

**Perspectives from “English as a Second Language” Teachers on Teaching  
Secondary Newcomer English Learners**

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## Abstract

**Background:** In Texas, newcomer English learners who enroll in a public high school are placed in either an English as a Second Language program or in classes that use the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol. Because these courses are expected to be taught in English, there is a disconnect between the program's bilingual identity and instructional practices. Often, English as a Second Language teachers work in isolation and do not have the capacity to collaborate with other bilingual educators or qualified Sheltered English Instruction teachers. Therefore, with growing deficits among all of the most vulnerable populations due to COVID-19, the voices and perspectives of educators are a valuable tool in closing these learning gaps. **Purpose:** Minimal research has been conducted about the challenges high school English as a Second Language teachers face with instruction of newcomer English learners. In order to get a holistic picture of these challenges, asking English as a Second Language teachers to provide their perceptions and experiences is vital. **Question:** What are the perspectives of "English as a Second Language" teachers teaching secondary level newcomer English learners? **Method:** A narrative inquiry framework allowed the researcher to gather and retell the stories of the participants. Five participants were selected using a convenience sample from the researcher's social/professional network consisting of high school English as a Second Language teachers that taught newcomers. The focus was through the lens of lived experiences and challenges these teachers faced regarding the English as a Second Language program. These lived experiences were captured by conducting one round of individual semi-structured interviews with items designed in collaboration with an English as a Second language expert. After interviews were conducted, participants

engaged in a member check interview to ensure their individual interviews' validity and accuracy. Finally, participants participated in a focus group to engage in discussion with other participants. All interviews and the focus group were recorded and transcribed. Thematic coding was utilized for identifying emerging themes among participants. The data analysis was checked for researcher bias by an educator familiar with English learner instruction. **Findings:** The study added to the literature of secondary bilingual education regarding teacher perceptions surrounding the English as a Second Language program. Three major themes emerged: 1. The importance of collaboration for teachers; 2. Support is needed for English as a Second Language teachers; and, 3. Teaching newcomer English learners is more than the standards and test scores. The findings suggested that participants' perceptions and experiences of teaching high school newcomers before COVID-19 were isolating and lacking support at the district and state level. Consequently, the challenges that participants experienced were magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus creating an even larger gap for students and educators. **Conclusion:** High school English as a Second Language teachers need more support in creating and maintaining a culture of collaboration both on campus and district-wide to ensure the overall success of newcomers.

**Keywords:** English learners, ESL, language acquisition, ESL teacher perceptions

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction to the Study**

As most public schools in the United States, the high school I work at opens its doors in mid-August. Classrooms are bustling with new students finding their desks, getting out their notebooks, and delving into content because they will have a quiz next week on the material. My 9<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, however, has four students. Fast forward to the second semester of school around the middle of January. I now have 25 students whose ages range from 13-18 years old in my Language Acquisition class. We are in the middle of having structured conversations about our morning routine using the past tense. I am politely interrupted for the third time this week with the same phrase, “Ms. Noyes, you have a new student! I don’t think they speak much English”. The other students know the drill, having been the new student interrupting the class at some point this year, they all text their friends that another new student who doesn’t know English is at the school to eat with them at lunch.

This new boy is nervous. I reach out my hand and say with a big smile, “Hello. My name is Ms. Noyes” and I point to his schedule with my name on it three times—taking up half of his day with English courses. “I am your English teacher,” I have this introduction down to a tee. I point to the word “English” on his schedule and with a thumbs up I ask, “English?” and with a thumbs down I say, “or no English?”. He laughs a little and wavers his hand in the middle indicating he could at least understand what I was saying now. The counselor smiles and says in one breath in order to get back to the office quickly,

*“Great! You will have lunch after 4th period and you will ride bus #225 when school is done okay? Don’t forget to pick up a tablet to use and get your picture taken for your ID. Bye!”*

The boy scratches his head and looks around. I motion with my hand that “eating” will be “after” (points to his schedule) 4<sup>th</sup> period. I write #225 on his schedule with a picture of a school bus. I circle his school ID number on his schedule and ask another student who speaks his home language to go get his picture taken. By the time both students come back, the bell has rung to go to their Geography course. As the only campus ESL teacher, this period without students allows me to focus on planning lessons for the upcoming week—all 15 of them. Without a team to plan with on campus, and new students coming in sporadically throughout the year, planning cannot be done too far in advance-- mainly because we work on a day-to-day basis. I am the teacher for two English as a Second Language courses, two Language Acquisition courses, and two intervention Reading courses every day.

When the students return to my class, the new boy and the student who helped him get his ID picture come up to me holding an article and assignment from their Geography class. They point at it and say, “Don’t understand, miss. Can I Google?”. I look at the article—a 3-page article, sans graphics or images, about popular inventions that shaped the United States. The assignment included a link to a video for them to watch for homework before reading this 3-page article and then completing short answer responses that delve into what these inventions were and how they helped shape the culture of the United States. There were no sentence stems, vocabulary words for him to use, or any expectation that he will do anything besides Google Translate this entire



assignment. I ask him to get out his tablet and I will help him Google the concepts and key vocabulary that I highlighted in the article.

He does not know how to log into his tablet. He does not know how to access the internet to the school building. He does not know how to type on an English keyboard. He *definitely* doesn't know how the invention of the air conditioner shaped the culture of the United States, especially how to explain that in English. A couple of students, those who speak the same first language as the new boy and some who do not, come over to help him log into his computer and write his username and password on the inside of his notebook cover for him. They show him how to get to Google, Google Translate, and Word Reference pages up on his tablet and how to bookmark them for future use. They all know this struggle. We skip today's lesson and look at the Geography article and the key vocabulary they will need and the sentence stems to start them writing the short answer responses.

In just one hour of this student's first day of school in the United States, he has faced challenges with the new language, the new building, new people, and an overwhelming amount of information that only continues throughout the year and his career of high school. He also, however, has gained the support of a community of students who have been in the same place and are facing these challenges every day—together. These are intelligent young adults who are capable of reading a schedule, working on an assignment, and have a voice—in their home language. As sometimes their only advocate both academically and socioemotionally, the role of an ESL teacher is at the frontline of helping address challenges that high school newcomer ELs (English learners new to the country) face.

### ***Statement of Problem***

English learners (ELs) are an increasing focus in public education and the number of students in this subpopulation have drastically increased by over 40 percent in five states and shown increases in twenty others (Department of Education, 2017). This group of students, especially at the secondary high school level, overcome many obstacles both academically and socioemotionally. This study investigates the perspectives of ESL teachers through their own personal accounts and experiences with high school newcomers and the challenges they face with that could potentially impact the instruction of their students.

### ***Personal Narrative***

As a high school English as a Second Language teacher who primarily works with recent immigrants to the United States, I constantly refer back to when I was a language learner as a young adult myself. Growing up in Wisconsin, there weren't many opportunities to experience other cultures outside of the lush farmland surrounding me. As a high school student with set intentions to attend a state college after graduation, I needed foreign language credit. What started as a "need to" transformed into a "want to" situation. I felt immediately enamored with the Spanish language and cultures of many countries I had only ever seen on maps. It gave me the drive to pursue the language and cultural studies into my college and professional careers.

My new love and appreciation for a language and series of cultures that were not my own gave me many opportunities to travel and meet new people that I would have never come across in Wisconsin. My "want to" become bilingual then turned into a "love to" for me. Sure, learning workbook skills and reading books in another language helps to

learn a language, but it was the experiences and opportunities that solidified it. Being able to be bilingual in English and Spanish allowed a double life, not like the ones you see on television soap operas, but a life filled with twos. I was now able to have experiences and appreciation of tv shows, movies, and music expanding to both English and Spanish. I had double the amount of words to use to describe what I'm thinking or how I'm feeling. Most importantly, I doubled the amount of people I could now communicate with. This did not come without struggle though.

After high school, my language journey flourished. Being an adult at a university in Buenos Aires, Argentina when I was in college was exhausting. Important information about my grades, my visa, and my living conditions were all in Spanish. The heightened sense of urgency and worry about whether or not I understood what many would call basic (my address, getting directions, understanding a different monetary system), was a constant stressor every day for me. Although my one true task was to learn and improve my Spanish language with having all classes in Spanish, I constantly felt overloaded with information all around me in a language that I wasn't 100% familiar with and to which I didn't have family or friends to turn to help me understand. Out of frustration, home sickness, a deficit in communicating my needs and wants, and making new friends, I cried a lot.

With time, however, living in Buenos Aires became my new normal. The information overload headaches started going away. I learned how to function in a new country by listening to others, mimicking what they were doing, listening and doing as they did, and found people that gave me the confidence to learn and grow to become part of the community and culture. I truly became bilingual being immersed into my double

life of twos—my English and my Spanish reflecting and bouncing back on one another, affording me one of the biggest opportunities that got me to where I am today.

I had the opportunity to learn a language by choice and to put myself out into the world where I knew the importance of my double bilingual life. However, many high school newcomers coming into the United States have different motivations and needs that are not being addressed by teachers. Although my goal for students is the same as it was for myself about becoming bilingual and living a double life of opportunities, these high school newcomers face many obstacles, which some I can relate to when I was a young adult language learner, but others that I cannot. My hope is that all students have the opportunities like I did to grow their love and appreciation of being bilingual. High school language learners are not only learning English, they are experiencing life on the cusp of adulthood in a new place, with new people, and establishing a new normal.

### ***Significance of the Study***

Minimal research has been conducted about teachers of high school newcomer ELs (students who have been in the country less than three years) and distinct challenges they face. There are stricter requirements for teachers of minority language students at the elementary and middle grade levels than at the secondary level. The teachers at the lower grade levels are state-qualified Bilingual or Dual Language teachers who use students' first languages to help them learn English. Teachers are required to have extensive training on language acquisition that is not seen at the high school level. In comparison, to teach English as a Second Language at the secondary level in Texas, teachers only need a supplemental certification that is required among all English teachers in the district anyways.

The correlation of isolation of a high school campus ESL teacher, lack of training and qualified Sheltered English content-area teachers and addressing specific needs of high school newcomers is one that needs to be talked about more to promote success across the board for students and all stake-holders in public education. As more states require language learner English proficiency growth as part of campus accountability funds, addressing needs for high school Newcomers is a crucial component of campus operations--and it starts with the teachers.

There is a lack of a solid knowledge base surrounding specific challenges older students have in an all-English-speaking school that has little to do with the fact they come in not speaking English. High school in particular is a place where students have basic knowledge of the inner workings of the society around them, how to use language in different ways to communicate, and interact in a social way that promotes growth of the whole student. Older immigrant adolescents are at a disadvantage coming into a country that relies heavily on established communication and social interaction skills, that it could potentially inhibit their academic growth.

Minimal studies and anecdotes have been published about challenges that high school ESL teachers face and how these challenges could impact newcomer students.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

As a public high school newcomer ESL teacher, I have come to feel burned out. Exhausted by the numerous differentiated, yet engaging, lessons I prepare alone every day for students, frustrated by reteaching content from other core classes in a way that makes sense in my students' second language, and tired by the lack of empathy and

awareness my colleagues have for immigrant adolescents who are in the emerging stages of being bilingual in a foreign country. And I know I'm not alone.

With high school classrooms that are packed full of a wide-range of students, and content is crammed in a 45 minute time slot, it can be easy for newcomers to slip through the cracks and become invisible. This is why the ESL teacher and the ESL classroom is an information hub for newcomers about everything school-related as well as community-based needs.

As a young adult, it is immediately understood that you should have the basics figured out, thus potentially losing out on supports that should be in place for all emerging bilingual students-- just like in an elementary setting. Many high school English learners are getting lost in the shuffle of information overload and lack of support, and the challenges they face should be addressed in their pursuit of bilingualism.

Newcomer EL students require academic, culturally responsive, and socio-emotional teaching in the ESL classroom as well as outside of the ESL classroom. However, this isn't always the case—especially at the high school level. My goal is to examine what perceptions ESL teachers have on the challenges they and their students face, and how they are being addressed and supported. Throughout the first couple of years in the United States, ESL teachers spend the majority of their time with EL newcomers teaching not only English, but culture, tradition, and how to advocate for oneself in a new country.

Gaining insight into the challenges that ESL teachers are aware of and the potential challenges these educators face trying to address student issues will give

information as to how the ESL program as a whole on the secondary level can improve and implement strategies to avoid any preventable challenges for both students and teachers in the future.

### ***Conceptual Framework***

The research being conducted is centered around culturally responsive teaching (CRT), or culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) as it relates to the experiences of teachers teaching English as a Second Language to culturally diverse students. Geneva Gay (2002) explains culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). This directly comes as a result of her findings in 2000 that is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge along with skills are based in the lived experiences and frame of reference of students, they will be more meaningful and personal to students, have a higher interest appeal, and are actually learned more thoroughly and easily (Gay, 2000).

As educators, it is important to utilize the different cultures and experiences of students specifically who are language learners as a way to make connections and teach more effectively. Ladson-Billings (1995) suggests this through the inclusion of underrepresented minorities in texts that are centered around, as well as acknowledging, culture differences as a way to propel pedagogy forward into thinking critically through different social and cultural lenses

Although bilingual education in Texas is centered around culturally responsive pedagogy, it is a need that must extend to all content areas in high school due to the

growing number of English learners, and specifically newcomers, who need the support and acceptance of educators acknowledging cultural differences in a positive way.

### ***Research Question***

The true advocates for students in an ESL setting are the ESL teachers themselves. In order to get the best holistic picture for the program, the students, the curriculum, and the connection amongst all of these factors, asking teacher perceptions and sharing their stories is crucial (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The best data will come from high school ESL teachers who have different perspectives due to specific campuses they teach at, the number of years teaching newcomers, their experience with second language acquisition, and their overall awareness of the ESL program and students. My research question focuses on the following:

- What are the perspectives of “English as a Second Language” teachers teaching secondary level newcomer English learners?

Any emerging themes or topics that arise from this central question will drive more specific questions. As data is collected, pressing issues that come to the surface will be identified and a course of action will be made as to what steps should be taken next in the future.

### ***Definition of Terms***

*Bilingual:* Describes an individual with command of two languages

*LEP:* A label used in the US to refer to “Limited English Proficiency”. Criticized for its deficit view of students.

*EL:* English Learner



*Newcomer:* EL student in the US for less than 3 years

*Emergent Bilingual:* Alternative label for ELs that emphasized their bilingual development and the goal to becoming full bilingual

*Language Acquisition:* Gaining the ability to be aware of another language, understand it, and communicate with it

*Sheltered English Instruction:* Content-area classes taught in English at a language development level to minority language students

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

The purpose of this literature review is to provide historical context and background as well as current knowledge of the role bilingual education plays in the instruction of high school English learners. The literature review is broken into five sections. The purpose of this literature review is: 1) to lay foundational knowledge of EL policy in the US, 2) to demonstrate how second language is acquired in a high school setting, 3) to describe academic success and challenges for ELs, and 4) to explore effective cultural responsive teaching practices in and out of the ESL classroom.

#### ***Bilingual Policy in the United States***

In order to best understand what English as a Second Language program looks like at a secondary level in the United States, we must first reflect on bilingual policy in this country. In the last thirty years, bilingual education has grown exponentially into the American public school system with more and more students showing need for the services that this program can provide. Immigrant policy has become a hot topic in the American political climate as well by shaping educational policy. Bilingual Education is one component inside a larger social, economic, educational, cultural, and political framework in the United States that is centered on the fundamental purposes and aims of education in general: for individuals, communities, and nations (Baker & Wright, p. 172, 2017). Although there has been a growing shift to highlight bilingual education in this country, looking back on its true inception in the 1960s can help place emphasis on the dynamic and ever-changing nature of bilingual policy for the future.

