanted to celebrate with them. And really just tell them how important it was to us that they felt comfortable that they were able to voice their needs, and that they were able to have a safe space in school during that time. So that was a building-wide, I mean it was all hands on deck, there were several teachers and counselors and the principal that was really behind that, and that was fantastic.

We have teachers who, just in their everyday style, do a nice job of providing learning opportunities that make students feel comfortable to share examples of themselves. We as a county, this past Friday, we just finished our county wide diversity event, where we bring kids from all across the county, every school participates, that's a middle school and high school, we celebrate, we have a message, a theme every year. And the kids go through learning together, and really to open up conversations, and I think that was a really nice event. It always gives people perspective into others, and kids wanting to learn more from people who are different from them, and that's a really good, you know, you leave with that momentum, and I just got out of a meeting of okay what's the action planning now? Like now that we have this momentum going, kids want to advocate for some changes within their building, or some student advocacy even if things are going well. So you know, that's something that I follow up with, from my lens of equity and diversity of looking for, you know, how can we support that work and keep it going? So it can cross over into you know, the way students interact with the kids, or the kids, what social groups or opportunities they might have at their school.

I can't really think of an academic example right now, only because I haven't really been in a lot of academic secondary classrooms lately. But even within our EL services, we have students who are able to bring a cultural respect to the questions that the teacher asks. And honestly this year more than ever, at the elementary level at least, they're putting on their cameras, so people are seeing into their homes, they're seeing the cultural nuances of their family, seeing you know, just how a home might look different from theirs, how they're celebrating, how they might dress, the food that they're eating. You know, some of them are doing virtual birthday parties with kids to connect with them, and they're making their favorite ethnic dish at home that they normally wouldn't you know be having those conversations in school. So, there's been some struggles for sure with the pandemic, but I will say that the teachers who are really working with their students, especially in small groups, they're getting a

better insight into the students' home lives that they wouldn't necessarily get in school because it's not just, you know, highlighted to them.

R: Going back to that event that you talked about for Ramadan, how do you think the students reacted to that?

P: They were really open and honored to be respected, especially as you know, kids get older in age. These were 6th, 7th, and 8th graders at that one building and so they were I think pleased that adults went out of their way to accommodate them and get to know them. You could tell that they had good relationships with the teachers who were in that space. And then even myself and my boss as outsiders coming to that school, coming to them, they were very open to why they were doing what they were doing, they appreciated us celebrating them, and also one student wrote a letter and actually a petition to get Eid off on the calendar, and you know my boss kind of explained that we don't have control over the calendar, it's part of calendar negotiation, and my boss still has that letter and he's brought it up again this year, like we're going into negotiations and this student wrote, and you know, it was a newcomer student, so he definitely got some support to write this letter, and gave some very valid points of "my family that lives in a different county where they do get those days off of school, are able to celebrate, and I had to take off school and I was able to celebrate but then it counts as an absence, and I'm worried about the test I might have missed" and things like that. I think there, I mean just like all kids, kids want adults to not just talk to them, but to actually hear what they say and then do something with that information. I think whenever you have a student who opens up and you don't do anything with it, then you're not helping that relationship or trust with that student. And you want to promote the, you know, challenging ideas, so you need to make sure you're using student voice to make decisions and honor what your kids really want, right?

Yeah, it was definitely a positive experience and anytime I meet a student that is open to sharing, you know, at the event I was talking about last, the county wide event, we always have a student panel, and our district always provides the panelists, and we always have kids who, they present to other students on why they left their home country and what they experienced. This year being virtual, we had two kids that made videos, and explained what life was like in their home country, and what their life was here, and how they're getting adjusted, and what they wish people would know about, you know, themselves, and I think that's really important because 1. I don't think kids necessarily feel comfortable talking about themselves, especially if they don't have trust or a relationship with the people that are listening to them. But I also think it's important to build empathy and have people walk in someone else's shoes, and to hear that everyone's story is so different because, in our district, before I had this job maybe 8, 10 years ago, we were only getting a certain stereotype of EL student. We were only getting all refugees, all interrupted schooling, and so many people made that their definition of what an English learner is, and instead, you know, speaking another language is such an asset. It's such a gift that many of us wish that we had, and it will actually be an advantage for these students when they get into college or careers, or their next, whatever their next post-high school plan is, and so many people just don't either see it that way, or they have a very challenging mindset of "oh if you're an English learner you struggle." And that's not the case. If you give them the opportunity and you give them the support they want, some of our English learners are our highest performing students, you know, they're on the top ten to graduate, they exit the programs.... I think it's really, I think that's really the most important message, is making sure that whoever you're working with, whether you're... I don't think anyone intentionally does it, but making

sure you don't have a single story for somebody. And I think we do a better job at that gender wise than I think we do about ethnicity. I think we meet someone or we have one experience or we only have experiences based on social media, and you know, we're all guilty of it on some level you know, but someone's whose views are different from yours, not having a single story for that person, or their background.

And I am guilty of that too you know, I might make an assumption that if you're a- not to be political, but I might have an assumption that if you're a Republican you might follow... you might look like this in my opinion in my head, and you might act a certain way, and that's not the case, right? Like I need to make sure that I'm not getting myself into that bubble and defining somebody as one person because that's who might be on social media, right? So I think as the more empathetic you are as a person, and the more open minded that you are as a person, the more that's going to cross over into your students, and it might not even be an EL or a cultural piece, it might just be about your culture. If you grew up in a high middle class background with two parents, you were good at school and became a teacher, and you expect all kids to have a parent at home to help them with homework, and school to come easy for them, you're gonna have a really hard time connecting with your struggling students because they might not all have that same situation. So it doesn't even matter. They could be in an American, Western culture if you will, but if you're not really in tune to the kids in front of you, it won't matter if they're born here, non EL kids or not.

R: Do you have any examples of problematic teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who either did or did not take cultural differences into account? In other words, considering culture, do you have any examples of when a teacher considered it and the teaching didn't go well, or when they didn't consider it and the teaching didn't go well?

