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English Learner Perceptions And Interactions In Mainstream Versus Small Group Environments

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ENGLISH LEARNER PERCEPTIONS AND INTERACTIONS IN MAINSTREAM VERSUS SMALL
GROUP ENVIRONMENTS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in English as a Second Language.

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List of Acronyms Used

EL - English Learner

ESL - English as a Second Language

COLT - Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching

IPA - Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

L1 - first language, native language, or home language

L2 - target language , language one is trying to learn

SLA - second language acquisition

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My Research Question

“Sai can speak almost as well as one of my normal students.”

“And I’m expected to achieve those results when half my class are ESL students!”

“I don’t think Graciela’s family even reads to her in English.”

All of these are common sentiments I hear among mainstream classroom teachers regarding English as a Second Language (ESL) students on my caseload in a Midwestern, suburban elementary school called Green Valley Elementary (all names and place names are pseudonyms). Among mainstream teachers, however well-intentioned, ESL students are most often seen as a liability, students that will be twice the work and half the reward (measured by standardized test scores) as “normal” students. But what is a “normal” student? What do these teachers have in their minds when referencing one? Anecdotally, it is easy to see that many mainstream teachers view their ESL students as outside of the norm. But what do the ESL students themselves think? This perception of “normal/not normal” in the elementary school setting is what I sought to explore in this study by investigating both ESL student perceptions and interaction levels in mainstream versus small group environments.

Although the United States is linguistically diverse, with over 300 languages spoken by its citizens, English is still spoken by the majority. According to the 2011 census report, 21% of the American population over five years old spoke a language other than English in the home (Ryan, 2013). This is also true in the mid-size Midwestern suburb, Green Valley, where this study takes place. There are approximately 68,000 people living in Green Valley, but only 15% speak a language other than English in the home. Because language is often racialized, the racial makeup of the suburb can help in understanding the context of this study. Of the approximately 68,000 people living in Green Valley, 81.4% claim their race as White alone. 9.1% are Asian alone, and the remainder are African-American, Hispanic or Latino, or of mixed race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). These figures tell us that the population of Green Valley remains fairly monolithic in both language (English) and race (White). Is this, then, what teachers are referring to when they say “normal”? This chapter introduces issues associated with the idea of perception relating to ESL students.

The Power of Perception

Perception can have a powerful effect on a student's success. In Rosenthal and Jacobson's famous Pygmalion study, elementary school teachers were told that 20% of the students in their class had taken a prestigious IQ test and were on the verge of great intellectual advancement. The students thought to "bloom" were randomly assigned, so there was actually no difference between them and other students in the class. However, at the end of the school year the researchers found that students who teachers believed were advanced made more growth than the rest of the students in the class. More strikingly, teachers tended to describe students labeled as advanced in positive terms when they succeeded, whereas other students were seen in a more negative light when they achieved academic success (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). This evidence is compelling when viewed in regards to ESL students in the mainstream classroom. If mainstream teachers believe ESL students are something other than "normal," what effect does this have on the ESL students themselves? Do ESL students in turn believe that being ESL is not "normal"? Finally, how do ESL students differ in their interaction levels in the mainstream classroom versus in a small group environment? These are questions this study seeks to answer. My research investigates how ESL students perceive "being" ESL and receiving ESL services. It also seeks to determine if student interaction levels differ between their mainstream classroom and the small group setting.

ESL Service Models

The court case of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) entitles non-English speaking students to have fair and equal access to content education regardless of English language proficiency level. This has resulted in many different program models for ESL education in the United States. Programs range from bilingual education, in which students receive content instruction in both their home language and English, to pull-out ESL instruction where students receive English language instruction outside of their mainstream classroom for a set amount of time each day. There are many other models for ESL instruction. These include sheltered instruction (where teachers adapt content to fit the language ability levels of ESL students), structured immersion (classes are taught in English by ESL or bilingual teachers, and English is taught through content) and co-teaching (where both the content and ESL teacher are teaching and planning together). Bilingual models also help to meet the needs of ESL students. These can range from

early-exit bilingual programs, where students are initially instructed in their native language and then gradually introduced to more English until native language instruction is phased out, to dual immersion programs, where both native and non-native English speakers receive content instruction in both languages (Wright, 2008). Of these program types, long term dual bilingual education is the most successful in closing the achievement gap between monolingual English speakers and ESL students. According to a longitudinal study by Thomas and Collier (2002) among five school districts nationwide, bilingually educated students outperform monolingually-educated students in all academic subjects after 4-7 years of bilingual schooling. Students who have been in bilingual programs for at least five years reach the 50th percentile on reading standardized tests by middle school and by high school outperform students from monolingual programs. In contrast, students who receive segregated, remedial ESL programs do not achieve at grade level on standardized reading tests after exiting the ESL program and usually fall further behind as they continue through school (Thomas and Collier, 2002). This is not to say that bilingual education is the only way ESL students are able to close the achievement gap, simply that the data show it is the most effective service model. High quality ESL content programs were also shown to be effective in closing the achievement gap if they were sustained for at least 5-6 years and were approached as enrichment rather than remedial classes (Thomas and Collier, 2002). In a more recent study in the North Carolina Public Schools, Thomas and Collier (2014) found that students enrolled in dual language (immersion) programs had higher overall Reading and Math scores on statewide standardized tests than students who did not participate in these programs. Furthermore, both ESL students and African American students who participated in dual language programs had smaller achievement gaps (compared to achievement levels of white students) than their counterparts who were not in dual language programs.

Although the difference in program effectiveness has been well-documented, many school districts are unable to fund fully bilingual programs for their ESL students. In the case of the school district in this study, many factors make a bilingual program untenable at this time. Although the demographics are rapidly changing, ESL students remain a minority in the district. The ESL student population district-wide is also extremely diverse, with more than twenty home languages spoken across twenty-two schools. Choosing one language for a bilingual program would leave many ESL students who did not speak that language unable to participate. Furthermore, the majority of classroom teachers are not

bilingual and do not have necessary training or licenses to effectively teach ESL or deliver content in a language other than English. The district program model therefore is currently a mixture of pull-out, push-in, and co-teaching.

Pull-out Instruction at Green Valley Elementary

The majority of ESL instruction at Green Valley Elementary is delivered in a pull-out setting. Pull-out ESL instruction occurs when students are placed in mainstream classrooms and are pulled out of their classrooms for part of the day to get specific ESL instruction from a licensed ESL teacher. There can be significant variation in the amount of time students are pulled for, skills targeted, and curriculum used in a pull-out program (Wright, 2008). Pull-out services can also vary based on student needs. Students are qualified to receive ESL services based on an initial screening test of English language proficiency (the WIDA MODEL), which gives them a proficiency score in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Scores can range from Level 1 (little to no English) to Level 6 (native-like proficiency). Students continue to receive ESL services based on standardized test scores which also give proficiency scores in speaking, listening, reading and writing. The standardized test used at Green Valley is the ACCESS test. Students can qualify for ESL services based on a weak proficiency in one or all of the four modalities.

There can be a perception among students, or even among teachers at Green Valley Elementary, that the work students do in ESL pull-out classes is less academically rigorous than the work done in the mainstream classroom. Some students dislike being pulled out of their mainstream classes. Others believe they are missing the “real” content and will need to make it up later. In fact, some mainstream teachers at Green Valley Elementary insist students pulled out for ESL make up the content they missed, regardless of whether it is appropriate for the students’ English language proficiency level. Other students look forward to getting pulled out every day and appear to view pull-out ESL class as an equally rigorous learning environment. It is difficult to teach when you have engagement from some students but not others, sometimes within the same small group. I wanted to quantify these conflicting perceptions I see among my students daily through this research. I wanted to discover how students themselves viewed their ESL services in order to inform my instruction and help me to meet their needs.

The Importance of Interaction

In this study, I measure student interaction levels in the mainstream classroom and in a small group environment. Measuring interaction in the mainstream classroom assumes that interaction is a positive part of learning. I take the assumption in this research that interaction is not only an important part of learning, but that it is a necessary condition (DaSilva Iddings, 2010; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Norton and Toohey, 2001; Toohey and Day, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978; Zwiers and Crawford, 2011). Second language acquisition is often viewed through the lens of either cognitive or sociocultural processes. Cognitive theory assumes that language learning is largely the result of internal processes of the learner. In this view, language acquisition is related to an individual's cognitive development. Many cognitive theorists also focused on learner characteristics that could be linked to successful language acquisition, such as motivation and attitude (Lightbrown and Spada, 2006). In contrast, sociocultural theory, pioneered by Vygotsky (1978), considers language acquisition a product of social interaction. Vygotsky believed that language is one tool among many that children (and adults) use to achieve certain goals. Language develops as children use it to achieve goals within social interactions.

Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) extend sociocultural theory in their work on communities of practice. In this view, learning is inextricable from the context in which it occurs. Activities are situated in a broader system of relationships, both among people and concepts, which give them meaning. In order to access learning, one must participate in its context. Learners are constantly negotiating their place within a community of practice so that they may learn. This process is called *legitimate peripheral participation*, and it assumes interaction as a prerequisite for learning to take place. This concept can be applied to the current study when measuring ESL students' interaction levels in the mainstream classroom. If we assume that the mainstream classroom constitutes one community of practice, a student's interaction level within that community becomes important if they are to learn effectively. In the case of ESL students, their learning in the mainstream classroom is happening twofold: they are acquiring the English language while also learning grade-level content. In order to access both, students must participate at a certain level of interaction with both their classmates and their teachers. It is important to note here that the idea of successful interaction in the classroom can be culturally specific. The types of interaction valued in an

American classroom may clash with those expected in a students' home country or culture (Wallitt, 2008). This study measures interaction in the classroom with the acknowledgement that the types of interaction measured could be biased towards a Western model of a successful learner.

Role of the Researcher

I was in my second full year teaching ESL at Green Valley Elementary at the time of this study. I am one of two full time ESL teachers at the school. My colleague has been teaching at Green Valley Elementary for 10 years, and has seen the population of EL students grow exponentially during that time. I work with ESL students in grades 3-5 and deliver a mix of pull-out, push-in and co-teaching ESL services. The length and frequency of pull-out services are guided by the district ESL service model and implemented by the ESL teacher based on scheduling and student need. The majority of students on my caseload receive some kind of pull-out instruction, which may or may not be augmented by co-taught classes. The curriculum covered in pull-out ESL classes can vary between grade levels, language proficiency levels, and gaps in academic achievement depending on the group of students.

I conducted research with participants in third grade, who were on my caseload for the first time, having worked with my colleague the year before. Students were familiar with me and knew who I was, but had never had me for a teacher. These students were part of my sheltered Writer's Workshop group. I pulled a group of nine students to my classroom during the thirty minute Writer's Workshop block in their mainstream classroom every day. I collaborated with their mainstream teachers on instructional strategies, grades and assessments to ensure we were meeting third grade writing standards. I also occasionally pushed in to co-teach a lesson with one of their classroom teachers before pulling students out for work time. The work that ESL students did in my pull-out group closely resembled what their peers were doing in the mainstream classroom, with more emphasis on building vocabulary, grammar, and syntactical skills in English. Students were aware that their classroom teachers "Mr. oeder" and "Mrs. Smith" and I talked often and had mutual respect for each other's work. They were also aware that their writing grade came from the work they did with me while they were pulled out of their mainstream classroom.

Background of the Researcher

I became an ESL teacher through my love of language and travel. I took Spanish and French in high school, and took a gap year traveling around the south of Mexico before beginning college. I

traveled throughout my twenties in Mexico and Europe. People whom I have encountered in both my travels and my life in the U.S. have oftentimes been impressed that I speak Spanish and have a working knowledge of French. This perception has always struck me as hypocritical. Why am I applauded for learning a different language, whereas the millions of immigrants in the United States are not? Why is my accomplishment worth more than theirs? The answer is embedded in power relations within a larger social context (Bourdieu, 1977; Ogbu, 1983). In my teaching, these issues translated into the questions of why my language skills are seen as an asset, whereas those of my students are often viewed as a deficit. My privilege of being part of the dominant culture (native English speaking, white) allows my language abilities to be seen as an asset (Leung, Harris and Rampton, 1997). My students are often viewed from a deficit mentality by the school system. But what did they themselves think? With this study, I wanted to investigate student perceptions of receiving pull-out ESL services to determine whether or not they carried this deficit mentality of their language abilities as well. I wanted to then measure their interaction in the mainstream classroom versus their interaction in the small group setting. I did not want to ascribe certain identities or perceptions on my students; rather, I wanted to determine their viewpoints in order to better meet their needs.

Guiding Questions

My research followed five third-grade students from three different language backgrounds and varying ability levels for five months and used qualitative methods including student interviews, a questionnaire and observations. I collected data on how students perceived a variety of factors relating to pull-out ESL services, including being pulled out of the classroom, the work done in ESL class, why they are pulled out of the classroom, and what they understand about being an ESL student. I sought to gather information on how comfortable students are both academically and socially in my pull-out ESL class versus the mainstream classroom. I also measured their interaction level in their mainstream classroom and in small groups. The components of this study were designed to answer the questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?*

Summary

This study focuses on both student perceptions of receiving ESL services and their interaction levels in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting. The results of this study will contribute to ongoing research in the field on ESL students' perceptions of their ESL classes. It will also add to the body of research by exploring ESL student interaction levels in the mainstream classroom versus in a small group environment. It will provide needed data on ESL students' interaction levels and perceptions at the elementary level. In my own context at Green Valley Elementary, the data will give both ESL and mainstream teachers valuable information about their ESL students. The results of the student questionnaires and interviews will help inform how I structure my pull-out ESL classes. Measuring student interaction in the mainstream classroom will also open a space for a dialogue on meeting the needs of ESL students in the mainstream classroom. Most importantly, this data can guide the school forward in structuring an ESL program that meets both the instructional and social-emotional needs of its ESL student population. This research can also be useful to teachers and administrators in other districts in creating an ESL program and school climate which inspires ESL students to participate fully in their learning communities. It is my hope that the results of this case study can be used to evaluate how to best structure elementary ESL programs to encourage ESL student interaction in the mainstream classroom in both the Green Valley school district and beyond.