However, the illusion that bilingual education is a modern phenomenon is wrong and dangerous. In one shape or another, bilingual education has existed for the last 5,000 years—shaping societies, cultures, and expanding on the limitations set by monolingualism in global policies, battles, and development. It has shaped many countries around the world in both educational contexts, but historical and political contexts as well. (Baker & Wright, p. 172, 2017).

It is necessary to state that long before immigrants made up the majority of the people in the United States, there were more than 300 indigenous languages from the various tribes of Native Americans throughout the country. Colonization did not happen overnight and was brought about by different Christian denominations setting up missionaries that were instrumental in the conversion and growth of Christianity in the United States. This is where we could possibly say bilingual education was first introduced into the United States. It was not all English, however. Many missionaries were brought over by the Dutch, French, Spanish, and German as well (McCarty, 2004). Although this time period in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was horrendous for Native Americans for many reasons outside the scope of this literature review, it is important to note the historical significance of mandatory language conversion: for this is not the last time we will see this.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as a wave of immigrants came to set up a new life in homogenous communities, schools started to pop up in heavily concentrated ethnic areas in regions such as the Midwest and Eastern states. Due to The Naturalization Act (1906) which required all immigrants seeking naturalized citizenship to speak English, these schools used their European mother-tongue language (most notably Dutch,

Danish, German, Norwegian, Italian, Polish, Spanish, French, and Czech) as well as English for instruction (Baker and Wright, pg. 173, 2017). By 1919, the Americanization Department of the United States Bureau of Education “recommended” that all public and private schools conducted instruction in English, however this was not totally restrictive. Many Supreme Court cases arose challenging the idea of a strict “English-only” policy in schools. Most notably during this time was *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923) where a teacher teaching German Bible verses to students after school hours was brought to trial over not giving instruction in English. The court ruled it was “not injurious to the health, morals, or understanding of the ordinary child” (Wiley, 2013). The second most notable case was four years later in 1927 where the Hawaiian education system was putting restrictions on after school bilingual and multicultural programs for Chinese and Japanese communities. The Supreme Court found this unconstitutional (Del Valle, 2003).

Overall, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was not necessarily *for* bilingual education and creating any policies dictating the implementation of bilingual programs, but instead showed that the United States upheld the rights of individual states to dictate language instruction in schools but was not given the authority to regulate private instruction in a foreign language after regular school hours. In the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the government takes many different stances on foreign language instruction and bilingual education as it suits its political needs and necessary gains in comparison to the other countries in the world. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on the historical context of the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States that focuses on policy and court rulings that have influenced bilingual education as it is today.

### Later 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Again, for the purpose of our literature review, we will focus on the implications of any historical events talked about through the lens of foreign-born persons whose native language is not English. As we will see, Bilingual Education trends follow important historical events in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the launching of Sputnik in 1957 by the Russians, the United States engaged in what has been dubbed “The Space Race”. This was a period that was crucial in educational policies and the next year in 1958, the National Defense Education Act was passed that promoted foreign language learning in order to gain a leg-up on any country who could potentially be seen as a threat to the United States (Baker & Wright, p. 176, 2017). This eased the country’s intolerance attitudes towards ethnic groups and languages other than English that were used throughout the country.

Civil unrest in many minority groups in the United States came to a head in the historical Civil Rights Act in 1964 that prohibited discrimination on the basis of color, race or national origin. The Civil Rights Act shows the possibility (at the Federal level) that intolerance towards ethnic groups and languages other than English was a crime. New legislation and lawsuits would abound more frequently in the later 60s, propelling language-minority education and bilingualism into the forefront of American educational policy.

Starting in 1963, the “restoration of bilingual education is often regarded as starting with Coral Way Elementary in Florida” (Baker and Wright, p. 175, 2017). This school was created as a response to exiled Cubans in Florida setting up the first true bilingual school that was staffed with highly trained professional teachers who knew the purpose was to help transition Cubans fleeing communist Cuba to the American way of

life through the use of mother-tongue and English instruction. The community sympathy grew to the point where the school was funded and functional: prompting the National Education Association (NEA) to hold a meeting in 1966 about other educational needs of immigrant students throughout the country in a similar fashion to Coral Way. The NEA conducted surveys titled “The Invisible Minority” at innovative and successful school programs in Texas, New Mexico, California, Colorado, and Arizona that used Spanish specifically in their daily instruction (NEA, 1966).

Because of the findings of the NEA in 1966, one of the most significant moves by the federal government during this time was the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that introduced and included an amendment in the form of The Bilingual Education Act in 1967. Although the original intent was conceptualized to give support to Spanish speakers failing in the American school system, it was later broadened to include students that didn’t speak English as their native language. A year later in 1968, Title VII of ESEA, the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) was included to indicate that bilingual education programs were under federal educational policy (Wiese & Garcia, 2001). This was a huge step in procuring federal funds for bilingual programs and to squander any remaining “English only” policies that were adopted by some states. Funds were also given out to students who were transitioning to working through English in the classroom instead of their native language.

In 1974, the landmark Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* outlawed English submersion, or mainstreaming, for students who are not proficient in English. Going through years of rejection through district courts in California and the court of appeals, it

was finally accepted by the Supreme Court and effectively deemed that total English instruction to students who didn't understand the language as unconstitutional. This was covered under the equal protections clause in the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 citing specifically that Chinese students in the San Francisco School District were not given the same opportunities to succeed in school as their native English-speaking counterparts because they did not understand instruction or content that was being presented to them.

Because of this, the Office of Civil Rights (created during the inception of the Civil Rights Act) set guidelines for school districts to help remedy this issue of newcomer students with little to no English proficiency. One of these guidelines was the introduction of English as a Second Language course. Although these were not laws, it was the first time there were any sort of guidance in bilingual education to support the use and transition of minority languages and English in the public education system. Throughout the next twenty years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we will see many how different presidents change and sway bilingual legislation to uphold political beliefs and ideals: switching back and forth for more and less restrictions on bilingual policy.

In sum, the later 1970s reauthorized the ESEA Title VII again to provide clearer boundaries on bilingual programs as well as made students receiving grant money to include students' home language into instruction (Wise & Garcia, 2001). Of course, there were many heated debates about how much of the home language should be utilized in instruction, placing extreme emphasis on teaching new concepts to students in English. This is when the middle ground of transitional bilingual education was stressed instead of a native language-heavy maintenance bilingual education. However, the use of a true dual

language program was not allowed at this time. Four years later, these dual language restrictions were lifted (Baker & Wright, p. 177, 2017).

A distinct change in bilingual education came in the 1980s, specifically under the Reagan administration (Hakuta, 2020). In general, this administration was hostile towards bilingual education. *The New York Times* published an article in 1981 quoting Reagan as to saying, “It is absolutely wrong and against the American concept to have a bilingual education program that is now openly, admittedly, dedicated to preserving their native language and never getting them adequate in English so they can go out into the job market” (1981). This blatant disdain and sentiment was reflected in the reauthorizations of ESEA Title VII in both 1984 and 1988 to give more funds to schools and districts that were geared towards bilingual programs who did not use native language instruction. This administration’s ideology mirrors the opposite of the decade before, weakening the guidelines set in place by *Lau v. Nichols* and instead recommending what was deemed unconstitutional in 1974.

The 1990s brought hope to a new era in bilingual education with the Clinton administration. Again, with a new reauthorization of ESEA Title VII in 1994, the states’ role in bilingual education strengthened with an emphasis on holding limited-English learning students to a high standard of learning but also giving more funds to immigrants and immigrant programs in particular. The Clinton administration emphasized the importance of bilingualism specifically in languages with economic prosperity. The hypocrisy during this era was the rise of foreign language courses in schools across the country which were “regarded as important in educating students for the global economy” (Baker & Wright, p. 178, 2017). Also, no specific guidelines in language



instruction were addressed here, the Clinton administration strayed away from Reagan's "English only" stance to "use native language as a resource". Although this was an important step in the right direction, the general American public and politicians alike were against this type of bilingual education, resulting in cuts in programs, teacher trainings, research, and support.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought the same optimism as the 1990s did in the from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act in 2001 under the George W. Bush administration. It's radical elimination of the decades-long Title VII Bilingual Education Act was replaced with Title III "Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students". This was the first time in federal legislation where language instruction was written in. This is where the current indicator of LEP (Limited English Proficient) is first presented. It is important to note the significance in this student indicator. The use of the term LEP brings back the Reagan sentiments of a deficit in students who are not proficient in English as *lacking ability in English* (Baker & Wright, 2017). Although the use of native language in instruction as a benefit in instruction is addressed, a narrow focus on English language development instead of developing true bilingualism packages Reagan's "English only" in a more desirable and unethical form. Instead of taking the opportunity to include legislation introducing English-learning students as bilingual or coded as language learners, the term "bilingual" was completely cut out and silenced.

Under NCLB, states were required to provide bilingual instruction in their own way as long as any form of scientifically based studies were used, but no specific

program model was specifically recommended. The same process of requiring teachers to be “highly qualified” to ensure high standards were being met, no criteria were outlined specifically for teachers of English language learners. Again, under NCLB, the federal government held states accountable for LEP student performance by having yearly standardized tests and making sure students improve yearly. However, severe sanctions for campuses who failed to meet specific requirements two years in a row were in place even though there were no exclusions for this high standard of instruction and learning for students learning English. High-stakes testing was at the forefront of NCLB as was holding campuses accountable for student performance.

Potential negative outcomes as a result of the restrictions put into place by NCLB included an increase of dropouts, less instruction time to develop English and math skills, inaccurate measurement of proficiency in LEP and other subgroups, and the loss of fluent and native-speaker teachers and aides who were not deemed “highly qualified” (Wiley & Wright, 2004). Hakuta (2020) explains that because of this, there was a disconnect in states between teacher credentials and policy. There was a lack of capacity in hiring teachers to deliver bilingual education, English language development services, or even appropriate content instruction for English learners. Due to the lack of reauthorization or discussion of ESEA during the Bush administration, the effects of NCLB were in place for eight years, despite growing bipartisan dissatisfaction with the unrealistic expectations and failures across the country (Baker & Wright, p. 182, 2017).

As the Bush administration left and the Obama administration came forth in 2009, many initiatives were put into place to try and shift away from the test heavy NCLB days. This included President Barack Obama’s “Race to the Top” initiative that employed

international benchmarks to meet to prepare students for the workforce and college, retain effective teachers and administration, and support intervention programs for low-performing schools. However, high-stakes testing was still prominent in the American education system, as well as standards of teaching and instruction that were difficult to meet in order to gain more funding.

In 2011, the Obama administration heard the outcry of schools across the country about the woes and unattainable expectations set forth by NCLB and created accountability mandate waivers for states to adopt. This included the adoption of English language proficiency (ELP) standards to drive instruction for all content-area teachers with LEP students in their class that supplemented and corresponded to college and career-readiness standards already utilized throughout the country (US Department of Education, 2012). With one step forward came one step back; ESEA Flexibility didn't waive the Title III (20 U.S.C. 6811) requirements of holding districts accountable for yearly English proficiency increases.

In summary, the overall perception of educational policy being slow-moving and difficult to change is contradicted by the rich history of bilingual legislation through the last fifty years in the United States. Especially in the current political climate, change in bilingual policy is inevitable and will never remain static. Disdain and uncertainty in immigrant and bilingual education forges that path in constant change but brings about opportunities to reinvent bilingual programs to progress into the future.

### ***Programming and Language Acquisition***

Throughout the remainder of the literature review, we will focus on Texas legislation and mandates regarding bilingual programs due to the nature of the study that will be conducted will happen in Texas with Texas teachers and students.

According to the Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.051 -29.064 Subsection B of the Bilingual Education and Special Language Programs section , schools in Texas are required by law to have a bilingual or English language program in place if twenty or more students in a grade level are identified as LEP. These programs change depending on the age group of students. Referencing Subsection B again, bilingual education should be offered at the elementary level, bilingual, dual language, English language, or other transitional programs should be offered at the middle level, and grades 9-12 should be offered an English as a second language course.

Under Sec. 29.055 specifically about method of instruction in bilingual programs, this is the language that is used:

A bilingual education program established by a school district shall be a full-time program of dual-language instruction that provides for learning basic skills in the primary language of the students enrolled in the program and for carefully structured and sequenced mastery of English language skills. A program of instruction in English as a second language established by a school district shall be a program of intensive instruction in English from teachers trained in recognizing and dealing with language differences.

As we note the difference in language most commonly found in the elementary and middle level grades, it is clear that the expectation for students is to have a strong

foundation in their first language and then slowly and “carefully” master English language skills. On the other hand, students who may not have a foundation in their first language (interrupted learning, school systems were poor, not legally necessary to attend school in home country), but are enrolling in an American high school are only offered English as a second language courses that, have “intensive instruction in English”. Because of this sudden shift of expectations, districts have supplemented intensive English instruction courses at the high school level with reading intervention courses and language acquisition courses, or commonly referred to as English language development (ELD) courses.

### ***Language Acquisition***

Looking back at the history of English learners coded into the school system as LEP, the subtle nuance to this label shows that the goal of the American school system is to produce English proficient students, not placing importance on both English and a student’s native language. For this reason, many researchers and programs across the country use the term, “emergent bilingual” (O. Garcia, 2009) interchangeably with “LEP” to provide a positive connotation to students are yet to become proficient in English. For the purpose of this literature review, I will use this term interchangeably with LEP. Ideally, second language acquisition (SLA) for emergent bilinguals is acquired through a “natural” environment much like a baby learning its first language through its surroundings and experiences. Researchers have thought of SLA as a fluid continuum with bilingualism being the ultimate finish line for language learners. Unfortunately, there isn’t time for this natural acquisition of another language for students when high stakes testing and benchmark assessments are involved.

According to Thomas & Collier (2002), basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) develop anywhere from one to three years depending on the student and must be supported in and outside of the classroom to build conversational fluency. On the other hand, cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP), which is needed for academic success develops at a slower pace, taking from four to seven or more years (Cummins, 2000). If a student arrives in the United States and enrolls in a bilingual program in kindergarten, the student has the time to build their communicative and academic skills in a way that is organized and slowly introduces new English language concepts. If a student new to the country enrolls at the age of 17, this is a totally different story. Programs that cannot accommodate for this needed time for acquisition of both BICS and CALP are doing the student a disservice; but as we learned in the previous section, this disservice falls upon the state policies for bilingual education.

Seeing a need for the students, especially at the high school level, to have more time acquiring language, Texas adopted an English Language Development and Acquisition (ELDA) course (19 TAC Chapter 129).

(Geneese, et.al, 2006), (Ellis, 2005), and (Norris & Ortega, 2000) have all written meta- analyses of second language acquisition that have contributed to the overall literature of the importance of acquiring a second language. However, there is an overall lack of research supporting instructional methods and best practices at the K-12 level for English learners.

Stephen Krashen (1982) a notable SLA theorist has noted the need for comprehensible input for language learners as well as meaningful and intentional interaction and output with other students in his notable hypotheses of the same names.

The Texas standards for the high school ELDA course recognizes this, “Through comprehensible input, students have access to a curriculum that accelerates second language acquisition” (Texas Education Code, **§128.36.**). This will be talked about more in the next section that focuses on sheltered instructional programs. Although there is much debate as to whether or not focus on where linguistic skills in acquiring a second language are innate (nature), acquired (nurture), or a combination of both is truly dependent on the age, first language skill, and sociocultural factors of individual students.