P: You know, that's a great question. I can't think of an example academic wise off the top of my head, but I do know that I'm sure that happens often. But I guess my only comment on that would be thankfully that person took that risk to include that culture, and then hopefully they learned as in a learning experience. And I think that, you know, I don't assume that I have all the answers, so I might call a family, and think that they might need an interpreter for example, and they really don't. Or think that, you know, they want something for their student, and they might want a different path for their student. And that's okay, to me it's most important to be curious, which also I guess comes from... I'm a trauma informed and resilient trainer, so we're doing a lot of mindset work with our schools, and I just think for any teacher, you need to be curious about why a student is acting a certain way, or what a student needs, not feeling like you're coming in all encompassing and knowing the answer. If you take a risk and it doesn't go well, I would hope someone takes that as a learning experience and doesn't assume that that's- oh I failed, then I can't do that. Right? I hope there's some learning that's happening. When I was in the classroom, sure I had moments, but I can't really think of one at the moment.

R: How has your training and/or experience prepared you to understand the cultural aspects of learning that your students experience?

P: I would say that before I went into ESL there wasn't really anything in my undergrad that prepared me. I would say they focused on maybe multiple intelligences, kids learning differently, disabilities, or different strategies that kids might need from a learning standpoint, building relationships with your students, but as far as bringing in your student's culture, or having that open mindedness about learning about someone's culture and bringing that into the classroom, I

really don't think that was in any of my training before I became, before I got into an ESL program, into my master's, and then probably more so when I went to specific professional learning. I think there's a lot of professional learning happening right now that's really great. And getting people to think about different cultures. The mirrors and window diversity training is kind of building momentum. There's a lot of equity work that's happening the last few years. So there's definitely trainings out there that are addressing this issue. My biggest concern is it's not getting to the people who need it. It's getting to the ESL people who already have this open mindset. We don't have all the answers, but we have this mindset of we are advocates, we need to bring in all their, all these different cultures into our schools, we need to make sure grading policies are appropriate, like those are people that get it, and I don't know if we're getting to the content area classroom teachers who might not have this background. They- if you studied to be a social studies teacher, you might have some more empathy because you study cultures, right? But if you're a math or English or science teacher, it really depends on your own personal upbringing and your own personality versus the training you got.

And then it's kind of, you're leaving it up to chance if you will. So I think there's some good momentum out there for training, but for me, it didn't get to me until I was a specialist, and at that point, you know, specialists serve one role, but we're not the tier one content teachers, right? So, I would say I got a glimpse of it in my student teaching, because I actually student taught abroad. I actually student taught in New Zealand and of my class of 26 kids, 6 were born in New Zealand and 20 were from all over, different countries. And that's what got me to really love ESL, and want to come back and study ESL and wouldn't have gotten to live that, if I only student taught in Michigan at the school I was originally at. I would've gotten some diverse groups of kids, and gotten to teach some groups of kids, but I wouldn't have lived it, you know, in a different country, where I had to learn a different culture, and what was important to the kids in front of me. So I think that people are starting to do a better job about that, but I still don't know enough to say it's getting to the masses. I think they're probably doing a better job of it because of social media and us being able to "travel" without leaving our seats to learn about different people, but yeah.

R: Do you encourage and/ or expect teachers to incorporate the family or community of non-Western students' learning? Could you give some examples of how?

P: Definitely would encourage it. Again, I'm not working directly at a building, but within my group of teachers, we definitely encourage it, we provide examples with each other. I always start off my meeting with some celebrations, like success stories, and I want to hear about kids. I love being able to see the students obviously. I was a teacher before I was an administrator, so the days I get to be in a classroom, whether it's virtual or in person, are some of my favorite days. I think our students do a really good job. Our EL teachers call families all the time. They're not... they get over... maybe they get anxious calling another family who doesn't speak English, or you might now know if the parents can understand you. We do a lot of trainings with language line, which is our phone interpreter service and how you can use it. And this is a district resource that we have. We have staff that we employ that can speak Arabic and call families. We really encourage that connection. I'm curious to hear, you know, how much it's used in a high school setting for example, or core content areas.

But I know in our EL services, absolutely. Your EL teachers could tell you the life story of a kid, what's going on in their family, what's going on with their siblings. They just, they are invested, they have relationships and they're invested. And even when they register here, you

know, the first thing I do is go and meet the parents, and even if they don't speak another language, I'll use an interpreter or I'll do my best to help them understand what's going on. And I'm just really, it's all about follow through. If I can't communicate with them, I'm gonna give them a number or I'm gonna tell them I'll call you right back with an interpreter, checking on them a week later, having staff follow up with them. I think it's really about connecting, and I would hope they would do that for any student. But I think our families who are coming from another country or a different cultural background really need to understand that you're invested in them. And they need to have time one on one with you or a conference with the principal or the teachers to know what's expected.

I'll give you an example. We had my very first event ever when I got this job. We did an event for new families at one of our high schools. And we did a new parent night. And we actually did a presentation where, we actually did this with a community organization too. The last few years we've done a back to school organization, where we don't assume anything. We explain you know, this is how you apply for lunch, this is what you have to do every year to get on the bus route. Your teachers want to hear from you. We want you to email teachers, but you can't just show up to school and want an appointment with the teacher when they have 30 kids in front of them. Using office hours, understanding what conferences are- it's a good thing to talk to your teachers. Because there are some cultures where school is school and home is home. And there isn't- homework is a very American thing, right? That's a concept that we have to talk through.

But even oral communication and socializing in school is also something that's not natural. So we get kids sometimes from, sometimes overseas there are kids that are really good at reading and writing English, because they were taught in a class where they read novels or they had to write about it. So, even for me, in high school Spanish, we read and we wrote. We did some dialogues. But, you're not gonna practice English if you don't get to speak it in class, and just the idea of being allowed to speak in class, that is an American system. And, depending on your school, that's a certain classroom. Like you might walk down the hall and there's a teacher who really wants debate, and has small group instruction, and kids are working together, and then they have somebody report out. I think you might walk into another classroom and it's- people are in rows, and nobody wants to talk, and it's quiet and they're afraid to make a mistake. That's where, it's not even about Western v non-Western cultures, it's about the connections in the classroom.