Chapter Overviews

In this chapter I have introduced this study by giving background information on the variety and efficacy of different ESL service models, the role teacher perception can play in student achievement, and the importance of interaction in the learning process. I have outlined my role and background as a researcher and stated the questions guiding this study. I have concluded with a summary of Chapter One, highlighting the rationale behind this research through its potential benefits both in theory and practice. In Chapter Two, I review the literature relevant to this study by looking at perceptions of ESL students by others, students' self-perception of being part of an ESL program, and learning from a community of practice perspective. I will also identify gaps in the research that the current study seeks to address. Chapter Three describes the research design and methods of this study. Chapter Four states the results of

this study. Chapter Five is a discussion of results, including this study's limitations and implications for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This research investigates the questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?* In this section, existing literature relating to these topics will be reviewed. The first section begins by exploring other people's perceptions of ESL students by looking at deficit and additive mentalities. I will explore ESL and marginalization, deficit mentalities in the mainstream classroom, and additive mentalities and how they relate to student empowerment. Next, I will look at how language communities are perceived, including teacher perceptions of ESL students. Then I will review studies that unpack concepts of linguistic hegemony and the concept of the idealized native speaker, and connect these to the experience of ESL students in the American school system.

The second section examines studies that focus on student perceptions of being an ESL student, with emphasis on the concepts of identity, motivation and investment. I will first explore concepts of identity as it relates to ESL and second language acquisition (SLA), specifically looking at conflicts of identity as well as how teacher expectations relate to ESL identity. I will then look at studies on student perspectives of their ESL class. Finally, I will examine concepts of motivation and investment in SLA and connect them to the experience of ESL students.

The final section looks at the concept of communities of practice. I first review sociocultural theory as a framework for approaching language learning. I contrast sociocultural theories with cognitive theories, and explore the concept of cultural resources. Next, Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of situated learning is discussed, with subsections on types of non-participation and engagement with the community. Finally, I review studies relating to access to community resources, looking at classroom practices that restrict or encourage participation in the mainstream classroom.

It is concluded that although there have been previous studies on ESL students' perceptions of their ESL classes, much of the research has focused on either adult or secondary ESL students. There is little information on what elementary students think about being in the ESL program or receiving ESL services. Studies that do exist on ESL student perceptions do not also look at interaction levels of ESL students in the mainstream versus small group environment. This study aims to fill this gap by studying

elementary ESL student perceptions of their pull-out ESL services as well as their interaction levels in both the mainstream and small group setting.

Other People's Perceptions of ESL Students

In this section I will review literature relating to other people's perceptions of ESL students. I will explore the concepts of deficit and additive mentalities, issues relating to how language communities are perceived, and the concepts of hegemony and the idealized native speaker.

Deficit and Additive Mentalities

A deficit mentality occurs when someone is judged by what they lack, rather than by assets they might have. Deficit theory in education has a long history. It sought to provide a theory to account for persistent underachievement among students from stigmatized groups in the United States, such as African Americans, Native Americans, Latino/as and Appalachians. Deficit theory assumes that students from underprivileged racial and socioeconomic groups lack cognitive and linguistic resources to be successful in school because of their home culture (Hadjistassou, 2008; Song and Pyon, 2008). This can be extended to ESL students, who are often viewed as coming to school lacking necessary resources (fluency in standard English) to be academically successful.

This is in contrast to an additive mentality, which takes the view that all students bring strengths with them to school. Additive programs seek to use students' linguistic and cultural resources to inform and guide instruction. This mentality goes beyond how students perform in the classroom to view a student's community, culture and language repertoires as *funds of knowledge* that have a profound influence on how students form meaning (L. Foster, 2013). Teachers then draw on these funds of knowledge to form a more responsive pedagogy for all students based on their community, cultural and linguistic context (Hadjistassou, 2008).

Marginalization and ESL. It has been argued that pull-out ESL instruction can contribute to the marginalization of both EL students and their teachers as "other" (Wright, 2008). ESL instruction can also be perceived as a remedial service and is sometimes delivered as such. At the elementary level, the structure of ESL services can often be similar to that of special education services, which contributes to the perception of ESL as remedial. It is important to note again that in Thomas and Collier's (2002) comprehensive study, ESL content programs were only found to be effective in closing the achievement

gap when approached as enrichment rather than remedial classes (Thomas and Collier, 2002). To understand why ESL pull-out classes are oftentimes viewed as remedial or outside the norm, it is useful to examine the concept of *monolingual bias*. As V.J. Cook (1991) states in her *poverty-of-the-stimulus* argument, “It is commonly assumed that acquiring one language is the unexceptional norm for a human being. Acquiring two is sometimes assumed to be something that is peculiar, difficult, an intellectual achievement, a problem - in other words anything but commonplace” (p. 113). Although this assumption is not universally true (in many countries multilingualism is the norm), it does tend to be the case in the United States. It also holds true in school districts where ESL students are a minority and monolingual English speakers are the majority, as is the case in the studied district. This monolingual bias is compounded by the fact that many mainstream teachers seldom see or hear their students speaking a language other than English. Because students’ linguistic abilities in languages other than English oftentimes remain outside the school, these skills can become invisible to the school system.

Deficit mentalities in the mainstream classroom. Mainstream classrooms also have different instructional goals than ESL classrooms. In her study, Harklau (1994) contrasted mainstream and ESL classrooms at the secondary level in the U.S. and found that curriculum in mainstream classrooms rested on several assumptions, many of which were not true for ESL students. These assumptions included continuity of schooling, a shared knowledge base, and students who were native English speakers. Instruction was also constrained by curriculum guidelines and standards at the state, district, and departmental level. These assumptions and constraints in the mainstream classroom created an environment in which ESL students struggled to gain access to content at the level of their native English-speaking peers. The primary instructional goals of the mainstream classroom were content and standard based, and few mainstream teachers adjusted their input level to make it comprehensible for ESL students. In turn, mainstream teachers did not have the linguistics background to give meaningful feedback on ESL students’ grammatical errors. Feedback given was either vague or nonexistent, which led to what Harlau asserts was, “mainstream teachers...abdicating responsibility for instructing nonnative speaker on issues of language form” (p. 261). Mainstream teachers simply saw their ESL students struggling with English vocabulary and grade level content, and were unequipped to give students the language instruction they needed to access the content meaningfully. This common situation creates a

deficit mentality in schools in which minority students are viewed in terms of what they do not have (Song and Pyon, 2008).

Additive mentalities and empowerment. In his framework for empowering minority students, Cummins (1986) claims that teachers can be placed on an *additive-subtractive* continuum based on how they incorporate minority students' language and culture. This could be expanded to include the degree to which mainstream teachers incorporate instruction to meet the linguistic needs of ESL students. On the additive end of the spectrum, teachers see their role as adding an additional language (English) and culture to an ESL student's existing linguistic assets. Teachers on the subtractive end of the continuum see their role as replacing a student's existing language(s) and culture. This would align with the deficit mentality, in which students are seen as lacking in some way, and where ESL students' home language and culture are not acknowledged. This deficit mentality corroborates the idea of ESL as a remedial service, where students make up for the skills they lack. The remedial status of the ESL program and ESL students can also be compounded when ESL students are tracked into certain classes at the secondary level. In Harklau's (1994) study, she notes that ESL students who were mainstreamed were often put in low-track classes, which did not provide them with significant opportunities for the linguistic interaction necessary to improve their English skills. Schools in which this remedial message is pervasive often have a monolingual bias.

In order to determine how monolingual speakers could begin to approach ESL students and the ESL program from an additive perspective, it is useful to examine the findings of Youngs and Youngs. Their 2001 study examined predictors of mainstream teachers' attitudes towards ESL students. They created a model with six categories of possible predictors, including general education experiences, ESL training, personal contact with diversity, prior contact with ESL students, demographics and personality traits. They administered questionnaires to 143 junior high and high school teachers to measure each of these predictors, and found that there were several factors indicating a positive attitude towards ESL students. These predictors include teachers who took a foreign language or multicultural education class, had some specific ESL training, have lived outside of the United States, and have had contact with culturally diverse ESL students. Female teachers were also found to have more positive attitudes towards ESL students than male teachers (Youngs and Youngs and Jr., 2001). These predictors could show a way

forward for districts and mainstream teachers to begin to approach their role with ESL students from an additive perspective. However, their results are limited as the teacher participants all worked at the secondary level.

In more recent work, Cummins (2016) has proposed intercultural (multicultural) education as a framework for empowering students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. He argues that although many teachers may view their students' home language and culture positively, they see little pertinence between student backgrounds and curriculum. This results in *benign neglect*, where students' cultural and linguistic resources are not utilized and rarely acknowledged as relevant. Educators can counteract this benign neglect by approaching instruction through an intercultural framework, which has a specific focus on affirming students' linguistic and cultural identities and connecting these to broader societal issues. An intercultural framework focuses on critical pedagogy, encouraging students to question unequal relations of power both in the school and in their lives. It encourages students to use all of their linguistic assets to achieve academically. This framework also empowers educators to make instructional and curricular choices in order to resist implicit bias found in both schools and society.

How Language Communities are Perceived

The language communities to which ESL students belong are also an important factor in the way ESL students and the ESL program is perceived within the larger school community. Languages and language communities are embedded within their wider social context, which is often structured by power relations. The French sociologist Bourdieu (1977) argues that all linguistic exchanges are dependent on the particular relationships of the speakers or the wider groups they belong to. This is in turn related to the status of an individual or a group in society. Linguistic competence not only means one can use a language grammatically, but also that one has the authority so that people will listen when they speak. How authority is determined is related to both the language and the language variety that someone speaks. Certain languages and language varieties are privileged over others. Privileged languages or varieties are spoken by privileged members of society, and in turn "inferior" languages or varieties are spoken by those who are marginalized. Bourdieu states that

a language is worth what those who speak it are worth, *i.e.* the power and authority in the economic and cultural power relations of the holders of the corresponding competence. (p. 652)

Bourdieu's notion of linguistic power is useful in understanding how language communities in schools can be marginalized. ESL students can belong to several language communities at once, but by virtue of being labeled as an ESL student, they do not belong to the language community of standard English speakers, which holds power and status in the school system. In addition, ESL students can be also perceived differently by the school system based on their home language community and its relative status in the wider society (Ogbu, 1983). These perceptions can have an effect on both students' linguistic identities and their academic success.

Teacher perceptions of ESL students. Teachers can have varying perceptions of ESL students. The reality of ESL students is impossible to uncouple from broader societal issues of immigration, assimilation, and status. Vollmer (2000) argues that teacher perceptions served to construct a discourse reinforcing the idea of who was typical and atypical for an ESL student. In her ethnographic study, which explored teacher attitudes towards different ethnic groups of ESL students, she conducted interviews with seven mainstream teachers at the secondary level. She found that teachers often praised one group (Russian speakers) over other groups (Chinese speakers, Spanish speakers). Vollmer argues that this is because teachers perceived Russian speakers as having character traits that aligned with traits teachers defined as being more American; individualistic, outgoing, and aggressive. In contrast, Chinese speaking students were often posited as being the model minority hard workers, yet teachers said that they had difficulty connecting with them on a personal level (Vollmer, 2000). The familiar trope that Asian ESL students were inherently good at math was expressed by several teachers. These perceptions have an effect on students, as seen in Wallitt's (2008) study of Cambodian students at the secondary level. Students can feel invisible, or real academic needs can be negated based on the model minority myth.

Teachers can also have varying perceptions of students' home language and literacy experiences. In her study done at the elementary level, Hamel (2003) found that many of the teachers she interviewed often failed to view students' home language and literacy as resources for the classroom. Rather, teachers tended to view dialect differences as a mismatch between home and school that needed to be fixed.

Teachers also largely viewed students' home language and literacy experiences in terms of what they were not getting at home. They then tried to make up for what students were lacking at home in the classroom. This deficit mentality can negate assets that students bring to the classroom.

Hegemony and the Idealized Native Speaker

This othering of ESL students and the ESL program is inextricably linked with status and power relations both in the school system and in greater American society. In Gramsci's theory of hegemony, power structures remain in place because of small, normalized actions which create and reinforce the existing system (as cited in Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001, p. 248). In schools, this can be revealed through a system which is biased towards standard English as the only language of academic success. It can be enacted through acts of omission (negating or ignoring students' multilingualism), viewing students with a deficit mentality, or other microaggressions. It is important to note that actions which reinforce this hegemony are often invisible to perpetrators, and are not based on any hostility towards ESL students in particular. The power of hegemony comes from the combined effect of actions that reinforce the power status quo, which in this case is rooted in monolingual bias. Cummins (1986) discusses these power relations in his framework for empowering minority students, which is based on three sets of interactions. These include "the classroom interactions between teachers and students, relationships between schools and minority communities, and the intergroup power relations within society as a whole" (p.19). Acts that reaffirm hegemony can occur within each of these interactional settings. Cummins also argues that students outside of the dominant group are either empowered or disabled based on their interactions with people in the school system. Empowered students are more likely to both participate in school and find academic success. If interactions within the school system affirm monolingual bias, and similarly affirm that being pulled out of the mainstream class for ESL makes you "other," students are more likely to be disabled rather than empowered (Cohen, 2011; Cummins, 2016; Kanno and Applebaum, 1995; Nero, 2005; Walitt, 2008)

In many American schools standard English has linguistic hegemony; it is implicitly the language of power and status, despite the fact that standard English itself is a myth (MacNeil and Cran, 2005). The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines standard English as the language of educated speakers, which is a definition based on status, not linguistic features ("The American heritage dictionary entry: Standard

English,” 2016; Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2014). Standard English can be highly subjective depending on region, culture, social group, age, and more. Linguistically, standard English is simply another variety of American English which is privileged above others. The hegemony of standard English in schools is predicated on the notion of what Leung, Harris and Rampton (1997) call the *idealized native speaker*. ESL services exist to teach students with limited English proficiency, which assumes that there is an ideal level of English proficiency that can be attained. This ideal level of proficiency is based on standard English. The process of qualifying for ESL services involves taking a standardized test which determines a student’s proficiency level in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Teachers decide who takes the test based on whether any language other than English is spoken in the home. Many students who qualify for ESL services, however, do not have a strong foundation in their L1. Some students who are classified as ESL students live in a home where English is spoken the majority of the time. Others may have attended all-English schools in their home countries. Some may have literacy in their L1, and some may be proficient in multiple other languages. ESL teachers often struggle, due to lack of time, resources, or fluency in students’ home languages, to truly measure this linguistic complexity. Furthermore, the structure of ESL services depend on “the assumption on an idealized native speaker, usually a monolingual European American” (Nero, 2005, p. 196). This assumes that proficiency in English is equivalent to proficiency in standard English. It also negates the complex linguistic identities that EL students bring with them to school, and only judges them based on what they do not have. They are then placed in ESL services with many other students who may or may not share their linguistic and literacy background, where they are expected to learn the standard English of the idealized native speaker (Leung, Harris, and Rampton, 1997).

