English Language Learners and Special Education:

One District's Journey Through the Collaborative Problem Solving Process

by

Laura S. Salem

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One District's Journey Through the Collaborative Problem Solving Process

Laura S. Salem, Ed.D.

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Advisor: Mary Beth Lehmanowsky

English Language Learners are a growing population in schools in the United States. There are many challenges that face this group of students in addition to learning English as a new language. A major issue for teachers, schools, and districts is determining whether an English Language Learner is experiencing academic difficulties based on issues primarily related to language acquisition or whether a learning disability is contributing to the academic challenges. As a result, English Language Learners are often misidentified for Special Education services and may be placed in classrooms that are not adequately prepared or appropriate to meet their needs.

The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions of educators in an urban, midwestern school district who participated in a collaborative problem solving process for identifying and addressing the academic needs of English Language Learners who may require a future referral for Special Education services.

Deciphering the differences between language acquisition and learning disabilities is difficult for educators. I used a narrative method of inquiry for this qualitative study in order to describe the perceptions and experiences of the educators involved in the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process pilot.

Collecting the stories of the participants provided an opportunity to make sense of their experiences. By better understanding the perceptions and experiences of educators, a more efficient and systematic process could be developed for schools to follow when making decisions about which English Language Learners to recommend for a referral for a Special Education evaluation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I had been teaching English Language Learners for about a year when I got a new student in my class who I will call Alan. Alan had recently come back to the district as a 6th grader after spending one year in China. He was born in the city where our school district was located and attended the same elementary school in the district from Kindergarten through 4th grade. At the end of his 4th grade year, his family moved to China. When Alan came back, he was reassessed for the English Language Learner program and tested at Level 1, a non-English speaker. I thought this was an unusual placement since he had been in the district from Kindergarten through 4th grade and had only been out of the American school system for one year. While it is normal for a student to show some regression if he has not been in an English speaking classroom for a period of time, it is not typical that he would test this low on the language proficiency assessment when he re-entered.

When Alan came to my classroom, I knew right away that there was something different about the way he learned new concepts. I would ask the class questions and students would answer. Alan would always look like he was deep in thought, but would not offer an answer right away. It would sometimes be a few days later that he would raise his hand and give the answer to the question that I had asked two or three days earlier. This confused me at first, but then I understood what was happening. It was taking him this long to process the question, retrieve the information, and produce the answer.

I spoke with our Special Education coordinator about Alan and my concerns regarding his slow processing skills. He was hesitant about talking about the possibility of Special Education for this student because he qualified for, and was being served in, the English Language Learner program. I had come to the English Language Learner program from Special Education, and it was clear to me that Alan was a student with a learning disability. We invited his mother to meet with us and gathered a little more information about Alan and his background in terms of his education. She started by telling us that the school he attended in China was very different from the school he was currently attending. It was a school for students who did not learn as quickly as their peers, and she perceived the academic rigor not to be as demanding as traditional schools in China.

Alan's mother told us that he was always a good student and he liked school a lot, but he would often come home from his Chinese school feeling sad and frustrated. She also told us that when he was in 3rd grade, he fell off his bike on the way home from school and hit his head pretty hard on the street. He was not wearing a helmet, but she did not think he was injured badly enough to take him to the hospital to have things checked out. She started to notice that after this happened, Alan was having a hard time remembering things that she asked him to do, like, "Go get your jacket." or "Time to brush your teeth." She reported that his elementary school teachers told her he seemed to have trouble responding to questions in class, which was similar to what I was experiencing with him in my classroom.

After this meeting with Alan's mother, I looked at his cumulative file in the school office to see if there was any additional information that had been shared and documented from his time in elementary. In the file, I found records of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that had been written for Alan in 4th grade, just before the end of the school year. The elementary school had worked through the process of identifying him as a student with a specific learning disability. We met with his mother again after having learned about his Individualized Education Plan. We talked with her about how to move forward to make sure Alan would be served appropriately so that he could be as successful as possible in school.

At this time, the team decided that Alan's academic needs would be best served through the goals on his Individualized Education Plan and we would no longer have him participate in the English Language Learner program. Because of the nature of his learning disability, it would be difficult for him to continue to make progress with language acquisition skills and the objectives that were outlined in the district's English Language Learner checklists. His inability to retain newly learned information, as well as his difficulty processing, had a greater impact on his ability to learn than the fact that he was an English Language Learner. Even with continued use of effective strategies which targeted his language needs, Alan was simply not able to hold onto newly taught concepts, nor was he able to express his ideas in a timely, organized way.

Alan was a student who was not making progress in his language acquisition skills because of a learning disability. I knew there were probably other students in my school, as well as across the district, who had similar issues. I had previously talked with

my English Language Learner colleagues about students they had in their classrooms that they were concerned about, but did not know how to bring everyone together to start the conversation. There were many inconsistencies in the district regarding when English Language Learners could be considered for the Student Assistance Process. In some cases, it seemed to depend on what school students attended in order to get the Student Assistance Process started.

Over the course of the past ten years, I have worked to collaborate with my colleagues in Special Education, specifically the supervisors of speech language pathologists and school psychologists, in order to attempt to address the concerns that teachers of English Language Learners have about their students when they suspect have learning disabilities. We have each had the opportunity to meet with staff in our individual areas to talk about how best to make this a smooth and successful process, but it was not until two years ago that the three of us developed a systematic process for all schools to use in order to have these conversations about English Language Learners who were suspected of having a learning disability. We understood there were questions that our staffs were having about how best to work through this process. Each of us, in our own areas, talked with staff about the process as we saw it from our respective disciplines. We knew we had to work together to help our staffs understand how to work together in order for them to be successful. During the 2014-15 school year, we piloted this process with one middle school and one elementary school in the district. It was clear to me that, based on my experience with Alan and other students like him, a district-wide, systematic process needed to be in place.

Understanding Alan's case was not an isolated incident, I was cognizant that work needed to be done to support other students like him. I knew, as Alan's teacher, I was not going to be able to do this alone, so I had to enlist help from my colleagues in Special Education. In addition to utilizing their expertise, I had to make sure they understood the basic tenets of 'normal' language acquisition so we could find a starting place in our conversation. I also knew in order for me to 'make a case' that factors outside of language acquisition were inhibiting his ability to make progress, I had to be able to show I had been using sound teaching practices and specific strategies that were effective for language learners.

As I began to research more about the relationship between English Language Learners and Special Education, four major themes continued to emerge which heavily influenced this topic. While none of the themes holds more weight than any of the others, the literature was consistent in that these ideas needed to work in tandem in order for there to be a greater opportunity of finding the best way to support a student who is not making academic gains. While the end result in Alan's case led us to a Special Education evaluation, and later a Special Education verification, we were well aware that the purpose of our collaboration was not focused on this being the end goal. The end goal was the same then as it is now: to determine the main areas of concern for a student and to initiate strategies and interventions to address those concerns in order for the student to make academic progress. In some cases that may mean a Special Education evaluation, and in other cases, it will not be necessary.

The major themes addressed in the literature review include collaboration, teacher training, appropriate instruction, and valid and reliable assessments. This study specifically focused on describing what a group of educators believed to be the most important components for making decisions about English Language Learners who may need a referral for Special Education.

I found these themes to be consistent with the idea that we knew we had to work together and everyone needed to be knowledgeable on not only what and how to teach English Language Learners, but also how to make sure the assessments being used were accurately depicting the picture of them as learners. The primary purpose of our collaboration had to shift from a mindset where the outcome was for English Language Learners to be referred, evaluated and verified for Special Education services, to working together in a partnership that would bring all of our expertise to the table in order to find effective strategies and interventions which would move students towards meeting academic goals.

This dissertation is the result of many years of questions that have been asked by teachers of English Language Learners, Special Education teachers, speech pathologists, school psychologists, and classroom teachers with regard to how they could work together better in order to best support language learners who may require an evaluation to determine whether a student qualifies for a placement in the Special Education program.

Background

In the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), an English Language Learner is defined as a student:

> whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing or understanding English may be sufficient to deny the individual (i) the ability to meet the state's proficiency level of achievement on State assessments, (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to fully participate in society.

English Language Learners are a growing population in schools in the United States. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a), the number of English Language Learners increased by 300,000 students between the 2002-2003 and 2011-2012 school years; from 4.1 million to 4.4 million students. The growth of English Language Learners is expected to continue at a very high rate, as it is estimated that by 2030, 40% of the student population in the United States will be made up of English Language Learners (Maxwell & Shah, 2012).

Data in the mid-western state is similar to national statistics. During the 2002-2003 school year, 4.9% of the total student population (13,803 students) was identified as English Language Learners in the midwestern state. That number grew to 5.8% (17,532 students) of the total students population identified as English Language Learner students during the 2011-2012 school year. According to the Annual Statistical Handbook (Lincoln Public Schools, 2011), provided by the school district, during that same time period, there was increase from 5.3% (1,657 students) to 6.3% (2,212 students) of the total student population qualifying for the English Language Learner program. As a result of this changing demographic of students, teachers in the state and across the

United States are likely to have English Language Learners in their general education classrooms at some time during their teaching career (Samson & Collins, 2012). These percentages of English Language Learners only reflect those that are served in language support programs, not all of the students that have met the exit criteria required by their state but may still be struggling to learn academic English (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013).

Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

A major issue for teachers, schools, and districts is determining whether an English Language Learner is experiencing academic difficulties based on issues solely related to language acquisition, or whether a learning disability is contributing to the academic challenges. As a result, English Language Learners are often misidentified for Special Education services and may be placed in classrooms that are not adequately prepared or appropriate to meet their needs.

The purpose of this study is to describe what a group of educators believed to be the most important components for making decisions about English Language Learners who may need a referral for Special Education.

The English Language Learner/Special Education Dilemma

Federal mandates under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's main education law, require that all students have access to the core curriculum and meet specific academic targets (Samson & Collins, 2012). Included in this mandate is the necessity to modify classroom instruction to meet the needs of English Language Learners. Modified instruction for English Language Learners can vary from

bilingual/dual language instruction, where the home language and English are used, to structured/sheltered English immersion classrooms, where English is modified for English Language Learners. Further examples of modified instruction include mainstream classrooms, where English Language Learners receive English as a Second Language (ESL) support within the classroom (push-in ESL) or spend time in an English as a Second Language classroom (pull-out) (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Based on the definition set by the No Child Left Behind Act, proficiency in English is based on three specific pieces of criteria: proficiency on state assessments, success in the classroom and full participation in society (Cook, Boals, & Lundberg, 2011). In addition to the academic assessments required by the state, English Language Learner students must also participate annually in an assessment that measures their proficiency in English (Chudowsky & Chudowsky, 2010). How students perform on the language assessment helps states to define what it means to be proficient.

Federal guidelines, however, do not mandate that in order for students to be proficient in English, they must also be proficient in academic content, but rather they should "have the ability" to be proficient (Cook et al., 2011). In order for students to "have the ability" to be proficient, they need to have access to content area curriculum. In 2005, English Language Learners participating in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 46% of 4th grade English Language Learners scored "below basic" in math, compared to 18% of non-English Language Learners. On the same assessment, 71% of 8th grade English Language Learners scored "below basic" compared to 30% of non-English Language Learners.

Consideration for an English Language Learner's level of language proficiency needs to be taken into account in the discussion of a student's ability to be proficient on any academic assessment. The lower a student's language proficiency, the less likely he or she will be proficient on any given assessment (Cook et al., 2011). The standardized assessments which English Language Learners are required to take are normed on native English speaking students and may include test bias, as well as academic language that beginning English Language Learners have not yet mastered. When reviewing the test scores, it is necessary to consider their abilities in terms of language skills and how this might factor into their performance on a particular assessment.

All students, as required by the No Child Left Behind Act, participate in their state's academic assessments. Language learners who are considered "newly arrived," as defined by having been in the United States less than 12 months, are exempt from taking their state's reading assessment. They are required, however, to participate in all other assessments including math, science, writing, as well as the language proficiency assessments given in their state (Cook et al., 2011). Although students can be given accommodations on these assessments, many of the accommodations suggested for students who qualify for Special Education services may not be as effective for English Language Learners. Teachers who choose to provide these accommodations for English Language Learners on standardized tests should be consistently using the accommodations on regular classroom assessments to ensure they are making a difference in the student's ability to perform at their highest level of understanding. Accommodations should not be used only for standardized assessments.