Because there's kids who don't realize it's a good thing to ask questions, right? Because back home, we had kids who were very traumatized, we had kids who came from a country where if you made a mistake, they got hit in school. And they were afraid to speak up. And we have kids with disabilities who never even got to go to school overseas, and then they get to us and we're like "oh yes, they're going to school, and we're going to provide this IEP, and they're going to get this service" because some cultures education systems just don't have the sources to allow anyone who is not your average IQ to go to school. So we have a lot of those cultural conversations when kids need IEPs, and explaining to students that this isn't- you know some kids they used to hide some of their kids and think they were going to take them to a home, right? Like this old mindset that a label is going to hurt your student versus get them the accommodations they need. Like if they are a special ed service for example. Those conversations we have a lot with families and getting them to know the expectations of the school and why we want them to ask questions and interact with others, but then also, getting families to be open to testing if there is a concern in a potential special need situation. Like that

is a place that definitely takes some cultural understanding. Because they didn't necessarily have that back home, and it was looked as an insult to the family, right? Like their family name would be penalized if a student was getting that type of support. And so sometimes those kinds of situations happen. But you get very excited when you get a breakthrough, and they feel like you're understanding them better and they're understanding your side better, and the support you're trying to get to their student.

M: If you have a student from a background you and/ or the school is not experienced with, what steps would you take to ensure the student's education?

So, first we make sure that we can communicate with the family. So from my end, I would make sure that their language is through our online service. So I would first do that. And we haven't had a language that we can't get, but sometimes we have to be specialized. For example we were meeting with a family a couple weeks ago, and they spoke Arabic, but they were from Yemen, and the teacher who spoke arabic at the school really couldn't understand the dialect. So we scheduled an interpreter who was Yemenese ahead of time, so that we could make sure we could answer questions. So first you have to make sure that you can communicate with people, and make sure they feel secure and trust with you.

The second is making sure you have the coach working, if you are in a building with a coach or an EL teacher, making sure you have those strategies and visuals that are really going to help that student acquire English, because unfortunately we aren't a school that just has one language, like we can't just have everything be in English and Spanish and help our families with a mass producing of signs and things like that. So we really wanna make sure that we're doing a good job communicating and modeling. A lot of times, our schools will pair that student up with someone else who speaks that language, so the benefits of us being a larger district is that they'll have sort of student ambassadors. Newcomers who are in their second or third year love to be able to help the new kids coming in, and show them the ropes, and help them get used to the school, and kind of be their peer mentor, because they had just lived through it. Our schools do a fantastic job of that. Like the kid's first day, and they speak let's say Albanian, then they'll find a student leader a couple years older, or someone who has been in the country a little bit longer who also speaks that language, and can kind of walk that student through and build that connection from a peer, so not just a staff member.

So we try to do that. And I think just reaching out to the family. It's really important to welcome a family. So I think our EL teachers, even if a student doesn't qualify maybe- proficient in English but there's a different culture at home, they really do like to- I think they do a good job of calling at home and just getting to know the family and what not. I do think there are some things that can fall through the cracks because we are so large. But I think a lot of our- I would say that probably 9 times out of 10 there is some sort of phone interview or informal phone call to a family to get to know them. And our principals do a good job of this too, like meeting a new family. And if a family was new to [city] and they didn't necessarily speak another language, English or not, they will invite them in, give them a tour, answer those questions, so they're getting that personal customer service, which I think is really important. So we do try to give that one on one time and a follow up number, because when you're new, so much is being thrown at you that you might not think of a question until a week later, or two weeks later. And so I think that dedication is really important. I think every school kind of has their own system with it. But as far as the district level, we do the intake system for new families. So we either know that family situation because we met them ourselves, and tested the student ourselves, and

interviewed that student. Or, we are getting them from another contact in the community, and we are calling that contact to get what's the story behind this student, what's their strengths, what's their weaknesses. How many years were they with you? Does the family need language support? Who in the family might need language support? I think in our department we do a really good job about that. The hard part again is getting it outside of the EL department, and having it be just what we do as a district, no matter who's that person. And I think that high school is a bigger challenge because they have so many kids, and I feel like they feel they have a lot of content to cover, but I think the counselors and principals do a nice job of that too.

And I think that it's really important to get to pronounce students' names the best you can. We do talk about that every year and how that's important to have a kid teach you how to say their name, and how powerful that is. And you know, I just use myself as an example. I'm a [name] on paper, but I've always been [shortened version of name]. As soon as I hear that, I know I have an instant trust or connection with someone, because they know me, they know that that's who I am. So you know as a student, you really do connect with those teachers who go out of their way to know how to pronounce your name and know your situation. So we have some really phenomenal principals and teachers who just do a really great job about you know, if anything, trying to pronounce their students' names and connect with them appropriately. So, I think we do a really good job about that too.

M: Are there any accommodations or policies you would like to make available or employ in the school, but are unable to? (This can include accommodations you wanted in the school prior to COVID.) If so, describe these accommodations and how you would implement them.

I: I think there's some things that I wish had some more leverage. Like there's obviously parts of ESL that are tied to students' civil rights. There are language accommodations that we are obligated to provide. And I think a lot of it has to do like I was talking about- contracts. We in an EL department sometimes struggle, because we don't have the dynamic laws behind us as special ed for example. And there's no one really questioning the special ed accommodations or modifications a student might need. It's written into the teacher contracts. It's expected that you're providing x amount of service. And their ratios are phenomenal. I think they can only have like 12 or 15 kids on their caseload, or 17. Like in EL work, we have no caps. The federal government doesn't give us caps. So I have some schools where they have 180 EL kids, and I can get 1 teacher and aide. So they obviously can't see 180 kids in the way they would want to. So you have to prioritize within that. So those are policies I wish someone above me would make. I mean, there's a teacher shortage, so if they literally said you need an 80:1 ratio or 50:1 ratio for EL students' teachers, I mean every district in Michigan probably would have to hire 50, at least 50 teachers or something ridiculous. There's just not enough out there, but I would like to see more leverage like that.

I would like to see a requirement at universities that teachers have to get an ESL endorsement. Some universities have started doing that a few years ago, and then some have kind of stepped away from that. I know some universities are starting to require at least an ESL class. So if you're getting a reading endorsement or an English degree, you have to take an ESL class, but it's still not mandated so you know I think myself, I had to take one special ed class that was required. Did it help me work with special ed kids? No, but it at least gave me an introduction to "this is what's out there." I think in EL world, it's a mindset like it's almost a

choice, like yes I need to accommodate them, but maybe I'm accommodating on a test. And it's not about the test, it's about your delivery of instruction.