So far I have reviewed literature relating to other people’s perceptions of ESL students. I have outlined the concepts of deficit and additive mentalities, explored issues relating to how language communities are perceived, and looked at the concepts of hegemony and the idealized native speakers. In the next section I will review literature related to student perceptions of being ESL, including identity and ESL, student perspectives on ESL class, and motivation and investment in SLA.

Student Perceptions of Being an ESL Student

This section explores studies relating to student perceptions of being an ESL student. I first review the concepts of identity in the field of SLA, focusing on ESL. Next, I examine studies revealing student perspectives on ESL classes. Finally, I look at concepts of motivation and investment and how they relate to ESL students.

Identity and ESL

The school system ascribes an identity of English learner (EL) to multilingual students through proficiency tests which are predicated on the idea of an idealized, monolingual English speaker. This ascribed identity, compounded by the hegemony of standard English, can create tension in students seeking to form their own identity, which may be very different from that assigned to them at school. As Marshall (2010) states, “ESL is not only a linguistic state, a course, an abbreviation, appreciated by many, disliked by others; it is also an institutional and learner identity that some students associate with nonacceptance, deficit, and even nonrecognition of their multilingual and multicultural knowledge and competence” (p. 51). Many SLA scholars take the stance that identity is dynamic and evolving throughout all stages of life (Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001). Tabouret-Keller and LePage (1985) state that individuals are constantly engaging in *acts of identity* in which they are continuously creating their identity through linguistic and social interaction. People shift their identities through language based on their social context at any given time. These acts of identity serve to align or distance individuals with one group or another (Tabouret-Keller and LePage, 1985). Wenger (1998) builds on that idea by arguing that identity should not be viewed as purely individual or social, but rather as an interplay between the two as an individual creates new ways of being and belonging within a community of practice. An individual belongs to multiple communities, both globally and locally, which help to create their identities. Maintenance of an identity involves a constant negotiation between participation in communities and reification, or naming that participation as a reflection of self (Wenger, 1998). In each of these conceptions, identity is firmly situated in broader social contexts, and is a negotiation between those contexts and the individual’s participation or non-participation within them.

Conflicts of identity. Identity can also be viewed as a site of struggle. Wenger (1998) calls this struggle *reconciliation*. In his view, reconciliation occurs when individuals belong to multiple

communities of practice with conflicting interests, and must reconcile their membership in each community. This is common for ESL students, who usually belong to very different linguistic and cultural communities of practice. There can oftentimes be incongruence between the values of their school communities and those of their home communities. In Wallitt's (2008) study on Cambodian students at the high school level, many participants reflected on this culture clash. Many students stated that they felt uncomfortable with disrespectful behavior in school by other students because in Cambodian culture respect for elders and teachers is paramount. They also noted that showing respect in the classroom for them meant that they waited until they were called on to talk rather than offering their opinions freely, as is expected in Western style education. The overarching theme taken from the participants' testimonies was going back and forth between two cultures, and constantly adapting to each. Another site of struggle can occur when there is a clash between identities that students claim and identities given to them by the school system. Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) see this identity clash as a site of negotiation:

... many individuals find themselves in a perpetual tension between self-chosen identities and others' attempts to position them differently. Thus... *negotiation of identities* will be understood as the interplay between reflective positioning, that is, self-representation, and interactive positioning, whereby others attempt to reposition particular individuals or groups. (p. 249)

ESL students, and to a certain extent all students, have this tension as the school, their teachers, and their peers position them within a given system which does not necessarily match their own conceptualized identity. ESL students in particular may feel tension as they are labeled as an ESL student, but may not view themselves as an English learner, or may feel that this label negates or simplifies their linguistic history. Students in Wallitt's study complained that they were often viewed as a "model minority," or as being good at school simply because they were Asian, or because they were quiet and respectful during class. These perceptions not only caused students to feel they did not belong, they also erased any real academic struggles Cambodian students had.

Expectations and ESL identity. Students also may feel that teachers have low expectations of what they can accomplish based on their identity as an English Learner. Cavazos (2009) reflects on both her own experience as an ESL student and that of her Latino/a students, claiming that teachers have

different expectations for student achievement based on academic placement or identity labels. She recalls her own experience as an ESL student, when “Being an English language learner contributed to my feelings of disappointment and frustration as I was learning the English language and subjected to discouraging teachers” (p. 74). She also notes that her Latino/a students, many of whom are ESL students, comment that they are not in advanced courses and question why they are not doing academically rigorous work. They have internalized teachers’ low expectations of their capabilities in school (Cavazos, 2009). One Cambodian student in Wallitt’s (2008) study comments that he believed many teachers did not try to help him, because they assumed he would drop out anyway. Wallitt observes that Cambodian students in particular were stuck between the myth of the overachieving “model minority” Asian student and that of the drop-out, low-achieving Cambodian student. A student in Kanno and Applebaum’s (1995) study believed she was only receiving good grades because of her effort, not because she had actually mastered the academic content. Students in Cohen’s (2011) study often complained that their ESL teachers did not hold them to high academic standards, proving that low expectations for ESL students is not just a mainstream problem.

Student Perspectives on ESL Class

The most tangible marker of the ESL label is ESL class. Students can have mixed feelings about being in the ESL program. In many cases, ESL classes are perceived as lacking the academic rigor of mainstream classrooms (Cohen, 2011; Harklau, 1994; Kanno and Applebaum, 1995; Marshall, 2010; Norton, 2001). Although students may feel comfortable in their ESL classrooms, they often believe that the mainstream classroom is a more challenging environment. In some cases, students feel that the empathy or kindness of the ESL teacher is a barrier to success. One student in Kanno and Applebaum’s study felt that the relaxed environment of the ESL classroom made it possible for him to stagnate at an intermediate level of English, which his teacher and peers considered good enough. Another student in Cohen’s study believed that her ESL teacher, although kind, taught at a slow pace without sufficient pressure to achieve to her potential. Students may also feel that what they are learning in ESL classes is not useful or applicable to the skills they will need to succeed in mainstream classes. At the secondary level, students may feel that ESL classes are a hindrance to achieving future goals. Students in Cohen’s study believed that ESL classes did not and could not offer them what they needed to succeed in the

future, and it was necessary to leave ESL classes so they could get instruction that they could use to pursue future goals. A student in Kanno and Applebaum's study believed that her ESL class was not sufficient preparation for participating in mainstream classrooms, and also did not cover things that she needed to learn in order to be successful academically. Harklau notes that in the high school where she did research, classes in the ESL program tended to follow a similar format. This led to students complaining that every year in ESL class was the same content, which was not taken as seriously as what was covered in mainstream classes. Many students also did not consider the many communicative activities in ESL class serious learning; they believed they could pick up communicative competence outside the classroom, and needed ESL class for more explicit language instruction. This was also true among adult learners in Norton's (2001) study who dropped out of their ESL class after it failed to meet their needs. While many of these studies examine ESL student perceptions of their own ESL classes, they only deal with secondary or adult learners. More research is needed at the elementary level on students' perceptions of their ESL classes.

Motivation and Investment in SLA

To understand why ESL programs and classes so often seem to fall short of students' expectations, it is useful to examine the concepts of motivation and investment. Gardner and Lambert (1972), in their seminal work, established the concepts of instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation occurs when people learn languages for their own practical goals, whereas integrative motivation occurs when language learning happens for personal and cultural enrichment (as cited in Lightbrown and Spada, 2006, p. 64). These theories of motivation assume the language learner actively chooses to learn the target language. However, this is not the case for many ESL students, who may or may not have chosen to migrate to another country, and who may feel ambivalent about learning English. It is still harder to apply these concepts to elementary ESL learners, who may not even view themselves as English learners. Gardner and Lambert's theories of motivation fail to take into account the complex relationships language learners have with the target language community. They also place little to no emphasis on learning contexts and the social and power relationships that may influence learning a target language.

Norton (1995) aims to fill these gaps in her theory of *investment*. She argues that theories of motivation artificially separate language learners from the contexts in which they are learning the target language. Language learning contexts are inseparable from relationships of power and status between target language speakers and learners. For many ESL students, these relationships are bound up in the identity tension of being a linguistic, cultural, or ethnic other within a monolingual school context. This othering can happen regardless of whether the student was born in the United States. Norton contends that learners do not have fixed identities such as “introvert/extrovert” or “motivated/unmotivated.” Rather they may act one way or another based on a variety of factors at any given point in time. Language learners choose how much energy to invest in learning another language based on their anticipated rate of return on their investment. Because many English learners are in a low-status position in their school, or in greater American society, they may gain what Bourdieu (1977) calls *cultural capital* by learning standard English. Cultural capital refers to the status markers which privilege a given group in society, one of which is standard English in the United States. ESL students may also feel that they do not have the right to speak if they themselves believe they are in a low-status position. Perceptions of status can also be linked with the concepts of ESL as a remedial service, or ESL students viewed from a deficit mentality. Hence my research sought to determine if ESL students themselves believed they were in a low-status position by determining students’ perceptions of the mainstream classroom versus their ESL class.

In this section I have reviewed studies relating to student perceptions of being ESL. I first examined the concepts of identity in the field of SLA, focusing on ESL. Next, I looked at several studies revealing student perspectives on ESL classes. Finally, I defined concepts of motivation and investment and how they relate to ESL students. In the next section I will review literature relating to the community of practice perspective, including a sociocultural framework for approaching learning, situated learning, and access to community resources.

Community of Practice

This section first examines sociocultural theory as a framework for approaching language learning. Next I dissect Lave and Wenger’s notion of situated learning (1991). Then I review studies

dealing with access to community resources for ESL students. Finally, I summarize, according to the literature, which classroom practices can restrict access to resources and those that encourage access.

Sociocultural Theory: a Framework

The notion of investment assumes that the language learning context is inseparable from language learning itself. Claiming the right to speak assumes that speaking, or verbal interaction in general, is necessary for language learning. This research takes a sociocultural approach to learning as its lens to answer the questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?* In this section I will review some of the basic tenets of sociocultural theories of learning in order to provide a framework and justification for this approach.

Cognitive and sociocultural theories. Two major schools of thought in the field of second language acquisition are cognitive and sociocultural theories of development. Much of the research in SLA in the mid to late 20th century took a cognitive approach. This approach was characterized by a focus on the individual's internal processes. Cognitive theories also emphasized the role of motivation and individual learner traits that led to successful L2 acquisition. As Davis (1995) points out, "context was seen as at most a modifier of the internal activity that occurred in individual language learners" (as cited in Norton and Toohey, 2001, p. 308). An alternate approach to cognitivist theory is sociocultural theory. While not mutually exclusive, both cognitive and sociocultural theories begin their work with fundamentally different assumptions. The sociocultural theory of learning emphasizes the importance of social context in learning and development. Vygotsky, a prominent supporter of sociocultural theory, believed that all cognitive and affective processes were mediated by material and symbolic tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Individuals can use material tools to achieve a goal, such as a fork to lift food to one's mouth. We can also use symbolic tools to achieve a goal, such as using a recipe in a cookbook to make dinner. Both tools, whether material (the fork) or symbolic (words written in the cookbook) help to achieve the goal of feeding ourselves.

Language is one of the most prominent symbolic tools that humans use to mediate both their own complex mental processes and their interaction with the world. Language is used both to mediate our interactions socially and intellectually. Children develop language use as a means to social ends.

Individuals use language in private and collaborative dialogue to help process cognitively demanding tasks. Private speech, a concept present in both cognitive and sociocultural theory, is an internal dialogue where an individual talks with himself as a means to think something through. Collaborative speech occurs between individuals as they process an intellectual problem together to find a solution. In sociocultural theory, it is through both private and collaborative dialogue that meaning is made (Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman, 2015).

Cultural resources. Current sociocultural theory in SLA also addresses ideas of cultural resources as learning tools. In her work, Rogoff (2003) conceptualizes “human development as a cultural process in which all children develop as participants in their cultural communities” (p. 42). People develop, or learn, based on their social and cultural context. Their participation in these contexts determines both what and how they learn. The individual is not posited as a separate being influenced by culture, but rather as being shaped by their communities by engaging in cultural practices, and in turn influencing those communities. Cultural practices include the activities and tools available within the community which are essential for learning (Rogoff, 2003). If learning is predicated on participation in the cultural community, access to quality learning tools becomes important. These mediating tools include language, which means that in order to develop as participants in a cultural community, one must have access to the linguistic space in that community. For this reason, studying interaction becomes important when we consider ESL students’ learning in the mainstream classroom. If ESL students are not engaging in the cultural practices of the mainstream classroom community, they are not making meaning, and therefore not learning. In the next section, I discuss how this concept of cultural communities can be applied to the education context through Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of situated learning in communities of practice.

Situated Learning

In their seminal work on situated learning, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning is a social practice which comes about through negotiating meaning in a culturally and socially constructed world. This learning takes place in communities of practice. Within these communities exist different relationships between learners, some old-timers and others newcomers. Learning is a constant interaction between participants where newcomers learn knowledge and skills and move closer to being old-timers in

the community. Old-timers also interact and learn from newcomers, so that all members of the community engage in what they call *legitimate peripheral participation*. It is peripheral because no one is ever at the center of a community of practice; the community is created based on a series of relationships that are constantly being negotiated.

Types of non-participation. In his later work, Wenger (1998) argued that people can relate to their communities of practice through either participation or selective non-participation. One type of non-participation is *peripherality*, which refers to non-participation that someone engages in intentionally as a part of moving from being a newcomer to an old-timer. This could happen in the case of a new-to-country student who does not speak any English. Such a student would be limited, or choose to be limited, in the way she participates or does not within a new classroom setting so that she can learn the ways of the community before participating in full. Peripherality is non-participation on the way to full participation. Wenger's (1998) other type of non-participation is *marginality*, which occurs when non-participation is not a part of the trajectory to full participation. An example could be an ESL student who has an English language proficiency level of 3, who was born in the United States, yet is still unable to access full participation in the mainstream classroom due to lack of academic language, cultural references, or other skills. The concepts of peripherality and marginality are useful when observing student interaction levels in the mainstream classroom. Because marginality can serve as a barrier to eventual full participation, it is important to measure interaction levels to ensure that students are not being marginalized.