The problem of practice this study addresses is the fact a significant number of English Language Learners are not meeting academic targets, and there is a growing concern for schools to develop an appropriate educational plan to meet the varied academic needs for English Language Learners. For some of these students, their needs may include Special Education services. To date, there have been few large data set studies that have looked at the intersection of English Language Learners and disability classifications (Archerd, 2013).

In the United States, during the 2002-2003 school year, there were a total of 6,523,000 (13.5% of total K-12 student population) students who were identified as needing Special Education services. During the 2011-2012 school year, the number had decreased to 6,401,000 (12.9% of total K-12 student population). More specifically, during the same time period, those students who were identified with Specific Learning Disabilities also showed a decrease and went from 2,848,000 students (5.8%) to 2,303,000 students (4.7%) of the total student population qualifying for Special Education services (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b). The decline in students qualifying for Special Education services with a Specific Learning Disability could be the result of an increase in schools utilizing the Response to Intervention (RTI) process.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), enacted in 1975, mandates that children and youth ages 3–21 with disabilities be provided a free appropriate public education. Shown in Archerd (2013), the Individuals with Disabilities Act defines a child with a disability as:

> A child evaluated in accordance with 300.34 through 300.311 as having a mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language

> impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as "emotional disturbance"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, and other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

More specifically, according to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004), a specific learning disability is:

> A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

It can be difficult for a Student Assistance Team (SAT) to distinguish whether an English Language Learner who is not meeting specific academic targets in terms of language acquisition has a language disorder or a learning disability (Archerd, 2013). When a teacher assesses that an English Language Learner is experiencing more difficulty on academic tasks in school than he/she feels is typical, he/she may conclude the student has a need that should be addressed through Special Education (Hamayan, Marler, & Damico, 2013). To date, there has been relatively little attention paid to the essential standards, knowledge, and skills that general education teachers ought to possess in order to provide effective instruction to English Language Learners placed in their classroom (Samson & Collins, 2012). When teachers have not had adequate coursework to learn about language acquisition, they will not be effective in implementing strategies needed for the English Language Learners in their classrooms to be most successful in meeting the high academic standards. Teachers lacking adequate coursework also struggle to appropriately identify learning disabilities with regard to English Language Learners in their classrooms. In these situations, teachers struggle with

making educated judgements and decisions on both sides: language acquisition and learning disabilities.

The number of English Language Learners in a district has been found to influence the under and overrepresentation in Special Education. Maxwell and Shah (2012) found that districts with small numbers of English Language Learners (fewer than 99 such students) are likely to over-identify, while under-identification was more common in districts with larger English-language learner populations. Evidence of disproportionate representation of English Language Learners has led to legal action and policy changes in order to reduce this occurrence (Coutinho & Oswald, 2006). Students who are over-represented, under-represented, or incorrectly placed in Special Education are all at a disadvantage in making sufficient academic gains by not receiving a free appropriate public education.

It is therefore imperative, especially when decisions are being made about evaluating an English Language Learner for Special Education services, there be collaboration among teachers who are specifically trained in understanding language acquisition and those who have knowledge related to Special Education. Schools can utilize the student assistance process to ensure all necessary staff have been trained and decide if part of the lack of understanding of language acquisition should be addressed through appropriate teacher training, including necessary strategies that are essential for language learners.

Because an efficient and systematic process is lacking for many school districts, it is necessary to have one in place in order to correctly assess and identify English

Language Learners' academic needs in a timely manner. By establishing a process, schools will be able to ensure all students are able to receive a free appropriate public education.

Statement of Research Question

What do educators perceive as being the most important components for making decisions about English Language Learners who may need a referral for Special Education?

Method of Study

This study will use a narrative analysis approach to directly gather data in order to provide an in-depth perspective of the participants. According to Saldana (2011), a case may be chosen deliberately because of its unique characteristics, which may provide a rich opportunity and exemplar for focused study (p. 9). A qualitative method is appropriate for this study because my goal was to better understand the lived experiences of the participants which will serve to inform the problem of practice that has been identified through this research. The goal of qualitative research is to understand the phenomenon and meaning it has for its participants (Merriam, 2009).

In this narrative analysis, professional educators were interviewed to collect information pertaining to a pilot that was conducted, which utilized a collaborative problem solving process as part of the pre-referral process for English Language Learners that may require Special Education supports. Josselson (2013) notes, narrative research projects aim to build a layered and complex understanding of some aspect of human

experience (p. 3). Perceptions, as the participants have explained them, are regarded as truth.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was modeled after Response to Intervention, a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. Brown and Doolittle (2008), outline four areas that must be considered within the framework for Response to Intervention addressing the needs of English Language Learners. Those areas include:

a. a systematic process for examining the specific background variables or ecologies for English Language Learners (first and second language proficiency, educational history including bilingual models, immigration pattern, socioeconomic status and culture);
b. examination of the appropriateness of classroom instruction and the classroom context based on knowledge of individual student factors;
c. information gathered through informal and formal assessments; and
d. nondiscriminatory interpretation of all assessment data. (pp. 67)

In a paper presented at the New York State Association for Bilingual Education Conference in 2009, Garcia identifies three key components when utilizing Response to Intervention with English Language Learners. They include:

a. universal interventions for all students based on the core curriculum;
b. instructional modifications for students experiencing difficulty; and
c. use of collaborative problem-solving teams and/or supplemental programs when students continue to experience difficulties even with increasingly intensive intervention. (Garcia, 2009, p. 1)

The English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process that was developed in my district, encompasses each of these components. Within Tier 1, teachers provide universal strategies targeted to meet the needs of all English Language Learners. Figure 1, developed by and used with permission from the

Student Services department of the local school district, displays the multi-tier systems where schools systematically determine student needs and provide the supports necessary for success. When beginning the collaborative problem solving process, educators are focused on those universal supports noted in Tier 1. At this time, parents should be involved in the decision-making process when determining strategies to implement. Progress on the universal supports is closely monitored during Tier 1 and adjustments are made to determine whether students are meeting the learning targets that are identified in this stage.

Universal strategies that are found to be most effective for English Language Learners are outlined in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model (Echevarria et al., 2013). They are organized into eight categories which include:

1. planning and preparation,
2. building background,
3. comprehensible input,
4. strategies,
5. interaction,
6. practice and applications,
7. lesson delivery, and
8. review and assessment.

All of the strategies outlined in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol are designed to make learning comprehensible and accessible for language learners and have shown to be beneficial for all students, not just those who are learning English as a new language.

After modifying instruction based on progress towards meeting the learning targets and if students are still not making adequate gains, teachers may consider moving

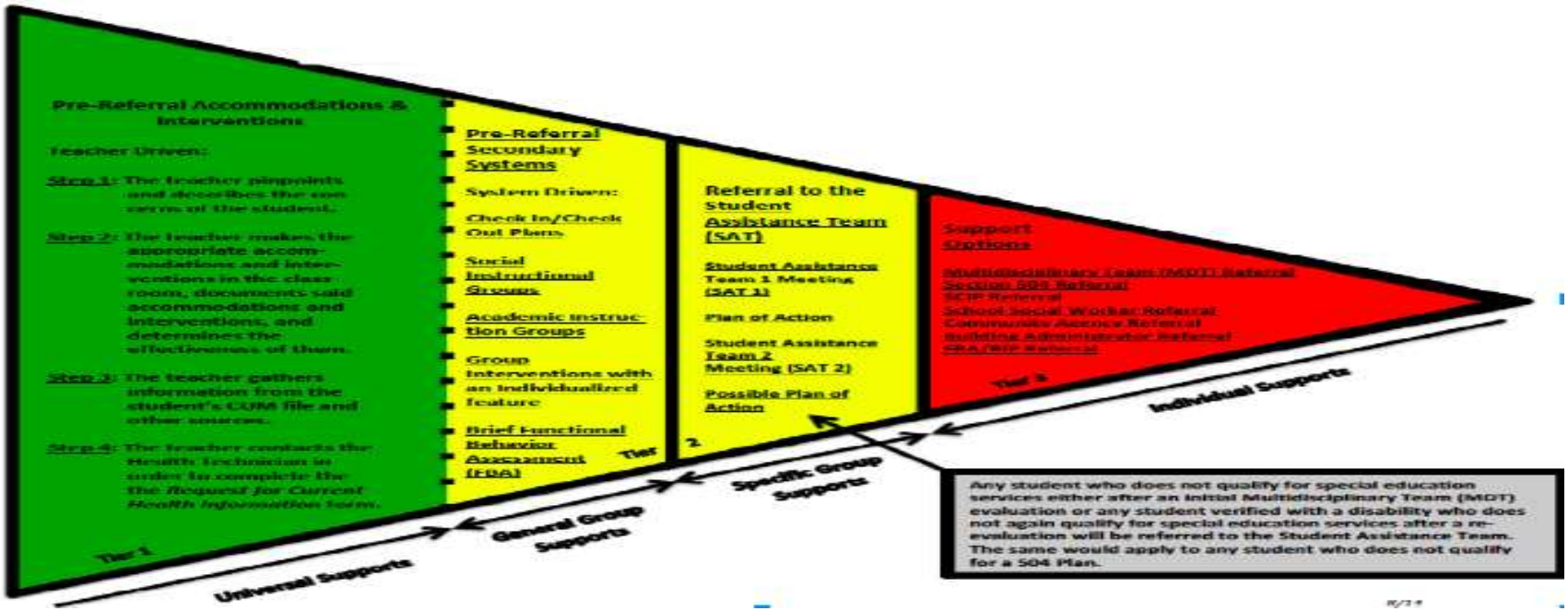

Figure 1. Student Assistance Process flowchart.

to Tier 2, which includes more intensive support. Students in this stage may receive supplemental supports by a specialist, which could include a Title 1 teacher, a special education teacher, or a speech/language pathologist. Progress is continuously monitored at this stage. Students may move between Tier 1 and Tier 2 based on their progress related to specific learning targets. By following this model, English Language Learners who are struggling can be identified early and interventions can be put into place to provide necessary supports before students fall too far behind to ever catch up (Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

Garcia and Ortiz (1988) describe an 8-step process, including specific pre-referral interventions that can be used with this unique population of students who may have learning disabilities occurring in conjunction with linguistic and cultural differences (Appendix A). Similarly, the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process encompasses five basic steps. Figure 2 indicates the process that teams will follow as they begin to have conversations about an English Language Learner the team is concerned about in terms of their academic progress, in both their English Language Learner and in their content area classes.

Specific interventions must be provided early and be intensive enough to bring students to the level at which they can succeed in the general education classroom (Ortiz & Yates, 2001). Using the conceptual framework, as outlined above, this study used data collected after a group of educators participated in a collaborative problem solving approach. The purpose of this collaborative problem solving approach was to identify

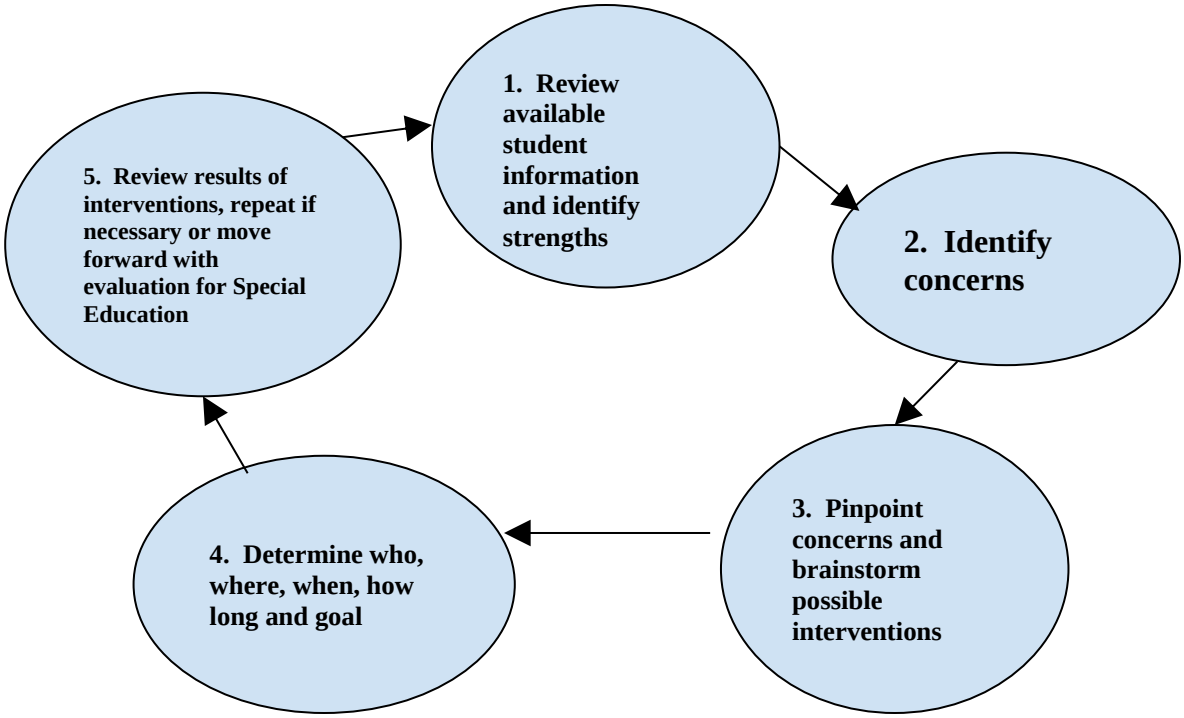

Figure 2. English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process flowchart.

and specify student concerns early on, apply effective instructional strategies to address those concerns, and revisit progress in order to make informed decisions about the need to move forward with a referral to Special Education.