So I would like to see stronger policies at the district level that get into teacher contracts or into grading policies that are very specific to English learners. That's not something I have control over, but I continue to advocate for. I think this pandemic has brought that out into the spotlight a little bit more. I think people are starting to see that you know, there's a lot of kids in our district who are not as well off as they assume. They assume they can just go home and turn on a computer. And we had to give out- I think $\frac{2}{3}$ of our students had to get a computer this school year from us.

I think people assume that kids have their own room at home to work. And then you go on a webex and you see five kids all sharing a room to try to all do their webexes or their zoom meeting with their classroom online at the same time. So yeah, I'd love to see some strong stances on what should be done for ELs from a civil rights perspective, but also a best practice instructional perspective.

And I'd like to see from a curriculum standpoint, ELs needs written right into the tier one. I don't think it should be a second piece. Like "here is my curriculum, and then what do I do if people struggle?" I think it needs to be "I'm gonna present my curriculum for the population that I have," and that you're infusing more culturally diverse questioning and texts into the curriculum. I think that that's something that's not an EL department piece, but I think it's something that our collaboration could really improve the curriculum. I'd like to see policies that perhaps make it a requirement to have some sort of diversity or equity, but some sort of lens or committee at each building, and it should mirror your population. So if your population has 6 or 7 prominent ethnicities, then they should be represented on that panel. Or at least different- someone who has been in the country 5/ 6 years, someone who is new. I think it's hard, you know, because there's only 1 or 2 EL teachers in a building that are certified. So they can't be on every single committee, but I think they're the advocates and they're the voices of these students, but they're not necessarily in all of the tier 1 conversations, or policy conversations. So they might do an excellent job providing a service and advocating for their families, but they're not the content teachers. They don't teach the classes they need to graduate. They don't teach the fourth grade curriculum. I would just like to see more policies that are not within the EL system. I feel like at least in this district, we've filled the holes and systems of policies that need to be done within the EL group, and we're kind of fine tuning as a lot of those work. Now we're at the point where okay, our service looks a certain way under the restrictions that we have, can we cross over into the tier 1, into the curriculum, into the policies that are outside of us?

And I think the other piece too is depending on your district, it's really like a grass roots movement within the union. So in our district, our teacher union is very strong and decides a lot of what happens. And so when my teachers are frustrated or they feel like they need to be the advocate for their kids, I listen and I try to do what I can at my level, but a lot of those decisions are beyond me, and really take that movement of them expressing that to their peers. So for example we had a school that didn't have enough newcomers to house their own program. Like HR cut it, and so we had to bus those kids to another building, because they wouldn't run the class with 5 kids let's say for an example. So I advocate every year to bring it back, but I don't get to make those decisions. So I advocate every year, and if it gets to come back great, but it hasn't come back yet. And so the teachers at the one school feel like they're missing that

community, like those people are missing out on you know they're neighborhood kids, but they don't go to that school.

And I said well you know, that's where you really need to advocate within your teacher union, because that's not something I have control over. I didn't want to cut that program. I didn't make the cut to that program. So if you feel like that's a grass roots- like this is really important to our community, we need to be able to offer this to our families, then that's something that really needs to go to the mediation table. And that's where I say we don't really have as much power or leverage as special ed, because in special ed, they wouldn't just cut that program. They would have at least a teacher at that building who is able to run it. Or, they would have extra funding, so they could support a 5 person class or something like that.

I think a lot of people who make decisions are not necessarily the people who know enough about the students or the cultures of the students we have. So it's my job to advocate as much as possible, and get that information to the right people. But it can be frustrating when you're not the one who gets to make the decisions sometimes. And every school is different. Every district is different. So to me, that's a huge piece that's missing. And I don't know if everyone would see that... At the same time, we have a lot of wins and a lot of positive experiences. When you're in a pandemic, or when you're worried about a student, it's hard to sometimes celebrate all the good things that are happening, because people are very connected to their kids, and they're very- well you know, you want every kid to be successful, so if you have one kid who is not doing well, you're gonna take that home with you and keep fighting that fight. So that can be very daunting if you feel like you're in it alone or you're the only advocate. Or it's outside of your means, that's a predicament that's not going to serve you very well. And I don't think that's everywhere, but I do know that's a theme.

I'm on a lot of committees at the state level. There's some districts that don't even have a single EL teacher. There's districts that have one to service the entire district. There's districts that don't have money to pay for a salary for someone, so they have multiple hats that they wear, and you know I guess, that's not the case in special ed. In special ed, it's just expected. You have the rules and policies to have to advocate and provide, and I also think that EL families- they're not going to stir the pot if they're a newcomer family. If you're a special ed family, you learn what rights your student has, and you advocate, and you go to the IEP meetings, and you might be more vocal to get what you feel like your student deserves. And depending on an EL family, they might not want to, or they don't feel safe being vocal about it, because of their immigration status, or their culture that you don't question the authority. Or they didn't even know that was an opportunity that their kid missed out on because it's their first child in that district, or they didn't know that was something that was available to them. So it's our job as advocates in the system if someone has privilege and power to advocate on their behalf.

So I guess, any policy that can be in the masses, in my opinion, is much needed. It needs to be someone higher than me that can change some contract language or that can get some policies out there that this is expected and required for students and that you- it's part of the expectation that you do it. I think that's more of a high school struggle, because I feel like there's a mindset that it's about effort and meeting me where I'm at sometimes, than meeting your students where they're at. And I don't want to overgeneralize for high school, but I feel like it's definitely more prevalent there than in our K-8 buildings where- elementary teachers are very much so about getting to know that child and owning that it's their child for the year. And in our middle schools, I think we've done a really good job of getting some MTSS (multi-tiered system of supports) conversations and really good PLC work, and counselors who are really dedicated to

getting to know their kids. And I think in high school, sometimes, there's still relationships, but I think the focus somehow becomes more on content and academics than maybe students' mental health and well being. And not that they don't focus on that, but I feel that they're stretched too thin and there isn't necessarily a good system within every building to do that.

Interview 2:

R: You said you were the language acquisition specialist. I am a little unfamiliar with that title, and I was wondering if you could tell me about it, and if it's more of a teaching position or an administrative position.