Engagement with the community. In the situated learning framework, the most effective learning takes place through engagement with a community. Engagement can take many forms, whether it is participation or non-participation. There are multiple communities of practice at any given time within both a school and a classroom. Assuming that the mainstream classroom constitutes one community of practice, engagement within that community becomes necessary for learning to take place. One of the most critical forms of student engagement is verbal interaction, both with the teacher and among peers. In the community of the mainstream classroom, ESL students can be classified as one kind of newcomer; a newcomer to the skills and knowledge base of native standard English speakers. As Lave and Wenger (1991) state, "For newcomers then the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (p. 109). The

concept of learning to talk, or claiming the right to speak, becomes more complicated when it is applied to ESL students, who are literally learning to speak English, and figuratively learning to claim their linguistic space and access cultural resources in a community of practice where the majority of participants are monolingual English speakers. This will be addressed in the following section while addressing issues related to access and community resources.

Access to Community Resources

Different members of the community have different access to resources. In the case of ESL students, certain practices can prevent them from gaining full access to the content of the mainstream classroom. This results in lower academic achievement and slower language acquisition.

Classroom practices that restrict access to resources. English proficiency is a barrier to accessing mainstream classroom resources fully for ESL students. Yet there are other practices within the classroom that can cause ESL students to be marginalized and ultimately limit their access to resources of content and language. In her two-year study of ESL students during kindergarten and first grade, Toohey (1998) notes several things that serve to marginalize the ESL students in the room. She first notes that the seating arrangement of the room puts ESL students close to the teacher. The teacher intended for this arrangement to help ESL students if they had questions, but what it actually accomplished was fewer opportunities for ESL students to interact and learn from their peers. This arrangement cut off a valuable resource of English language knowledge and practice from the students. She also noted that while these same students in kindergarten were able to engage in choral speech, in first grade the teacher discouraged copying others' words both orally and in writing. In addition, much of the classroom lessons had a teacher-led discussion format, where one student was called on to answer questions the teacher posed. Toohey notes that most of the ESL students in this study neglected to take part in such discussions, which cut them off from any linguistic or content resources they may have gained from participating.

DaSilva Iddings (2005) observed that second grade ESL participants in her study were grouped together during reading activities in their classroom. This prevented them from interacting with and learning from their native English speaking peers, as was the case with Toohey's participants. These ESL students received reading instruction from a special education teacher aide, which conflated Special Education with ESL, though they are distinct services. Their reading groups focused on basic skills like

matching words, tracking print, and repetition. This served to limit the ESL students' exposure to authentic language use, and distanced their English use from real-life contexts. It also narrowed the scope of material ESL students learned. The classroom teacher often focused on grammar points rather than content with the ESL students, which DaSilva Iddings (2005) argues obscured the purpose of learning for the ESL students.

Over time, this dissonance accentuated a general disjunction in patterns of participation of ELLs in community practices while key understandings were forming, and also served as major constraints for ELLs as they attempted to gain access to and become more centrally involved in the practices of the community. (p. 175)

The teacher's focus on grammar forms, while intended to meet the linguistic needs of her ESL students, actually served to distance them from the more valuable classroom resources of academic content and linguistic space. Cavazos (2009) noticed the same disparities in academic content in her work at the high school level. She observed that Latino/a students on the lower track were assigned to read an abridged version of a book, whereas students in more advanced classes were expected to read the entire book. The abridged version did not provide students with equal access to the academically rigorous content of the full novel, which resulted in "basically telling them they cannot read a full-length book" (Cavazos, 2009, p. 76). Both DaSilva Iddings and Toohey studied interaction and access to resources in the elementary ESL setting. Neither study however, directly addressed the perceptions ESL students themselves had on their learning as an ESL student as well as interaction and access in the classroom.

Classroom practices that encourage participation. Not all classroom practices serve to marginalize ESL students. Some have been found to encourage legitimate peripheral participation. Toohey and Day (1999) note that small group work can help increase access to participation. Choral speech, songs, and rhymes also give equal access to language in the classroom. Students themselves can demand linguistic access to the classroom by talking with one another outside of teacher-sanctioned interactions. The students in Toohey's (1998) study did this by constantly borrowing and lending classroom materials. These practices, along with more research, can help us understand how to structure instruction in the mainstream classroom in order to ensure equitable access to community and cultural resources for all students.

This section reviewed sociocultural theory as a framework for approaching language learning by first contrasting cognitive and sociological theories. I looked at ideas of cultural resources and connected this to Lave and Wenger's (1971) concept of situated learning. I reviewed non-participation and engagement within a community of practice. Then I reviewed studies dealing with access to community resources for ESL students. Finally, I summarized, according to the literature, which classroom practices can restrict access to resources and those that encourage access.

The Gap

Studies summarized above show that there has been considerable research on a variety of factors relating to ESL students and marginalization, including other people's perceptions of ESL students, identity issues, and concepts of motivation and investment. However, there is little research on ESL student perceptions of their ESL class. Although there have been previous studies on ESL students' perceptions of their ESL classes, much of the research has focused on either adult or secondary ESL students. There is less information on what elementary students think about being in the ESL program or receiving ESL services. Likewise, there has also been significant research on the benefits of interaction and participation in effective language learning. However, these studies do not examine ESL students' interaction levels in the mainstream classroom and if they differ from interaction levels in the small group setting. This study aims to fill this gap by studying both ESL students' perceptions of and interaction levels within the mainstream and small group environments.

Research Question

The goal of this study is to answer these questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?* This case study was conducted with third grade ESL students in a suburban elementary school with the hope that its results can guide both teachers and schools to better structure ESL programs which encourage student interaction and engagement both in the ESL and the mainstream classrooms.

Summary

The current study seeks to discover students' perceptions of pull-out ESL services and their interaction level in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting. In this section, existing

literature relating to my research question was reviewed. I began by exploring concepts related to how others perceive ESL students. This included discussing deficit and additive mentalities and the monolingual bias. I then reviewed studies on how language communities are perceived by others, with a focus on status and power relationships grounded in sociological theory. Next, the concepts of the idealized native speaker and the hegemony of standard English were unpacked and related to this study's context.

The next section dealt with both theory and studies related to ESL students' perceptions of either being in an ESL program or being labeled as ESL. I reviewed some current concepts of identity in SLA, and discussed the idea of negotiating identities as it relates to ESL students. I reviewed studies on student perceptions of both being labeled ESL and being in the ESL program, and discussed concepts of motivation and investment as they relate to ESL students. Finally, literature relating to the framework of sociocultural theory in SLA was reviewed. I summarized key assumptions in sociocultural theory, and extended them through Lave and Wenger's (1991) idea of situated learning through a community of practice, which will be the lens through which this research is conducted. I finished by reviewing studies related to access to community resources in the classroom, which is pertinent to the issue of student interaction levels in the mainstream classroom.

Chapter Three will review my research question, the research context and methodology. I will describe the research context and participants. My methods will then be explained and justified, followed by samples of data collection tools used. The chapter will end with a discussion of planned data analysis and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This case study is intended to explore issues related to ESL students' perceptions of receiving pull-out ESL services as well as how students interact in the mainstream classroom. This study aims to answer the questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?* This chapter will outline the methodology used to collect and analyze data to answer these research questions. I will begin by describing this study's research paradigm. I will then provide a description of the context for data collection, which includes information on the participants, location, and data collection techniques. The procedure of data collection is outlined next, including data analysis and an ethics review. This is followed by the conclusion.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

This study uses a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Qualitative research generally uses descriptive rather than statistical data (Mackey and Gass, 2016). This study used qualitative data as a way to study a phenomenon in its context to gain a better understanding of the issues involved around it. Qualitative studies focus on interpretation based on meanings that participants attach to certain phenomena; that is, how participants make sense of experiences that they have (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This is especially helpful considering the complex issues related to student perceptions of ESL services, such as linguistic and academic identity. Diverse methods of collecting data can help researchers both triangulate and gain greater insight into information gathered. By using three total data collection methods I was able to triangulate my results. Triangulation occurs when a researcher is able to compare multiple data points to address the same research question. Triangulation in this study adds validity to its results (Mackey and Gass, 2016).

Case Study

This research was approached as a case study which investigated student perceptions of and interaction levels in their mainstream classroom versus the small group setting. Case studies in SLA focus on comprehensive descriptions of language learning in an individual or group using either or both qualitative and quantitative data (Mackey and Gass, 2016). Approaching this research as a case study allowed me the freedom to collect and analyze data using qualitative methods. Case studies focus on a

case, which can be an individual, group, or phenomena. The researcher then investigates how this case functions in its real-life context (Nunan, 1992). Benefits of case studies include the ability to represent multiple viewpoints, providing a database for future study, and producing results that are easy to translate into action. Drawbacks of the case study approach include difficulty of generalization and problems of validity and reliability, which will be further addressed in the data analysis section.

Data Collection

My research question investigates student perceptions of and interaction levels within their mainstream classroom versus the small group setting. Within these questions, there are two elements that require data collection. The first deals with student perception of receiving pull-out ESL services and of their mainstream classroom. In order to gather data for this question, I used a student questionnaire with closed yes/no questions. I conducted semi-structured interviews next, which provided more in depth qualitative data to augment the data gathered from the closed questionnaire. The second element of data necessary is regarding levels of student interaction in their mainstream classroom versus a small group setting. Measurements used to address this question were both a modified version of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) Observation Scheme (Mackey and Gass, 2016) and observational field notes.

Participants. The subjects of this study are five 9 year old ESL students in third grade. Three subjects are female, two are male. Students' home languages are Tamil, Telugu, Hmong, and Spanish. All students have a composite English proficiency level of at least 4.0, as measured by the standardized ACCESS test. All range from a level 3.0 to 3.9 in writing, and level 5.0 or above in speaking, listening and reading. All of the participants are pulled as part of the same ESL Writer's Workshop pull-out group along with four other students. The participants are:

Maryam. Maryam is a 9 year old girl in third grade. She was born in India and enrolled at Green Valley Elementary in October of the 2016-17 school year. Her previous school was in Ohio. Maryam's home language is Telugu. She is a twin, and both her and her sister come to the same pull out ESL writing group. Her mainstream classroom teacher is Mr. Schroeder. She qualified for ESL support in the area of writing at the time of the study with an English proficiency level of 3.5 in writing. She has since exited from the ESL program.

Aarav. Aarav is a 9 year old boy in third grade. He was born in India and enrolled at Green Valley Elementary in the fall of the 2015-16 school year. His mainstream classroom teacher is Mrs. Smith. Aarav's home language is Tamil. He has been back and forth to India several times in the past two years, which sometimes disrupts his schooling at Green Valley. He qualified for ESL support in the area of writing at the time of the study with an English proficiency level of 3.7 in writing. He has since exited from the ESL program.

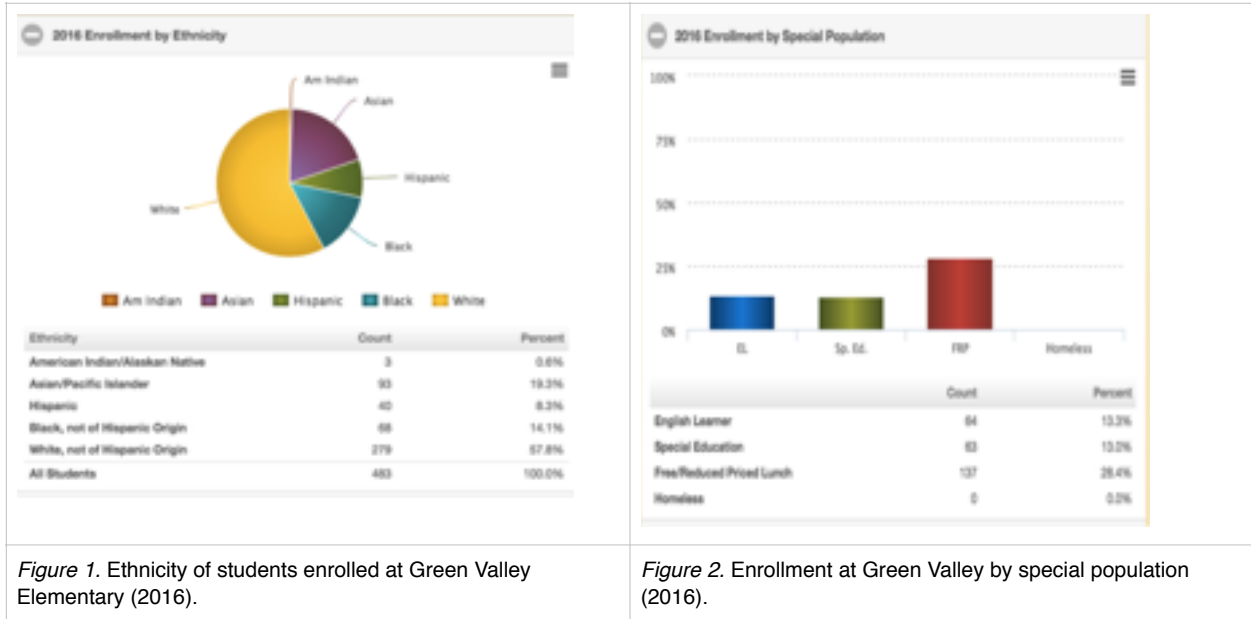
Meera. Meera is a 9 year old girl in third grade. She was born in India and enrolled at Green Valley Elementary in the spring of the 2014-2015 school year. Her mainstream classroom teacher is Mrs. Smith. Meera's home language is also Tamil. Meera was put on monitor status during her second grade year after her initial screening, but then qualified for ESL writing support after taking the ACCESS test in winter of 2016 with an English writing proficiency level of 3.5. She will continue to receive ESL services in her fourth grade year.

Violeta. Violeta is a 9 year old girl in third grade. She was born in the United States and has attended Green Valley Elementary since her kindergarten year. Her mainstream classroom teacher is Mrs. Smith. Violeta's home language is Spanish. Violeta has been receiving ESL services the entire time she has been a student at Green Valley Elementary. During the 2016-17 school year she qualified to receive writing support with an English proficiency level of 3.4 in writing. She will continue to receive ESL services in her fourth grade year.