Student language learning is promoted through social interaction and contextualized communication as teachers guide students to construct meaning and understand complex concepts from texts and classroom discourse (Vygotsky, 1978). Ultimately, second language acquisition is acquired through engaging and meaningful experiences and activities that have a purpose and drive inquiry in a class.

### ***High-Stakes Testing and NCLB***

Since NCLB (No Child Left Behind; U.S. Department of Education, 2002) legislation was enacted in 2001, there appears to be an increase in the number of high school ELs not receiving a diploma, because they failed high-stakes tests, despite fulfilling all other graduation requirements (Center on Education Policy, 2005) There are many high-stakes tests that high school English learners are responsible for, so we are going to look at high-stakes testing as a whole and the effect it has on campuses, teaching practices, and the students themselves. It all stems from No Child Left Behind (2001).

The vision of NCLB when it was first enacted by the United States Department of Education was “to change the culture of America’s schools by closing the achievement

gap, ...more flexibility,...more options, and teaching students based on what works”

(United States Department of Education (USDOE) 2012). In order to change and enforce this mandate to closing achievement gaps, states came up with external accountability: large-scale standardized assessments, that in turn became tools for educational policy leverage (Valenzuela 2005). The name and process of these standardized tests have changed throughout the years in Texas, but remains the same amount of pressure and impact they have on high school students, especially English learners.

Since 2001 when NCLB (No Child Left Behind; U.S. Department of Education, 2002) legislation was first enacted, there is a correlation between how instruction and testing has changed and the increase in the number of high school English learners (ELs) not receiving a diploma due to the fact of failing high-stakes tests, despite fulfilling all other requirements to graduate (Center on Education Policy, 2005). Although there is an increased focus on the growth of ELs in the public school system, the testing does not reflect the bilingual nature of these students, and instead can be a major hindrance to future plans of students by putting pressure on teachers and schools to “teach to the test”, bypassing second language acquisition.

Overall, the increase of high stakes testing as an answer to federal mandates set forth by NCLB in the early 2000s only adds to the challenges high school emergent bilinguals (especially newcomers) face in both an academic and socioemotional way.

The state of Texas has long tied particularly high stakes to its state exam, which for grades 3-12 are currently the State of Texas Assessments for Academic Readiness, or commonly known as STAAR (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a). At the high school level, passing scores on three out of five (with special permission and provisions) STAAR end-



of-course exams are required for graduation from high school, making the test essentially a gatekeeper to both postsecondary education and most career paths (Bach. 2020). With Texas high schools focusing on college, career, and military readiness, a high school diploma or its equivalent is a requirement for participation in all three area of post-secondary life: the military, most trade schools, and employment in many sectors of the labor force.

Bach (2020) explains how the shift of accountability and the skills tested for these high-stake tests in Texas implies an upward shift from basic knowledge skills to academic skills to better prepare for college readiness. Researching the disparity and challenges English learners face with high-stakes testing, Bach (2020) explains the shift in testing and the ultimate impact it has on high school English Learners. In 1986, a passing score on the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) was a requirement to graduate from high school (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a). Since then, Texas has phased in three different assessments: the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in 1990, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in 2003, and the current assessment, the STAAR in 2012 (Texas Education Agency, n.d.a). Although high-stakes testing for graduation is nothing new in Texas, the level of rigor and pressure that is placed on these tests has only increased, and most recently due to federal mandates such as NCLB.

Although NCLB did not ban bilingual education or native language assessments, its language focus was English only, especially at the secondary level (Menken and Solorza 2014). Additionally, because end-of-course exams use English to assess students' content knowledge, they then pose linguistic challenges for emergent bilingual students

and make it impossible to separate language proficiency from content knowledge. In addition to the content standards that all students, including ELs, have to meet each year, states also must submit English language proficiency standards (ELPS) for ELs that were incorporated into the AYP accountability system (Menken 2008). With increasing numbers of ELs taking standardized achievement tests in English, concerns about the validity of test results began to surface (Menken 2008). Emergent bilinguals can understand content, but they don't pass these tests because ultimately language impacts the results (Bach, 2020).

While most emergent bilingual students in U.S. public schools are younger and usually elementary school students, a majority of public-school districts nationwide have ELs in high school. This is especially relevant in Texas (Bialik, et al., 2018). While emergent bilingual students in elementary and middle schools are offered a range of accommodations for taking the STAAR exam in a language they are still learning, and even a chance to take it in their native language if their home language is Spanish, those in high school are afforded significantly fewer. In high school, if using a paper copy of the tests are only able to use dictionaries and have extra time to complete tests (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Currently, Texas is rolling out computer versions that include more embedded supports such as text-to-speech and pictures for *some* unknown words. However, they are not given the option of being assessed in their native language or have any other native language supports (Bach, 2020; Gándara et al. 2010).

### ***Policy Driving Instruction***

English learners are an increasing focus in public education, and the number of students in this subpopulation have drastically increased by over 40 percent in five states

and shown increases in twenty others (Department of Education, 2017). This is a growing population of students that are being impacted by high stakes testing and accountability culture in education. Ultimately, standardized high-stakes tests such as STAAR put pressure on English learners who work hard to complete course work but get hung up on passing these exams. Bach (2020) found in her cite-wide case study of a particular school district in Texas that the needs of emergent bilingual students are deemphasized, and learning is equated with raised test scores in an attempt to help students meet graduation requirements and prevent a school district from being penalized by the state. She also goes on to say that, “teaching to the test is not the same as gaining proficiency in a subject area” (Bach, p. 27, 2020).

High stakes testing such as STAAR promotes rote, standardized teaching, and learning, and monolingualism in schools. Bach (2020) describes her overall concern of the impact high stakes testing has on instruction and EL achievement as not being able to help students develop higher-order thinking skills, nor the critical literacy skills emergent bilinguals need in both a social and academic setting. She claims that test-centric instruction masks these challenges emergent bilingual students face in order to meet state accountability standards, especially in resource-poor schools that rely on the funding provided to higher test scores (Bach, 2020).

The emphasis on preparing for high-stakes tests, including high school exit tests, had other consequences for ELs. In a study conducted by Menken (2006), it was noted that one consequence was narrowing of the curriculum. This is due to the specific standards that are on STAAR exams, and the teacher then bypasses other learning to focus on getting students to pass end-of-course exams. Another consequence Menken

noted was, in some cases, the loss of English language acquisition support. For instance, ESL or English language development (ELD) instructional approaches were replaced by English language arts classes for native English speakers or remedial reading classes. Bach (2020) also saw the loss of second language support at the high school level due to district concern of having students not taking more than four years to graduate high school, eliminating an “overabundance” of elective ELD credit.

While NCLB took an important step in creating guidelines for educators and schools to provide a full education complete with highly trained educators, the emphasis on high-stakes testing has been a challenge for many students, especially high school emergent bilinguals. The pressure of graduation and future plans are dictated by these tests. However, this is not an argument to eliminate state testing, but to recognize that the literature points to it not being an effective formative assessment of ELs’ literacy and content knowledge (Bach, 2020). Tying state funding to the scores of students and sub-populations without proper accommodations for what the state is truly testing should thus not be the sole decision-making tool for predicting passing rates and accountability, especially for language-minority students (Acosta, et.al., 2019)

A critical gap in current literature about the challenges emergent bilinguals face at the high school level to recognize the effects an obstacle such as high-stakes testing impacts emergent bilinguals, their instruction, and academic and socioemotional lives. With COVID-19 encroaching on the way educational policy is thought of, created, and rolled out is evolving every day and has already affected high-stakes testing in the state of Texas.

### ***Sheltered Instruction***

The main goal of a Sheltered Instruction content-area class is for teachers to deliver grade-level objectives for the different subject areas to English learners through modified instruction that makes the information comprehensible to the students while promoting their academic English development (Vogt & Echevarria, 2010). The most widely-known and used method of Sheltered Instruction is research-based SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) from Jane Vogt and Jane Echevarria that includes eight components to differentiate instruction. They suggest activities that promote culturally relevant pedagogy by cooperative learning and making connections to student experiences, targeted vocabulary development, slower speech and fewer idiomatic expressions, use of visuals and demonstrations, and use of adapted and culturally diverse and responsive texts (Short & Echevarria, 2004). In effective SIOP lessons, language and content objectives are systematically woven into the curriculum (p. 20). This is to help bridge the gap of deficiencies found with English learners and content-area courses that are taught in English and brings together what to teach by providing a framework for how to teach it (Vogt & Echevarria, 2010, p.23).

As referenced earlier about bilingual programming, there is no true bilingual program at the high school level in Texas. There are English as a Second Language courses, Language Acquisition courses, and SIOP courses--all which are taught in English. According to Vogt and Echevarria (2010), "Currently in the United States, content-based English as a second language (ESL) and sheltered instruction are acknowledged methods for developing academic English and providing English learners access to core content coursework". In the state of Texas, EL students are most often placed into Sheltered Instruction content-area courses that specifically follow the SIOP

method. This includes newcomers, students in their first couple of years of English language learning, and students who are no longer in the ESL program because they have completed all ESL courses but haven't met the criteria to be reclassified as students no longer needing Bilingual Education services (Parrish et al., 2006). Also, native-born students whose home language is not English can also be placed in SIOP courses for English support as they are officially recognized as "long-term English learners" by the time they get to high school (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). SIOP courses are a melting pot of EL students at different levels of English that need language support in one form or another.

In content classes such as science, math, and social studies, ELs must integrate their emerging knowledge of the English language with the content information they are studying in order to complete the academic tasks. In one class period, an emerging bilingual student must complete three steps in order to accomplish work in their non-native language: knowledge of English, knowledge of the content topic, and knowledge of how the tasks are to be accomplished (Short, 2002). This is no easy feat. According to Short & Echevarria (2016), Academic language involves the use of higher-level vocabulary and sentence structures along with more sophisticated forms of expression than is generally found in everyday conversation.

However, sheltered curricula such as lessons, activities, and resources that are appropriate for each course are not always readily available or used with fidelity. Successfully trained teachers may take one to two years before they can implement the sheltered model consistently to a high degree with support from administration, PLCs, and coaching (Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012). Teachers who do not get the

opportunity to have a SIOP coach, proper training or PDs or knowledge of emerging bilinguals can be at a severe disadvantage. (McIntyre, et.al., 2010) suggests that teachers' proficiency in implementing the SIOP model may depend on their background teaching experiences (ie. years, population, schools, grade-levels taught) and the design of their professional development. This may cause an issue for both teachers and students: teachers feeling more overwhelmed and underprepared to teach language learners as well as students not receiving proper instruction that meets their language and content needs.

Academic growth and achievement for EL students are not possible without feeling comfortable to learn in another language. Rodriguez (2019) describes *belonging* for English Learners as "...how networks of support and membership among and within immigrant communities proves enhanced access to opportunities and resources" (pg. 137). The partnership between ESL programs and the content-area teachers who teach EL students to feel safe and "secure" obtaining knowledge and feel a sense of belonging and community in their classrooms and on campus can be a strong team in providing insight, strategies, and knowledge for their high school emerging bilingual students.

### ***Cultural Responsiveness***

Culturally relevant educators use constructivist methods to develop connections of students' cultural references to academic skills and concepts. (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Essentially, the culturally relevant classroom is inclusive of all students. In order to best fit the needs of this growing sub-population of students, teachers need to have an awareness and positivity that benefits student learning in the classroom.

CRP strategies are considered the gold-standard of teaching anyways: scaffold students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and learning styles to provide better access to curriculum. Teachers should consider flexible groupings and collaborations with peers, and creating a cooperative classroom community feel (Ford, 2010). At its core, CRP is student-centered and provides support to learners by approaching effective instruction through different cultural lenses to provide clear concepts and information (Irvine, 2009).

At present, one of the largest pressing issues for high school newcomers are courses that are taught in English; their content-area courses. In Texas, where this study will focus on its laws and regulations, these math, science, and social studies teachers are not required to obtain bilingual or ESL certifications to teach English Learners. The focus and lack of cultural responsiveness in curricula is a direct effect of this, segregating cognitive and cultural connections in learning. This is where the importance of professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy is a must.

In Texas, English Learners account for 18% of all students in public education (NCES, 2019). This makes up any immigrant students, long-term ELs, and Newcomers receiving bilingual education services. Data also collected from the National Center of Educational Services (2019), shows that this number is only growing. It is estimated that by 2025, over 25 percent of students in U.S. schools will be ELs ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)). Therefore, educators must ensure that the academic and language needs of students, whose first language is not English, are met (Vogt, 2009). Many teaching strategies like building background and using connections to oneself are well known to teachers, but it



is the *combination* of them and the *consistency* with which they are used with fidelity that appears to influence academic gains.

Gay (2013) states that, “beliefs and attitudes always precede and shape behaviors” so it is wise to “examine teacher beliefs before instructional actions (p.49). This can help inform change or a need on a campus in a district for potential training, modeling, or professional development for teachers to raise awareness and practice CRP strategies and implementation. Teachers often feel unable to meet the challenges of CRP without any formal training or guidance, and this feeling is coupled by the ever-increasing demands of high stakes testing and all-or nothing teacher accountability measures (Harper & De Jong, 2009; Walker, Shafer & Iiams, 2004).

Overall, this can potentially create negative attitudes toward English learners, and especially newcomers with very limited English language, that arrive in high school content-area courses that are solely provided in English. However, Mellom et. al. (2018) found that when teachers receive training and support in CRP, negative connotations and beliefs do change over time.

### Chapter III

#### Methodology

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) established the educational importance of narrative inquiry as a research methodology that brings “theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived” (p. 3). As educators, we are storytellers. We teach, we live, we share, we know, and we grow through lived stories and our experiences. This study uses narrative inquiry to come to understand the lived stories and experiences about the challenges ESL teachers and newcomer bilinguals face through a qualitative narrative inquiry approach. This has been the mode for this study’s methodology.

Lived experiences and stories from educators are the woven fabric of school landscapes. Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr (2007) explain this as moving from telling stories of teaching practices to narratively inquiring into teaching practices then situates teachers and teacher educators in the known and the familiar while it asks the researchers to make the known and the familiar strange and open to new possibilities. This is where the stories of high school ESL teachers can be heard. This study intended to answer the question of: *What are the perspectives of “English as a Second Language” teachers teaching secondary level newcomer English learners?* Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reiterates that a narrative inquiry is focused on the past and present lived experiences of individuals--and how they are lived for the researcher to gain intelligence on how this can affect the future.

A qualitative narrative study was the most appropriate for the high school teachers being studied along with using my own lived experiences as a high school ESL teacher to narrate these experiences into a common story that will emerge. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) define a narrative story as coming out of a view of human experience in which humans, both individually and socially, lead their storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. In this study, I, the researcher, acquired oral stories from high school ESL teachers and their perceptions on the challenges they face and how they are addressing these through interviews of four teachers and a researcher reflective journal.

Through the interviews, the researcher acquired experiences and perceptions of high school ESL teachers. This, along with my own personal reflective journal and focus group took a collaborative approach in collecting the data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that this type of approach interwoven with my own allowed me to gain a better insight that produced turning points or epiphanies in the study.

The researcher aimed to analyze and categorize the findings in a way that explored any emerging themes and connections among the participants. The researcher wanted to tell the stories and lived experiences of the high school ESL teachers to give them a voice in bilingual literature that frequently glosses over the secondary school bilingual experience. The researcher used their own reflective journal to provide qualitative descriptions to their own lived experiences to triangulate and support the emerging themes amongst the participants.