The data collected in this study is best interpreted through narrative inquiry analysis. Narrative inquiry analysis seeks to transform data into literary stories, sometimes referred to as "creative nonfiction" (Saldana, 2011). Because of this, I believed conducting a narrative analysis was most appropriate for this study.

Definition of Terms

Student Assistance Process—A process involving a team of educators with expertise in second language acquisition, culture, learning disabilities and content (especially reading and writing) that work collaboratively to determine appropriate instructional strategies prior to referring a struggling student for Special Education services (Burr, Haas, & Ferriere, 2015).

Least restrictive environment—The requirement in federal law that students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent possible, with nondisabled peers and that students that qualify for Special Education services are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Burr et al., 2015).

Response to Intervention—A three-tiered instructional system that increases the focus and intensity of interventions for a student as the student responds below required minimum expectations on each instructional tier (Burr et al., 2015).

Free appropriate public education—A child with disabilities will receive the same education as a child without disability or handicap. This can be achieved by giving the child special services, usually written in an Individualized Education Plan.

Individualized Education Plan—A legal document that defines a child's special education program. It includes the disability in which the child qualifies for special education services, the services that the team has determined the school will provide to the child and any accommodations that the student will receive to best support his/her learning.

Assumptions

If schools follow recommendations to be collaborative, provide training for their teachers in order for them to deliver effective language acquisition instruction, and administer assessments that take into account cultural considerations, schools will have limited struggles in the pre-referral process which may result in an English Language Learner requiring Special Education services.

Delimitations and Limitations

While the issue facing educators working with English Language Learners has increased in districts across the United States, the delimitation of this study narrowed the scope to only two schools in one school district. This study does not take into account those educators who may have a wide range of knowledge pertaining to English Language Learners. The limitations in this study are that only seven educators were surveyed as part of this research. This study is also limited to those educators who elected to respond to the interview request and share their insights regarding English Language Learners in the pre-referral process.

Significance of the Study

While there is not a universal, prescribed process for schools to use when they are trying to make a decision about an English Language Learner who may or may not have a learning disability, the work that has been done over the last year in the district that I studied, which has attempted to address those needs. There are many suggestions in the literature which attempt to address the concerns that districts face when they encounter English Language Learners who are not making adequate academic progress. By

involving parents, teachers, and other staff members, a collaborative problem solving process was developed which will address these needs as identified by this district.

Summary

Because English Language Learners are a growing population in the United States, many school districts are finding it necessary to better prepare all classroom teachers to effectively provide instruction to meet their language acquisition needs. Sometimes, even when teachers are adequately trained to work with English Language Learners, they may still encounter situations when more specific interventions are required for students to meet academic targets. By working collaboratively, teams which include teachers of English language learners, general education teachers, Special Education staff, and parents can develop appropriate plans to meet student needs as part of the pre-referral process.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

English Language Learners are a growing population in schools throughout the United States. With these growing numbers of English Language Learners also come increased concerns for schools to develop an appropriate educational plan to meet the varied academic needs of English Language Learners. For some of these students, the varied needs may include Special Education services. Huang, Clarke, Milczarski, and Raby (2011) describe the need for further research on this unique population of students which may have learning disabilities happening in conjunction with linguistic and cultural differences. According to the literature, a structured process, which uses data, is an effective approach to disseminating the differences between language acquisition and learning disabilities (Burr et al., 2015). This literature review summarizes the consistent themes represented in the literature. The four major themes that will be addressed include collaboration, teacher training, appropriate instruction, and valid assessments and diagnosis.

Collaboration

After reviewing the literature, one of the emerging themes is the importance of collaboration within schools to address the growing challenges of providing an appropriate education plan. Efforts for school staff—including general education teachers, teachers trained in language acquisition, special education teachers, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, administrators and parents—to all have a

voice at the table are of the utmost importance as part of this process. All those involved in problem solving, referral, and eligibility processes must be adequately prepared to make these distinctions (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson-Courtney, & Kushner, 2006). It is important for teachers to be aware of a student's background and to meet with parents to form a partnership (Fisher, 2009). Not only does it benefit the student to have multiple viewpoints represented in conversations about his/her learning, the participation of parents at all levels in their child's education is required by the Office of Civil Rights (U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, 2015).

School districts are obligated under the Office of Civil Rights to make sure parents, who are also themselves considered limited English proficient, have access to any school related information that non-limited English proficient parents would receive, including participation in student assistance process meetings where a team decides to gather data and monitors student progress in determining if the child may qualify for Special Education Services. English Language Learners and their families have the same rights as their native speaking peers (Litt, n.d.) throughout the Student Assistance Process.

Not only are schools obligated by law to include parents throughout the Student Assistance Process, but there are many benefits of including them in all stages of the conversation. Parents can educate school staff regarding the student's cultural background and linguistic practices (Burr et al., 2015; Scott, Hauerwas, & Brown, 2014) as well as contribute important information about their family needs, values, and culture (Rinaldi, Ortiz, & Gamm, n.d.). By having parents involved, schools are better able to

build relationships that can help foster useful information in the instructional-decision making process (Park & Thomas, 2012).

The Office of Civil Rights is clear in that school districts have an obligation to ensure meaningful communication with limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand and to adequately notify limited English proficient parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district that is called to the attention of non-limited English proficient parents (U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, 2015). It is also necessary that schools must provide language assistance to limited English proficient parents effectively with appropriate, competent staff or appropriate and competent outside resources (U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, 2015). This language assistance can be provided in the form of a bilingual liaison, which is someone who can help to ensure communication takes place in the parent's primary language and information from the school (written or oral) is shared accurately (Burr et al., 2015).

Having all stakeholders at the table provides for increased opportunities for professional dialogue, peer coaching, and creating instruction models. Staff must work together and understand each other's role in the process (Scott et al., 2014). An important consideration involves the inclusion of English Language Learner staff at every step and at all levels of the Student Assistance Process (Scott et al., 2014). A three-stage problem-solving model for supporting struggling learners and determining whether they are eligible for special education services is used. Each stage includes problem identification, intervention design and implementation, and systematic progress

monitoring (Ortiz et al., 2006). When teams are working in collaboration with one another, they can use documents that encourage collaboration across disciplines (Scott et al., 2014). This allows for everyone to have a voice and be able to contribute to the problem solving process. While not one single person is responsible for leading the group through their collaborative efforts, it is important for all to feel their contributions are equally valued.

Documentation is crucial to this process as it allows for information to be collected in such a way that it can be utilized at a later time if the team decides to move forward with formal assessments of the student. This information can and should be gathered from all participants, including the English Language Learner teacher, classroom teacher, Special Education staff, administration, and family (Litt, n.d.). The process begins when members first reach consensus about the nature of the problem; determine priorities for intervention; help teachers select the methods, strategies, or approaches they will use; assign responsibility for carrying out the team's recommendations; and establish a follow-up plan to monitor progress (Ortiz et al., 2006).

There is an emphasis in the literature that effective collaboration skills must be learned. Garmston and Wellman (2009) identify six professional capacities for collaboration. These six capacities are termed the *Adaptive Schools* approach. One of the six capacities is collegial interaction. Collegial interaction is a learned skill. Group members must understand how to monitor and adjust their individual behaviors in order to support others within the group and tend to the group dynamic.

As a way to prepare group members to effectively collaborate, all members must understand their individual group member capabilities. Garmston and Wellman (2009) explain group members, as individuals, must:

1. know one's intentions and choose congruent behaviors;
2. set aside unproductive patterns of listening, responding, and inquiring;
3. know when to self-assert and when to integrate; and
4. know and support the group's purposes, topics, processes and developments. (p 28)

The main premise of the *Adaptive Schools* process to collaboration is the establishment of the seven norms of collaboration (Garmston & Wellman, 2009). School staff can participate in training as part of increasing their effectiveness in working together collaboratively. Productive communication between group members can happen when teams utilize the norms of collaboration. The norms of collaboration include:

1. pausing,
2. paraphrasing,
3. putting inquiry at the center,
4. probing for specificity,
5. placing ideas on the table,
6. paying attention to self and others, and
7. presuming positive intentions. (p. 31)

Group members must give themselves, as individuals and as a group, the time they need to practice, monitor and reflect on the way that utilizing norms has impact of the effectiveness of their work (Garmston & Wellman, 2009).

Further in the literature, considerations were present when collaboration was most effective include establishing structures for school-wide participation. Other considerations of effective collaboration include modeling constructive feedback to strengthen the collaborative culture, seeking new hires who are open to collaboration and

providing opportunities for staff to work together collaboratively (Poulos, Culbertson, Piazza, & D'Etremont, 2014).

While it is clear that collaboration is an essential component, establishing a structure for schools to use in order to ensure teachers understand the purpose and are able to have effective and efficient conversations is necessary. School leaders must work to build a culture of collaboration among their staff. Collaborative cultures come from authentic and relevant problem solving. Teachers are more willing to work collaboratively when they are able to see the problems being specific to their practice and have a solution that only be reached through collaboration (Sutton & Shouse, 2016).

Teacher Training

Along with collaboration among stakeholders, the importance of teacher training emerged as a second theme in the literature. Teacher training is needed in order to make sure information regarding the student's current academic strengths and challenges is accurate. Also, quality teacher training assures the instruction provided for students is meeting the unique needs of the individual. Burr et al. (2015) list areas of need as suggested by multiple researchers for professional development which include:

- appropriate formal and informal evaluation practices;
- understanding and evaluation of second-language acquisition and learning disabilities (and their intersection);
- ways that cultural background may influence behavior;
- how best to communicate with parents;
- instructional strategies matched to each stage of language development;
- typical and atypical language and literacy characteristics of English learner students;
- early intervention strategies for English learner students who are struggling with reading and math;
- classroom management skills;
- accommodations and adaptations for English learner students during testing;

- accommodations and adaptations for English learner students in the classroom;
- collaboration with colleagues related to serving English learner students;
- eligibility determination for both second-language and special education services; and
- progress monitoring. (pp. 7)

A further challenge to teacher training is the lack of guidance provided by state policies in regards to instructional practices and during teacher preparation (Scott et al., 2014). Due to this lack of guidance at the state level, local school districts are left to decide how to effectively improve instructional practices and improve teacher quality, factors that are crucial in this process of making accurate and informed decisions about student learning. General education teachers often lack training related to both special education and/or the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ortiz & Yates, 2001).

A recent analysis of state requirements for the preparation of content teachers to work with English Language Learners, found the majority of states (32) only referenced the special needs of English Language Learners or referred to language as an example of diversity in state certification requirements. Fifteen (15) states did not require any training or expertise in working with English Language Learners. Only four states—Arizona, California, Florida, and New York—have specific or separate certification requirements for all teachers in the area of English Language Learner education (Anstrom et al., 2010). Research shows that 56% of public school teachers in the United States have at least one English Language Learner in their class, and only 20% of those teachers are certified to teach English Language Learners (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Similarly, in research conducted with 279 teachers in a school district with a minimal number of

English Language Learners, it was found that 81.7% believed they did not have adequate training to work effectively with English Language Learners, and 53% wanted more preparation (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy 2008).