Nick. Nick is a 9 year old boy in third grade. He was born in the United States and has attended Green Valley Elementary since his pre-kindergarten year. His mainstream classroom teacher is Mrs. Smith. Nick's home language is Hmong. He has been receiving ESL services since kindergarten. During the 2016-17 school year he qualified to receive writing support with an English proficiency level of 3.5 in writing. He has since exited from the ESL program.

Location. This study takes place at an elementary school in a mid-size affluent Midwestern suburb in the United States. The elementary school is situated in a town of approximately 70,000 people, 15% of whom speak a language other than English in the home. Racial makeup of the suburb is predominantly White (81.4%), followed by Asian (9.1%) and African-American, Hispanic or mixed race. The elementary school enrolls students pre-K through 5th grade, with 483 students enrolled for the

2016-17 school year. Green Valley Elementary is fairly ethnically diverse, although White students remain a slight majority. The below graphics from the Minnesota Department of Education (2016) show the demographics of Green Valley students.



Although Green Valley is ethnically diverse, only 13.3% of students qualify for ESL services. There are a variety of home languages spoken among the ESL student body population, including but not limited to Spanish, Hmong, Chinese, Vietnamese, Telugu, Tamil, Russian, and Somali. Some ESL students were born in the U.S. and some were born abroad. Some have home language literacy while others do not.

Data Collection Techniques.

Questionnaire. Students filled out a closed questionnaire which included several yes/no questions regarding their perceptions of social and academic conditions in both their pull-out ESL class and their mainstream classroom. Because the questionnaires contained all closed yes/no questions, I was able to measure the results consistently, which means this data will be more reliable. This data served as a baseline for the semi-structured interviews that followed. Some examples of questions are below. Each question was answered by students circling yes or no.

- I like being in Mrs. Smith’s class - yes / no
- I like being in Ms. Amdahl’s class - yes / no
- Mrs. Smith’s class is hard. - yes / no

- Ms. Amdahl's class is hard. - yes / no
- I ask Mrs. Smith for help when I don't understand - yes / no
- I ask Ms. Amdahl for help when I don't understand - yes / no

There are some drawbacks to using questionnaires. Some of these most relevant to my participants include unreliable or unmotivated respondents, superficiality of answers, and participant literacy problems (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010). Elementary school students may be unmotivated to fill out this questionnaire, or may give unreliable answers in order to get it done faster. They may also answer questions quickly or superficially, without truly thinking about their answers. Finally, literacy issues may prevent participants from fully understanding the questions posed. To mitigate these disadvantages, I modeled and practiced how to fill out questionnaires on different topics throughout the school year so students were familiar with the format and procedure. I also encouraged students to reread their answers before accepting the questionnaire. Finally, I read the questions aloud while administering the questionnaire to ensure students understood what is being asked.

Semi-structured interviews. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with students. I asked questions regarding students' linguistic identities as well as questions about pull-out ESL class and their mainstream classroom. Questions about students' different learning environments focused on academic rigor and *why* students think they are pulled out for ESL instruction. Some of the questions were:

- How many languages do you speak?
- Do you like speaking more than one language? What do you like about it?
- What do we learn in Ms. Amdahl's class?
- What is different about Ms. Amdahl's class and Mrs. Smith's class?
- Why do you come to Ms. Amdahl's class?
- What is the easiest part of school for you?
- What is the hardest part of school for you?

In semi-structured interviews, questions like these served as a guide, but still allowed me to diverge if a student was willing to talk more about one topic or less about another. Interviews allow the researcher to gather information on things that are not observable. Because students' perceptions of receiving pull-out ESL services are not observable, the semi-structured interview is an appropriate data collection method.

Interviews are a source of rich data because they allow participants to express themselves freely, which aided in the holistic description and analysis in this case study (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Interviews also have disadvantages. One such is the halo effect, which occurs when participants pick up cues and answer questions based on what they think the interviewer wants them to say. Another possible drawback is selective recall on the part of participants, in which they answer questions to put themselves in the best light rather than focusing on accuracy (Mackey and Gass, 2016). Both of these are very pertinent to interviewing elementary age students, as I am in a position of authority as their teacher. This may have made them more susceptible to lie or say what they think I want to hear. I mitigated these drawbacks by asking open ended questions, repeating students' answers, being nonjudgmental during the interview, and making students as comfortable as possible.

Observations. Two types of observation methods were used to measure students' interaction levels in their mainstream classrooms. I used an observation checklist and field notes, both detailed below.

Modified COLT scheme. To observe student interaction levels in their mainstream classroom, I used a modified version of Part B of the Communicative Orientation to Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme (Mackey and Gass, 2016), which measures frequency of a variety of observable communicative behaviors. I used this checklist to observe each student on at least two different occasions in their mainstream classroom. I noted both the language students used (L1 or L2) and the instructional context (whole class, small group or one to one) Examples of interactional behavior I measured include:

- giving information
- requesting information
- sustained speech
- minimal speech
- utterance type (assertion, question, or request)
- reaction type (repetition, paraphrase, clarify or elaborate)

Using this observation scheme allowed me to gather detailed data on how students behaved in their mainstream classroom.

Field notes. I observed participants in the classrooms as I was co-teaching and took field notes on their interaction. Field notes served to enrich and deepen my understandings of observational data from the COLT scheme. Field notes are valuable because they allow for detailed descriptions and researcher questions as the observation is taking place.

Observations can be rich sources of data on student behavior in a given context. There can also be drawbacks to this method. A well-known disadvantage to observations is the observer's paradox, which transpires when the presence of an observer influences behavior and alters the normal state of events. Another disadvantage is the Hawthorne effect, which occurs when participants sense their interest to the researcher and act differently because of this interest (Mackey and Gass, 2016). I largely conducted observations in mainstream classrooms where I normally co-teach. Students did not think it strange that I was in their classroom taking notes, because I did this during the course of my regular teaching schedule. Because students saw me as a normal part of their mainstream classroom landscape, their observed behavior should be representational of what occurred when I was not there as well.

Procedure

Materials. See Appendices B, C, and D for sample student questionnaire, interview questions and modified COLT observation scheme.

Data analysis.

Questionnaires. Each participant filled out a closed questionnaire near the beginning of this study. I administered these in a group setting during our normal pull-out ESL class time. I read the questions aloud as students filled in their answers. Once I had collected the questionnaires, I followed the coding process outlined by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010). I first assigned identification codes to each questionnaire. I then coded individual items and answers on the questionnaire and put them into a spreadsheet where I analyzed them for patterns. Finally, I summarized them using descriptive statistics, which is appropriate given my small sample size and specific context, which tend to preclude generalization.

Semi-structured interviews. I conducted one-to-one interviews with each participant at least once during the course of this study. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. My coding scheme was driven by the data, as is best practice in qualitative research. I followed an open coding procedure

informed by the process outlined by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) in their work on interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). The first step includes reading and re-reading the data to gain a sense of its overall structure. The next is initial noting, where I examined the transcription contents and wrote free commentary. I then repeated the practice with the next interview. When all interviews were coded, I looked for patterns that emerged from all the data I collected, and discarded codes that seemed to be outliers (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). From here I developed emerging themes, then looked for connections between themes. Then I reread the interview transcripts and recoded them, using focused coding as defined by Charmaz (2006) in her work on grounded theory. During focused coding, I kept emerging themes in mind as I looked for additional data that I might have overlooked the first time. I compared the data with similar codes, and reexamined how the codes related to the data. These themes and connections became the basis for my analysis.

Observations. I observed each student in their mainstream classroom environment for fifteen minutes twice, using the COLT observation scheme and field notes. The COLT scheme is both an observational and coding scheme for data. To code field notes I followed the same qualitative data analysis procedure outlined for interviews, drawn from the work of Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) and Charmaz (2006), which involved reading and re-reading, initial noting, developing emerging themes, looking for connections between themes, and connecting patterns across different sets of notes.

Ethics. Maintaining a high standard of ethics is essential in any research study, but especially in one that has children participants. This study employed the following safeguards to ensure that participants' rights were protected:

1. Humans subjects form was completed, submitted and approved by Hamline University before conducting any research.
2. A form outlining the nature and purpose of this research, as well as copies of data collection instruments, was completed and approved by both my district and building principal before conducting research.
3. Parents received a consent form (in simplified English and translated into their home language when necessary) outlining the guidelines, procedures and risk factors of this study. Parents were informed that participation was voluntary and there were no negative consequences if they chose

not to participate. No student was involved in the study without a signed informed consent form from their parents.

4. All identity markers were wiped from transcriptions of oral interviews and final results.
5. Audio of interviews were destroyed as soon as they were transcribed.
6. Research materials were locked in a secure location when not in use.

Summary

In this chapter, I described and justified the qualitative methods research paradigm and case study approach to this research. I outlined the context where data collection took place, including the participants and location. The data collection techniques of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observations were described, along with their respective advantages and disadvantages. I also described methods for data analysis for each collection technique, as well as ethical considerations and safeguards that were used during the course of this study. Chapter Four will review the results of the study, which sought to answer these questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?*

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This study sought to answer the research questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?* I collected data using three different methods: a student questionnaire, semi-structured student interviews, and observations. This section explores the results gathered from the collected data. I first look at the results of the student questionnaire, then analyze key themes in the student interviews. Finally, I outline information gathered through the observations. Through the collection of these data I sought to find answers to the following questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?*

Questionnaire

I administered a closed questionnaire as the first step in my research. Students were familiar with answering yes/no questions based on their opinion. In my class we had done several activities to boost student engagement by asking the students their opinion on a certain issue and having them defend their positions. Sometimes students would take a side in writing (as in the questionnaire) and sometimes they would move to a certain part of the room based on their opinion. Before administering the questionnaire, I told students that they were helping me with a college project to help me be a better teacher, and that it was important that they were honest. I modeled how to fill out the questionnaire on the document camera before handing them out to students. I read each question and gave wait time for students to fill in their answers. The results are in Figure 3 on the following page.

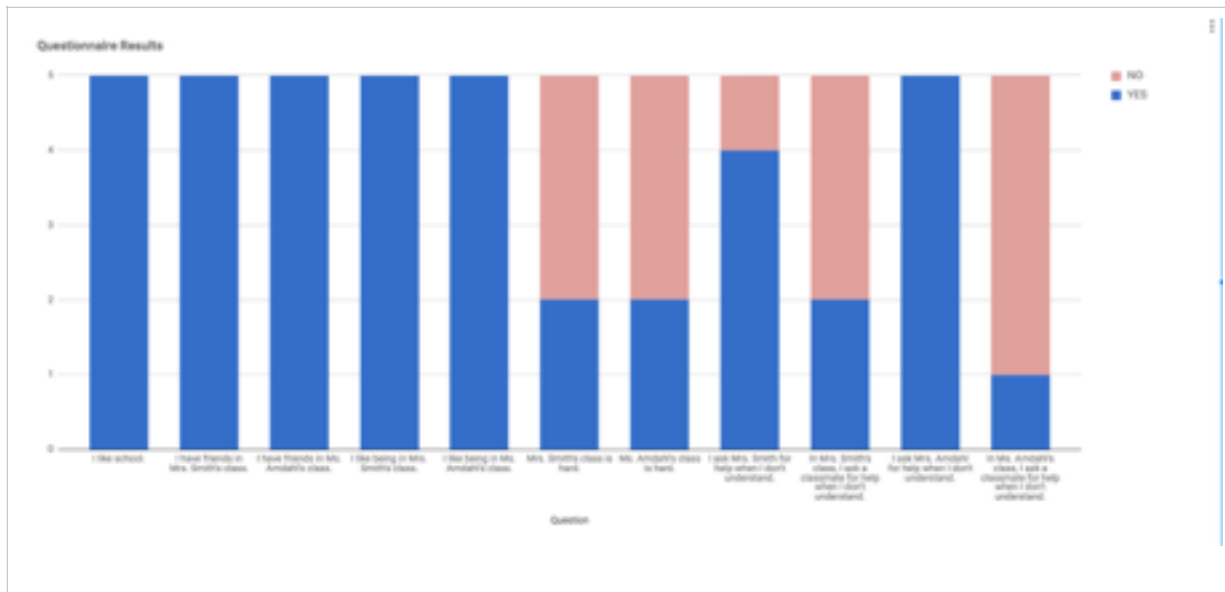


Figure 3. Student questionnaire results (2017).

All of the students had a fairly positive outlook towards school, my class, and their mainstream classroom. All five answered that they liked school, had friends in both classes, and liked being in both classes. Students were divided on the question of whether their mainstream class was hard - Maryam, Aarav and Meera answered that it was not hard, and Violeta and Nick answered that it was. The same was true when asked if my class was hard; Maryam, Aarav and Meera said that it was not, whereas Violeta and Nick answered that it was. All of the students except Violeta stated that they asked both their mainstream teacher and myself for help when they did not understand something. Violeta answered that she did not ask Mrs. Smith for help when she did not understand; however in my class she did ask me for help. All of the other students affirmed that they asked me for help when they did not understand as well. Finally, students were divided on whether they asked their peers for help when they did not understand. Maryam and Meera both answered that they did ask their peers for help in their mainstream classroom when they did not understand, whereas Aarav, Violeta, and Nick did not. In my class, only Maryam answered that she asked a peer for help when she did not understand. Meera, Aarav, Violeta, and Nick all answered that they did not ask their peers for help in my class. This could simply be because they have more access to me as their teacher in a small group setting, or it could be that they are more comfortable with their peers in the mainstream classroom. Their mainstream teachers also could have encouraged

asking peers for help more than I did in my class. Overall, the data paint a picture of students who are largely comfortable in both their mainstream classroom and their ESL class.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants one-to-one. Each interview lasted about 10 minutes and took place in the familiar environment of my classroom. I told students that they were being interviewed as part of a project I was doing in college to help me be a better teacher, and that they could help me by being honest and giving their best answers. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. All names used are pseudonyms.

Several key themes presented themselves as I coded the interview transcripts. I will explore student responses through the lens of the four themes below: knowing and speaking multiple languages, doubt and uncertainty, struggle and improvement, and the differences between the mainstream and ESL classroom.

Knowing and Speaking Multiple Languages

All of the students were able to name the languages that they speak, and most students seemed to view the fact that they spoke more than one language as a positive thing. All students affirmed that they like speaking more than one language. Maryam described how speaking more than one language allowed her to communicate with others.