P: It's more of a coaching position, actually, so my role is to work primarily with the teachers. Our district has a lot of EL students. In my building we have over 300 EL students. So, we have our shelter classes, but then we still have a lot of EL students who are in the mainstream courses. And so really every teacher in our building is an EL teacher. And not all were formally trained, and so my role is to help them find the best strategies for working with those students, whether it's helping them to accommodate lessons or instruction or assessments or going in and modeling, lessons, things of that nature to help them provide the best equitable education for their EL student.

R: What do you know about the cultural context of teaching and learning (or schooling) in the non-Western cultures of your students? Can you give some specific examples?

P: So of our students specifically, a lot of them come from places like Iraq and Syria, where they've had interrupted education. Some of them are coming to us with very little, to know education at all, so sometimes they get to our middle school or high school, and it's their first experience with school. It's all because of wars and things like that. But then we also have a large population of students who come from Bangladesh, where their education was more formal, and you know, lacking the English skills, but they've had years of formal schooling, and typically it's the same with- we have a large Vietnamese population as well, so you see quite a difference with a lot of our students depending on where they come from. Some of them have very formal education- you know they had their math, they had their science, and they have the content, they just don't have the language. And then we have some who because of their situations never went to school, they're not even literate in their own language. So, it's very different depending on where they came from.

R: How did you learn about those cultural differences?

P: Well, I've been doing this a long time. Before I was in this position, I taught a sheltered class at the middle school, so I had 6th, 7th, and 8th graders all day for all subjects, so I had them all day. So just over time I mean, you get to know them. We ask questions, they tell their stories. I mean you have to do that in a classroom where you have a group of students all day long. And so, just through asking questions, meeting their families, you know we would have parent nights where they could come in. You know we do our best in the EL program to get to know them and their situation because really you have to in order for them to learn, because some of them are coming from situations of trauma and war, and you know you have to get past all that before you can learn. You know students learn, their brain is stressed, it's just something that you have to know about in order to do your job as a teacher, is learn about them

R: How do these cultural differences inform how you teach students, or I guess in your case, how you create those plans and help. So, in other words, do you accommodate the cultural learning needs of your students like through modifying activities or specific considerations?

P: Well you know, again, I'm in a newer role. As a classroom teacher when I taught the sheltered class, I would say it's a lot easier because I had full control over that, whereas now in my role, coaching at the high school, I can offer suggestions and advice. And some teachers are very responsive and open, where as some can be set in their ways. "I've been doing this twenty years and things have changed, but I'm not changing," is something that you hear. So I try to, with the teachers that I work with, I try to provide them a glimpse into what those specific students have been through. You know I always say this is why they're so old... they have limited or no education, this is their background, so I try to educate the teachers on that because sometimes they don't even know, like they don't have the time, or they don't want to take the time, so first and foremost it's just explaining to the teachers where they're coming from, and again making suggestions like in English classes they use a lot of literature that can be totally irrelevant to some of our students from these backgrounds. And so, trying to find literature that is going to connect with the students or help them make connections, trying to find lessons or material that will still teach the content standards, but in a way that they can understand. Because that's the goal, we don't want to limit or lower expectations for our EL students. You know, we want them to have the same experience and learn the same standards. We just have to find a way to do that they're going to connect to if that makes sense

R: Do your teachers know about the cultural context of teaching and learning (or schooling) in the non-Western cultures of your students? Can you give some specific examples?

P: Some of them, I would say some of them. You know, we try, you know my role is new, not just to me, but it's a newer role in the district, so since it's been around we've been trying to teach the teachers about these things and we've had professional development about it... again it's just to be honest, some teachers are very open and receptive to learning about these things, some you know they're, how can I word this nicely? They're near retirement and not really interested in learning anything new or changing anything. And I can say that as a person who has had [a] background in elementary and middle school for most of my career- it's only my second year in the high school... it's a very different mindset in the teachers. Elementary and middle school teachers tend to work together, they unite, they're more about getting to know those students, whereas at the high school level, it just seems like, in my building anyway, a lot of the teachers are kind of off in their own little bubble, in their own thing, just trying to make it through the day, and don't necessarily want to learn about new things, or implement something, even though it could be helpful. There's a lot of resistance.

R: Do you think that there's a reason that high school teachers are more in their own bubble?

P: You know that's a good question, something I've been trying to figure out because for me, it was kind of a culture shock when I came to the high school. Last year was my first year, we shut down in March, and then we've been pretty much online, and then we just started going back to two days a week. So it's hard for me to speak to that because I'm new to the high school and we've had so much time away. I think that a lot of it just has to do with, in my building, we have

a lot of, I don't want to say old teachers, but again, teachers who have been there a long time, and are nearing retirement, so that's kind of what they're focused on. I think it has to do with accountability at administration. That's just historically how it's been. They teach in their rooms, they do their thing, they leave. When I was at the middle school PLC, which is the professional learning communities. You know, those were taken very seriously. We met together in groups, whether it was by grade level or content level, it depended on what the goal was, whereas at the high school it's kind of like "here's some PLC time, do your own thing." And everybody just goes off into their room, and so it's a little bit of their mindset, it's a little bit of lack of accountability, it's a little bit of administration.

R: Do you have classrooms where students of two or more non-Western backgrounds are in the same class? If so, do you expect that teacher to consider both of those cultures separately and create something cohesive, or do you expect them to have a generalized template they can apply to any EL student?

P: When you say expect, like are you asking if that's what they do or what I wish they would do?

R: Like your personal expectation.

P: Okay, I mean, I would hope that they would take different backgrounds into effect because like I said, we have a lot of students from different backgrounds, but those backgrounds vary. We have some that you know they came here just for a better opportunity, but where they came from was safe. They were educated, they weren't in danger or harms way and then you have students who came from war torn countries and came here as refugees. So those backgrounds look very different in how you work with those students, and teach them and get to know them, so I would hope that they would take all of those factors into consideration. I do my best to try to aid them into understanding the different backgrounds and how it can affect the students' learning and how teachers need to modify their teaching because of that. Again, it doesn't always happen, especially this year's been difficult because of you know just everything going on with the pandemic, and again, some are more open to meeting with me and learning about these factors, and some kind of brush me off and say "I've got enough to do, I don't have time to worry about this." It really just depends, and mindset is something that's very hard to change especially at a building with 100 teachers where a lot of them are getting ready to retire. It's just, it's really difficult.