It is essential to effective teacher training for teachers to be knowledgeable in both first and second language acquisition principles, to utilize culturally proficient pedagogy, and to have access to trained staff that understands the differences between linguistic differences and learning disabilities (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Research has demonstrated that high quality professional development can provide meaningful learning experiences for teachers to explicitly teach academic English within the content areas (Anstrom et al., 2010). However, the literature shows most teachers typically receive a low percentage of professional development to specifically address the needs of language learners (Fenner, 2014). Language learners would benefit more if all teachers, both English Language Learner and content area, would have the linguistic knowledge to select or adapt materials which help them develop increasingly sophisticated language skills and plan instructional activities that provide opportunities for them to use language in new and increasingly complex ways (Anstrom et al., 2010). Teacher beliefs and practices about language can be successfully challenged and changed when professional development provides teachers with a deeper understanding of the role of language in academic learning, when it is ongoing, and when it is directly relevant to the content teachers are teaching (Anstrom et al., 2010).

Without these components, teachers do not have a good grasp of the natural progression of language acquisition and, therefore, can struggle to make valid judgments

on whether or not a student is making adequate progress in their learning. There is a need for teachers to have the linguistic knowledge and skill to help students use the language associated with the academic discourse of school subjects and develop an awareness of how language modalities (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) function across different academic contexts (Anstrom et al., 2010). Without proper training to fully understand the components of second language acquisition, teachers may sometimes limit their students to responding to low-level recall questions or basic knowledge questions, or simply not ask any type of questions at all because they anticipate that their English Language Learners may not be able to fully respond (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Because of this, students may not be able to fully demonstrate their understanding, which can lead to misinterpretation of the data that is gathered by the Student Assistance Team (Geva, 2000; Scott et al., 2014).

For those students who have already been identified through the Student Assistance Process, teachers working with English Language Learners who are identified with a learning disability also need to be knowledgeable of second language acquisition (Huang et al., 2011). This would include special education teachers, as well as other staff such speech pathologists and school psychologists. Huang and colleagues (2011) emphasize the lack of training available for teachers working with these students and, therefore, advocate for appropriate professional development. The advocacy for appropriate teacher training is left to the local school district due to lack of guidance or professional standards at the state level (Scott et al., 2014).

Effective teacher training also stresses the importance of professional collaboration (Scott et al., 2014). When teachers in all areas have the opportunity to participate in inclusive professional development to address the needs of all students, they are more likely to be aware of and incorporate expertise from others (Rinaldi et al., n.d.). In addition to experienced classroom teachers participating in professional development pertaining to effective instructional strategies, pre-service teachers also need to have access to information about instructional strategies (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Many teacher preparation programs at the college level offer limited classes addressing this population of students. Often, pre-service teachers have some exposure to learning about how to address the needs of special education students, but not how to address the needs of English Language Learners. The literature provides a number of recommendations for improving teacher pre-service and in-service programs (Anstrom et al., 2010). As the English Language Learner population in schools continues to grow, it will be vital for more attention to be given to this group of learners in teacher preparation programs.

Another area which needs to be addressed within professional development is the various ways to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction. A study of the relationship between English Language Learner achievement and the credential held by teachers who taught English Language Learners found that teachers with English Language Learner authorization had a positive impact on their students' outcomes (Anstrom et al., 2010). A child's language and culture should not be seen as a liability, but rather as a strength teachers should capitalize on in order to strengthen a student's

educational foundation (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Teachers should be aware of evidence based instructional strategies linked to academic growth and assessment practices to monitor progress (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Teachers are then better able to deliver appropriate instruction when they have had clear professional development (Huang et al., 2011).

Appropriate Instruction

Teachers providing appropriate instruction emerged as the third theme from the literature. If teachers do not have the skills to adapt instruction for English Language Learners, these students are likely to fail (Ortiz et al., 2006). Instruction, as well as interventions, must consider a student's background, experiences and linguistic proficiency in order to be appropriate (Brown, & Doolittle, 2008). One approach found many times throughout the literature was the use of Response to Intervention with English Language Learners.

In order for the interventions in the Response to Intervention process to be most successful, school staff needs to be sure they are culturally and linguistically sensitive while addressing language acquisition needs (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Burr et al., 2015; Navarrette & Watson, 2013). Without first making certain specific interventions are culturally and linguistically appropriate, instruction can lead to a disproportionality of English Language Learners involved in the Response to Intervention process (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Burr et al., 2015). Once language acquisition needs have been considered, it is necessary to document the specific interventions being used by clearly monitoring progress, which will then inform teachers as to whether students are meeting

benchmarks or demonstrating progress based on the interventions (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Interventions must be aligned to meet student needs (Hosp, n.d.), and strategies should be adapted or different altogether for language learners (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Teacher training is again important in this stage so teachers who are documenting student progress are making informed decisions based on knowledge and understanding related to language acquisition.

In addition to Response to Intervention, research has shown that English Language Learners also need time to learn English and develop their proficiency in second language. In many classrooms, there is evidence that students have opportunities to "talk to learn," but for many English Language Learners, they also need consideration for ways to "learn to talk" (de Jong & Harper, 2005). For this to happen, there needs to be structured opportunities to practice English in supportive learning environments where students are engaged (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Students who are learning English as a new language will often develop their social language (BICS – Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) at a much faster rate than their academic language (CALP – Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency).

Teachers who are trained in teaching language acquisition understand that students must be exposed to rich learning environments with regular opportunities to practice language and literacy skills in L2 (Navarrette & Watson, 2013). Even when taught by highly trained teachers, students' progress in Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency may take years of continual support. English Language Learners need time to develop language proficiency and usually need continued support even after they have

met the criteria as determined by their state to show that they are proficient and exit direct English Language Learner instruction (Rinaldi et al., n.d.).

English Language Learners need to have access to ongoing and sustained instruction in the areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing as part of the core areas for as long as possible from an English Language Learner certified teacher (Rinaldi et al., n.d.). Although the expectation for how this is done varies by state, it is recognized that the instruction in language acquisition needs to be intentional. The most effective English Language Learner instructional programs are not considered additional support like an intervention, but rather as core instruction (Scott et al., 2014).

Appropriate instruction includes culturally relevant curriculum. Students may have highly trained teachers who provide effective instruction, yet if the students do not experience curriculum that is relevant to their cultural backgrounds, student success is stunted (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Districts must review materials that are designed specifically for language learners to make sure they are culturally sensitive. Opportunities for students to be able to continue to develop their oral language skills need to be addressed during this exploration of curriculum. It is possible a student is struggling because of a lack of effective instruction or curriculum (Navarrette & Watson, 2013).

Valid Assessments and Diagnosis

The final theme which emerged from the literature specifically addresses the needs of English Language Learners who are involved in the student assistance process. Perhaps the most complex part of the student assistance process involves the assessment

and diagnosis of a learning disability for a student who is not a native English speaker. Recommendations from the literature consistently describe an effective student assistance process to require multiple types of information be gathered through both formal and informal assessments, and nondiscriminatory interpretation of results (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Burr et al., 2015). The literature shows multiple measures are necessary when evaluating the needs of students who have language needs. A collection of quantitative information (standardized test scores and academic grades), qualitative information (parent and teacher descriptions of behavior), and language proficiency information (prior schooling and English and native language proficiency levels) are needed to ensure a complete academic profile has been considered as part of the pre-referral process. When the school staff involved in the student assistance process does not understand English acquisition (Scott et al., 2014), results can be misinterpreted, which can lead to an incorrect diagnosis. This connects to the emphasis on collaboration in the literature.

It is essential that English Language Learner teachers are part of the Student Assistance Process in order for expertise on English acquisition to be part of the Student Assistance Process. Student Assistance Process teams must accurately interpret data unique to these students, such as the results of language proficiency assessments, and design interventions that are culturally and linguistically responsive (Ortiz et al., 2006). It is often thought by those who do not have a language background that an English Language Learner's reading difficulties are a result of not being adequately proficient in

English. While reading comprehension and oral proficiency are closely related, the two do not rely on each other (Fisher, 2009).

Timing is the main issue involved in the identification of English Language Learners for Special Education services. School staff sometimes waits too long in thinking a student's potential disability is related to language acquisition. The delayed student assistance process can leave students without the needed support. Once a student qualifies for Special Education services, it may be too late to address the disability with appropriate instruction. The literature emphasizes early intervention and a timely student assistance process are most beneficial in assuring English Language Learners are getting the support they need to address their learning needs (Huang et al., 2011). When students receive remediation at an early age, they are more likely to see gains in their learning in the long term (Huang et al., 2011).

When teachers have not had the proper training to be able to understand the difference between language acquisition and learning disabilities, they may be more likely to want to wait until the student is proficient in English before considering Special Education (Huang et al., 2011). Teams need to think about all aspects of a student's learning progression when making decisions about assessment. Consideration for the relationship between developing language proficiency in a student's second language and a true learning disability should be made (Rinaldi et al., n.d.). Teachers should also be aware at this point if the student has had access to research-based, high-quality interventions designed for language learners and are not making adequate progress to other similar English Language Learners (Spear-Swerling, 2006). Geva (2000) found it

is possible to assess reading disability even when linguistic proficiency is not fully developed.

When a team has made the decision to move ahead with testing, there needs to be specific documentation to support this move. Response to Intervention documentation of interventions can and should be used in the decision making process (Huang et al., 2011). Multiple measures documenting learning strengths and weaknesses need to be used (Burr et al., 2015; Scott et al., 2014). Conversations with parents can lead teams to be aware of a history of oral language delay or disability in the student's first language, difficulty developing literacy skills in the student's first language, or of a family history of learning difficulties. Because English Language Learners are not included in normative samples of standardized assessments (Scott et al., 2014), utilizing informal assessment measures are essential to having a complete picture of the student's learning needs. Assessments that are based on our standards of the English-speaking culture provide little chance the scores are appropriate, meaningful or useful (Burr et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2011).

Even when schools try to evaluate students in the most culturally sensitive way, there are still disagreements about what is considered to be culturally and linguistically diverse sensitive assessments (Scott et al., 2014). Translating assessments that were normed for native English speaking students is ineffective in providing information which is useful to schools during evaluations on English Language Learners. Hosp (n.d.) notes the process for identifying students is, therefore, not always applied equally.

There are some assessments that can be given in Spanish, but in most local school districts, Spanish is just one of numerous native languages. During the Student

Assistance Process, sometimes students are misidentified based on the assessment results that are normed on native English speakers. While many standardized tests may themselves be statistically unbiased, their administration and the interpretation of the results may not consider cultural or linguistic differences that English Language Learners may bring to the task (Terry & Irving, 2010). For those students inappropriately identified for Special Education services, there is shown to be regression in their academic progress (Huang et al., 2011).

Summary

Because of the difficult nature in determining whether or not an English Language Learner may also have a learning disability, it is important for many factors to be considered in the process. First, it is necessary to engage all of the stakeholders in the student assistance process in order to develop the best educational plan to support a struggling language learner. General education teachers, as well as those teachers who support Special Education students, need to have effective teacher training to learn about second language acquisition so they can make sound decisions, which may influence their instruction. Appropriate instruction must be intentional to meet the needs of all students, particularly those with language acquisition needs. Finally, understanding diverse cultural and linguistic needs is essential to the accurate assessment and diagnosis of English Language Learners' needs. Without all of these components, it will be challenging for schools to make accurate decisions about providing appropriate education for the increasing number of English language learners.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

English language learner/Special education problem solving process.

Initial conversations pertaining to the development of the English Language Learner/Special Education Problem Solving Process began in January 2014. The district administrative team, which included the supervisor of speech/language pathologists, the supervisor of school psychologists and myself, the supervisor of the English language learner program, met to organize information that had already been gathered from each of our respective groups which included background information about English Language Learners and current district practices for the identification of all students in the student assistance process.

The process began with a review of a document which had been created several years prior through the work of a smaller committee called SPELL (Special Education and English Language Learners). The English Language Learner Collaborative Problem Solving Process: Foundations and Philosophy document, was developed by this smaller committee, which was made up of English Language Learner teachers, school psychologists, and speech/language pathologists, in an effort to address questions that had arisen over time regarding English Language Learners and their placement in Special Education. This document began with this assumption:

> The approach to supporting English Language Learners who are not making adequate progress should be an ongoing problem solving approach rather than a rush to assessment. The goal of this process is to help an English Language Learner make progress. In many cases, this may take a year or more. It all

> depends on the student, his/her needs, the student's response to the interventions that are implemented and the capacity of the team to develop the appropriate strategies and interventions to address the student's needs. A student with one learning target may take more time or less time to make progress than a student with multiple learning targets. (SPELL committee, 2012)

This assumption is what led to the final English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process that was used in this study.