***Teacher:** And what do you like about it [speaking more than one language]?*

Maryam: I like it...I like to talk more than one language because in case I meet somebody who doesn't know how to speak English and speaks a little bit of Spanish or Telugu I could speak it with them.

Nick also expressed that his languages allow him to understand others who are speaking different languages. Aarav noted that speaking more than one language is a unique skill when he said "...that it's special. Like other people don't know how to speak two languages." And Nick pointed out that speaking Hmong helps him connect with his family because his parents speak Hmong at home. Violeta expressed a sense of ownership around the languages she speaks, calling them "my languages."

Only Nick made the connection between coming to my classroom and the fact that he speaks two languages. When asked why he came to my class, he replied, "Because I speak two languages and I

sometimes I need help.” Aarav seemed to approach the connection between my class and language when asked if he thought he was good at learning languages.

Teacher: Do you think you're good at learning languages?

Aarav: I can't...

Teacher: No?

Aarav: No cause...there's a reason...(unintelligible) but in class...(mumble) tested about it, so... that's why.

Teacher: If...you're in class for Tamil or for English?

Aarav: English.

Teacher: Can you say more about that?

Aarav: Well this is my English class.

Teacher: Ok. But you don't think you're good at learning languages?

Aarav: Except some I already know.

Aarav clearly makes the connection between my class and the English language. However, he stopped short of explicitly stating that he comes to my class to learn English. He may have been implying that there was a reason he was in English class, and that reason was that he was not good at learning other languages (i.e. English). However when asked to say more Aarav was unwilling to elaborate or articulate his thoughts further. Maryam expressed that in my class “we learn about stuff from other countries and other nations.” Although I did not have explicit lessons on different countries in their Writer’s Workshop group, the cultural makeup of the students was very diverse, which allowed Maryam to make a connection between my class and multiculturalism as something she learned there.

Doubt and Uncertainty

All of the students interviewed expressed doubt that they were good at learning other languages, despite liking the fact that they could speak more than one. Maryam, Aarav and Meera all answered “no” when asked if they thought they were good at learning other languages. Interestingly, Maryam and Aarav have since tested out of ESL services. This shows a disconnect between their perception of their abilities to learn English and their actual abilities, proved by their success in exiting the ESL program. Violeta expressed uncertainty about the topic:

Teacher: Do you think you're good at learning languages?

Violeta: Maybe.

Teacher: Why?

Violeta: Because sometimes I mess up on some of them.

Violeta is unsure if she is good at learning languages or not because she makes mistakes when speaking, despite the fact that mistakes are an integral part of language learning.

Students also expressed uncertainty about why they came to ESL. When asked why she came to my class, Maryam answered “I don’t know how I came to this class, but I’m guessing because I could be a better writer.” She also asked if she would be coming back next year. Aarav stated that he came to my class “To learn. Um...to learn about...speaking...stuff like that.” Meera said she came to my class to improve her reading and writing. Nick said he came “because I speak two languages and sometimes I need help.” Violeta was unable to answer the question. Although most students had an answer to the question, only Nick made a connection between coming to my class and speaking more than one language. Maryam, Meera and Nick all expressed that they came to get extra help to improve their skills. However, none of the students were able to articulate that they came to my class to improve English language skills.

There was additional uncertainty about what they learned in my ESL classroom. Maryam stated that we learned about other cultures and nations, which is not the explicit focus of my class. Meera and Nick listed some of our writing projects when asked what we learn about in the class. Aarav and Violeta simply said they did not know what we learned about. Again, students were unable to connect the learning in my class to their English language development.

Struggle and Improvement

Many students talked about struggling to learn a new language. Maryam states that she is not good at learning languages because “first I have to learn the basic words and they’re kind of hard for me.” When asked if he would be able to learn a new language, Aarav says no. Meera says that she is not good at learning languages because “It just like, took me a lot of time, in India and here, to learn English.” Violeta talks about her struggle with languages:

Teacher: Do you like speaking more than one language?

Violeta: Sometimes.

Teacher: *Tell me more about that.*

Violeta: Um...well I don't know some Spanish words so it's kind of confusing.

Teacher: *Do you think you're good at speaking languages?*

Violeta: Maybe.

Teacher: *Why?*

Violeta: Because sometimes I mess up on some of them.

Nick also talked about his struggle to speak Hmong. He says "I don't know how to speak that much Hmong but I used to speak Hmong so I understand". It is interesting that Meera, who was born abroad, sees herself as struggling at English, whereas Nick and Violeta, who were born in the United States, talk about struggling to speak their home language. All three of them have similar levels of English language proficiency, yet their perceptions of their language abilities differ.

Some students talked about struggling in their mainstream classroom. Aarav expressed his difficulty in science because of the writing they do. Meera struggled with spelling. Nick struggled to concentrate in Mrs. Smith's class because there were more students. And Violeta talked about her struggle to follow along in the mainstream classroom.

Teacher: *So do you think the work's harder in my room or Mrs. Smith's room?*

Violeta: (pause) Mrs. Smith's.

Teacher: *And why do you say that?*

Violeta: Mmmm...some things I don't get sometimes.

Teacher: *And in this room do you understand usually all the time?*

Violeta: Usually (nods).

It is interesting to note that Violeta was the only student who answered that she did not ask Mrs. Smith for help when she did not understand on the questionnaire. She answered that she did ask me for help in my class when she did not understand. In Violeta's case perhaps the small group of the ESL setting allowed her the confidence to ask for help when she needed it.

The students also discussed improving various skills. Nick talked about coming to my class so he can "be neater at writing." Maryam guessed that she came to my class because she "could be a better

writer.” Meera said she comes to “improve her reading and writing.” They also talked about getting better at other skills. When asked about the hardest part of school, Nick talked about how he used to struggle in math in first grade but now he likes it because they do different things like multiplication and division. It is important to note that all students were able to talk about a part of school that they enjoyed or were good at. The total picture of these students was not only one of struggle. However, it was one of the main themes that continued to emerge as I went through the interviews.

Differences between the Mainstream and ESL classroom

All of the students believed that definite differences existed between their mainstream classroom and their ESL class. Several students stated that in their mainstream class, they studied a variety of subjects whereas in my class they studied only one thing. Maryam said “...in your class we do only writing and in Mr. Schroeder’s class we do lots of different stuff like math, recess, lunch, um...social studies, science and other subjects.” Meera echoed these thoughts and pointed out that she was in my class for a much shorter time. Violeta said that the classes were in different rooms and she did “different stuff” in each class. Nick talked about working in each classroom.

***Teacher:** So what’s different about being in my class and Mrs. Smith’s class?*

Nick: Well Mrs. Smith’s class has a lot of students in there and it’s hard to work because they... some of the students talk a lot and I can’t really concentrate and when it’s in here there’s not that much students so I can concentrate a little bit better and I will...and I like to work with people in both rooms.

Many of the students expressed that they liked coming to my class because they had a chance to see their friends there. Because I pull from various classrooms, students get an opportunity to both make and keep friends outside of their mainstream classroom. Maryam talked about making new friends in my class, and Meera said she got to see her friends in my class. Aarav also said that he liked my class because one certain friend was there.

The students unanimously agreed that the work in their mainstream classroom was harder than the work in my ESL class. Meera said that it was harder because there were more subjects in Mrs. Smith’s class and because she spent more time there during the day. Nick said that Mrs. Smith’s class was harder because they had multiple subjects and “we do a lot of stuff in Mrs. Smith’s class that sometimes is tricky

and I need help with it.” Maryam and Violeta talked about understanding more in my class. Violeta said that there were some things she didn’t understand in Mrs. Smith’s class, whereas in my class she usually understood all the time. Maryam talked about the differences in teaching styles between myself and Mr. Schroeder, her classroom teacher.

Teacher: What’s different about my class and Mr. Schroeder’s class?

Maryam: Um...that your classes don’t look alike. And...you guys speak different languages but you guys...you guys kind of teach the same but you explain a bit more better for us.

Teacher: Who, I do or Mr. Schroeder does?

Maryam: You do.

It is interesting that Maryam says that I speak a different language than her classroom teacher, even though both classes are conducted in English. She clearly makes a connection between my class and languages other than English. Aarav also sees a big difference between my class and the mainstream classroom.

Teacher: So what’s different about being in my class and being in Mrs. Smith’s class?

Aarav: That is a whole different rule...that’s a whole different.

Teacher: Say more.

Aarav: Like it’s a like a...class...that one...so...writing class...and I come here with different people and they’re all...people.

When pressed further, Aarav was unable to say more. However, it is clear that he saw a significant difference between my class and his mainstream classroom.

Observations

I observed students in their mainstream classroom on two separate occasions. Each observation lasted 15 minutes and took place during times of the day when I normally co-teach to avoid the observer’s paradox, with the exception of one observation in Mr. Schroeder’s classroom. During those time periods, students did a variety of activities in a variety of instructional settings. I measured student interaction levels with a modified COLT observation scheme which measures utterances, or speech, as interaction. I also took field notes to supplement the observation scheme. Students’ interaction levels based on instructional context are outlined below in Figure 4.

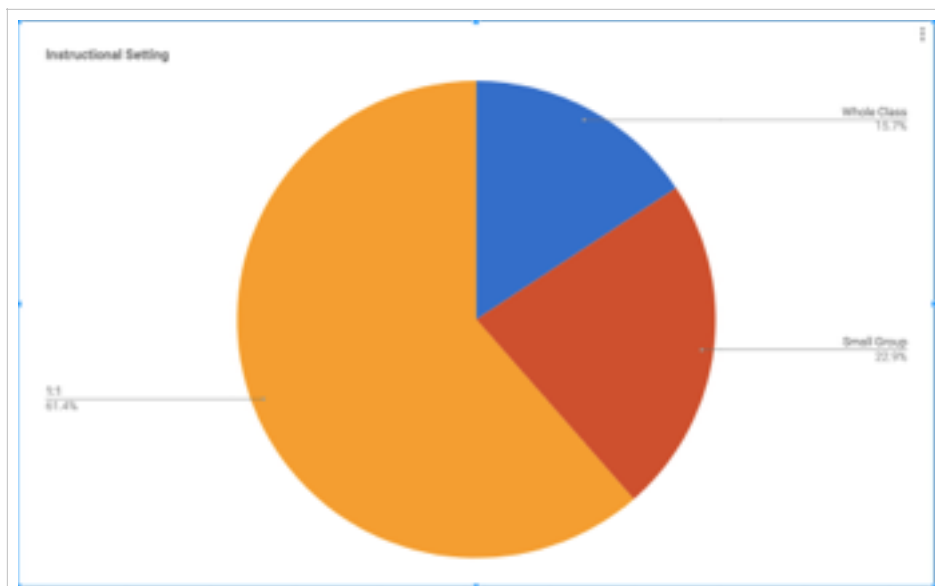
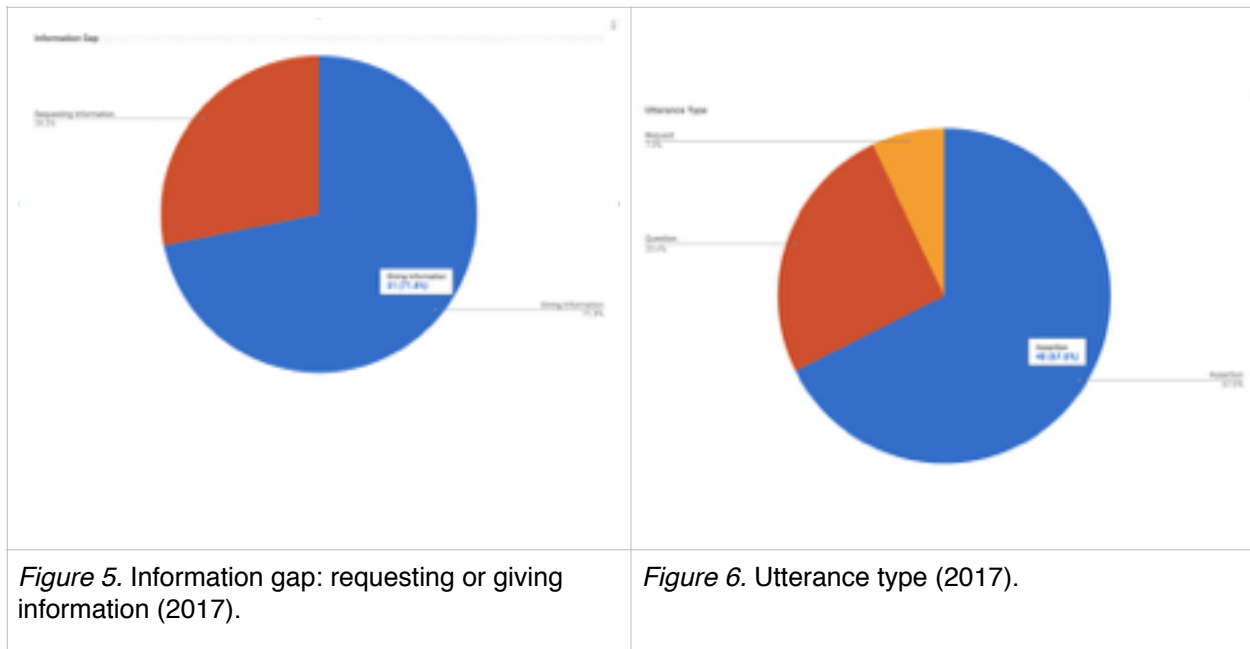


Figure 4. Interaction levels based on instructional setting (2017).

The majority of student interactions occurred when students were put in a one-to-one setting. Students talked the most when working in pairs. One-to-one interactions composed 61.4% of all speech measured. Many one-to-one interactions were off-topic, with students talking to the classmates next to them during transition times, or sometimes during the lesson itself. In Violeta's case, nearly all of her interactions were off-topic conversations with the girl sitting next to her. Nick also had many interactions with a fellow classmate one-to-one which were off topic, yet produced sustained speech. Next were interactions in a small group, which comprised 22.9% of the interactions measured. Finally, student speech in the whole class setting constituted just 15.7% of the interactions measured. Many of the utterances that took place in the whole group consisted of choral responses to questions posed by the teacher or as part of whole class call and response.

I also measured whether students were requesting or giving information and the utterance type. Results are in Figure 5 and 6 on the following page.