R: Do you have any examples of good teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who did take cultural differences into account?

P: Yes, I mean so, I know it sounded somewhat negative, but we do have a lot of wonderful teachers, especially our shelter teachers. So I'm not sure if you're familiar with how our building works or not, but we have shelter level 1 classes and level 2 classes on the WIDA, you know level 1, those are your newcomers. Brand new very limited English. And then level 2 is just a step above that. So when they come in as level one, they have their core content classes in sheltered- so they'll have their math, their science, their English, and their social studies for the level 1 and level 2. And those teachers, historically, have been in those positions for a while, and so these are people that are really familiar with the different backgrounds. Our one social studies teacher for example, she's amazing. I mean, everything she does is with excitement and enthusiasm, with visuals, with pictures. It's an American history class, but she doesn't strictly do that. She, when other holidays, or celebrations, or events come into the date of that and are from our students backgrounds, she recognizes them and celebrates them in the classroom. You know,

prior to the pandemic, they could bring in food and treats and celebrate and talk about it. Again, everything is a little different this year, but she's a really great example. I mean, she's someone that I use a lot as far as when I give some sort of professional development to the staff. I use her work as an example a lot, because she has really mastered what it means to work with students from different backgrounds. And I would say that for the most part, our sheltered teachers have done that, have done a really good job of including those factors into their teaching.

R: Do you have any examples of problematic teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who either did or did not take cultural differences into account? In other words, considering culture, do you have any examples of when a teacher considered it and the teaching didn't go well, or when they didn't consider it and the teaching didn't go well?

P: I can think of examples where teachers haven't considered that at all. So for example, we have something called our transition classes. Those are classes like English 9 or 10 where when students exit those sheltered classes, now they're in a mainstream class, and the expectation is that those teachers, will accommodate their work, meaning accommodate their instruction and their lessons through using simplified texts, simplified language, comprehensible input... visuals, all of those things. And often times, even though they have me as a resource, because that's what I'm there for, I'm there to help them with those things, some don't want to take the time out of their day to do a little extra work, and so actually I just had a situation a few weeks ago where I found out a level 2 student who was in one of those transition classes, failed a semester of an English class, but the teacher hadn't provided any accommodations. So, that's not okay, because that's a violation of her civil rights, you know, if you're going to fail a student-it's one thing if you've provided those accommodations and then they still fail. But it's another if you haven't. So this was something that's fresh in my mind because I just had to meet with the counselors and the administration and try to figure out a way to remedy this situation without forcing this student to take this class over and delay graduation. But that is something that unfortunately, I do see a lot, and that's part of that whole mindset again of the high school, and I'm here as a resource and they don't necessarily want to work with me, so it's something that we see where these students kinda fall through the cracks because the teachers aren't providing those proper accommodations. I can't give an example though of a teacher who has tried and hasn't done well, because I've basically seen teachers who try and they really do well, or teachers who say "i'm not doing that."

R: And I'm curious, do you think that, you say that they have these accommodations, so do you think that the policy is supporting students, but teachers are just choosing not to enact that, or do you think that the policy is not strong enough to support students?

P: I think the policy isn't strong enough to support students. This has been kinda my beef with this program since I started in this position because I think that an administrator should be able to come in and say "show me all the accommodations you're making for your EL students." Teachers should be able to say "Oh, I'm doing this, this, this, and this." And I don't think it should get to a point where a student fails and then I have to come in and go through counselors and administration and central office to remedy a situation. I know that we have a very strong union, we have a very strong contract, and ultimately in that contract, the teachers have the final say of the grades. So like in this situation that I was just describing, the teacher who failed the student ultimately did agree to provide an alternative assignment that I could work on with the student, so that she can pass the class and not have to retake it. However, the administration told

me “well talk to her, but if she doesn’t want to do that, she doesn’t have to. She has the ultimate, final say.”

And so I think that is a policy that doesn’t support students because if you’re telling me that a teacher doesn’t have to provide accommodations all semester, and can fail a student after not providing those accommodations, and then choose not to come up with some sort of alternative assignment or way to pass that class, I don’t think that the policy supports the students. We actually are in the process of negotiating a new contract, and that is something that I’ve talked a lot with the union representative’s about. We need to add language to that contract that is going to support the EL students. But again, it’s problematic just because historically we are such a strong union. And I’m not saying that the union is bad, but sometimes it’s so strong in favor of the teachers, that it doesn’t help the students, which should come first, so when an administrator is telling me “yeah I’m going to ask this teacher to allow for something else, but she has the final say,” and administration can’t do anything about it, that tells me yeah, the policy is weak.

R: Do you encourage and/ or expect teachers to incorporate the family or community of non-Western students’ learning? Could you give some examples of how?

P: Especially now, yeah, because with the whole online thing we’ve had to. I mean, I’ve had to call so many parents and teachers too, just because getting them logged in and on their laptops, we’ve had to really explain to parents you know, just because they’re on their laptop doesn’t mean they’re logging onto class. We had, in the fall, it was very problematic with students who were not attending classes at all, and I would call a parent. And when I call a parent, I use something called language line, which is a translation service, I’m not sure if you’re aware, but you know, I don’t speak all of the languages, so I can make a three way call and I have an interpreter on the phone. So i’ll call a parent and they’ll say “but she logs into her laptop every day,” and we have to explain, okay here’s a schedule and she has classes, and she has to be logged in at the same time, and so that’s one example that yeah, especially this year, we’ve had to really include them. I would say historically a lot of teachers don’t because of the language barriers and I think parents sometimes feel intimidated because of that. We do provide some kinds of services like at conferences we usually have like interpreters because we have a lot of Arabic speaking students. However, that doesn’t help the students whose families speak Bengali, or Vietnamese, or other languages. When I was in the classroom with the sheltered students, and I get students who spoke a variety of languages, I would tell them to come, and I would just, I would have my phone out and I’d get on a three way call, you know, right there with the parents so that I had an interpreter. And if I let those parents know interpretation will be available, they were more apt to show up. But a lot of times, for whatever reason, even though it’s really easy, a lot of teachers don’t do that. A lot of teachers will say, “well they don’t speak English so I can’t call them, or they don’t respond to my emails” and again a lot of times, they’re not willing to take that extra step, that five minutes, to use language line and make a phone call or whatnot, so it really depends on how hard a teacher is willing to try. And you know, I think, parent communication, whatever the background of their- you’re born in America or if they’re from another country, I think that parent communication is really important and critical in a student’s educational experience, so I think that it’s great that we have the resources to do that, and I think that when teachers use them, you see more interaction between the parents and the teachers and involvement from the parents, but it’s just a matter of again, getting teachers to utilize those resources.