### ***Methodological Framework: Narrative Inquiry***

Clandinin and Huber (2010) describe a narrative inquiry study as a way of thinking about, and studying, experiences. Through inquiring of lived experiences, the researcher thought about and created their interpretation of shared narratives. This type of qualitative research is fairly new and focuses on the participants' natural setting that allowed the researcher to fully tell the stories and experiences of participants through narration and thick descriptions.

There are three commonplaces that make up a narrative inquiry study: temporality, sociality, and place. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) describe temporality in a narrative study as understanding that all participants and events have a past, present, and future; they are always in process and transition (p. 479). Clandinin and Connelly (2006) go on to explain that sociality is that there is a connection between personal conditions such as feelings, hopes, reactions, desires, and dispositions and that of social conditions (p. 480). It is important to note that these personal and social conditions were critical when gathering stories and experiences to gain better insight on all facets of the lived and possibly shared experiences of participants. Finally, Clandinin and Connelly (2006) describe place in a narrative study as the literal “specific, physical, and topographical boundaries where the experiences and events take place” (p. 480). The physical location of the experiences and inquiry from participants was important in the gathering of data because it helped shape the participants’ views and perceptions of their individual stories.

As a current high school ESL teacher myself, I have my own perceptions and experiences of working with newcomer emerging bilinguals and the challenges, both academically and socioemotionally. I also have lived experiences of the challenges high

school ESL teachers face in the bilingual program and how that can impact their students. I had a desire to explore other high school ESL teachers' perceptions, insights, and the stories of the challenges they face in and out of the classroom by giving them a voice to implement change by being part of literature that is almost nonexistent in the bilingual education world.

Narrative inquiry was the framework that best allowed the researcher to gather and retell the stories of the participants. This allowed for the individual participants to share their experiences: the good, the bad, and the ugly through their own story and lens. Using these stories, the researcher analyzed and found commonalities as well as outliers that drove further inquiry. This narrative inquiry approach allowed the stories of participants to be heard and felt through their own words and descriptions.

### ***Participants***

There was a total of five participants in this narrative inquiry, one being the principal researcher, and four high school ESL teachers who all work with high school newcomers (emerging bilinguals/English learners who have been in the United States for less than three years).

All participants were from a district in the Houston-area which has a large population of English learners and Title 1 schools. There has been a revolving door of ESL teachers at the high school level, as well as leadership positions-- to which may result in teachers' voices not getting heard or needs not being met. Each teacher selected reflected a different campus or classes taught in the district in order to receive a holistic picture of ESL teachers' perceptions and experiences of the high school ESL program and challenges they and their students face and how they are being addressed.

The participants for this study were selected using a convenience sample through a social/professional network outside of the researcher's home campus. At the time of this study, the researcher served in a district leadership role in which the participants are employed. As the district team lead, the researcher had a social/professional relationship with all teachers that was built on respect of opinion and professionalism. The researcher had no hand in evaluating teacher performance or anything outside of support and instructional materials. The principal researcher created a curriculum guide for these teachers to follow for instruction, however the textbook adoption used for the curriculum was determined by others than the researcher. This did not cause any conflict within the research and was stated to participants that they were free and open to talk about their own perceptions and experiences related to teaching newcomer students. The researcher did not insinuate or assert her own opinion onto participants or attempt to influence them in any way. IRB approval was obtained prior to beginning the study.

### Appendix C

Participants and Researcher					
Participant Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Years Teaching ESL	Education and Training
Maria (Participant)	28	Female	Hispanic	1 year	-Alternative Certification -Bachelor's Degree
Jennifer (Participant)	42	Female	Caucasian	11 years	-Alternative Certification -Pursuing Ph.D.
Shin (Participant)	34	Male	Asian	7 years	-Alternative Certification -Master's Degree
Emmitt (Participant)	69	Male	Caucasian	25 years	-Alternative Certification -Bachelor's Degree
Researcher	27	Female	Caucasian	6 years	-Alternative Certification -Pursuing Ed.D

### ***Sampling Design***

The researcher followed a purposive sampling design for this qualitative study (Shank and Brown, 2007). Shank and Brown (2007) describe purposive sampling as a tool researchers use to select the sample participants based on particular characteristics or their nature. The researcher had chosen the other four participants, apart from themselves, based on their certification and active employment as a high school ESL teacher who works specifically with newcomer English learners. The purpose of selecting these individual participants was to show a wide range in the overall ESL teacher experience based on race, age, and years as an ESL teacher. Although these participants may have had different backgrounds, the researcher anticipated commonalities in themes throughout their personal narratives about challenges they and their students face and came together in the focus group to discuss how these challenges are (or are not) being addressed.

### ***Methods of Data Collection***

The collection of data for this study was acquired over the course of six weeks. The conclusion was at the end of March of 2021. The researcher utilized different modes of data collection as well as the triangulation method to represent and verify significant data finding (Mills, 2014). The data for this study was acquired through interviews, a focus group, member-checks, and a self-reflecting journal kept by the researcher.

### ***Individual Interviews***

To gather a well-rounded narrative for this narrative inquiry research of each participant and their story, I first conducted individual interviews that lasted anywhere

from one hour to an hour and a half. All questions in the individual interviews were semi-structured to promote inquiry in this qualitative study. Individual interviews were centered around personal experiences and stories of the participants as was the goal in a personal narrative (Seidman, 2012).

The individual interviews allowed the researcher to gather more insight on high school ESL teachers' experiences with the challenges they face in the classroom, the challenges high school newcomer ELs face, and how they are intertwined and addressed. By having interview questions in a semi-structured format, this provided participants with their in-depth experiences while I maintained data points that were compared amongst all participants for commonalities and any epiphanies that may come up. The individual interviews took place on a UH-approved Microsoft Teams account that was recorded and transcribed for the researcher to maintain fidelity in what the participants are saying. The questions that were elicited in the interviews focus on the experiences of high school ESL teachers with the bilingual program, the challenges and highlights of being an ESL teacher, and other questions aimed to bring participants' high school bilingual education teaching to the forefront. The semi-structured format of questions allowed for the researcher to maintain control of the interview with pointed questions, while allowing participants the opportunity to freely share their stories and perceptions on specific topics.

### ***Focus Group***

After all individual interviews were collected, analyzed, and member-checked for accuracy and clarity, the researcher gathered the participants in a virtual focus group. Focus group data over the course of two hours were an expansion on these individual



stories that were centered around rich discussions. The goal was to find commonalities and organized data points that were analyzed for patterns among participants in the focus groups as well and individual interviews. The focus group also utilized the UH-approved Microsoft Teams account to record and transcribe the gathered data.

### ***Vital Conversations***

The purpose of a narrative inquiry study was to gather the experiences of individuals, and these vital conversations amongst participants were at the center of the data collection. All questions for participants in both the individual interviews and the focus group were semi-structured in order to facilitate the stories and experiences but allowed the researcher structure for future coding and analysis.

The participants provided thick and rich stories and perspectives of the challenges presented in the high school ESL program for both high school ESL teachers and their newcomer students and how those challenges are being addressed. These conversations were filled with information that the researcher analyzed and re-told to gain a better understanding of how high school ESL teachers feel, what they think and believe, and give them a voice through these vital conversations. I, the researcher, recorded and transcribed these conversations. I anticipated similar stories and new insights as to the challenges presented in bilingual education at the secondary level. They revealed interesting changes and shifts in perceptions to pre-Covid instruction and current Covid-19 instruction and the challenges that are highlighted.

### ***Journaling***

I, the researcher as a participant in this study, had data collected through personal journal entries throughout the time of the study. In this journal, I collected my own

thoughts and experiences related to bilingualism in high school, and the challenges that myself and my students face and how I am addressing them. This journaling was a tool that I as the researcher looked back on as my own personal narrative as I gathered those from the other participants formulating my own story.

### ***Reflections through Journaling***

As a researcher participant, it is important that I recorded my own personal ideas and perceptions to the same questions I asked my participants. I kept journals that show my own personal thoughts and experiences as I went through this process in order to triangulate and analyze data with my participants who were in the same position as I am. Being a high school ESL teacher myself, I believe these journals will act as essential artifacts to maintain a level of unbiased opinion as well as a way I recorded my own data through the process as I encountered each participant and engaged in vital conversations.

The journal entries were a written account of my own past and current experiences and how they were connected to my participants'. All participants were aware of my own personal journal entries and how my own experiences and perceptions connect to their own in order to make meaning for the purpose of my research.

### ***Data Analysis***

#### ***Interviews, Focus Group, and Journaling***

Through semi-structured interviews and the focus group presented by the researcher, the participants told their stories through their perceptions and experiences in high school ESL. These stories were recorded and transcribed in order to be coded for recurring themes between them and the researcher's reflective journal. This was done using a Grounded Theory Analysis in which the data provided by the participants was

then compared to generate a general explanation that is shaped by the participants (Creswell, 2018). The researcher shared these stories from the participants to include their voices in bilingual literature that usually isn't inclusive to high school ESL teachers. The stories of each participant were presented as a restorying in the order of their lived experience (past, present, future).

Personal journal entries from the researcher were used to compare side-by-side to data transcribed and collected from individual interviews from other participants. By comparing what I, the researcher, thought to that of other teachers, emerging themes arose.

### ***Limitations***

Because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, there were restrictions and specific guidelines in order to maintain a safe social distance. To prevent any possible spread of the virus or for participants to feel unsafe, the researcher decided to conduct all interviews and the focus group through a University of Houston-approved online platform (Microsoft Teams). This is where all participants were interviewed, recorded, and then transcribed for analysis.

Because this study gathers information pertaining to the challenges high school ESL teachers face and is only hearing from teachers, acquiring interviews from students themselves might allow for a more well-rounded picture of any issues that are not known or being addressed by teachers. Ultimately, the research is limited to the stories and narratives that were shared through the interviews and focus group of the high school ESL teacher participants, and the data is thus dictated by the amount of detail they provided. The length of time for each interview (60-90 minutes) and the number of

individual interviews (1) also contributed and limited the amount of possible data that was collected from each participant.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

This study did not use any participants' real identities, and each was given a pseudonym that was reflected when describing the participants earlier in this chapter. All data that was gathered from participants is secure and not used for any future studies or data gathering. This ensured that participants' data is confidential, and nothing was shared in direct reference to the participants. All information gathered from participants was shared with them through member-checks to ensure accuracy of what they said and the interpretation from the researcher was correct.

### ***Conclusion***

Using a narrative inquiry approach was vital in gathering well-rounded data about the experiences and perceptions high school ESL teachers have on the challenges they and their newcomers face by re-storying their lived experiences. With the use of the individual interviews, focus group, and personal researcher journaling, the researcher was able to make connections between the researcher's lived experiences and the participants for the purpose of answering the intended research questions presented in this study.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Research Findings**

#### ***Introduction***

As a high school English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in Texas, I have always questioned myself as an educator. Year after year, I was given different curricula for the three courses I taught (or no curricula at all). Until very recently, I did not have the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers in my district teaching the same thing. This may be for a number of reasons: the improvement of technology resources and virtual meeting platforms, budgeting, leadership, and awareness and accessibility to professional development on second language acquisition. In my particular school district and that of the participants in the study, newcomer students enrolled in the English as a Second Language program have three courses that focus on different aspects of the English language that are all taught by the same ESL teacher. There is an immense pressure of being with the same group of students for three hours every day that arrive into a new country with many needs; at the bottom of that list of needs, to be honest is passing their STAAR tests (which is opposite of what is expected of high school students to graduate from Texas public schools). I noticed this right away as I started my position many years ago, and it was very overwhelming.

I was the go-to for these students on learning English, learning the processes of "school" in the United States, answering questions about how to make appointments to get the long list of vaccines needed to attend school in the first place, explaining the intricacies of all of the different technology tools and resources that are second-nature to

their peers, helping students balance working jobs outside of the classroom and helping them not only catch up--but to learn, and being their confidant on all things teenagery and hormone-like because they had no one at home to seek advice.

The feelings and experiences I have had made me wonder about other educators who have the same job description as I do. In this study, I sought out stories and experiences that secondary ESL teachers had while teaching newcomer English learners. Secondary ESL teachers have job duties that do not look taxing on paper, but they are the unsung heroes of the secondary world as more and more students require instruction in English when it is not their first language. Overall, the challenges that these teachers face have nothing to do with the newcomer students themselves, outside factors that are viewed as constraints to them, thus impacting newcomer students. Three themes emerged while I spoke with the participants that will be broken down and analyzed here: 1) The importance of collaboration for English as a Second Language teachers; 2) Support is needed at the campus, district, and state-level for English as a Second Language teachers in the high school setting; 3) Teaching newcomer English learners is more than the standards and test scores. There is a lack of research that delves into the world of secondary bilingual programs and the challenges teachers face. Therefore, this study focused on the following research question: What are the challenges English as a Second Language teachers face while teaching secondary level newcomers?

Interestingly enough, the stories of my participants (including myself) start at the same place: NOT bilingual education. The data that was collected through the individual interviews, member checks, and the focus group seem to stem from our beginnings and lack of knowledge of the secondary ESL program here in Texas.

### *Becoming Secondary ESL Educators*

All participants in this study, including myself, received degrees outside of the education field. Although this starting point was similar, each of the participants has a different story that shapes their ideologies and holistic approaches to their current positions as high school ESL teachers.

Emmitt had an established career in buying for a major retailer before transferring his skills of working with people to education using the different connections he had. Teaching ESL was an opportunity that was presented to him that he has stuck with for 25 years. He shared:

After I graduated, I moved to New York City and lived in Manhattan for almost ten years. I managed to chain up boutiques there. Then I came to Texas. My brother was already living in Dallas. I came to Texas to visit. And while I was here, he talked me into interviewing. And I got hired by Sacco, it was a department store, and I became a buyer for them. Until they went out of business. So then all the buying offers I got were all back to New York City. Bergdorf Goodman called me twice, but I didn't want to go back to New York. I'd already been there and done that if I'd never lived in New York. I might have jumped on it. But so I had a good friend, [who was associate superintendent of the curriculum] who talked about teaching, and I said well, I wasn't certified to teach, and he said we can get you certified. So then he put me in charge with the alternative certification program. Back then, I had to take four graduate-level classes at the local university to get certified... and we, it took a year, it was pretty

involved, we did two-semester classes in one month, in July. They told us they said this was not the easy way to get certified; it was just the fastest way to get certified. So then, they had told us that if we hadn't been in the school in a long time that we really should do some substituting because schools had changed greatly. I subbed at [current place of employment] anytime I could. So then, I got to know the ESL teachers there. And they told me an opening came up in the ESL department. So I had an interview with the principal. And, of course, he hired me on the spot. And a Matter of fact, what was so funny was when I walked out of the office, the secretary already had all my paperwork filled out to get over to the ad building. (Interview, February 21, 2021)

Jennifer shared a similar story to Emmitt by getting involved in education at a later age by first starting as a paraprofessional and making connections in the school district that way. She indicated how she was not looking for an ESL position, especially a high school one:

So I took an alternative route, of course, 42. I've only been teaching for seven years. So I got my Bachelor's degree just online. And so I did that while I was a paraprofessional. And then, after I got my Bachelor's, I was hired on with a TCP program. Well, when I started out teaching seventh and eighth grade, by the middle of the year, there was a need for someone to take over the ESL position because the other teacher was on maternity leave. And so it just kind of got dropped in my lap. And so, at that time, I had never taught. It was my second year teaching. I never thought of teaching it. So I was given three, four different preps of ESL, so they took four of my mainstream classes and gave me four preps of



ESL. And so I did that for that year, I split ESL and pre AP. And then the next year, they told me I was actually ready to quit. And the next year, they told me that they were going to make a purely honest, straight ESL position, and that's where I stayed. And so I taught basically six preps to different levels at the seventh and eighth grade level for two more years after that, and then They cut the position. They said, We just can't do it. So we went back. And then, after that, I pursued my Master's [degree]. I wanted to learn more about it since I was teaching, so I knew that was something that I wanted to stay with me because I love the kids. And so I pursued my Master's in TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages). That was really my motivation. And I was like, there's no way. So I started looking for another job. And I got a job at the high school. And I love it. I love teaching there. And so ESL kind of just fell into my lap, I guess. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

Jennifer continued talking about her motivation to continue her education out of almost a necessity. She pointed out how there were not any opportunities to learn more about ESL outside of her finding opportunities on her own. Her story mirrors my own and others out there who have been put into a position without the proper training and guidance--fueling my inquiry into the topic of teacher perceptions. She shared:

...at the beginning, I had no training. Like they gave me ESL classes, and I didn't know anything about ESL. I'm like, I can't speak Spanish. I don't know how to teach these kids. And so, I had to seek out help. You know, I had to go to the ESL everything that was ESL. I went to everything. Do strictly great professional development any said "EL" on it, I was there, first two years. And then, I signed

up for my Master's in TESOL. And that was good because I learned a lot about language acquisition and linguistics and all that. And that helped. But I did all that on my own, no one came to me and said, Oh, we want you to go to this. It didn't happen. And then the district in our, when, when I taught intermediate, we didn't have the same type of, we didn't have good team planning. And so we were kind of on our own. And it was, you know, it was hard as a beginning teacher.