Deciphering the differences between language acquisition and learning disabilities is difficult for educators. A narrative method of inquiry was selected for this qualitative study in order to describe the perceptions and experiences of the educators involved in the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process pilot because collecting the stories of the participants provided me with an opportunity to make sense of their experiences. By better understanding the perceptions and experiences of educators, a more efficient and systematic process for schools to adhere to when making decisions about English Language Learners as they related to Special Education could be developed.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to describe educators' perceptions of the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process in a midwestern, urban school district, for identifying and addressing the academic needs of English Language Learners who may require a future referral for Special Education services. The main research question for this study was:

1. What do educators perceive as being the most important components for making decisions about English Language Learners who may need a referral for Special Education?

Although understanding educators' perceptions regarding the problem solving process could have been gathered by administering a survey, I believed collecting stories was a more effective way of identifying methods in which districts might be able to increase collaboration, as well as understanding the process as outlined in this study. Additionally, by collecting the stories of the participants through one-on-one interviews, "qualitative interviewers create a special kind of speech event during which they ask open-ended questions, encourage informants to explain their unique perspectives on the issues at hand, and listen intently for special language and other clues that reveal meaning structures informants use to understand their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 23).

Qualitative Research

Narratives are stories of lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). Because the goal of narrative research is to design a multi-layered, intertwined picture of the experiences of the participants, qualitative research strives to use rich narrative description rather than statistical significance to convey meaning. Narrative stories connect people to their own experiences, as well as to each other. They help people to better understand the past, experience the present and anticipate the future (Saldana, 2011).

Creswell (2007) identifies five different types of studies to conduct qualitative research: Narrative, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study. Narrative research designs use procedures where researchers describe the lives of

individuals, collect and tell stories about their lives, and write narratives of their experiences (Creswell, 2012). A narrative research design was therefore selected for this study as the most appropriate method to describe the experiences of those participants that were involved in the district pilot of the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process because "stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us" (Merriam, 2009, p. 32).

Hatch (2002) stated, "While traditional quantitative methods generate data through the use of instruments such as questionnaires, checklists, scales, tests, and other measuring devices, the principal data for qualitative researchers are gathered directly by the researchers themselves" (p. 7).

Merriam (2009) defines qualitative researchers as those who are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, or rather, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. Merriam (2009) identifies four characteristics as key to understanding qualitative research:

1. the focus is on the process, understanding and meaning;
2. the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection;
3. the process is inductive; and
4. the product is richly descriptive. (p. 14)

Qualitative research is conducted

> because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature. (Creswell, 2007, p. 40)

Creswell (2012) highlights six characteristics at each stage in the research process when conducting a qualitative study which include:

1. exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon;
2. having the literature review play a minor role but justify the problem;
3. stating the purpose and research questions in a general and broad way so as to the participants experiences;
4. collecting data based on words from a small number of individuals so that the participants' views are obtained;
5. analyzing the data for description and themes using text analysis and interpreting the larger meaning of the findings; and
6. writing the report using flexible, emerging structures and evaluative criteria, and including the researcher's subjective reflexivity and bias. (p. 16)

Study Population

Two schools were specifically selected to participate in the pilot of the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process. This collaborative process was designed during the spring semester of the 2013-14 school year by a district administrative team, which included myself, the supervisor of the English Language Learner program, and two Special Education supervisors representing the areas of speech/language pathologists and school psychologists. The district administrative team had previously received feedback from staff in the two buildings indicating they needed support in working through a systematic process when having concerns about academic progress of English Language Learners who may require possible referrals to Special Education.

Creswell (2007) recommends selecting participants who will best help the researcher understand the questions associated with the research study. Each participant in this study was specifically selected because of his/her role in the English Language

Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving process pilot at both the middle school and elementary school that opted to take part in this pilot. Hatch (2002) states, "Qualitative researchers try to understand the perspectives of their participants or informants" (p. 48).

Participants in the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving process pilot at the middle school included the school psychologist, speech/language pathologist, instructional coordinator, six members of the English Language Learner team, and a secondary district English Language Learner instructional coach; while participants at the elementary school included the school psychologist, speech/language pathologist, assistant principal, English Language Learner team leader, grade level classroom teacher, and an elementary district English Language Learner instructional coach. In addition, the district administrative team was also in attendance for meetings at both the elementary school and middle school. Although I was an active participant in the pilot, for the purposes of this study, the participants were the ultimate gatekeepers. They determined whether, and to what extent, the researcher would have access to the information desired (Hatch, 2002).

Pilot Procedures

A brief description (Appendix B) of the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process was emailed to the school administrator at the selected middle school seeking his permission to contact the building level team to participate in the pilot. After the school administrator responded to the request for the team to participate, the district administrative team made arrangements to

attend a regularly scheduled English Language Learner team meeting at the middle school that included the school psychologist, speech/language pathologist, a district English Language Learner instructional coach and the school's instructional coordinator and planned to provide a general overview of the process as well as a discussion of next steps. Before the scheduled meeting, the participants were asked to select one English Language Learner student who they had the most concerns about in terms of academic growth, as well as limited growth in their language acquisition skills, and to bring any and all documentation that had been gathered pertaining to the identified students. The same procedures were followed with the elementary school team.

The district administrative team first began working at the selected middle school. The school team brought all of the historical information that they were able to gather about a student that they had the most concern about at that time. The student was primarily selected based on the fact that she was not making what the English Language Learner teachers felt like "adequate progress" in her language acquisition skills. Adequate progress could be defined as a student moving up to the next English Language Learner level within a specified amount of time or independently meeting specific learning targets connected to state English Language Learner standards For example, it would be ideal for an English Language Learner to be ready to move to the next English Language Learner level after one year of service at each specific level. The reality is that some students may require less time, while others may require more time. Factors such as previous schooling or literacy in first language may impact a student's ability to make "adequate progress".

The district administrative team was able to provide a structure to the meeting by using the seven norms of collaboration (Garmston & Wellman, 2009). Garmston and Wellman (2009) state that, "A major tension is that all groups have more tasks to accomplish than time in which to accomplish them". As a way to alleviate the pressure of trying to do too much at one time, the district administrative team introduced the English Language Learner Collaborative Problem Solving Process forms. The forms included the English Language Learner Collaborative Problem Solving Process forms (Meeting 1 and Meeting 2) (Appendix C), the English Language Learner Student Progress Documentation form (Appendix D), and the Student File Review form (Appendix E).

The main purpose of the English Language Learner Collaborative Problem Solving Process Meeting 1 form was to structure the conversation with all team members in an effort to identify the primary student concern. Divided into ten target areas, section two was used to help the team identify the primary student concern, which allowed for the team to pinpoint the specific area of need and then begin the work of generating possible interventions to address that specific area of need. At the end of the meeting, the team had narrowed down their area to one specific concern and was then able to discuss an intervention to address that specific need. A second meeting was scheduled to review progress made on the identified area of need and to evaluate the student's response to the specific intervention.

During the second meeting, the team used the English Language Learner Collaborative Problem Solving Process Meeting 2 form to review the student's primary

area of concern and to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention that was used. Both teams met several times after the second meeting to review additional interventions and results before coming to a decision about moving forward with an evaluation. This process was also used with the elementary school team members that participate in the pilot.

Data Collection Procedures

After IRB approval (Appendix F) was obtained, the researcher emailed a recruitment letter (Appendix G) to each of the identified participants from the pilot. Of the 15 educators that were contacted to participate, the sample for this study consisted of 7 educators, representing English Language Learner staff, school psychologists and speech/language pathologists.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Role	Number of Years in District
Speech/Language Pathologist	27
School Psychologist	14
English Language Learner teacher	24
English Language Learner teacher	16
Speech/Language Pathologist	7
English Language Learner teacher	14
English Language Learner teacher	3

Participants had the option of being interviewed at their school site or at a different location of their choice, such as a public library or coffee shop. The participants contacted the researcher through email, and appointments were made with those that agreed to participate in the interview.

Qualitative research consists primarily of interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and visual materials such as artifacts, photographs, video recordings which serve to document life experiences (Saldana, 2011). Based on this, the data collected for this study was done by interviewing participants of the pilot from the 2014-15 school year. Sample selection in qualitative research is usually nonrandom, purposeful and small (Merriam, 2009).

Creswell (1994) outlines options, advantages and limitations of interviews, which include:

Table 2

Options, Advantages, and Limitations

Options within Types	Advantages of the Type	Limitations of the Type
• Face-to-face; one on one, in person interview.	• Useful when informants cannot be observed directly.	• Provides indirect information filtered through the view of interviewees.
• Telephone; researcher interviews by phone.	• Informants can provide historical information.	• Provides information in a designated "place," rather than the natural field setting.
• Group; researcher interviews informants in a group.	• Allows researcher "control" over the line of questioning.	• Researcher's presence may bias responses.

At the interview, participants were given an informed consent letter (Appendix F), in addition to the copy that was sent with the recruitment letter, (Appendix G) to review and sign. Participants were given a copy for their records and the original informed consent letter was stored in a locked file cabinet that only the researcher was able to access.

Interviews were conducted face to face and took between 15-25 minutes to complete. The participants were audio recorded, and recordings were coded with pseudonyms in order to assure confidentiality. Each participant was asked the same set of interview questions:

1. Describe the process at your school if a teacher recognizes that any student may need support from Special Education.
2. Tell me about an English Language Learner you have taught that you sensed needed support from Special Education.
    a. Describe your overall experience as a teacher in working with this student.
    b. How did you recognize that the student had learning needs that were not being met through the regular English Language Learner instruction?
    c. What were unique considerations you had for this student?
    d. What were additional instructional supports that you put in place to address these needs of this student?
3. What was everything you needed to consider in providing these supports?
4. What information did you share with colleagues about this student's unique needs?

5. What happened when you got to a place in your collaboration when you had to make a decision about where to go next? More interventions? Evaluation?
6. What information did the student's family share? How did you gather this information?
7. How did you share information with the student's family about his or her needs?
8. How did you communicate a concern with parents when they were possibly unable to recognize a concern of their own?
9. How were parents involved in the process?
10. How do you think English Language Learner teachers can better understand interventions that would be helpful for language learners?

At the conclusion of the interview questions, each participant was asked if there was anything else that he/she would like to share about the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process pilot that they were involved with during the last school year. I transcribed each of the participants' responses and those transcriptions were, and continue to be, saved on a password protected laptop within Google Docs.

Data Analysis Procedures

"Data analysis is the process of making sense out of data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning" (Merriam, 2009,

p. 185). Creswell (2012), identified the following six steps in order to accurately analyze and interpret collected data:

1. prepare and organize the data for analysis,
2. explore and code the data,
3. coding to build description and themes,
4. represent and report qualitative findings,
5. interpret the findings, and
6. validate the accuracy of the findings.

To prepare and organize the data for this narrative study, I read the transcripts in their entirety several times, making note of themes. The data was coded and classified based on emerging themes. The coded and classified data was reviewed to identify the larger context of its meaning. I then interpreted the data. "It is a process that begins with the development of the codes, the formation of themes from the codes, and then the organization of themes into larger units of abstractions to make sense of the data (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). "Interpretation is about giving meaning to data. It's about making sense of social situations by generating explanations for what's going on within them. It's about making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance, refining understandings, drawing conclusions, and extrapolating lessons" (Hatch, 2002, p. 180).

Triangulation was utilized to assure themes. Triangulation "encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). Multiple data sources were compared with regard to the interview data that was collected from people with different perspectives. English Language Learner teachers, speech-language pathologists, and school psychologists that participated in the interviews each brought their unique perspectives as part of their reflection of the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process. The researcher

examines each information source and identifies evidence that would support a theme (Creswell, 2012). As a former Special Education teacher and current English Language Learner administrator, I had personal experiences with students in which the distinction between language acquisition and learning disability was unclear. Hatch (2002) explains that researchers always engage their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data (Hatch, 2002). This study was designed to describe the perceptions of those involved in the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process in order to make recommendations for how collaboration could be utilized more effectively when making decisions about English Language Learners in the pre-referral process for Special Education. "Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that was has been learned can be communicated to others" (Hatch, 2002, p. 148).