R: If you have a student from a background you and/ or the school is not experienced with, what steps would you take to ensure the student's education?

P: That's a good question, because I can't think of an example in the recent past where that's happened. But you know, if I were to have a student from a background that I was not familiar with, I mean, personally first, I would just do some research on that background to kind of learn a little bit more about their culture, but I am very much of a hands on person, so I would just, I would ask them questions. I'd probably bring in the parents to talk to them just to find out a little bit about their background, as a teacher. Again, it's different now because I'm in a different position, but usually the students who are new to the school I'm aware of and I'm introduced to, so I would probably just do the same thing, and then whatever information I learned that's important to their learning in the classroom, I would communicate with their specific teachers, that would be a start. But we don't have a system in place necessarily for something like that.

R: How has your training and/or experience prepared you to understand the cultural aspects of learning that your students experience?

P: Sorry just to clarify, are you talking specifically for the backgrounds of the students we have in my district or?

R: Yeah, so any training, experience, in service, how anything more formal has prepared you, or any experience has prepared you to understand cultural aspects of students that you are experiencing?

P: So a lot of it has really to be truthful, has been experience. I started my teaching career in Hamtramck. I don't know if you're familiar with that community or not, but it's a very small city that is completely surrounded by bigger ones. You know, back in the day, it was considered more of a Polish town, but over the years, the demographics have changed. You have a lot of people from Eastern Europe, from Yemen, from Iraq, from Bangladesh as well, so I started my teaching career in a building that was very diverse. We had students from all over the world, and so just getting to know them and their families. And the school that I was at in Hamtramck was very community oriented, we had a lot of events for the families, or there was picnics or movie nights, things of that nature, so I really got to know families well in that setting, and then when I left Hamtramck, I came to [current district], which is very similar, even though not in the same area, very similar in terms of student demographics, so I felt like it was nice that it was very similar to where I had come from.

As far as formal inservices, I do know that when I was in Hamtramck, every year we would have someone come in, and I couldn't tell you, I think he was someone from a local mosque and he would, because we had such a high Muslim population, and he would, just kind of teach us some of their cultural beliefs and you know, dealing with the parents, how maybe for example, they might not want to shake your hand, or they might not make eye contact, and it's not rude it's just something that is considered rude in their culture, and so they would kind of teach us a lot about that, which was helpful because you know if you're someone like me who grew up in an all white school with no diversity, you haven't really had experience with that until you, you know are in a situation like that. And in my experience at [school district] I do think they've tried, they've brought in people like Jay Marks and Dr. Mohammed who really speak to culturally responsive teaching, and try to educate the staff about the importance of these things. But I would still say overall, it's just, for me, experience over any formal training. There's a lot of things in teaching in general that they can't teach you, they can't teach you in college, they can't prepare you for, it's just some of those things you get into the classroom and you're like oh

my gosh im not prepared for this,” but as time goes by, in general, there’s a lot of things that they can’t prepare you for in college, but you get into the classroom, and something happens and you’re like wow I wasn’t prepared for this, but just as you gain more experience and time goes by, you learn about the different situations, so I would say experience is really valuable.

R: Are there any accommodations or policies you would like to make available or employ in the school, but are unable to? (This can include accommodations you wanted in the school prior to COVID.) If so, describe these accommodations and how you would implement them.

P: Yeah, I mean, I could probably speak all day to that, I won’t. But you know, like I mentioned, we have an issue with students, EL students need accommodations such as simple things- visuals, simplified language, simplified texts, etc., and you know there are some teachers who do a great job doing that to help them, and there are others who don’t try at all, will not try at all, and don’t provide them, and then you see these students failing, and our policies support the teachers more than the students. I would love to see something happen where, you know just like there’s laws in special ed., students have IEPs, and teachers have to follow those. I would love to see something where if a student is an EL student who has a WIDA score, those teachers are required to provide accommodations. And again, they have me as a resource, so they are required to meet with me, they’re required to provide evidence of what it is that they’re doing to accommodate those students. That would be, really a first and most important step because it needs to happen. It’s something that, how can I explain that? It’s the expectation that teachers do that, but again, the policy doesn’t support it, so there’s no accountability or consequences if they don’t, and a lot of them don’t. And what happens is it hurts the students, so for me that would be a big starting point.

R: Do you have any final thoughts, questions for me, or would like to circle back to anything?

P: I think that I covered everything, and I don’t have any questions.

Interview 3:

R: I understand that you’re an assistant principal. Could you tell me a little bit about your responsibilities?

P: Would you like just my responsibilities pertaining to EL?

R: Yeah, and then maybe also especially considering cultures

P: So my responsibilities as the administrator in charge of EL is that I evaluate, well some- basically I am the resource for teachers that are in our sheltered program as well as essentially all teachers that have EL students which is all the teachers in our building. I am the direct supervisor at the building level for our language acquisition specialist, as well as our language acquisition teachers. And we have three language acquisition parapro’s, our aides. I am in charge of running... I am the building administrator for our WIDA test, which entails... it’s annually. We’re in the middle of it right now. We’re in the window, but also for screening purposes, whenever we have a new student that needs to be screened.

R: Do your teachers know about the cultural context of teaching and learning (or schooling) in the non-Western cultures of your students? Can you give some specific examples?

P: So I would say the vast majority have a working understanding, but our sheltered teachers have more of an understanding, largely because they are working with the students and they get their personal accounts. A lot of what our teachers understand culturally about where our students are coming from, what education is like in their country is anecdotal. It may be from prior students, or from something- some pd that was presented years ago. But obviously our sheltered teachers are more entrenched in that. And we have, I wanna say between eight and ten sheltered teachers this year. So yeah, and they are also- so our sheltered teachers, none of them are strictly shelter, they also teach mainstream courses. And that's largely because our shelter population has decreased so much in the past five years.