(Interview, February 25, 2021)

Like Emmitt and Jennifer, Shin initially had different aspirations and intentions before teaching ESL. His intentions for teaching were centered on his interests and previous studies, and he explained his road to becoming a high school ESL teacher in his current district.

So I accidentally became a teacher. What I initially was doing was pursuing a master's in philosophy, which is why I came to [current city in Texas], which is why I moved from Los Angeles, which is where I'm originally from. After getting my Master's degree, I decided that that wasn't necessarily something I wanted to continue pursuing. But I wasn't sure what to do for a career because I didn't necessarily have any kind of technical experience of other things. Aside from education, I was a private tutor for a number of years, where I tutored for the ACT and SATs with a company. But I didn't necessarily have experiences outside of that. And I found myself kind of struggling to find a job. Even though I had a master's in philosophy. So I was like, I still wanted to maintain my background, which was mostly centered around language; I read a lot and write a lot. So I figured, let's just go in that direction, trying to salvage most of what I have done.

And that led to me considering being a teacher. I looked at that there's an ACP, and I got the mandatory like, the number of hours you have to substitute at a school prior to actually like, it's one of the many minutes, so I did that. And then I can become a certified teacher for Texas, right. And I originally became an English teacher with the ideal, perhaps not perhaps definitely naive sense that like, I'm going to be an English teacher and I haven't read them in a while I can read the students and stuff and like, break it down and like and teach it, and that will be fulfilling for me, and I thought it would be great. And then I ended up working at a place that was one of them, one of the worst schools in [previous school district in Texas]. And then I still wasn't an ESL teacher; it was the second year where, you know, my school, the school I was working at just really needed it, you know, they're just so many students that fit the ESL demographic that wasn't being serviced. I taught multiple preps of on-level, pre-AP English, and a couple of preps of ESL for the next two years. It was a hodgepodge. I felt like a master of none. I looked for other English jobs in other districts. I got hired as an ESL teacher in [current district]. And again, it wasn't necessarily because I was looking for an ESL position. I was looking just for another position. And there were, at the time, only two English positions available in that area that I was interested in, I think, and one of them happened to be an ESL position. And given that I had this certificate, I was like, Okay, I can give this a try. And so I just did it. (Interview, February 28, 2021)

Finally, Maria was a first-year ESL teacher that had a similar reason to start teaching as Shin. She explained how it was difficult to find a different job with her

degree, and ESL fell into her lap by first working as a paraprofessional like Jennifer. She explained her story:

I majored in psychology. And I couldn't really find a job there. So I started venturing off to different places. So I went the alternative certification route and got everything through the Texas Teachers program. I became a high school ESL teacher almost by accident. I started working in the school in the school system about five years ago. And I became a classroom paraprofessional and got put into English, and they needed somebody to fill the gap for two ESL courses. So they put me in there without asking me. Once they put me in there, and I started working with the students and seeing how different the curriculums were, is what drew my attention to stay in ESL. So that's transferred over now to I guess, what would be my first year officially teaching the whole year ESL. And I really enjoyed it. So it happened. Somebody placed me there, and now I would decide to stay there by choice. (Interview, March 2, 2021)

My own story as a researcher who is invested in the world of bilingual education did not start out seeking education--or English as a Second Language for that matter. Reflecting on my own personal journal entries on how I became a secondary ESL teacher, my life experiences led me to my current passion and career. I had always wanted to be a teacher growing up and would play pretend with my friends of being a teacher; however, when I looked into programs to pursue education for my Bachelor's, all of the programs around me in my home state didn't interest me, and I didn't particularly hear positive things coming from teachers (there were many teacher strikes while I attended public school) and it was general knowledge that teachers in Wisconsin did not

make good money.

I had gotten my Bachelor's degree in Latin American Literature and Culture with minors in Biology and Music. I took the approach of using school to pursue all of my interests and had the goal to be a medical translator working in hospitals or care facilities. However, my last semester was spent abroad in Buenos Aires, Argentina where I really felt what it was like to live abroad in a new country with a new language and the pain and triumph that comes with that. I enrolled in a program, getting certified to teach English to adult learners, and taught through the program. I had met someone from Texas that encouraged me to come back to the states to teach because teachers made better money there than in other states. When I returned to the states, I went through Texas Teachers' online alternative certification program. I had a connection with a friend from college with the school district I currently work. I sent my resume to the HR department, and I immediately got a call encouraging me to apply for ESL (when I had the intention to teach on-level or even pre-AP English) based on my experiences. Within 48 hours, I received an email asking to set up a phone interview for the next day. I went to my workplace at the time to put in my two-week notice and moved down to start working as a high school ESL teacher that I am still currently teaching at. Essentially, all of my experiences, connections, and random life chances resulted in me teaching high school ESL.

It was interesting to me that I and all of my participants who were very passionate and happy in our current positions as secondary ESL teachers all stemmed from our other life experiences. I believe this is a direct reflection of the success of an educator teaching in a multilingual classroom and plays an enormous role in being successful in areas

outside of teaching content-specific standards.

It is essential to understand all participants' backstories before sharing their opinions and experiences as high school ESL teachers. The backgrounds and lived experiences of each of these participants are important to better grasp their views on the ESL program and the perceptions they have on the challenges they face that could potentially impact their students. This is ultimately a study feeding into my curiosity of what other high school ESL teachers feel and think about the high school ESL program. Although this was a small sample size whose participants all teach in Texas, I am confident that the feelings and sentiments about challenges that have been expressed are echoed throughout the country. I hope that the voices of secondary ESL teachers are heard.

### ***Emerging Themes Across Narratives***

After collecting and analyzing participants' individual stories, personal journal entries, and information gathered during the focus group, the data was triangulated where significant themes emerged. There are three general themes that present the findings of the narrative analyses. Each emergent theme represents and breaks down the responses of each participant and their personal experiences. This dissection will allow us to see how the stories of each participant are connected to the larger picture.

#### ***Theme #1 The Importance of Collaboration***

This first emerging theme was centralized in all of the participants' responses in one way or another. My personal experiences also center around the idea of

collaboration, or lack thereof. This can be broken down into two generalizations: 1) *There should be time allotted for teacher collaboration amongst high school ESL teachers.* 2). *There could be a collaboration opportunity between SIOP teachers and the campus ESL teacher that is being unrealized.*

This first section will focus on the individual ESL teachers' role in planning instruction and how district-wide planning would benefit in some capacity.

Jennifer and Emmitt described similar experiences of feeling isolated in their planning on their campuses. Both had more than one class that they taught and were responsible for planning individual lessons for various English proficiencies in their respective classrooms. Jennifer expressed her schedule as an ESL teacher:

As an ESOL teacher, I teach three different subjects and have to create lessons, grade, and teach three different content areas every day. That is 15 lesson plans every week. Whereas a teacher that teaches only English 1 has to create one lesson plan per day, but they are on a team, so everyone takes turns with lesson plans. As the only ESOL teacher for 9th grade, I am on my own team. The district ESL team is sometimes helpful because we sometimes share plans etc., but not everyone does that. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

She continued:

I actually am not really a part of the campus teams. I have a different conference period than the 9th-grade team. It is almost like I am on my own island on campus. I sometimes collaborate on units of study with the 10th grade ESOL

teacher, but his kids are at a different level, and he doesn't get where my kids are, so it is hard to work together. I think that if the district ESL team met more often, we would feel more collaborative. I also feel that many decisions on how things are done are left up to the campus, which makes ESL a free for all. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

Emmitt expressed his schedule as an ESL teacher and how it has changed over the years:

I am the only teacher that teaches ESOL I and Reading I at my school. Other teachers, for example, English teachers, have others that teach their subject matter. They can plan together in PLC meetings. They have told me that they take turns doing lesson plans. I am the only one doing my lesson plans. Two preps per week. Last year it was three. When I first started teaching, all ESL was in portable buildings. We called it "ESL Village" We were often forgotten about. The students did not always feel that they were part of the school. I had to ask to be more included constantly. Finally, when the building was remodeled, we came inside. (Interview, February 21, 2021)

Jennifer further discussed with me how she had seen a high turnover rate of teachers teaching high school ESL. She believed isolation to be a factor in this:

I think [isolation is] the reason a lot of people leave because there's not always support. You're really the only person on your campus teaching it. And so really the only way that you're going to really survive is to, you know, make acquaintances, and with your colleagues that teach the same thing on other



campuses, that's the only way you're going to make it and work together outside of the district PLC as a district PLC does not work if it's not consistent. That's the only way you're gonna make it. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

During our focus group, all participants agreed that their jobs could feel very isolating and overwhelming. However, Shin shared an interesting viewpoint that he called "an upside to this job." The isolation of an ESL teacher breeds a level of autonomy that may be daunting to some and enjoyable to others. During his individual interview, member checks, and the focus group, Shin had shared his confidence in planning and instruction:

I enjoy my autonomy because I do not have to compromise my high-quality lessons with ideas and activities that a well-intended but misguided team may decide for me. Over my six years of teaching and planning, I very rarely came across people that I thought actually could help me. It is extremely rare. Working autonomously saves me from the personal hell of having to pretend that the unusable contributions of others help me when they don't; that is actually more work than creating my own lessons. I imagine that the feeling of being forced to wade in others' mediocrity and worse is felt by others in our field and outside of it. I imagine it is not uncommon. (Interview, February 28, 2021)

Shin described a personal experience that was echoed throughout all participants in their interviews in different ways. Each of these teachers spent multiple hours a day with their students, and they felt like they knew them well-enough to make planning and instruction decisions based on their individual students. Nobody in the district or on

campus knows the students better than the ESL teacher. Ironically and contrary to his statements, Shin has used and depended on lessons created by others in the district despite the claims that others' plans are not up to par.

All participants agreed that having autonomy as a teacher was necessary and lessened the pressure put on teachers. This segued into district PLCs and how they could also lessen the burden for ESL teachers, especially when it came to planning. As a new teacher, Maria found that having regular meetings as a district was really beneficial to her:

I feel like [district team meetings are] really valuable because they teach me not only to see things the way that I may want them to see him in the classroom but see how other teachers teach a skill in their classrooms. The district team members are very approachable, and I feel like if I needed something, they would help me. But we don't meet often. I feel like we're not only just teaching the content, you know, we're building relationships so that these kids can talk to us. So I feel like there needs to be a little more time for us to collaborate together as a team. (Interview, March 2, 2021)

Hesitantly, Maria suggested to me that if the district could find time to collaborate on not only content-related planning time but also the relationship-building aspect of ESL as well as proper procedure in guiding students to help outside of the classroom, she believed it would be helpful to her as a new teacher. Even as a brand-new teacher, Maria saw the power in collaboration and learning from her colleagues.

Although previously Shin was quite strong in his conviction on his level of

autonomy not being disrupted, he agreed with Maria about collaborating with peers who have found success in particular instructional practices or successful teaching strategies for specific skills. He went on to say:

You know, so rather than paying for things we'll never use, or spending time doing things we'll never think about, why don't we use that time and like, in real practical ways, like hey, I don't know how to do these verb things. Can you show me or like, and I think that's another thing that people need to do more if we're going to be developing is to admit that we need to develop, you know, it's like, Hey, I don't know how to do a bunch of this crap. Can you explain? Does anybody know? You do. She can explain a learning application to me because I am lost, right? Or like, hey, Brian, you were successful with this, look at your scores. Can you share with the team how you taught that skill? Then that way, it wouldn't be just another district presentation--it wouldn't feel like a chore. It would be us helping each other and not reinventing the wheel all the time. We are the best resources. Let's go. Let's rock this. (Focus Group, April 25, 2021)

Shin continued:

And I really think when it comes to being a good teacher, it's not just that you have resources, because then you're just a walking Google, you know, but it's about, like, how it comes together and why it's significant, and you need to have that kind of perspective in mind. (Interview, February 28, 2021)

Emmitt mirrored this same sentiment commenting on his age and lack of experience with technology for hindering his ability to find and create relevant resources

for lessons as instruction becomes more digital and less paper-based:

But you know, I don't have time to spend lots of time on the internet and stuff. It takes me a long time to find resources. I know others can do it. But it's time-consuming. It's very time-consuming. And I get very frustrated, sometimes when I can't find what I want, you know, for I don't like what I've done, I want to find something else that I think works better. [The other teachers] help a lot to explain and show what they do, and I think, "Wow, okay, I like this!" (Interview, February 21, 2021)

It is important to give time to teachers to work towards a common goal and collaborate. Although there is a level of autonomy that allows teachers to thrive by having the freedom to be creative in their lesson planning, there is power in collaboration and sharing experiences to know that the burden of planning many lessons a week does not need to fall on the shoulders of each individual teacher. Maria expressed the difference in planning as an ESL team:

I think our PLC is different, based off of what I've heard from other teachers and PLCs. And not things just not going well on them complaining about them, like I, I have yet to feel that way. And an ESL PLC, whether that be on my school or with all the teachers in the district. Because even though I feel like every teacher might have different ideas, I feel like they're still like, "We're going to piece it all together. And this is how we're going to do it". And the teachers in my PLC just understand everything that we do for students that don't involve actually teaching them content. And I don't know. I just I'm really thankful for the teachers that are

in that district PLC, and I wish I had more time to do it (Interview, March 2, 2021)

This flows into the next generalization of collaboration: *There could be a collaboration opportunity between SIOP teachers and the campus ESL teacher that is being unrealized.* There are usually only two ESL teachers on each high school campus (one for level one and one for level two). These teachers are essentially the experts on language acquisition and instructional strategies that work with their newcomer students. These classes should be models for those that have newcomers in their content-area classes. This second generalization delves into the perceptions and experiences the ESL teachers have with content-area teachers.