Summary

This chapter included seven sections outlining the methodology used in this qualitative study. After explaining the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process as it related to the introduction of the methodology, I outlined the purpose and research questions, research design, study population, pilot procedures, data collection and data analysis.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study is to describe educators' perceptions of a collaborative problem solving process for identifying and addressing the academic needs of English Language Learners who may require a future referral for Special Education services. The main research question for this study was:

> What do educators perceive as being the most important components for making decisions about English Language Learners who may need a referral for Special Education?

Of the 16 educators who were part of the pilot at both schools, 7 agreed to participate in this study. Each participant was asked the same questions. Those questions were:

1. Describe the process at your school if a teacher recognizes that any student may need support from Special Education.
2. Tell me about an English Language Learner you have taught who you sensed needed support from Special Education.
    a. Describe your overall experience as a teacher in working with this student.
    b. How did you recognize the student had learning needs that were not being met through the regular English Language Learner instruction?
    c. What were unique considerations you had for this student?
    d. What were additional instructional supports that you put in place to address these needs of the student?

3. What was everything you needed to consider in providing these supports?
4. What information did you share with colleagues about the student's unique needs?
5. What happened when you got to a place in your collaboration when you had to make a decision about where to go next? More interventions? Evaluation?
6. What information did the student's family share? How did you gather this information?
7. How did you share information with the student's family about his or her needs?
8. How did you communicate a concern with parents when they were possibly unable to recognize a concern of their own?
9. How were parents involved in the process?
10. How do you think English Language Learner teachers can better understand interventions that would be helpful for language learners?

Four main themes emerged from the interviews, which connected to the literature review. The four themes were: collaboration; teacher training; appropriate instruction; and valid assessments and diagnosis.

Theme 1: Collaboration

All participants spoke about the importance of collaboration when making decisions about English Language Learners who may need a referral for Special Education services. When we talked about the first two questions, it was clear that collaboration was a significant factor in what the participants felt needed to happen in

order for the greatest student gains to occur. Participant 1 summarized the importance of collaboration by stating:

> I think one of the key factors was getting everyone together and have the ELL [English Language Learner] teacher be a part of that process because the ELL teacher knows what normal development is, normal language acquisition is, for the second language. I think another key piece was having those three groups together, the speech path[ologist]s, the school psych[ologist]s and the ELL teachers because they each bring different knowledge and skills to the table and that wasn't there before, so I think it led to misunderstandings, it leads people to feeling like there was a wall or barriers to getting kids tested. Everyone just had a different idea how the process should go and what should happen so I think this new process really helped with that.

She went on to describe how the process was organized so that all participants were able to be actively engaged in the conversations. Because we were aware of the struggles that schools were experiencing, related to having conversations about English Language Learners who may need supports through Special Education, specific forms were developed to facilitate those conversations. We knew the participants were already unable to effectively collaborate on this topic based on the conversations that the district administrative team had previously had with their respective groups, so the development and use of the forms was critical to beginning these collaborative conversations.

> The other piece would be the actual tools, the meeting agenda and having all of those different areas of concern broken down [English Language Learner Collaborative Problem-Solving Process Forms--Meeting 1 and Meeting 2, Appendix C]. I think it helped teams go through and look at what kinds of things were getting in the way for a student and that wasn't a piece that was there before. (Participant 1)

The tools, which included the English Language Learner Collaborative Problem-Solving Process Meeting forms (Appendix C), were used at each meeting and helped to

focus the conversations. During the pilots, the district level team took the lead on helping guide the teams through the forms and through the process.

> The process would be just the same as what I just described. What's nice is the new structure that we put into place for the collaborative problem solving process which is exactly the same thing which is going through the SAT [Student Assistance Team] process conversation and using the tools that we put together to structure that. (Participant 1)

All of the participants were aware of the need for multiple perspectives to be involved in the discussions since everyone brought a different skill set to the conversation. Having representatives from the English Language Learner program and Special Education were important for a number of reasons. Participant 1 shared:

> I think they [the English Language Learner teachers] know an awful lot already. That is their thing, they're the experts in that area. I just think that by having conversations with the school psych[ologist] and the speech pathologist there might be some more things. They all three learn from one another, but I think they might be able to come up with some more ideas that maybe they haven't thought of. But in general, they're the experts.

Participant 2 agreed, sharing, "The difference is the team members. So the team members included the ELL [English Language Learner] teachers, the SLP [speech/language pathologist] and the psych[ologist]."

Participant 3 echoed these sentiments when sharing their insight.

> Well I appreciate collaboration because everybody comes to the table with a little bit of expertise. For example the teachers have the expertise of what they see everyday. The school psychologist has expertise of typical learning kinds of patterns that they see in the whole school and they're familiar with what kinds of things are typical/not typical, those kinds of things. Speech pathologist has their perspective. School counselor may see this the student in a different realm. (Participant 3)

Although it was clearly established that collaboration was necessary to begin having productive conversations and eventually make sound decisions about English

Language Learners, there were concerns about the ability to be able to do this regularly based on aligning the schedules of all of the needed stakeholders. Participant 4 shared this concern:

> The biggest struggle has been getting everyone together, everyone's schedules are nuts and so trying to get the school psychologist and the speech pathologist and I'm also inviting the teacher, the gen ed teacher as well, it's tricky. That's the hardest part, getting everyone to the table to just do it together and being able to meet because our school psychologist is incredibly busy, and our speech pathologist, she's got kids that she has to serve, and so carving that time out for multiple, multiple students in a big school is tricky.

In addition to the school staff that needed to be included, the participants also shared the importance of collaborating with parents in the initial conversations. Participant 5 indicated that parents can sometimes share similar concerns, which can validate the concerns of the school. In speaking about the father of the student they were concerned about, she stated:

> He had many of the similar concerns that we had, even though he's not English speaking. "Yeah, I know she's struggling, she says it's hard, her brother's learning faster than she is, she seems stuck." I felt like we were on the right path, when even parents were saying "Yeah, we have those concerns" even though they don't know the language and aren't able to support her academically at home. To see that she doesn't get this and they still knew that that was a concern. (Participant 5)

With regard to parent participation, Participant 6 added:

> You're the most important educator in your child's life. You're the one who has all the information. We need your help to make sure that we're doing our best for your kid because I know you how much you want your child to succeed. We want it just as bad as you do so that helps a lot.

In order to gather the most useful information, one of the forms that is important to include in these initial conversations is the Student Assistance Team K-12 parent interview form (Appendix H). By including historical information, school teams are able

to have a clearer picture of the needs of a student, as well as data that might shed some light on the reasons behind certain behaviors. In the example of Alan used in the introduction, without the use of the Student Assistance Team K-12 parent interview form, we might not have learned about the accident where Alan fell off of his bike and hit his head. This information proved to be paramount in our team's ability to determine that he had likely suffered a traumatic brain injury as a result of this fall, which likely caused an impact on his ability to learn and retain information.

Educators know that parents are their children's first teachers, so having their input is essential. In addition to sharing historical data about their children, parents are also able to provide teachers with meaningful information, including relevant cultural perspectives with regard to Special Education. We need to understand there are cultural differences when we talk about Special Education. Families from other cultures may view Special Education differently than those in the majority culture. From my experience talking to bilingual liaisons and parents about Special Education, in many countries, students that do not learn at the same rate as their peers will go to a different school altogether or in some cases, they are not allowed to attend school at all. Students that would qualify for Special Education services in the United States do not receive the same kind of supports in their home countries as they would in the United States. Families are often times reluctant to have their students participate in Special Education based on the stigma that they are familiar with in their home countries. Participant 6 talked about the need to be sensitive to these cultural differences.

> I think a lot of the cultures that we work with have a lot of stigmas towards students that need Special Education so that sometimes becomes a little bit of a barrier because parents don't want you to think of their kids poorly. (Participant 6)

In addition to the Student Assistance Team K-12 parent interview form, the team also utilized the English Language Learner progress documentation form (Appendix D) and the student file review form (Appendix E) to organize all of the information pertaining to the student. Participant 2 explained the purpose behind these additional forms: "So we were just trying to get a really comprehensive picture of what school had been like, what life, what learning had been like up to that point."

The basis behind having access to all of this information was further explained by Participants 2, 4 and 5:

> We had to consider her language acquisition and her school experience up to that point and her experience speaking English, understanding English. Was it spoken at home as well or was it just spoken at school? (Participant 2)

> We sat down with the student's father for an interview and we found out a lot. We found out some history of some trauma and some things that we just weren't aware of before that we found that as a child's developing and growing that could definitely have an impact on her. (Participant 5)

> So with that same student I was referring to earlier, we did talk with parents through the ELL [English Language Learner] parent interview about just how much energy that student had and lack of focus. The parent then was invited to this parent interview and while they were there, the speech language person, as well as the school psychologist gave the parents some forms to fill out, some surveys about how that student is behaving at home, do they see some of those same things that we see at school and the mom agreed with us and was maybe even a little more harsh with what she saw at home and said, "Yes, yes, yes! This is a huge concern for me even at home. He has a hard time focusing." So using that [sic] surveys was helpful because it really solidified what we were thinking at school. Getting those parents involved helped because they were saying the same things too. "Yes, he needs more support. He needs more help." (Participant 4)

The English Language Learner Collaborative Problem Solving Process highlighted the need to have multiple perspectives during all levels of the process. It was not something that had happened in the past, so we were also creating a mind-shift from what had traditionally been done.

> And so last year was also the first time with a student that we sat down with the school psychologist, the [English Language Learner] teacher that had been involved with the student for a number of years, the speech pathologist and the parent and finally we were all able to get on the same page. We have different questions for different reasons and when we were both able to have that opportunity we learned a lot more than I think we would have if one person had done it and tried to share information. (Participant 5)

In the past, Participant 3 described how conversations like this were handled.

> I feel that we avoid looking at ELL [English Language Learners] because it's messy but I think we have to work together and not be afraid to help identify. I'm not saying that that Special Education is a magic bullet. That's what some Special Ed. people say "It's not a magic bullet." No, it's not, but what it is is it gives an individual learning plan that opens up content and that gives them accommodations. We need to work together. We still have language but they might have something else, so we need to find what's best for them and there are lots of students. I think it's overwhelming and teachers throw up their hands and say "I don't know what to do," and so students sit in ELL for years, years at the same level. That's not right. (Participant 3)

Based on the data that was collected as part of the English Language Learner Collaborative Problem Solving Process, the fact that everyone was involved in the meetings at all stages of the process, and the understanding that all team members were able to contribute to the discussions, the decision to move forward with a Special Education evaluation was one that was easier for everyone to be in agreement with when that came up in the conversation. The awareness of the need for the evaluation was grounded in solid data that would support that decision.

> The first meeting, we just kind of narrow down and focused on the concerns for the student and looked at gathering some data, then we put some things in place and then after we did that for about 2 different rounds, we tried one intervention for a while and then we tried a second one, and once we just didn't see progress, or maybe just a tiny bit, and then a plateau, then we started to think, "ok, we've been really intentionally working with this student for a number of weeks, we probably need to look at the next step." (Participant 5)

> We can't just hand over a list of 15 kids to special ed[ucation] and go, "Here, you deal with it" because we don't know what to do. So that's why the problem solving, collaboration thing is good and the team seems to be like taking a deep breath, and exhale, because we're feeling more listened to. (Participant 7)

The need for collaboration was summed up by Participant 1.

> We brought two worlds together - that didn't know what the other did, so that has been really, really important. . . . It shouldn't be that difficult but I think people are afraid of it because they feel like, "Well I don't know [English Language Learners] and I don't know what to do about that". I think it's a good process and it will continue to evolve and we'll continue to get feedback and refine it as we go along, but I think it's a good starting place.

The general feeling from participants regarding the collaborative aspect of this process was the idea all participants had an equal place at the table. There was no perceived hierarchy in the determination of whether or not to move forward with a Special Education referral. English Language Learner teachers felt like they were being listened to, in some cases for the first time, while the school psychologists and speech language pathologists felt like their need to have enough data before moving forward with an evaluation was recognized. Overall, the staff who participated in the pilot expressed appreciation for the development of the collaborative problem solving process. It brought together all of the necessary stakeholders and provided a structure that could be used to facilitate collaboration.