R: Do you have an expectation that they either know about or learn about those kinds of differences?

P: An expectation, in that, there's nothing that's required or compliance piece, no.

R: Do you expect that their teaching activities take cultural differences into account? Why or why not?

P: I would expect that, because that's important. Just as any student's background should guide teachers as to how their current practices are, how their current instructional practices are, so it's so much more important even so with kids coming from other countries and different educational backgrounds, or no educational background.

R: Do you have classrooms where students of two or more non-Western backgrounds are in the same class? If so, do you expect that teacher to consider both of those cultures separately and create something cohesive, or do you expect them to have a generalized template they can apply to any EL student?

P: So in the sheltered class, it's absolutely taken into account, because virtually all of the students have a non-Western educational background, with the exception of, we have a few students that come from Europe. But in the general ed classroom, I think it's more generalized there, the idea being that they're no longer sheltered. It's not that they don't need support, but these students are our students, they're now part of the general population.

R: Do you have any examples of good teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who did take cultural differences into account?

P: Well I've been here for twenty years, so I am sure that there are plenty of examples. I just can't think of anything right now. I'm sure there are plenty. I will write down to email you as soon as I think of any.

R: We can also circle back to it if you want to do that.

(note: The participant did not email or mention good teaching examples at the end of the interview.)

R: Do you have any examples of problematic teaching that you've seen in your school of teachers who either did or did not take cultural differences into account? In other words, considering culture, do you have any examples of when a teacher considered it and the teaching didn't go well, or when they didn't consider it and the teaching didn't go well?

P: Well I can say that for some of our students coming from non U.S. schools, the idea of what cheating is, is very different than what it is here, so that is always a learning curve for our

sheltered teachers. So for example, they may say, “could you please find information on x, y, and z.” Whereas it may be very common for these students to copy verbatim something from the internet and hand that in, and obviously that’s not allowed here. There’s a learning curve with the teachers saying you know this is not acceptable, this is not what we do here, and then you know, having conversations with the student who has no idea that they’ve done anything wrong. That’s very common. We see that time and again.

R: How has your training and/or experience prepared you to understand the cultural aspects of learning that your students experience?

P: So I feel like, me specifically? My family is from another country, so I kind of grew up, you know, straddling both worlds. And then when I- I taught English in Europe for two years, so I was able to see that system before I came here, and I immediately began teaching EL, and I got my master’s in EL. So I kind of feel like I’ve always been hyper aware of that other world or of that... of that, just my whole life. So me, in particular I’m very sensitive to the needs of our EL students because I feel, you know, empathy for that. I have many staff members who feel the same thing, who have the same experience which is great. And we have others who don’t.

R: Do you think it’s more so your personal background that informed this? Or did any part of your formal education inform this also?

P: I would say it’s a mix. So also my master’s coursework, and my experience as an EL teacher all these years, prior to being an AP (assistant principal) informed that.

R: Do you encourage and/ or expect teachers to incorporate the family or community of non-Western students’ learning? Could you give some examples of how?

Well we always sort of harp on parent contact. And meeting with the parents, and we have many means of doing that. I think that’s difficult in this environment right now, but I know that more, you know, more teachers have been able to do that with the help of our aides who were kind of reallocated in a different way this year. So for our sheltered teachers that was much easier, because they had an actual aid in their room that they could use to have personal contact with, with parents for. But that’s not something that we typically have. Those aides are usually allocated to the mainstream classroom and were used very infrequently for that.

R: I know that since we are in a pandemic right now, some policy or kind of rules have had to change. Can I ask some of the rules you’ve had to create for ELs because of the pandemic?

P: Things are very different this year, as you’ve mentioned. So traditionally, our ELs are receiving in-person support, generally pullout from our LATs (language acquisition teachers), and that hasn’t been possible. So the idea of support has been not just for ELs but for all. Our test had to provide technology, which was something we were not prepared for. But getting that technology in our ELs hands was an added challenge in terms of communicating with parents, so it’s sort of been all hands on deck. So the FRA, I don’t know if you know the acronyms of our district, the FRA is a family resource assistant, so it’s essentially one person whose role is for the high school feeder paths, so us, our middle school, and elementary schools, whose job is to contact the parents. We are lucky because our FRA speaks Arabic. So she’s able to communicate with most of our family members, but she also is very used to the language line. So that’s her

job, she has been fantastic. We've really utilized her more than we ever have this year for communicating with our families, as well as our aides.

R: Do you think the resources you have have been sufficient, or have they been difficult to access, or do you think it's gone pretty good over all?

P: I think it has gone as good as it can. As good as it can be expected.

R: If you have a student from a background you and/ or the school is not experienced with, what steps would you take to ensure the student's education?

P: So meaning a background from a country that we're not familiar with

R: Yeah it could be an environmental situation, a country where maybe they had a certain experience or trauma you're not used to, any kind of external factor like that.

P: Well we would do what we would do for any student, but we would have that added layer of EL support, meaning the LAT, the language acquisition teacher, the language acquisition specialist, counselor, we have a variety of mental health programs in native languages that we promote here, that are accessible, that our counselors are aware of. We have a wonderful counseling staff, so yeah we would start there. And of course we would inform the teachers. We always inform, we always inform, when applicable, the teachers of what's going on, with consent.

R: Is that part of a protocol?

P: Well it's tricky. We have to have consent to what we can share. And if we have that, then that's always made known to the teachers.

R: Are there any accommodations or policies you would like to make available or employ in the school, but are unable to? (This can include accommodations you wanted in the school prior to COVID.) If so, describe these accommodations and how you would implement them.

P: You know it would be really helpful for us, this is like big picture thinking, but I mean we kind of have something similar to that, we have language line, which is kind of a pain in the butt to use, but we use that when we're contacting parents if we need to right away. But I guess, it would be very nice to have a tech department that had multiple languages so parents could access, just in terms of what we've dealt with, in terms of issues. That's a wishlist item.

R: Do you have any final thoughts, questions for me, or would like to circle back to anything?

P: Not at this time, thank you.

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