Emmitt described his belief as to why newcomer English learners don't see the same success in their content-area classes as they do in their ESL classes:

I think maybe one of the major problems is the classes being too large. We know that I mean, you know, when you've got a science teacher, you when you've got kids that are beginners, plus, you've got regular students, it's not easy for them. Because they want to, they want to move faster, and they can't, and so I think sometimes it's the regular students, they get hurt. They're held back somewhat by the ESL students that are in the class. Now you say, well, you just differentiate, but you know, that's easier said than done, you know when you've got it on a daily basis. (Interview, February 21, 2021)

All participants agreed that having a newcomer English learner in a SIOP class could be challenging for teachers because of the differentiation that needs to happen as

well as content and language learning. In a high school classroom, there could be upwards of 35 students in one class period, allowing for newcomers to hide and not bring attention to themselves. Jennifer described an anecdote that shows teachers may mean well but may not be adequately trained in SIOP protocol or have the support they need to teach not only the content of their class but to support English language acquisition:

I don't think [newcomer students] are getting the support they need. Because, um, for example, in Biology, a Spanish-speaking teacher teaches that class, they call it a dual language class. Okay? The class is taught in Spanish. They're not learning English, they're now learning the content, but they're not learning it in English. And so that, I don't like that. So what are your Vietnamese students doing?  
(Interview, February 25, 2021)

While some campuses only have Spanish-speaking English learners, that is not always the case. While self-reflecting in my own journals, I have also encountered well-meaning teachers who may speak Spanish helping out students with the content. Using a student's first language can be very helpful when done correctly and with intent. However, I have also witnessed students having trouble when it comes to tests and quizzes because they have only ever learned and used content-specific terminology in their native language. On Jennifer's campus, she mentioned that there were also students whose first language is Vietnamese. If a teacher is teaching and sharing translations in Spanish, this poses a challenge to these students. For content-area teachers, Jennifer recommended:

Use the SIOP strategies like building background, using pictures, talking slowly,

speaking in complete sentences using sentence frames, use those strategies, and the academic vocabulary to produce work with targeted practice. Um, you know, sometimes it's hard to hold those kids to the same standard as a [non-English learning] student but give them the time to learn it. They can learn it, and they could learn rigorous content. They just may need more time because the only barrier they have is language. Patience. It's in short supply nowadays. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

As the "campus expert" on the instruction of newcomer English learners, this would be an opportunity for content-area teachers and the ESL teacher to collaborate on targeting language and making content more comprehensible. Maria reflected on this:

I would be interested in working, maybe meeting once a month or once every six weeks with their content teachers. I don't even know what that would look like, but just kind of curious about what they're doing in other classes and how that can be supported in my class where I can take a piece, maybe from a different content area. Right? I would like a collaboration with the content-area teachers.

(Interview, March 2, 2021)

Emmitt had started the collaboration process on his own campus with content-area teachers. He was in a unique position because one of them is his former student. This relationship and bond was formed prior to becoming colleagues, and it was a natural fit for Emmitt and his former student to stay in contact and up-to-date on the newcomers in their classrooms. Emmitt found that this relationship was a motivational tool for students to see a former ESL student now as a teacher. There was also a comfortability

for students to approach content-area teachers when they knew and saw their ESL teacher working with them. Emmitt talked about his relationship with content-area teachers:

We talk about students together, you know, because I'll have a problem with a student, and I'll call her math teacher and say, "Are you experiencing this too?" Usually, they are. So we get together to approach the student and figure it out together. The Biology teacher at our school is one of my former students. I had him when he was a beginner and didn't speak any English. The bookkeeper for our school is one of my former students. So that makes me really proud when I see that. My current students think it's really cool and feel more comfortable to talk to them if they need help with something (Interview, February 21, 2021)

In my own personal journals, I have felt that collaboration amongst teachers would be beneficial for the teachers and newcomer English learners. In my reflections, I was adamant that content-area SIOP teachers care for and want newcomer students to do well and succeed in their classes. However, in talking to my SIOP colleagues, they had expressed that they didn't know how to implement SIOP strategies in their classroom in a way as to not bog them down in paperwork or single out the English learners in the classroom. Supports such as word walls, sentence stems, comprehensible input such as chunking text, pictures to build background, and videos with captioning go a long way. There is the worry that some of these strategies may come off as too young and "babyish" for high schoolers. However, in my experience, when used correctly and with fidelity, these strategies are best practices for all students. This is an opportunity for ESL teachers to open their classrooms up to SIOP teachers to show what language acquisition looks like at the high school level.



As stated earlier by participants, collaboration amongst ESL teachers and collaboration amongst ESL teachers and SIOP teachers is critical in helping lessen the burden on lesson planning and share ideas that have worked with teenagers in acquiring English. What makes school challenging for newcomers to learn English when they enroll at a later age is having a new and different teacher for each 45-minute class in a room of thirty other students. More often than not, content-area teachers may not know the student isn't understanding a concept or topic because the student goes home to copy another student's work or Google Translates everything into their home language to not fail the assignment. Shifting the goal from "getting it done for a grade" to "learning the language to respond to the content" should be focused on and is one of the major differences seen in a high school setting versus the lower grade levels. Something as simple as giving teachers thirty minutes to collaborate on this goal can go far and, in my experience, improve instruction for newcomers.

Shifting from working with others and collaborating, participants had a common underlying tone about feeling like they lack support. Support here is multi-faceted and ranges from the feeling of someone having their back, helping complete tasks such as lessons, and being given the necessary tools to instruct newcomers the best they can. However, the term "support" also implies a level of empathy from those that do not experience the ESL classroom.

### ***Theme #2 More Support is Needed at the Campus, District, and State Level***

During the interviews and focus group, each participant brought up at least one level of support that they feel is lacking. These sentiments range from support of

curriculum and resources, support on their campus with other teachers and instructional coaches, support in their district with district specialists, and support at the state level (specifically standardized testing) as it pertains to the instruction of newcomer English learners.

Jennifer pointed out that the ESL department wasn't looked at as a distinct entity or with a standalone identity but rather a combination of different departments and courses:

I feel like the ESL team is the "black sheep" and doesn't have its own identity from the bilingual department and the English department. The things the English department doesn't always apply to ESL, and I feel like the bilingual program looks down on us because we only teach English. I feel like the ESL program doesn't really belong under either umbrella, and we are treated as such. There is a lot of back and forth between the programs. I feel like I identify with the LOTE (Languages Other Than English) teachers more than the English and bilingual programs, but that's only because they are treated "less than" as well because they are elective courses (Interview, February 25, 2021)

She felt that decisions being made regarding the curriculum for her classes were heavily focused and aligned to grade-level English textbooks, which wasn't feasible for her students who were just starting to learn English. She discussed this added pressure on the teachers using the curriculum to supplement and spend time dissecting material in order to produce comprehensible lessons for their newcomer students:

I think that the material that [the district] adopted is too difficult for our ESL

students, and we really have to break it down, for we really have to explain it. They take it for granted that a kid knows what. Like, we're using words like "visual perception," you know, we have to explain that we have to explain perspective, we have to explain all that stuff. And those are, I mean, that vocabulary is very difficult for our students. And there's a lot of idiomatic expressions that are in the stories. We have to explain it for the kids, and it is very difficult and takes a lot of time to prepare that for the students. There is no way I can use the material as it is and expect a newcomer to understand what's going on. I think the district should give more guidance in that aspect (Interview, February 25, 2021)

She continued:

The teachers didn't get any input on the textbook adoption. [District specialists] decided what they wanted. And they gave it to us and said you have to use it. The people that decided on the curriculum haven't been in any of our classrooms to see what the kids can do and the level of where they're at. And the stories are not relatable to the students. The kids understand it. I mean, what we're doing now was kind of interesting. But it's because we made it interesting, not because the stories were interesting. And so it ties together some of the things nicely, but it's not. It's not. It's not what we would do if we made it ourselves. If we, and if we made it ourselves, it would be a ton more work. And so, you know, you're kind of screwed either way. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

In the focus group, the idea of whether the curriculum was culturally relevant to

their students, all participants, including the researcher, agreed that the materials that were chosen were not particularly culturally responsive for our students. Jennifer summed up the participants' viewpoints very eloquently:

It is not diverse. It doesn't show books and literature is supposed to be like a sliding door or window into another world that relates to the student. And it's not the books that are written for students that live in the United States. They're not written for kids from Mexico. Or Vietnam, we have to find diverse work. It's not in our curriculum. This shows how removed those that adopted the textbook are from our classes (Interview, February 25, 2021)

Emmitt agreed:

I feel like it was definitely an administrator decision and not teacher-based. I really do now, you know, I mean, that's it. I mean, that's the way it is. I mean, they're the powers that be. But I've always found over 25 years that administrators don't always make good decisions. (Interview, February 21, 2021)

What Jennifer and Emmitt described is just for one of the English courses they taught. All participants spoke on other courses that made up a newcomer's ESL block of classes. While they were grateful that the ELD class had a newly implemented semi-structured curriculum with resources made by campus coaches, the other Tier III Reading course they taught did not have any set curriculum. Shin and Maria agreed with Jennifer and Emmitt's challenges of constantly needing to supplement and take more time to create lessons using the adopted materials from the district. Shin continued the conversation:

You always have to supplement. There's no one thing ever, ever. We need to have a common ground of how things are going to be taught. I believe there is a common way for skills to be taught for all of us to be on the same page, but we haven't seen that in curricula yet. (Interview, February 28, 2021)

Maria expressed:

I have struggled a little bit more with the curriculum this year. Because last year [as a long-term substitute teacher], I had more beginner students. This year I have more of like intermediate, high beginner level students. So I feel like some of the things that are in the curriculum are not challenging enough for them. And everything has to be modified. It takes me more than my prep period to make lessons and modify. (Interview, March 2, 2021)

Maria brought up a good point that the English proficiency level of students varied each year along with their other needs. This will be talked about deeper in the third emerging theme.

Shin suggested that because ESL is a niche-level of English instruction, there should be criteria for choosing materials and curricula for the classes. There are many facets to the ESL program that includes English grammar, culture, level of interest for high schoolers, and all while it is at a level that is not too difficult of "babyish" for the students. Although there may be hiring criteria for a specific district position, Shin focused on the possibility of having criteria specifically for the district team that allowed those that are "qualified" under these criteria power in resource decision-making:

I think if there is going to be anybody who's making decisions that teachers themselves cannot, that affects the teachers themselves. They should, I mean, it doesn't seem like it's like an unreasonable thing to ask. They should have us have a kind of set of experiences that allows them to know what those things that they're making decisions on are about. (Interview, February 28, 2021)

He continued:

Well, I do think that [the district ESL specialist] and the campus SIOP coaches support the teachers at some level by providing resources that they themselves have spent time making. Now, who specifically helped and to what degree are things that I do not know, so it is hard to make a more accurate assessment. The other ESL teachers currently across campuses in the district are--and I'm putting this generously--not helpful. It has gotten so bad that none of the teachers ask questions or engage with what we are doing when planning together as a district. I honestly feel like it's a waste of time, and it often feels like I'm explaining to everyone else what we're supposed to be doing and how we're supposed to be thinking about it. Everything is so up in the air that it feels like nobody really knows how to proceed at times. It feels like those that are supposed to be the experts are looking towards guidance from teachers...but when it comes down to asking their opinion on curriculum and planning decisions, they don't use teacher input. It's a vicious cycle. (Interview, February 28, 2021)

Reflecting on my own personal journaling, I can agree on some level with Shin's sentiments about those with instructional power in the district not giving the structured

support needed in such a unique department. High school ESL teachers teach multiple preps that are expected to be taught in English to students who have a range of English proficiency levels--all without fleshed out curricula. I believe that those who do not teach ESL do not fully understand what goes on in the classrooms if they do not experience it firsthand. This is where it gets tricky in the field of education. Everybody is stretched thin, and there isn't time to spend in everybody's classroom. However, the participants all had suggestions for campus coaches, administrators, and specialists to think about. Jennifer had strong views on how she believed the role of administrators to look:

I think that the district needs more time devoted to being in classrooms. I think that our administrators need to sit in our classrooms so they know what we're going through. I feel like the people in charge have been too long removed from the classroom. And they have forgotten how to relate to what we're doing. I think they need and not just on a video call-- no, come sit in my classroom. I also think we need more cohesiveness or more direction from the top down. And right now, it's coming from the bottom up because each school is autonomous. I think we need more top-down to say this is what you got to do. This is how we're going to do it across the schools because what we're doing now is not working. I think if we did that, I think it would help. And I think when we speak up for something like that, and then I think they would, it would make a difference. But now there's just too much autonomy where it is becoming more work for us because nobody else knows what we are supposed to be doing (Interview, February 25, 2021)

Shin shared his thoughts on professional development provided by the district and how it may not support his role as a high school ESL teacher:

I sometimes feel like professional development or training provides opportunities to learn more about a topic or subject, but I don't remember the last time there was something offered to me that was relevant to my job. I believe this is the case because there are fundamental misunderstandings of how one should teach English to EL students such that those who are choosing the PD and trainings on the teachers' behalf are misguided in what they think would be helpful. Maybe we could get a professional in or go outside of the district for training (Interview, February 28, 2021)

The participants all gave ideas about what they believe would be most beneficial for them in terms of training. All participants agreed they would be willing to attend training after working hours if it related to their specific needs if the district or outside provided it. The idea of having colleagues conducting content and language-specific training was also brought up again. It was evident that each of the participants had thought about training and gaining a level of support that they felt they were not receiving. Emmitt shared a particular area of support in the form of professional development he needed in his classroom:

Maybe some more tech skills and things to be able to share with kids online. You know, not being real tech-savvy. I'm not always aware of everything that's available, you know, that we could be using? I mean, I use that I'm getting real. I'm really good with one platform we use, you know, and all that stuff. But others? Technology is the future, and I think we should be investing in it. There are so many things we can do with kids that they can practice with at home online (Interview, February 21, 2021)



Jennifer continued with what she believed would be helpful:

I think there's so much that we get when we go to professional development, that we need things that are more targeted for us--especially for teaching English learners, like more pedagogy in language acquisition, like how does all this work and then specific things on, like Emmitt said, how to implement the technology in our classrooms. (Focus Group, April 25, 2021)

Shin and Maria reiterated that teachers didn't need to go anywhere outside of their team to get quality training and help. They believed that the teachers on their team and other teachers in the high school ESL world could be helpful. As a new teacher, Maria was adamant about how much learning from other teachers had helped her grow. Shin expressed: "...specific TEKS and skills that we plan out in our PLC meetings should be used to spend time, and teachers can give mini PD sessions to the other teachers" (Focus Group, April 25, 2021).

Maria shared:

I feel like the professional developments that we've had so far are really helpful with our ESL kids like, I don't feel like they really keep us on track—teachers who had high scores on tests shared strategies and their lessons with the team that were successful. Veteran teachers who have lessons from the previous years that have worked with kids and they've been, you know, fun, have shared with the team. And I feel like, for me, that's where I've benefited a lot, like being able to create communication and see what other teachers are doing, as opposed to kind of what the professional development we had where we just sat and listened to

somebody across the country navigate a confusing online textbook. (Focus Group, April 25, 2021)

While most of the support needed for these educators is resource and content-based, there are many moving parts and outside influences that specify what "should" be taught. Mainly those that prepare these newcomer students for the TELPAS and English STAAR tests. As we shift from talking about support as a team or a district level, the participants discussed their thoughts of state-level support. The conversation in both individual interviews and the focus group surrounded standardized testing. This is not a surprise given the number of standardized tests newcomer English learners must take in 9th grade alone and how much of an influence testing has on instruction and the lives of both students and teachers. I have designated the focus and the challenges of standardized testing under this theme of "support" because the participants believe they are not receiving any from the state to achieve the high expectations put forth from testing. Jennifer shared her thoughts about state-level supports:

I think at the state level, these people have never been in the classroom, or they've been out of the classroom for 10 or 15 years, and things have changed since the past. I've been teaching for seven years, and some changes and things have changed since LAST YEAR. The people that are making these decisions [about standardized testing] are not in touch with what's going on in our classrooms.