Theme 2: Teacher Training

The second theme to emerge from the interviews centered on teacher training. Making certain teachers have at least a basic understanding of the tenets of language acquisition is necessary in order to ensure appropriate interventions are being used and sound decisions about moving forward are based on specific needs. "We need to make sure that it isn't language that's getting in the way so we're trying to rule out some pieces" (Participant 6).

The English Language Learner teachers particularly felt as though their training in language acquisition was somehow being discounted and that their understanding of their students' needs and progress towards language proficiency was not regarded as being at the expert level. To that end, Participant 7 added:

> Because we're experts and we work with them every day and we know what learning looks like, we know what language development looks like, and that's just incendiary, it sets us off, and it makes us feel like we're not on the same page and you can't possibly know. You can't even trust that we know what we're doing, especially when it's 5 teachers who have the kid for 3 years.

All participants talked about the importance of recognizing that English Language Learners need to have more time to acquire language. Where there were differences were in the amount of time that people felt it was taking students to demonstrate progress. Participant 4 explained, "We've talked about how [English Language Learner] students need more time to go through that language acquisition process and so sometimes that school psychologist and I will feel a different sense of urgency." The need for taking enough time to learn English stems from the concern about over-identification as described again by Participant 4.

> I think part of it is because we want to be careful not to over diagnose [English Language Learner] students and say that they need to be in special education. We need to give them the time to learn language but I think where it's different is that the teachers that are teaching and seeing it, a lot of daily behaviors and struggles that the school psychologist doesn't necessarily see even when you're bringing proof in or things like that. (Participant 4)

Participant 6 had a slightly different perspective.

> I think the [English Language Learner] teachers are so good at what they do and know so much about language acquisition and then just pulling in people from, you know like your speech pathologist just knows from a different foundational base of knowledge, we're still very closely related but being on the special education side just a little bit different and just a little tweak in how you do it or how often can make a difference but I just think the teaming, because another teacher could say "oh I did this and it worked great" I think finding that opportunity and making it a priority to get together and talk about it. (Participant 6)

Another issue that was mentioned related to concerns about English Language Learners "being stuck." This could mean a student was not making adequate progress in their language acquisition and that they were not moving up to the next level in a timely manner. Participant 7 talked about the frustration she felt, as an English Language Learner teacher, when working with students in this situation.

> I'm thinking about a different student who was just kind of stuck in Level 2. Very high verbal. Great student, tried her best but I felt so inadequate when her father would come to every parent teacher conference and ask in really good English, "What can she do? What can she be doing? Can you give her more work?" And I would say, "Just read. The more reading you do. . . ." He said, "She reads every night. She gets her English books from the library and she reads every night." And so I'm like, "Well, that's all I've got! Just keep reading." Because I had no idea and that makes me feel really bad when I don't know what to tell them. (Participant 7)

As the teacher, she referenced that when she has students in this situation, she feels like she is at a loss and does not know how to change what she has been taught to do to support language learners. "So we're being asked for documentation, documentation,

data, data, data, but if we don't have the explicit training of how to do it logistically, that's frustrating. I just always feel like I'm failing them because I don't know how" (Participant 7).

Her concern stems from the belief that if she does what she's been taught to do, her students will make progress and eventually will be able to demonstrate proficiency in English and then they will no longer need support through the English Language Learner program. Not knowing what to do when this is not the case has been a concern for her.

When asked the question, "How do you think English Language Learner teachers can better understand interventions that would be helpful for language learners?" her response was:

> The SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol] model. If I had any time, I would love to do a book study with the school on how they can be making their lessons more comprehensible for [English Language Learner] students in their classrooms because I think oftentimes, it's like, oh my gosh now I have to do one more separate thing, I have to differentiate these things for that kid when really they could be doing things for all of their kids and some kids won't need it and they won't use it, and the other kids that do need it, will use it. (Participant 7)

She went on to explain that learning about language acquisition needs should not be confined to only those teachers who are working towards an English Language Learner endorsement.

> I feel that one thing is an attitude shift, like not passing the buck because they think they're supposed to be learning their English in their [English Language Learner] classes and then they're supposed to come out and be fully fluent. And that's not going to happen. I know that this is a pipe dream, but if every teacher, now I know it's hard enough to get teachers as it is, but if it weren't so hard, I would love it if every teacher had to learn a foreign language to be a teacher. To be an [English Language Learner] teacher specifically, but just to be a teacher. I just feel like it would be so beneficial if they realized what it's like. (Participant 7)

In summary, of the theme teacher training, Participant 2 provided this perspective:

> I think the important key to this is teaching people: take your time, partner and collaborate because all of that time is not wasted. It's all going to be part of the evaluation process. And that's a big mind shift from what we've been doing. So I think that's the key to this process being good.

Theme 3: Appropriate Instruction

A third theme that emerged from the interviews centered on appropriate instruction. Participants expressed the need to make sure that in order for students to be able to make adequate gains, the teachers working with them needed to have solid foundations in their ability to provide the right kind of instruction to meet their needs. Teachers need to have a varied repertoire of strategies they can pull from in order to match the unique learning needs of their students. Because students in one classroom will have various experiences in their previous schooling, it is important for teachers to be able to utilize those strategies and interventions that best meet their students' unique needs.

In terms of delivering instruction that is most effective for English Language Learners, Participant 7 shared some examples of strategies she utilizes in her classroom that address language acquisition needs, as well as the result of using those approaches.

> Those are some things, visuals, sentence frames, language goals, SIOP [Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol] and I would love to do a book study possibly next year with some teachers on how to do that, especially because I'm not perfectly consistent with it, particularly with Level 4, that's a hard one, but Level 1 and they don't have Level 1s in their classes. I just came up with one for Science, if the content goal is "I can make a hypothesis.," then their language goal can be "I hypothesize that blank will blank when blank." That this will happen when this happens. I know all students would go, "Oh! That's how you write about it." I think with my Level 4s are a perfect example. They were using language on a persuasive piece, like "One might argue that blank, however, according to blank, blah, blah, blah." And then they started saying it in class. I cried the day that they won that award at UNL. They said, "Remember how we used to make you cry?" I said, "Yes, I do. You broke me. You killed me." "And

> now we make you cry because we're good, because we did a good job." It's the highlight of my teaching so far. (Participant 7)

Similarly, Participant 4 indicated other effective components she has used to make sure English Language Learners are able to demonstrate their understanding.

> When giving directions, we would give directions and then give processing time and then ask that student again what those directions were. We might ask a question and if they were struggling with it, we might give words or a sentence frame. We might give binary choices, a yes or a no, or simplify the choices, so that they might understand what to do. (Participant 4)

For this particular student, she explained how she continued to work with his classroom teacher to understand how this student could be supported in the general education classroom setting.

> So when that student would go back to the classroom, I would talk about this things that I was trying in the [English Language Learner] classroom that helped that student. "Could make sure to repeat those directions again to that student after you've given them to the whole group?" If it's possible, this student really struggled with writing legibly, there were some fine motor skills there, so I would write out his answers sometimes. If there was an opportunity for a para to be in the room then I would ask the general ed teacher, "this is what I did in the classroom could a para help with that when he's in the classroom with you?" Buddy systems, things like that we put in place in the general ed[ucation] classroom to make sure he's on track, things like that. (Participant 4)

Participants 3 and 6 specifically referred to the fact that the English Language Learner program is not an intervention, as some people believe it is. The English Language Learner program itself is the primary instruction for those students that are learning English as a new language. It is not meant to be used in place of other academic areas, but rather the primary way for students, especially in their beginning stages of language acquisition, to learn both language and content objectives. It is also important to remember that a student's time in the English Language Learner program is meant to be

short term so that they can learn enough language and skills to access the general education content area classes as quickly as possible.

> You know this ELL [English Language Learner] is not an intervention. ELL is also not a lifetime program. ELL is a specific service for language to get students access to content and the longer students sit in an ELL class with no progress or no growth, the longer they're held out of those opportunities to really get the services that they need. It's not always language. Language is a piece of it but there might be something else prohibiting that language production, that language growth. (Participant 3)

> [English Language Learner] isn't an intervention, but this is their first way of addressing those needs to see if, just to gather more information about language versus learning. (Participant 6)

English Language Learners may sometimes benefit from interventions to move them forward in their language acquisition. Participant 6 was not opposed to English Language Learners participating in interventions, but acknowledged the importance of identifying what exactly makes something an intervention.

> Well I think we need to start by defining what an intervention is because sometimes for whatever reason I think we have gotten the idea that an intervention is something that happens separate, something that happens during this 20 minutes that they're pulled out of the classroom, that is has to be, not that it shouldn't provide us with useful data, but that is has to have graphing or some kind of way that we're recording the data and showing student progress, so I think sometimes we need to broaden our definition of what an intervention is and to document other stuff. (Participant 6)

She added:

> I think we really need clarification about what does intervention mean, what can that consist of and how can we record data and make sure that it's useful, because what's the point if we're not going to take steps to try stuff and do stuff if the data isn't going to tell us what we want? (Participant 6)

When staff is able to identify that an English Language Learner may need more support, in addition to the instruction that he/she is receiving in the English Language

Learner classroom or with the English Language Learner teacher, one idea has been to include time in Response to Intervention. The opportunity for English Language Learners to participate in Response to Intervention has been difficult in some situations. Participant 4 explains that:

> What the struggle is is when I try to get kids into RtI [Response to Intervention], and I don't have an RtI time within ELL, a lot of times the struggle is the gen ed teachers will say, "Well, he's already in ELL, so he's already getting a support and there's other kids that aren't getting anything and they need to be in RtI too, so we're going to shove the ELL kids off to the side because they're already getting support." So it's hard because I feel like in our building, RtI is much more respected in terms of getting a student qualified for special education than me going through the SAT and the ELL collaboration process. So I have to kind of fight my way through to get them into RtI (Participant 4).

Concerns about the amount of time students participating in the English Language Learner program were taking to demonstrate growth in their language acquisition was expressed by those who have worked closely with students. Participant 3 acknowledged that even when students make gains in social language, there may still be gaps in their academic language. "He's made some gains in social language but not to the degree that you would you would expect when you've had 3 years of instruction" (Participant 3). Likewise, Participant 7 expressed similar concerns.

> He has difficulty paying attention because "how could you pay attention when everything you're looking at is meaningless, every word that you see is garbled, just gobble-de-gook?" and I try to get his attention by saying, "ok, I'm going to ask you this question." . . . I try to give him opportunities so that he feels successful or not make him read in front of the class. I know that's so hard for him, so I would love some feedback on how we can identify the problems and then what we can do differently. (Participant 7)

Utilizing a multitude of strategies to address concerns without getting any results often times leaves the English Language Learner teachers feeling like they do not know

what to do next, so they approach colleagues in special education for advice. Staff, especially those trained in language acquisition, begin to feel frustration when time has elapsed and concerns have been shared, yet nothing is happening in terms of suggesting additional interventions or making a move towards an evaluation. This feeling of frustration is connected to the idea of "adequate progress" for language acquisition.

While there is no specified time for a student to be considered or not considered for Special Education, the concern that English Language Learner teachers repeatedly express is people outside of the English Language Learner program are harder to convince that there is something else going on besides language acquisition. For some English Language Learners who are not making adequate progress in language acquisition, they run the risk of being "lifelong" English Language Learners. A student that is considered a "lifelong" English Language Learner is one who does not make adequate progress in language acquisition and cannot meet criteria to demonstrate proficiency, but does not qualify for Special Education services.

> We discuss what the other ones are doing that might make a difference but unfortunately it's always at the point where we've had them for about 3 years and we're saying now here's a problem and we're seeing a problem in the first year, but we know that we can't, well we assume that we can't even begin the process because people will say that it's just language. (Participant 7)

> He's still lost and after 3 years, his decoding is still so poor, he guesses on almost every word. He maybe takes the first letter and makes the sound of the first letter and then he's lost. He can do some sight words. That's what it's been like teaching him. It's been difficult trying to get him assessed and trying to get him the help that he needs. (Participant 7)

> I can't say from a special ed perspective what is and isn't appropriate but I can tell you that if I have a teacher doing X,Y, and Z to meet language acquisition needs and she still is not showing progress or the same sort of issues are still cropping

> up then I can tell you that it's not for sure it's not language so we need to check on other stuff to try. (Participant 6)

Theme 4: Valid Assessments and Diagnosis

The fourth theme that emerged from the interviews described the need to have valid assessments that could lead to a reliable diagnosis. Participants indicated even after going through the collaborative problem solving process, making a decision to move forward with an evaluation was still difficult. Participant 5 explained:

> Our [English Language Learner] team is great at collecting data. I kind of get involved a little later in the process, but when they have taught the same skill in multiple different ways across multiple classrooms and the students still aren't catching on to that, that's we start to maybe feel like there's something and we need to look at it from a different direction.