The majority of interactions (71.8%) were students giving information, usually answering questions either posed by the teacher or one of their peers. In one observation, students were analyzing poetry as a whole class where students answered yes or no chorally to questions posed by the teacher. Utterances requesting information made up 28.2% of interactions measured. Some requested information were questions, and others were requests. Students asked both the teacher and their peers questions, but rarely in the whole group context. Questions and requests occurred either one-to-one, with students getting up to ask the teacher something, or in a small group where they were supposed to be working together on something. In one lesson, students were working in small groups on a fraction lesson with manipulatives. Students were asking questions of their peers as well as answering them. In another lesson, students were paired up in partners, asked to “be the teacher” and explain a one page project to their partner. This produced more sustained and meaningful interaction, with some students asking clarifying questions and others explaining the process as an extended assertion.

Utterances were also measured based on whether they were sustained or minimal. Sustained utterances were those consisting of more than one sentence or phrase; everything else was counted as minimal. The results are in Figure 7 on the following page.

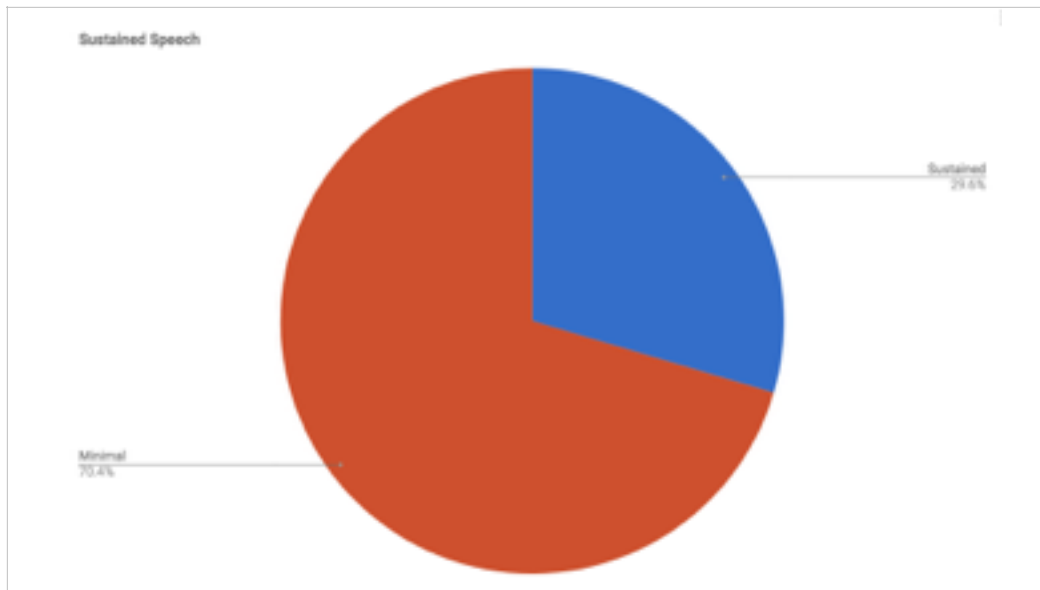


Figure 7. Sustained versus minimal speech (2017).

The majority (70.4%) of interactions were minimal speech, with sustained speech only making up 29.6% of interactions measured. Sustained speech largely occurred when students were in a small group or one-to-one setting. Students were able to produce sustained speech when activities placed them in pairs or in a small group where they had to help each other, either by asking or answering questions. Sustained speech also occurred frequently when students were talking to their peers or off-task from classroom activities. Very few occurrences of sustained speech took place in the whole class setting. One such instance was in a whole group lesson on poetry, where Aarav was asked to explain the imagery of a certain stanza. Even when students were given the opportunity for sustained speech in a whole group setting, few of the EL students studied took the initiative to speak. In one lesson I observed, students were having a debate about exploring Mars. Students had been learning about the solar system and had read several articles on the topic, as well as taken their own notes. The teacher had built up background knowledge and allowed students to use their notes during the debate. She also provided sentence frames. Even with these scaffolds, there were no sustained utterances by the ESL students when given the opportunity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the results of data collected to answer the research questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?* Data collected from

the student questionnaire showed that students were united on some questions and divided on others. All students generally liked being in both my class and the mainstream classroom and had friends in each. Students differed on whether they thought the work in both my class and their mainstream classroom was hard. They were also divided on whether they asked their classroom teacher or me for help when they did not understand. Some students asked classmates for help in their mainstream classroom and my class, whereas others did not.

The student interviews revealed four key themes that emerged: knowing and speaking multiple languages, doubt and uncertainty, struggle, and improvement and differences between my class and their mainstream classroom. All of the students liked the fact that they spoke another language, but expressed doubt that they were good at learning languages. Students also expressed uncertainty around why they came to my class and what they learned there. Finally, all of the students believed there were big differences between my class and their mainstream classroom.

Student observations revealed that interaction levels within the mainstream classroom differ greatly depending on the instructional setting. Most student interaction took place one-to-one or in small groups. The participants had fewer instances of interacting in a whole group context. Utterances were also largely minimal, composed of one sentence or less. The majority of interactions consisted of students giving rather than requesting information.

In this chapter I presented the results of my data collection. In Chapter Five I will discuss my major findings, their limitations and implications, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In this case study, I attempted to answer the questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?* To answer these questions, I collected data from five participants using a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and student observations. In this chapter I will discuss my major findings from the data. I will next discuss limitations of the study. Following the limitations, I will explore the implications my study's results may have for teachers and administrators. Finally, I will offer suggestions for further research to expand on the topics of this study.

Major Findings

Conflicting Views on Languages and Language Learning

Students held conflicting views on languages and language learning. On the one hand, all of the students claimed that they liked speaking two languages, either all of the time or most of the time. Maryam and Nick talked about how speaking more than one language allowed them to communicate with people who also spoke those different languages. They seemed to view their language abilities through an additive lens, where their skills are an asset that they can use to connect with other people. Aarav noted that he liked speaking more than one language because it was a unique skill that not everyone has. It is interesting that Aarav said this given his linguistic and cultural background. He was born in India and came to the U.S. relatively recently (2015). He returns to India frequently to visit family, and many of his friends at school are also Indian (who speak more than one language). Therefore his social context outside of school is one where speaking more than one language *is* in fact the norm. However in the broader context of Green Valley Elementary, speaking more than one language is definitely *not* the norm. The school falls prey to Cook's *poverty-of-the-stimulus* argument, where speaking only one language is viewed as normative (Cook, 1991). Moreover, the culture of Green Valley Elementary privileges standard English as the language of school and success (Bourdieu, 1977; Leung, Harris and Rampton, 1997). The fact that Aarav points out that speaking more than one language is special shows that he is comparing himself to the students and staff at Green Valley rather than his family and friends in the Indian

community. In his short time in the United States, he has already begun to believe that being monolingual is the norm, and speaking more than one language makes you “special.”

Nick describes that speaking two languages is part of his family life when he states that, “... my mom and dad speak a lot of Hmong.” He goes on to say that he used to speak more Hmong, but now he does not know that much. Nick’s reality is true for many English learners, who can have complex identities that are sometimes divided between home and school. Students must then learn to negotiate between identities based on contexts, engaging in *acts of identity* through social and linguistic interaction (Tabouret-Keller and LePage, 1985). In Nick’s case, he negotiates his Hmong identity by saying that even though he does not speak that much Hmong anymore, he is able to understand when his parents talk to him. By connecting with them in Hmong, he is reaffirming his Hmong identity, even though English is his more dominant language. It is also interesting that Nick names the two languages he speaks as “American and Hmong,” which shows how closely he links the English language to being an American, viewing English as the privileged language of the United States (Bourdieu, 1977).

Although all of the students largely viewed speaking more than one language as a positive skill to have, four doubted their ability to learn languages. Violeta answered “maybe” when asked if she thought she was good at learning other languages, and Maryam, Aarav and Meera answered “no.” Maryam and Aarav have since exited from the ESL program, showing a disconnect between their perception of themselves as language learners and their actual proficiency levels. Why did most of these students doubt their abilities to learn another language when they had already mastered more linguistically than most Americans?

One possibility can be found in Cummin’s (2016) concept of *benign neglect*, which occurs when students’ cultural and linguistic resources are not utilized or acknowledged as relevant in the mainstream setting (Cummins, 2016). Although both of the participants’ mainstream teachers were incredibly supportive of their ELs, they rarely used the students’ multilingualism or multiculturalism in their instruction. Neither Mr. Schroeder nor Mrs. Smith spoke another language, aside from learning a few words in a high school foreign language class. They praised the students’ ability to speak another language when it came up (usually when I was present and we were discussing language), but did not create instruction focused on bringing students’ *funds of knowledge* (Hadjistassou, 2008; L. Foster, 2013)

into the classroom. The participants were in their mainstream classroom for most of the day. If their linguistic abilities were largely unacknowledged by their mainstream teachers and peers, it could have an effect on their own perception of their ability to learn languages.

Violeta voiced her insecurity at learning languages when she said “I don’t know some Spanish words so it’s kind of confusing.” She is in the ESL program because her home language is Spanish. However, Violeta sees herself struggling with Spanish rather than English. Similarly, Nick stated that “I don’t know how to speak that much Hmong but I used to speak Hmong so I understand.” It is interesting that Nick and Violeta, the two students who were born in the United States, see themselves struggling with their home language rather than English. This is a common issue among elementary ESL students, who oftentimes lack a strong foundation in both English and their home language. This perception can cause tension, however, when students are placed in the ESL program to improve their English, yet speak English better than their home language. This situation is often a site of a *negotiation of identities* (Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001) where students navigate between how they conceptualize themselves and how others conceptualize them. In Nick and Violeta’s case they have positioned themselves as native English speakers who struggle with their home language, whereas the school system has positioned them as struggling with English. In contrast Meera, who was born in India, describes her struggles with learning English: “It just took me a lot of time, in India and here, to learn English.” Meera identifies as a strong speaker of her native language (Tamil) and a struggling speaker of English. In her case, her self positioned identity matches the one the school system has ascribed to her. Although Meera, Nick and Violeta all have similar English proficiency levels, their own perceptions of their language abilities widely differ. This shows just how complex the linguistic identities of ESL students can be.

Perceptions of the Mainstream versus ESL classroom

All of the participants saw large differences between their mainstream classroom and the ESL class, despite the fact that their work in the ESL group closely mirrored that of their mainstream peers during Writer’s Workshop. In the interviews, all five students stated that they believed the work in their mainstream classroom to be harder than in the ESL class. However, in the student questionnaire, Maryam, Aarav, and Meera answered that their mainstream class was not hard. Despite the fact that they thought the work was not hard, they still believed it harder than the work they did for me in ESL. This is

consistent with previous research findings where ESL classes are perceived as lacking the academic rigor of the mainstream classroom (Cohen, 2011; Harklau, 1994; Kanno and Applebaum, 1995; Marshall, 2010; Norton, 2001). Students also noted that in the mainstream classroom they had multiple subjects, whereas in my class they only learned about writing. Multiple subjects, plus a larger group, added legitimacy and gravitas to the work done in the mainstream classroom.

Added to this was uncertainty about why students came to my class and what they learned. Aarav and Violeta said they did not know what they learned in my class. This aligns with the common perception that ESL class is not “real” learning (Cohen, 2011; Harklau, 1994; Kanno and Applebaum, 1995; Marshall, 2010; Norton, 2001). Maryam said that we learned about different languages and cultures, which is not explicitly part of the curriculum. Nick listed some of our writing projects. This is true; my class followed the mainstream writing curriculum and third grade writing standards. I closely collaborated with the mainstream teachers on grades and projects. The students were expected to produce the same projects and were graded with similar rubrics. Despite all of this, the students still viewed the work in the ESL class as easier than their mainstream classroom. Furthermore when asked why they came to my class, Maryam and Meera both stated that they came to improve their writing. Nick said it was because he sometimes needed help. While true, this could be problematic because when ESL classes are viewed as remedial, they are not effective at closing the achievement gap (Thomas and Collier, 2002).

Some students expressed more confidence in asking for help in the ESL classroom. In the questionnaire, all five students answered that they asked me for help when they did not understand. Only four answered that they asked their mainstream teacher for help; Violeta said that she did not. She had also expressed difficulty understanding in the mainstream classroom, whereas she said that she understood everything in the ESL class. Even though she had more difficulty understanding in the mainstream classroom, she did not ask for help. As Norton (1995) says when outlining her theory of *investment*, language learning is inseparable from relationships of power and status. Violeta may have been hesitant to ask for help in the mainstream classroom because she felt she lacked the *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1977) to advocate for herself. Cultural capital refers to the status markers which privilege a given group in society, one of which is standard English in the United States. Although Violeta sees herself as speaking English and struggling with Spanish, she may also have seen herself as “other” in a

class whose students are mostly monolingual. This may have contributed to her reluctance to ask for help in the mainstream class. In contrast, in ESL class, she is with peers who are also multilingual and has no trouble asking for help when necessary.

Two students observed that the composition of my class was different than that of their mainstream class. Maryam said that “your classes don’t look alike”. When asked to say more, she declined. Aarav said that for my class “I come here with different people and they’re all...people.” Which types of people was he referring to? Again, when asked to say more he did not elaborate on what he meant. Nick said that he came to my class “because I speak two languages and sometimes I need help.” Were Maryam and Aarav also making the connection between the composition of my class and being multilingual and/or culturally diverse? It is not possible to tell from the data at hand, but this could be a worthwhile field of inquiry for a later study.

Differences in Interaction Levels

In the mainstream classroom, students interacted the most in one-to-one settings, followed closely by the small group setting. This is not surprising, given that Toohey and Day (1999) found that small group work tended to increase student participation. Similarly to the students in Toohey’s (1998) study, my students also created spaces for themselves to speak by talking with each other outside of teacher-sanctioned interactions. In fact a majority of their one-to-one interactions consisted of off-topic conversations with their peers. Because Mr. Schroeder and Mrs. Smith varied the seating chart, the ELs were seated throughout the room, sometimes next to each other and sometimes next to native English speakers. In my observations, the ELs often had one-to-one conversations with the native English speakers of the class. Violeta sat next to a native English speaking girl, and most of her speech in the classroom consisted of talking with her neighbor. Furthermore, many of these utterances were sustained, consisting of more than a single sentence. Although this may have been frustrating to her teacher, Violeta’s constant sustained interaction with a native English speaker was a great tool in developing her English language proficiency. In both classes, students’ reading groups were composed of both ELs and native English speakers, which provided a small group opportunity for ELs to access authentic language in context. When Mr. Schroeder and Mrs. Smith created small groups for other reasons, they were always mixed with both ELs and native speakers. This is essential for ensuring access to the linguistic and

academic resources of the classroom. When groups are monolithic, as DaSilva Iddings (2005) found in her study, ELs can have uneven participation which prevents them from developing key linguistic and academic understandings.