(Interview, February 25, 2021)

The lack of support here is in the form of empathy for the teachers and the students. After teaching for over 25 years, Emmitt has seen the evolution of standardized

state testing through all of the growing pains and making its way into accountability and funding of schools--heightening anxiety levels across the board. Emmitt discussed his experiences with standardized testing in Texas and how it has transformed:

...and you know, there's so many tests for these kids to learn. Well, when I first started, it was the TAS test. They had just come off a team. And we went to toss, Of course, then TAKS, then the STAAR, but the TAS test, I said, back then I said to non-teacher friends of mine, I said, this is just, this is a monster that's going to keep growing, you wait and see, well, that's exactly what's happened. You know, all the stuff we go through with the preparing and the training and covering things and everything we do. The tests are hours and hours long. I feel like it's the standards, you know, the standards we teach but on steroids. It's crazy to ask any kid to focus for that long and use that much brainpower. And OUR kids? Kids who barely know English have to take these tests. And I'll tell friends of mine who aren't in education, and I'll tell them what we do. And they look at me and honest to God, they go, you are making that up. I know that can't possibly be true. That's how ridiculous they look at it. So you know, we just do what we can but, but we know that they have done many, many studies. And they know that high-stakes testing is not good for kids. We had a lady at my church, she's retired now she was a pediatrician, and she told me, she says every year, she goes, "come testing time, I have 30 years in my office, all kinds of problems caused by stress and these tests with kids". (Interview, February 21, 2021)

During the focus group, there was a pause from all participants when asked about how state testing impacted them as teachers as well as their students. It was evident that

they all had something to say about the challenges that state testing brought to their classroom, but I also realized there were mixed feelings about it as well. It is critical to note that this focus group took place in the throes of STAAR and TELPAS testing for the school year after having a reprieve from it the year before due to COVID-19 school shutdowns. On one end, the participants spoke freely about the intensity of the tests for newcomer students and the language barrier it posed while being high-stakes and required for high school graduation. On the other end were sentiments that understood that data from these tests was a necessary tool to gauge learning gaps (and especially those that have widened due to COVID-19 and loss of instruction during the end of the previous school year). Emmitt specifically spoke about the mock tests and how stress and test anxiety starts there:

The worst part is we do these "Mock" tests that scare the kids because they don't know what the heck they are reading, and they feel defeated. And we as teachers are supposed to prepare them for the test, but we are preparing them with survival English and basic language skills. So we have to teach kids to try and shift the thinking, you know, shift the thinking by giving them ways to take the test even if they might not be able to understand it...when they do take the test, that anxiety pops up, and I don't think that's good for them. I think that's a bad choice to make. If it were up to me, we would not do that. (Interview, February 21, 2021)

Jennifer discussed her views on the TELPAS test and what standardized testing should look like for English learners:

I think the TELPAS test is a good test. And I'm saying that because it measures

language progress, right? That's what we're supposed to be looking at the progress...how far they have come. That's what I like about TELPAS. The STAAR tests, I think they can shove it. I don't like the test? Why do we individualize instruction and give a standardized test? You know, ESL kids don't understand the STAAR test. Heck, we've got kids that have been in the US in school for 10, 11, 12, 13 years, and they can't pass the STAAR test. How do we expect any English learner to pass it? Nope. And we have adults, I know, that couldn't pass it. I know some teachers that couldn't. It's very difficult. It's very confusing. And the kids don't know the vocabulary. It doesn't matter. If they get all the accommodations and supports in the world, they're still not going to understand what's going on. This language is a tough language. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

She continued on about standardized testing and her disdain for the STAAR tests and the test anxiety involved:

I do think [STAAR tests] cause a lot of stress for their performance. They're scared when they write for us, and we, and we ask them to tell us about things or write about your first day of school, they say, Oh, I was so scared. I didn't know where to go. I didn't know anyone, and everyone is different. They're speaking a new language. And they're so stressed out and, and as an ESL teacher, I just, you know, we just try to make them comfortable and feel at home. And I think that's more important. But they are stressed out, and it's really hard for them. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

Shin and Maria agreed with Emmitt and Jennifer about the stress that these tests induced, but they also saw the potential benefit of the tests. Shin shares an opposing viewpoint to Jennifer regarding STAAR:

I think the fact that [newcomer English learners] have to take [STAAR tests] is like a logistics thing that the people who created the STAAR and the rules restored, and they didn't anticipate ramifications because if you just reasonably think about it, there's no way you would expect them to be successful and have to take it. Especially like you're required to take it to get a degree, you know, but at the same time, like I get why. Standards are there like you need to know enough English to get a degree of a high school diploma in Texas because that demonstrates you learned as much English to be considered on-level or proficient or what have you. And so I get that. It just maybe we have to take things into context for our particular kiddos for that demographic. (Interview, February 28, 2021)

Maria took a middle-ground approach with standardized testing due to her lack of experience.

I feel like the level of intensity associated with standardized tests is really unfair. I think it is good to have data that align with each standard, but isn't it obvious each year that there is no way to expect a student who has been in this country learning English for a year to understand any of it. It's totally unfair of the state to make these students take it for graduation purposes, comparing other data with their data and school accountability. It's too much pressure for everybody! With

TELPAS...I don't disagree with it, especially because it's not for a grade but a data tool. (Interview, March 2, 2021)

Reflecting on my own practices, I related to what all of the participants expressed regarding the state and the influence of standardized testing. A ninth-grade newcomer student must take STAAR English I, STAAR Algebra, STAAR Biology, and TELPAS. This poses many challenges for teachers with instruction-- understanding testing logistics and purpose while navigating through the test anxiety.

***Theme #3 Teaching Newcomer English Learners is More Than Standards and Test Scores***

This last theme to emerge from the conversations and stories from the participants is a culmination of the challenges from the previous themes plus the other duties that arise that teachers aren't prepared for. These would fall under the category of "other duties" located at the very bottom in fine print on all teaching contracts. This final theme can be broken down into challenges that teachers face that impact students outside of planning and instruction, challenges newcomers face outside of school that influence their academic performance, an atmosphere of empathy in the ESL classroom, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The stories and anecdotes from the participants included challenges that they witnessed their newcomer students face in their classrooms and how they addressed these challenges while they handled their own difficulties.

Jennifer shared that the challenges she faced with planning and instruction were evident to her students, and she felt like she was constantly playing catch-up:

I think the hardest one is the multiple preps that we have. We teach three subjects, right? We have ESL One English for speakers of other languages. One, we have a reading one class, and then a language acquisition class. But then, on mine, I have one of my languages, I have two of each class. One of my classes for language acquisition is only Vietnamese students, and they're way more advanced than the other class. So that's a different prep, even if it's not official. So that's for, and we only get one, one planning period. And then two of those days, we meet for PLC, you know, and we plan with a team or, you know, with the specialist, and that's hard and grading and all that. I mean, it's just so time-consuming. And then having, we have a district PLC, but not everyone contributes. Then there are constant interruptions about kids needing vaccinations, or one kid needs individual attention because they just enrolled and didn't know how to log into their computer. And it's, it's almost like, it's sometimes it just feels like you're on your own. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

She continued:

I think just those issues impact my students because they see that I'm struggling to keep up with stuff like I forget to load an assignment that they're supposed to like this, you forgot to put the thing in, like, we know we're supposed to do it, but it's not there. I get frustrated and, you know, a little discombobulated and see that, and they can see all the gray hairs coming out. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

Interestingly, while conversing with each participant and as a group, we all shared similar stories and frustrations of our own accord regarding planning and instruction. But



we also shared similar stories of the challenges we witnessed as high school ESL teachers that our newcomer English learners face. We also agreed we were a hub of information for these students and were the go-to for all inquiries. Maria shared her personal experiences:

I am the homeroom teacher to all of my ESL students, so I see the same kids for over three hours every day and have taken the task of showing my students how to navigate all of their necessary resources to be successful in their classes. I also find that at times they will not ask other teachers for help but will rather wait until they see me to ask for help. I love being of service for my students. It can be a crazy day because I feel like I am the only one in the school available to help them out and have the patience. (Interview, March 2, 2021)

Jennifer had the same sentiment as Maria, feeling like she was the only one that had the patience to help guide students. Still, she also found she needed to anticipate questions from students to be prepared and answer them. Jennifer shared:

I have to anticipate student needs constantly, so I am prepared to help them. So that's where I've learned to try and think outside of my brain--I have to put myself in the shoes of my students. For example, they wanted to give the TELPAS test to our students the day we came back after the entire state of Texas was frozen for like two weeks of no school, and many of the students and families didn't even have heat in their homes! And I told the principal, please, please do not make them take a test the first day they come back. That's asking too much of them. The school listened to me, but if I hadn't thought about it and said something, that

wouldn't have happened. The same goes with preparing students: for a planned fire drill, what happens when their computer breaks and how to explain to them where to go and what to do, and anticipating questions about how to purchase a school shirt because I know they will be selling them in the cafeteria tomorrow. Things like that. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

In my conversations with the participants, we also spoke of the challenges that we know the students face in class, such as having an obvious language barrier, maybe having a learning curve with technology, and entangling in general logistics of being in an American high school.

However, we all had a deeper understanding of our students and the challenges that affected their performance in school because we understood and had empathy for them as people. Here are some of the challenges that the ESL teachers believe impact newcomers outside of the school setting and how they address and acknowledge these challenges. Shin stated, "There may be other things about this individual that aren't exactly language-based that might make school difficult. I think it's like, Is it something else?" (Interview, February 28, 2021) Jennifer expanded on this by explaining what she witnessed when newcomers enroll in United States public education:

I think the biggest challenge that the students face when they're a newcomer is they don't know how to navigate our education system. I mean, we have to show them everything we have to show them how to go to class, we have to show them how it all works too. Nobody does this when they enroll. There are just so many things that we take for granted that our students know about, like getting in the

lunch line punching in your lunch number like the kids don't get it. A majority of students we have may have interrupted education, so they haven't been to school in a while due to different circumstances. I had a student who didn't even know how to pass papers like we had to explain to him, you take the paper, you pass it back. Just little things like that where they could easily be embarrassed about in other classes and that other teachers take for granted, but we see all the time. A common one is they don't know to stand up and say the pledge or that they can't miss more than a certain number of days from school. It's all-new. Also, the families themselves don't know how to navigate our education system. We show students and parents how to check grades, what a 70 in the class means, and we have to explain to the parents about credits and how credits work for high school kids. The kids don't understand it, and it's very confusing. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

Shin also had experiences with students whose homelife had a direct effect on their school life:

A lot of times, they often are here in the States, without their family or immediate family, and they're here with some sort of distant family, like a cousin or an uncle or something like that, and their family tends to be working and expect the student to go to school AND work too. I always have students who talk about missing their families and the sacrifice of others so they could have a good life in the United States. And they feel so guilty about it. Especially, you know, if they don't understand what's going on in school. So that is already a huge, huge, dare I say, like, already, like, it's, it's too unfair. You know, like, it's, it's already like too

much of a weight. And you know, what, that's amazing that some kids can still ride with all that weight on their neck that would destroy a person, and they can still run to the finish line. Like those are the truly amazing people. But yeah, like the fact that they didn't even have their families, their immediate families. Yeah, that's a big challenge. (Interview, February 28, 2021)

Emmitt shared an anecdote about a student whose life experience mirrored that of a story they were reading in class about a boy jumping onto freight trains alone to make it to the United States for a better life:

...And he looked at me, he said, "Mister, I did that." And I just looked at him like, Really? I mean, when I was 14 years old, my mother wouldn't have let me travel by myself to another town, let alone leave my country and get on freight trains to get to another country. I mean, I just can't imagine what some of them have gone through. Some of these people that complain about immigrants, if they heard their stories, they might have a little bit of empathy at to what they've been through. So I find that the kids will talk more with me in my room than they do with maybe in a SIOP classroom because of experiences like this that are more common than not. (Interview, February 21, 2021)

In our conversations, it was clear that we all had a deeper understanding of our students and their challenges that affected their performance in school because we understood and had empathy for them as people. The nature of the ESL program is very hands-on and differentiated for a relatively small (in comparison to content-area courses) class size that we see for multiple hours every day. We know about their family, interests,

goals, fears, triumphs, insecurities, and what makes them tick. The students in our classrooms have overcome adversity on many different levels, and there was a consensus that it was the duty of the ESL teacher to create a safe environment for these students to learn, grow, and heal. Although it is not an official duty or has any way to measure success, the classroom environment is as important as learning. Maria discussed her classroom environment as a first-year ESL teacher:

I definitely think students are comfortable and confident in my class. It's because all of the students in the classroom are in the same or heading towards a similar goal of their English language. And I've noticed that at least this year, they feel really safe to try it out. And I've known in other classes they don't, they're not understood, or they have to repeat it. And so they have just said they give up. They're encouraged to try and make mistakes because everyone does in my class. (Interview, March 2, 2021)

Jennifer shares her experiences of students and her classroom atmosphere:

My classroom is very comfortable. I have a little sofa and lights and a lot of things to look at that are interesting for students. And I make it clear from day one, and I always tell them, you can ask me if you don't know what a word means ask me and I'll help you understand it. Or if I don't know how to explain it to you, let's look up a picture or, I just tell the kids, I'm here to help you whatever you need. Do you need to know how to go check out a library book? Do you need to know how to go to the Career and Counseling Center? You know, whatever, they have questions, I try and help them. Let's pull out your seniors. Okay, I'm a

freshman teacher. I have these students from before coming back to me asking how to fill out college application forms. They are even comfortable coming back. We get to know the students very well, and they get to know us very well too. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

She continued:

Newcomers are special. It's their first year, and they want to learn when they're here. Because their families want a better future, they want an education. And that's why they're in the classroom they want to learn. And so that's I guess, that's the difference our kids want to learn, and the other kids don't care. And that makes a difference. (Interview, February 25, 2021)

Emmitt had a similar stance on the atmosphere of his ESL classroom contributing to the overall comfortability and openness newcomers feel:

I think the kids are a little bit freer to speak [in the ESL classroom]. You know, if you don't like kids to talk, if you want a totally quiet classroom...don't teach ESL because that's not going to happen. You know, I learned early on in teaching that you have to pick your battles, what you're going to put tolerate in which you're not going to. I have a really good relationship with my students that they trust, you know, kids know if you care about it, they know it. And so they'll work for you. Especially if you build them up, you know, and give them praise, you know, when they are doing really well. Because this is a big deal, and they are accomplishing big things! You know, I probably have had the lowest failure rate at our school. I just don't tolerate students not trying, and I get on their case. I've

never had a student fail that was working hard. I've discovered that with the kids, they struggle, struggle, struggle, and then all of a sudden, it's kind of like a light bulb goes off. And all of a sudden, things fall into place, and they start getting it. So we have to give them that time because it'll happen. It doesn't always happen in the first or second year; it might not be till the fourth year. But it happens. They all say that my class was really hard, but they learned a lot. I expect a lot of them. And students really hold on to that, you know, they know that you care that you have high expectations for them. And you know, they can do it. And they appreciate that. And when I can look at them and tell them, your Biology teacher is one of my former students, they were sitting here just like you are, and they didn't know any English that really makes an impression, you know, they're like, really, because sometimes they don't think they can do it. But these are the students that will do it all (Interview, February 21, 2021)

Emmitt described how newcomers can enter his class at multiple points during the year, and he explained how difficult it is for newcomers who come towards the end of the year:

You know, it's really hard for them. But it amazes me how they can still get through the four years and graduate on time. It shows how hard they work. Because the research says five to seven years to be able to know English at that level, and these kids do it in four. I always tell my beginners the first year, I said, you can't work the same as the other kids, you have to work harder because you have to learn the content and learn English. So you have to work twice as hard as they do, do not look and say why I'm doing what they're doing. No, you have to

work harder. The ones that get that are successful, you know, they're successful.

(Interview, February 21, 2021)

In my conversations with participants, the idea of giving students a space where they feel comfortable enough to make mistakes and try their best is a breeding ground for learning and growing. From my personal experience, what makes a bilingual or ESL class work well is the atmosphere of empathy. The teacher isn't looking for perfection, but instead, they are looking for growth and work ethic. Shin made a good point that "And overall you know, they're high school teenagers, right? No matter what, life is going to be crazy and full of emotions for them. We need to meet them where they're at and, you know, help them grow in their new environment" (Interview, February 28, 2021).

During the 2019-2020 school year and into the first part of the 2020-2021 school year, a new challenge presented itself to students and teachers. COVID-19. Not only was there a global pandemic that left hundreds of thousands succumbing to the virus and even more who were severely ill, but students were also still expected to attend school in some form. Millions of schools quickly pivoted to having classes virtually while transitioning to hybrid learning when lawmakers decided it was safe to put thousands of people in a building together all day in the name of education. While many challenges tested teachers and students of all grade levels and content areas, the participants of this study discussed the major challenges they witnessed in their classrooms. These are challenges that the participants expressed are only the tip of the iceberg but are uniquely related to the newcomers they serve. Emmitt shared the struggles he saw his students faced:



I think this year, and it's this year specifically, it's being spread thin. With trying to do online and the kids in the classroom, I find that the kids with me face to face are doing better than the kids at home. Kids are not doing self-monitoring.

Teenagers are not good at it. I have a couple of students that are at home that are doing good. But they seem to be sort of self-driven, you know, but a few of the others have not done all that well. The kids have definitely been affected and hurt, but with the COVID business, you know, not able to do that small group instruction and be able to interact like they normally do with each other. It's been a real struggle because school is hard enough already. All new things online and in English for these kids? Ridiculous. (Interview, February 21, 2021)

Maria talked about the students at home trying to do virtual instruction as a newcomer learning English:

Most of my students have remained virtual because they can stay at home and babysit siblings or cousins and take care of the house, all while staying in school. But it's hard. Because of this, they don't like to turn on their cameras because there is so much going on at their homes. My kids just don't get to see each other. So they don't really know each other. So I say that would be the biggest struggle, kind of building that community in the classroom. There isn't any motivation for them. (Interview, March 2, 2021)

## **Summary**

The findings suggested that participants' perceptions and experiences of teaching high school newcomers before COVID-19 were isolating and lacking support at both the

district and state levels. Consequently, the challenges that participants and the researcher experienced were magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus creating an even more significant gap for students and educators. However, having an atmosphere of empathy is vital in the high school ESL classroom as students use it as a hub of resources and information. It is clear that there needs to be more training on language acquisition for all content-area teachers to utilize in classrooms, opening the door for potential collaboration amongst the campus ESL teacher and others. Overall, high school ESL teachers need more support in creating and maintaining a culture of collaboration both on their campuses and district-wide to ensure the overall success of newcomers.

## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The previous chapters in this study took us through an introduction of the secondary bilingual education world, a literature review to define some history and important topics of secondary bilingual education, and then the methodology of this particular piece of research, followed by the stories and results of the study. This upcoming chapter aims to synthesize all previous chapters to render possible opportunities and implications for the future. These five stories, including my own, opened up a door into secondary language acquisition instruction that rarely gets opened in literature or shown on the fancy teacher social media pages. May this be a door that is opened into a hallway of other doors to explore and share with others.

#### ***Review of Study***

This study focused on the real and lived experiences of high school ESL teachers regarding teaching secondary English learners. As Clendenin and Connelly (2000) say, "People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context." (p. 2)." The purpose of this study has been to retell the stories of these high school ESL teachers who teach English acquisition to give them a voice with their stories and how their experiences and perceptions can help and connect with the ESL program to implement growth and change.

In this study, the researcher has interviewed four ESL teachers and has re-storied

their experiences in this investigation. The researcher also wove in her own stories and experiences to connect with the participants and her own experiences. The data that has been gathered through this study was analyzed, and emergent themes were identified through coding. With the experiences and perceptions shared throughout this study, the goal is to use information gathered to create change and awareness and bring empathy to teenage English learners and their teachers.

The interviews and vital conversations were cathartic for all participants. The researcher was consistently told how good it felt to talk about their experiences and perceptions about instruction newcomers because they have never been asked.

The interviews conducted with the four participants and the researcher's journaling provided unique perceptions of the challenges high school ESL teachers face that aren't discussed or shown in current bilingual literature. These stories provided ideas and suggestions to promote change and growth in secondary bilingual programs. The following section postulates discussions and implications from the three emergent themes in the findings:

### ***Discussion***

ESL teachers feel a sense of isolation when planning and addressing challenges their students face. Because there is no bilingual or dual language program on the campuses of the participants (and most high school ESL teachers), these teachers are the "experts" on language acquisition. It would be beneficial for these teachers to have time to plan for instruction, review resources, and commensurate with their district colleagues. These teachers are also open to collaborating with content-area teachers to provide real-

world modeling of SIOP strategies that benefit all students in content and language. This all depends on the level of support that the administration gives on both campus and district levels.

Because school goes from kindergarten to 12th grade in the United States, school routines and "common knowledge" are taken for granted when newcomer students enroll in the later grades. This is where the ESL teacher becomes the hub of information and a place where students can grow from mistakes made because all students are on the same playing field. The ESL teacher advocates for these students and their parents as they navigate a new country and culture.

As the discussions and conversations with participants have shown, the challenges they face are directly related to the lack of support and empathy felt by those who make decisions for the ESL program. As discussed, COVID-19 has brought these challenges to the forefront. Across the United States, the need for bilingual teachers is at an all-time high as sign-on bonuses and stipends await those who are hired. According to Texas Teachers for Tomorrow, an alternative certification program, " Texas has seen a 50% increase in the need for bilingual teachers, with only 20% of that need being met". However, these incentives seem to end by the time one looks for a high school position. This is where the discussion begins.

Teachers of English learners at the high school level are only required to be certified in English and English as a Second Language. However, in the state of Texas, ALL English teachers must have the ESL certification as well. What is the distinction of a high school ESL teacher? There is no requirement to be bilingual, but the expectation

for ESL teachers is to teach students to be multilingual and become proficient enough in English by the time they graduate. There are obvious challenges present for this specific population that require different training, skills, and a level of empathy and patience that is not necessarily needed in other high school courses.

This retelling of the experiences of ESL teachers shows that there is an area of limbo they are currently fighting in--not fitting into the traditional high school English classroom role and not being treated like those that are bilingual teachers. It is interesting that the research and history of language acquisition and the bilingual programs show that using the native language to help drive success in the learned language is helpful. So why does bilingual and dual-language instruction end for newcomers who need it the most in the shortest amount of time?

### ***Recommendations for Educators***

As this study was being conducted, a major shift in terminology was taking place at the state level in Texas to reflect language learning as additive to the whole student versus LEP (limited English proficient). However, as terminology and the focus of bilingual learning shifts to terms inclusive of students knowing more than one language (including indigenous languages) to “multilingual learner”, it is critical that all facets of multilingual learning and instruction use and maintain synchronous terms. Although this positive change is slowly being integrated in the state of Texas, it is important that all states in the public education system get on board. This will cut out confusion and having a plethora of acronyms and terms that are used depending on grade level, program, and state. Being on the same page will streamline research, enrollment, and understanding of

what it means to be multilingual and best practices in instructing students.

It is also strongly recommended to have programs that incentivize learning and becoming certified ESL teachers instead of relying heavily on grade-level English certified teachers to step into roles in times of need. Just as those who are certified bilingual teachers by implementing best practices of acquiring two languages at the same time (Usually Spanish-English), there should be a strong emphasis in those seeking to teach multilingual learners at the high school level: having anywhere from 2-10 or more languages represented in their classrooms. As the United States continues to see exponential growth in the number of students needing multilingual programs to assist in acquiring English, those teaching not only standard bilingual and dual language courses (seen in elementary and middle level grades) receiving stipends, but also those teaching ESL at the secondary high school level as well. This will not only give more support to those teaching English learners by requiring more extensive knowledge of language acquisition, but also acknowledging through extra compensation that these teachers work in a high-need and time-intensive work environment.

The final recommendation for educators is to utilize teachers to their fullest potential: give them the opportunity and guidance to collaborate on the most vulnerable populations, allow the opportunity for teachers to share strategies and best practices with their colleagues in a non-judgmental environment, and be constantly aware of the challenges and work that is being done in the classrooms to support students. Without support of the campus, district, and state, these teachers might continue to feel isolated and a lack of empathy for the work they do.

### ***Recommendations for Future Study***

This narrative inquiry aimed to understand the perceptions of high school ESL teachers on the secondary ESL program and the challenges they face that could potentially impact newcomer student instruction. All participants did not initially set out to teach high school ESL, and they all participated in an alternative certification program. It would be recommended that a deeper look into the number of high school ESL teachers who have similar stories and the impact this has on newcomer students versus those that went through a traditional teaching program aimed at language acquisition. A look into the role an atmosphere of empathy plays in newcomer success could also be discussed.

Because of this non-traditional certification and the constant changes of bilingual education, the participants shared that they would like more professional development and training opportunities on language acquisition, instruction with culturally relevant resources, and skills mastered by their colleagues. The research sets up to further investigate perceptions of the high school ESL program throughout Texas with a broader number of ESL teachers and delving deeper into the potential impacts the perceived challenges faced have on their newcomer students.

### ***Conclusion***

Overall, high school English as a Second Language teachers need more support in creating and maintaining a culture of collaboration both on campus and district-wide to ensure the overall success of newcomers both academically but socio-emotionally as well. Sharing the stories and experiences of these educators will hopefully shed light on one of the many facets of bilingual education, encouraging growth in the program for



future educators and students.

Creating a culture of empathy and support in the ESL classroom is vital to the success of newcomer students as perceived by their ESL teachers. Based on the data collected through these vital conversations, it has been shown that targeted training and administrator awareness is critical in building a relationship of support at the campus level, and teacher voice is crucial in decision-making at the district level. It is the hope of the researcher that others may benefit from this study and find the anecdotes and experiences of these educators to validate their own experiences, help grow the bilingual program, or continue research on high school newcomer students and their teachers.

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## Appendix A

### Institutional Review Board Approval



DIVISION OF RESEARCH  
Institutional Review Boards

#### APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

November 5, 2020

Amanda Noyes  
[anoyes@uh.edu](mailto:anoyes@uh.edu)

Dear Amanda Noyes:

On November 3, 2020, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Perspectives from ESL Teachers Addressing the Needs of Newcomer High School English Learners
Investigator:	Amanda Noyes
IRB ID:	STUDY00002623
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IRB Application , Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Modification Point-by-Point Letter, Category: Other;</li> <li>• Individual Interview Questions (Appendix A), Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);</li> <li>• Focus Group Questions (Appendix C), Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);</li> <li>• Consent Form, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Email Script (Appendix D), Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Member-Check Questions (Appendix B), Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);</li> </ul>
Review Category:	Expedited
Committee Name:	Designated Review
IRB Coordinator:	Maria Martinez

The IRB approved the study on November 5, 2020; recruitment and procedures detailed within the approved protocol may now be initiated.

**DIVISION OF RESEARCH**

Institutional Review Boards

As this study was approved under an exempt or expedited process, recently revised regulatory requirements do not require the submission of annual continuing review documentation. However, it is critical that the following submissions are made to the IRB to ensure continued compliance:

- Modifications to the protocol prior to initiating any changes (for example, the addition of study personnel, updated recruitment materials, change in study design, requests for additional subjects)
- Reportable New Information/Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others
- Study Closure

Unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB, use the stamped consent form approved by the IRB to document consent. The approved version may be downloaded from the documents tab.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Research Integrity and Oversight (RIO) Office  
University of Houston, Division of Research  
713 743 9204  
[cphs@central.uh.edu](mailto:cphs@central.uh.edu)  
<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

## Appendix B

### Questions

#### *Individual Interview Questions*

1. Describe how you became a high school ESL teacher.
  - a. Did you take a traditional or alternative route?
  - b. Were you teaching other subjects or grade levels before?
    - i. How many years were you a teacher of record before becoming an ESL teacher?
    - ii. How did you become certified to be an ESL teacher?
  - c. What were your motivations into being a high school ESL teacher?
2. What are the biggest challenges Newcomer high school English Learners face?
  - a. In a school setting.
  - b. In the family setting.
  - c. In the social setting.
3. Do you feel adequately prepared to address the challenges and needs Newcomers face?
4. What are your feelings on the other content-area courses Newcomer English Learners take?
  - a. Do you believe students are learning and getting the second language support they need?
  - b. Do you believe that SIOP is being used with fidelity on your campus or in your district?
  - c. What are the biggest strengths and weaknesses you have experienced with content-area courses for Newcomers?
5. What are the biggest challenges you face as a high school ESL teacher?
  - a. Do you believe the challenges you face directly impact your Newcomers?
6. What are your feelings about the curriculum you teach?
  - a. Do you believe it is culturally responsive?

- i. Example: Do you feel your students can select novels/texts that represent their culture?
  - b. Do you believe the level of rigor is appropriate for Newcomers?
  - c. Is the curriculum state, district, or campus determined for the instruction of Newcomer students?
  - d. If you could change or include something that isn't currently in the curriculum, what you include and why?
- 7. Do you believe your voice is heard as a high school ESL teacher? Why do you feel this way?
- 8. How has COVID-19 impacted your Newcomer students and your instruction?
  - a. What are ways that you and your students are supported during this time?
  - b. What are ways you need to feel supported?
- 9. Is there anything else you would like to discuss about the challenges you or your students face in the ESL program?

***Focus Group Questions:***

- 1. All of the participants stated they would like to have professional developments that would be useful to them and their job. What are some PDs you would be most interested in attending?
- 2. Some participants thought it would be good to meet more as a district team when it comes to planning lessons. What would be the most productive use of your time during these district PLCs?
- 3. Some participants talked about a “top-down” approach where the district had more guidance in lessons and use of resources. This may include pre-made lessons, lesson templates to use, and more resources that are the same across the board for all teachers. Do you think this would be helpful for teachers?

4. In the individual interviews, all of the participants talked about the role of the SIOP campus coaches. I want to turn to paraprofessionals in the ESL classrooms. What are your experiences with them?
5. What do you believe is the best way to acquire English as a second language?
6. Walk through your lesson-planning process.

## Appendix C

### Participants

Participants and Researcher					
<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Years Teaching ESL</b>	<b>Education and Training</b>
Maria (Participant)	28	Female	Hispanic	1 year	-Alternative Certification -Bachelor's Degree
Jennifer (Participant)	42	Female	Caucasian	11 years	-Alternative Certification -Pursuing Ph.D.
Shin (Participant)	34	Male	Asian	7 years	-Alternative Certification -Master's Degree
Emmitt (Participant)	69	Male	Caucasian	25 years	-Alternative Certification -Bachelor's Degree
Researcher	27	Female	Caucasian	6 years	-Alternative Certification -Pursuing Ed.D