The fewest interactions took place in the whole group setting. Participants' speech in the whole class setting was largely minimal, consisting of one sentence or less, and tended to be answering questions posed by the teacher. This is not surprising, given that teacher-led discussions tend to restrict access to the community resources of the classroom (Toohey, 1998). Furthermore the participants varied in how much they were actively engaged during whole class work. Maryam, Meera and Nick tended to be very focused, generally following the teacher and responding out loud when the teacher asked questions of the whole class. Violeta and Aarav were more withdrawn, nodding or shaking their head when a question was posed. It is interesting that Violeta and Aarav have the lowest speaking scores of the five participants, despite the fact that all five have high listening proficiency levels. When ELs do not claim their right to speak in the classroom, they are missing important opportunities to develop their language skills. Violeta and Aarav could be engaging in what Wenger (1998) calls *peripherality*, where one declines to participate as a way of transitioning into a community. However, they could also have *marginality* in the whole group setting, where their non-participation is not part of the trajectory towards full community membership.

Both mainstream classroom teachers (Mrs. Smith and Mr. Schroeder) engaged in several practices which gave students access to the resources of the classroom. Mrs. Smith in particular used choral speech in a variety of ways in her classroom. She regularly used call and response, where she would say something and the students would respond in order to get their attention. She also had the whole class read passages together, and encouraged students to call out answers as a whole class when she posed questions. Mr. Schroeder and Mrs. Smith regularly put students in partners or small groups to complete activities. Mr. Schroeder had students partner up several times with students taking turns teaching each other about a topic they had just learned about. All of these practices have been found to increase student access to the linguistic resources of the classroom, and to give students more opportunities to participate (Toohey and Day, 1999).

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that could be improved upon in further research. Limitations included different classroom teachers, observation issues, and imperfect measurement tools. Each limitation is expanded upon below.

Different Classroom Teachers

I originally intended that all participants have the same mainstream classroom teacher. However I only got consent forms back from five students, one of whom was in a different mainstream classroom. Maryam was in Mr. Schroeder's class, whereas the rest of the participants were in Mrs. Smith's. During the school year I co-taught in Mrs. Smith's room, but not in Mr. Schroeder's. During some of the times that I co-taught in Mrs. Smith's room, the ELs from other classrooms were pulled in to Mrs. Smith's classroom to be part of the co-taught class. I observed Maryam once during this time and once in Mr. Schroeder's classroom. For consistency, it would have been better to have all five participants in the same mainstream classroom. I also was not normally in Mr. Schroeder's class, which meant that data obtained in that observation is subject to the observer's paradox, where participants act differently because an observer is there.

Observations

I observed each student twice in their mainstream classroom for 15 minutes each. This was enough to get initial data, but my study could have been enriched with more observations throughout the school year. I conducted these observations within the span of two months in the second half of the school year. Conducting more observations spread out between the beginning, middle and end of the school year could have yielded richer classroom data.

I also did not include my observations of my students in the pull-out ESL setting. Rather, I answered the research question by observing how students interacted in small groups versus the whole group setting within their mainstream classroom. A logical extension of that would be to compare student small group interaction in their mainstream classroom versus in the pull-out ESL group setting. However, collecting meaningful data while teaching at the same time proved too difficult as the school year progressed. The data I did collect from field notes in my small group was not detailed or conclusive enough for me to include in this study.

Measurement Tools

Finally, there are several improvements I would make to the measurement tools for future research on this topic. The COLT scheme provided too much information that proved irrelevant to my research questions. In the future, I would narrow its scope and omit the “utterance type” and “reaction type” categories. While interesting, they did not provide me with enough data to meaningfully relate to my research question and just proved to be more work to fill out as I observed.

I would also add more explicit questions about my class, language and culture to my interviews. When designing the questions, I wanted to keep them open-ended to allow kids to explore different topics and themes in their responses. However, my participants were only 9 years old and largely stuck to answering my questions. Oftentimes when I encouraged them to say more, they were unable or unwilling to elaborate. If I were to repeat the study, I would ask them more explicit questions relating to my topic, specifically about language, culture, and ESL class. I would also have added more questions about the composition of the mainstream classroom versus that of my ESL class. I believe I would have gotten more rich data had I done so.

Implications

There are several implications that can be drawn from the results of this study. It is my hope that this study can be used as a tool to create an engaging and meaningful learning environment for ESL students both in the mainstream classroom and in the wider school community.

All of the participants expressed conflicted views on languages and language learning, doubting their abilities to learn a new language. To counter this doubt, both ESL and mainstream teachers need to tap into students' *funds of knowledge* as part of their instruction. For mainstream teachers, this means getting more comfortable with using and celebrating students' linguistic skills in the classroom, even if the teachers themselves are monolingual. It also involves teachers, both ESL and mainstream, educating themselves about students' linguistic and cultural histories in order to incorporate them into instruction. ESL teachers also need to continually reconceptualize their role with ELs, many of whom position themselves as native English speakers. ESL teachers need to acknowledge the complex linguistic identities students bring with them and frequently adjust their instruction accordingly. Administrators can also help by creating a schoolwide environment that not only celebrates but normalizes speaking more

than one language. If students' multilingual identities are never acknowledged or celebrated at school, or worse, seen as outlier behavior, they will continue to doubt their own language abilities and will not see their languages as the assets they are.

Students also universally agreed that the work in their mainstream classroom was harder than the work done in ESL class. This is a common theme throughout the literature (Cohen, 2011; Harklau, 1994; Kanno and Applebaum, 1995; Marshall, 2010; Norton, 2001) and an area of improvement for ESL teachers. ESL teachers need to continually reevaluate their instruction to ensure that they are maintaining high academic standards and expectations for their students. This involves scaffolding content instruction without lowering rigor, which is challenging. Students must be able to show they have mastery of content without their language proficiency compromising their ability to do so. The students in this study also expressed uncertainty as to what they learned or why they came to ESL class. ESL teachers can continue to collaborate with mainstream teachers so that their language instruction is integrated with grade level standards and content so that ESL class is not seen as disconnected from the rest of students' learning. We can also be explicit with students about why they come to our class, being sure to celebrate their multilingualism as an asset rather than a deficit. Finally, ESL teachers should also be explicit with learning targets and daily agendas so that students are aware of what they are learning during each lesson.

The overwhelming majority of student interaction in the mainstream classroom took place in one-to-one or small group settings. All teachers, both mainstream and ESL, need to continue to provide many opportunities for students to work together in small groups or pairs. Small groups allow students access to the tools of the community, in this case standard English in the classroom. This approach is proven to increase student access to participation, both from my own observations and from the literature (Toohey, 1998; Toohey and Day, 1999). Furthermore, small groups and pairs allow ESL students an opportunity to claim their right to speak as a member of their classroom community (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Mainstream teachers should form pairs and groups that consist of both ELs and native English speakers. This allows ELs access to authentic language use and will promote their language learning (DaSilva Iddings, 2005). Teachers, both mainstream and ESL, can also engage in whole group practices that give ELs more opportunities to use language. These practices include call and response, choral reading, and having ELs seated amongst their native English peers.

Further Research

I conducted research to answer the questions: *What are student perceptions of their mainstream classroom versus their pull-out ESL group? Do student interaction levels differ in the mainstream classroom versus the small group setting?* There are several areas relating to these questions that I believe merit further research.

First, I observed student interaction levels in their mainstream classroom. A logical extension of this research is to observe students in small pull-out groups to determine if their interaction levels differ in a pull-out small group setting versus the small group context within the classroom. At Green Valley Elementary, students are pulled out for a variety of small group or one-to-one supports throughout the day. These include Special Education, ESL, Reading Corps tutoring, Reading Recovery, and other RTI (Response to Intervention) groups which target struggling students. Some research questions that come to mind include:

- *Do student interaction levels differ between pull-out small groups and small groups within the mainstream classroom?*
- *Do student interaction levels differ between different small groups? For example, does a dually qualified student have similar interaction levels in both their ESL and Special Ed small group?*
- *What is the relationship between English language proficiency levels and interaction levels, both in the mainstream classroom and in small groups?*

These questions are worthwhile for elementary schools looking to serve their ESL population because interaction gives students the opportunity to practice and grow their language skills and gain access to the content of the classroom.

There is also limited research on elementary ESL students and their perceptions of their schooling experience. This deserves further research, especially given the growing number of ESL students at the elementary level. Some research questions that could follow this study include:

- *What are student perceptions of themselves as language learners?*
- *What are student perceptions of their own cultural identity?*

- *How do students position themselves within the broader context of the mainstream classroom and school as a whole?*
- *How do students perceive their language communities? How do they think their teachers and classmates perceive their language communities?*

While this study began to address some of these questions, each one is an area which deserves more depth. Within these questions it would also be interesting to determine students' language backgrounds, whether they were born in the U.S. or abroad, and their socioeconomic status. All of these factors could prove to have a relationship with students' perceptions. A broader sample size could give more information on possible patterns and correlations between student perceptions and the variables listed above. The answers to these questions could provide elementary educators and administrators valuable information to help them better serve their ESL student population.

Conclusion

I began this study hoping to explore how my students perceived their ESL class and their identities as language learners. I learned some surprising things from my students. I had believed most of my students in this case study were fairly confident in their academic abilities. They all had high overall English proficiency levels and few to no accommodations in the mainstream classroom. Furthermore, most were performing at grade level in the mainstream classroom, qualifying for ESL services only in the area of writing. Despite this, I was surprised and disheartened that many seemed to doubt both their academic abilities and their ability to learn languages. I was especially discouraged that the students expressed apprehension about their language learning. These are some of my highest achieving students, who have so much to offer because of their global worldviews. Some are more widely traveled than adults that I know. Their self-doubt reinforced my belief that we as teachers need to continue normalizing being both multilingual and multicultural. Being seen as an outlier, even with a positive lens, ultimately teaches students that they are outside the norm. That is simply not true. As V.J. Cook points out, most of the world is multilingual, and indeed it is the monolingual population which is the exception (Cook, 1991). If ESL students are connected to that reality in their schooling, perhaps it could mitigate some of the doubt they might have about their own abilities.

I also wanted to explore how students' interaction levels differed based on their instructional setting. The results were not surprising to me; ESL students, and perhaps all students, tend to interact more in small group and one-to-one settings. This reality is often the motivation behind a pull-out ESL small group. I measured small group interaction within the mainstream classroom, but anecdotally I can also say that students have more chance to speak when they are part of a pull-out group. Even though students have more chances to speak in a small group, they believe that the work done in ESL class is not as hard as the mainstream classroom. Does this contribute to their perception that they lack strong abilities to learn languages, or are in need of extra help? If so, how do we as ESL teachers reconcile students' need for increased interaction with their depreciated perception of the pull-out ESL class? These are questions that are outside the scope of this study to answer, and yet will continue to be on the forefront of my mind as I try to give my students the best instruction possible.

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

Student Questionnaire

Circle yes or no.

<i>Example: I like to read.</i>	YES	NO
1. I have friends in Mrs. Smith's class.	YES	NO
2. I have friends in Ms. Amdahl's class.	YES	NO
3. I like being in Mrs. Smith's class.	YES	NO
4. I like being in Ms. Amdahl's class.	YES	NO
5. Mrs. Smith's class is hard.	YES	NO
6. Ms. Amdahl's class is hard.	YES	NO
7. I ask Mrs. Smith for help when I don't understand.	YES	NO
8. In Mrs. Smith's class, I ask a classmate for help when I don't understand.	YES	NO
9. I ask Ms. Amdahl for help when I don't understand.	YES	NO
10. In Ms. Amdahl's class, I ask a classmate for help when I don't understand.	YES	NO

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. What is your name? How old are you? How many brothers/sisters do you have? (to get students comfortable)
2. How many languages do you speak?
3. Do you like speaking more than one language? What do you like about it?
4. Do you think you are good at learning languages? Why?
5. What is your favorite part of school? Why?
6. What do we do in Ms. Amdahl's class?
7. What do we learn in Ms. Amdahl's class?
8. What is different about Ms. Amdahl's class and Mrs. Smith's class?
9. Why do you come to Ms. Amdahl's class?
10. What is the hardest part of school for you?
11. What is the easiest part of school for you?
12. Is the work harder in Ms. Amdahl's class or Mrs. Smith's class? How?
13. What do you like about being in Ms. Amdahl's class? What don't you like?
14. What do you like about being in Mrs. Smith's class? What don't you like?

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Letter for Parents/Guardians

DATE

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am your child's English teacher and a graduate student working on an advanced degree in ESL at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research in my classroom from October to March this year. This letter is to ask your permission for your child to take part in my research.

I'm studying elementary EL students' perception of pull-out EL services because I want to find out whether students' perceptions of receiving pull-out EL instruction affect their interaction level in the mainstream classroom. I want to know how elementary schools can structure their EL programs to encourage participation for EL students in the mainstream classroom. I will give your child a survey asking them questions about their work in English class and their classroom. I will also talk with your child and ask them questions about school in my classroom. These conversations will be audio recorded. I will write them down and then destroy the recording. I will also observe your child and others in their classroom as I am co-teaching.

There is little to no risk for your child to participate. All results will be confidential and anonymous. I will not record information about individual students, such as their names, nor report identifying information or characteristics in the capstone. You can decide whether you want your child to participate or not. You can call me at any time if you decide you do not want your child in my study.

I have received approval for my study from the School of Education at Hamline University and from the principal of Green Valley Elementary, Jane Doe. My report will be catalogued in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. My results might also be included in an article for publication in a professional journal or in a report at a professional conference. Your child's identity and participation in this study will be confidential. If you agree that your child may participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return to me by _____ (date).

If you have any questions, please email or call me at school.

Sincerely,
Kathryn Amdahl
Teacher of English Learners (EL)

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