There was still some confusion after the data had been collected for the students in both schools in terms of how to move ahead. Participant 7 explained her initial thoughts on this process, before we introduced the collaborative problem solving process, were pretty clear. She assumed that if she and her team collected all of the necessary information, then the next, logical step was an evaluation.

> I guess I was under the impression that we have to do the first step, the Tier 1, where we're all filling out the form and finding out if we're doing everything we can within our power to meet the student needs. I figured since we'd done that, the ball is rolling and then we ask for an evaluation. I'm actually kind of ignorant on that because it's changed so much and we've had a different school psychologist who does it differently, it's been confusing. I do feel like last year though, we were meeting with special education people that was very helpful in a way, the team felt better because I made the mistake during my first year teaching, in a flex session and just saying candidly, "Well you know how hard it is to get the [English Language Learner] kids assessed." Because everyone assumes that it's language, and I was in a classroom of people who were special ed and they were seeing the other side. "Do you know how hard it is for us to justify doing that?" (Participant 7)

Working through the collaborative problem solving process and being able to see both sides of the issue opened her eyes to the difficulty in making a decision, even when a larger team is involved.

A misconception referenced by several participants, particularly those who were English Language Learner teachers, was the idea that if a student could be evaluated for Special Education, somehow, all of the problems would be able to be addressed in a different, more effective way. Examples included:

> It's been difficult trying to get him assessed and trying to get him the help that he needs (Participant 7).

> So what you need to do is you need to look at language learners, anyone that was a language learner, and now is SPED [Special Education] and you have to compare what's the proportionality. I think we have a disproportionate amount of students that are ELL [English Language Learner] also identified SPED, under represented, many times people worry about overrepresentation of ELLs in SPED and that's that is a concern. We do not want that to happen but we also don't want a student who has a true learning disability to not receive the support and services that are appropriate for them that they need. So it's a very, I think, a delicate issue because we don't want to over identify but we also are denying some of these students services that could help them. (Participant 3)

As a way to address this misconception, a consistent message that our district level team tried to convey with both schools in this pilot was the idea that our goal throughout this process was not to end with an evaluation and possible verification for Special Education, but rather to develop a systematic way to identify and address specific needs to help English Language Learners make academic gains.

> I like the process. I think it's great for accountability. I think it's great to pinpoint strengths and concerns. It gives a lot of help in 'what is it really?' 'what's the biggest thing that they have trouble with?' I like it more than just the traditional [Student Assistance Team] forms that we're given. I think it gets at what you're trying to figure out. What's the biggest problem getting in the way? I like that you're asked to come back every few weeks and document what's

> happened, how will it be monitored and that you're meeting as a group with different people around the table. (Participant 4)

> Well I think that the key to that is really being able to pinpoint the problem. If you can't pinpoint the problem then you're really stuck in finding good interventions. The first thing I would do to help [English Language Learner] teachers is to really help them nail down what the problem really is. That really basic core, missing skill. (Participant 2)

We also knew there was a very real chance the teams participating in this pilot would gather enough information to be able to make a solid case for referring their selected students for an evaluation.

> The team's going to look at do they think they've tried all that they can or that's reasonable to try within those parameters of frequency and intensity. At the point that they feel there's nothing more they can try or that would be..that would help the child progress outside of looking into special education, that's when they're going to start moving into the special education referral. (Participant 2)

To that end, both teams felt certain they had gathered all of the information needed and exhausted all of the resources that were available to them to support their students before making recommendations to move ahead with the evaluation. Participant 2 explained:

> I think that while it's not always abundantly clear to anybody if it's a disability or is an [English Language Learner] issue, I think there's always going to be those cases that are muddy but I think if we really just do a good job of going through that problem solving process, at the end of the day we can start answering the question of "do they need more support?" and then at that point it's easier to say that it's a disability than not versus skipping that problem solving process or rushing through that process and then going with testing.

Using the available information, the teams were able to better justify their decision to move ahead with an evaluation. Most staff expressed concerns with making decisions too quickly without having enough information, so previous assessments and other data were powerful considerations.

> We have so much academic data - we have testing, we have ELDA [English Language Development Assessment], we have classroom performance, [English Language Learner] stuff, so looking at all of that and saying ok this student is probably going to need a little bit more instead of waiting for the student to be so far behind that we're trying to help him get out of a hole. (Participant 5)

Even with everyone in agreement to complete the evaluation, there were still feelings, such as those described by Participant 5: "But I feel like there's always still that "but they're [English Language Learners]" but they could really use help and can we clearly decide" (Participant 5).

There remained many concerns about the actual assessments used in the evaluation. Knowing the assessments that are used to make decisions about placement in Special Education available to school districts have primarily been normed with native English speakers sometimes makes it difficult to understand the results and feel confident the results are valid. Participant 7 said: "I wish there were real assessments in every language that we served, that would be awesome."

Having assessments available in any other language, other than Spanish, is not possible, which makes working through the collaborative problem solving process all the more important. Even though there are assessments available in Spanish, some school districts do not have staff that is qualified to administer bilingual assessments. The idea of having standardized assessments in multiple languages is something that is out of a school district's hands as a result of availability through standardized assessment companies, which means that school districts are left to use what is available to them.

Knowing the population of English Language Learner students spans hundreds of different languages has made the use of the English Language Learner Collaborative

Problem Solving Process that much more necessary as school districts move forward with formal evaluations. According to the state's Regulations and Standards for Special Education, it is specified that,

> School districts and approved cooperatives must ensure materials and procedures used to assess a child with limited English proficiency are selected and administered to ensure that they measure the extent to which the child has a disability and needs special education, rather than measuring the child's English language skills.

The English Language Learner Collaborative Problem Solving Process was specifically designed to provide a structure to the conversations that schools used address the issue of procedures being used that took the needs of students with limited English proficiency into account. After working through the collaborative problem solving process with both schools, each team eventually decided they had enough information and justification to recommend moving ahead with an evaluation. Both students did qualify for Special Education services and were verified with a Specific Learning Disability.

Chapter 5

Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

Summary

This study was important to conduct as it provided insight and a glimpse into the lived experiences of seven educators that participated in a pilot of the English Language Learner problem solving process in a midwestern public school district. This study had significant implications because discerning the differences between language acquisition and learning disabilities is a difficult decision for educators to make. I was especially interested in learning about the different factors that the educators who participated in this study believed could help schools better understand these differences, as well as provide some insight into possible solutions. Based on the research findings, there are specific areas which school districts can focus their attention in order to make the process more systematic.

As shown in the literature review, four specific areas were identified to address the ways in which educators could better delineate the differences between language acquisition and learning disabilities. The literature does not provide a systematic process to definitively separate language acquisition and learning disabilities. It does, however, provide discussion on which methods are the most effective.

> Interpretation is about giving meaning to data. It is about making sense of social situations by generating explanations for what is going on within them. It is about making inferences, developing insights, attaching significance, refining understandings, drawing conclusions, and extrapolating lessons. (Hatch, 2002, p. 180)

I can now discuss the findings of the research and make recommendations for the reader to consider.

Discussion

The main research question for this study was: What do educators perceive as being the most important components for making decisions about English Language Learners who may need a referral for Special Education? Through the individual interviews, participants identified components they felt were most essential to being able to address the problem of practice. The following components connected closely to the research; educators identified these components as related to the research question:

1. Collaboration between English Language Learner teachers and other school staff is a key factor in a school's ability to develop a strategic process for identifying the specific needs of English Language Learner students as they relate to the possible need for Special Education services.
2. School staff, including general education teachers, special education staff, and administration, needs to have adequate training in the area of language acquisition in order for sound decisions to be made about English Language Learners and any Special Education needs.
3. English Language Learner students must have appropriate instruction targeted to meet their language acquisition needs before other interventions should be considered.

4. Collecting enough data that accurately details English Language Learner's progress in language acquisition is essential in the pre-referral process for Special Education.

The responses of the participants in this study were consistent with the research findings. "In qualitative reports, it is usual to include data excerpts that take readers inside the contexts and allow them to hear the voice of participants" (Hatch, 2002, p. 159). All of the participants recognized the need for a systematic approach to solving the problems that schools are faced with when English Language Learners are not making adequate progress in either their language acquisition needs or are suffering academically in their content area instruction.

During the interviews, participants spoke at great length about the need for collaboration in order to make decisions about English Language Learners and Special Education. They also discussed the areas of teacher training, effective instruction, and, to a lesser degree, the importance of valid assessments and diagnosis.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. This study was limited to seven educators in a midwestern public school district. In order to further the findings, it would be valuable to increase the number of participants included in the study to determine if their responses are consistent with those of the participants.
2. In addition to increasing the number of participants, it may be beneficial to include parents as part of the interview process to gather their feedback on the

most important components to consider when making decisions about English Language Learners in the pre-referral process.

3. Isolating the identified components, which include collaboration, teacher training, appropriate instruction and valid assessments and diagnosis, in this study for further investigation would be important to determine their level of priority. Determining which components rated highest in helping schools make decisions about English Language Learners might help to provide a focus on where to begin this important work.

Recommendations for Further Practice

This study has addressed the essential components, which are connected to a growing population of students in our public school system, English Language Learners, as they relate to the possibility of a pre-referral for Special Education services. "Qualitative researchers are quick to acknowledge that as they design studies, consider theoretical bases, collect data, do analyses, and write up findings, they are constantly making interpretive judgements" (Hatch, 2002, p. 179). To address future challenges, recommendations include:

1. School districts should develop a systematic process for identifying and addressing concerns of English Language Learners who are not making adequate progress in language acquisition and/or content area growth. This should include opportunities to provide interventions for multiple students at a time that may be struggling with similar academic concerns.

2. School districts need to advocate for colleges and universities to provide courses for all students in their education programs to have coursework dedicated to learning about the needs of English Language Learners.
3. School districts should utilize experts in bilingual education to better understand the specific needs to emergent language learners. Understanding and addressing the needs of English language learners from a variety of cultural backgrounds can provide valuable information as districts move forward in their evaluation procedures as they relate to Special Education needs.
4. School districts should provide on-going professional development for all staff, including bilingual liaisons, around the needs of English Language Learners in order for educators to have as much information as possible to make decisions about their learning. This on-going professional development should also include research-based instructional strategies that effectively meet the needs of English Language Learners. By implementing these strategies in their classroom teaching, all teachers will be equipped to provide the most effective supports for those students in their classrooms that are learning English as a new language, as well as those native English speakers that might benefit from these strategies.
5. School districts need to identify their practices for working with students that may be considered "lifelong" English Language Learners. Developing appropriate programming to meet their needs may look different than those

students who are making adequate progress. It is important to recognize that their needs may not be related to Special Education.

6. School districts should review their practices with regard to the identification of students who are English Language Learners in Early Childhood programs for Special Education services.
7. School teams should be trained in the Adaptive School collaborative process. This process not only provides a structure of teams to follow to organize their meetings, but also builds in a way for all team members to feel listened to and valued during their group's discussions.
8. Identify ways in which local school districts can address the needs of English Language Learners, including those that may qualify in Early Childhood programs, in an effort to increase funding sources that could be used to support professional development for staff. In addition, school districts should advocate for policy changes at the state level to include the addition on Early Childhood age students, who qualify for ELL, the state's Poverty and/or LEP plans

Conclusion

This narrative qualitative study attempted to identify the most influential components that school districts need to address when making decisions about English Language Learners who are not making adequate progress in either language acquisition or academic areas may need a referral for Special Education services. The central question for this study was: What do educators perceive as being the most important

components for making decisions about English Language Learners who may need a referral for Special Education? The results would indicate that educators believe that collaboration, teacher training, effective instruction, and valid and reliable assessments are essential when making decisions about English Language Learners who may need a referral for Special Education. These results are consistent with the findings that were addressed in the research.

The English Language Learner Collaborative Problem Solving Process that was developed and used as part of this study attempts to address the various learning needs of English Language Learners. When school districts are intentional about preparing their staff to work with diverse learners, the outcome will lead to greater success for not only English Language Learners, but for all students.

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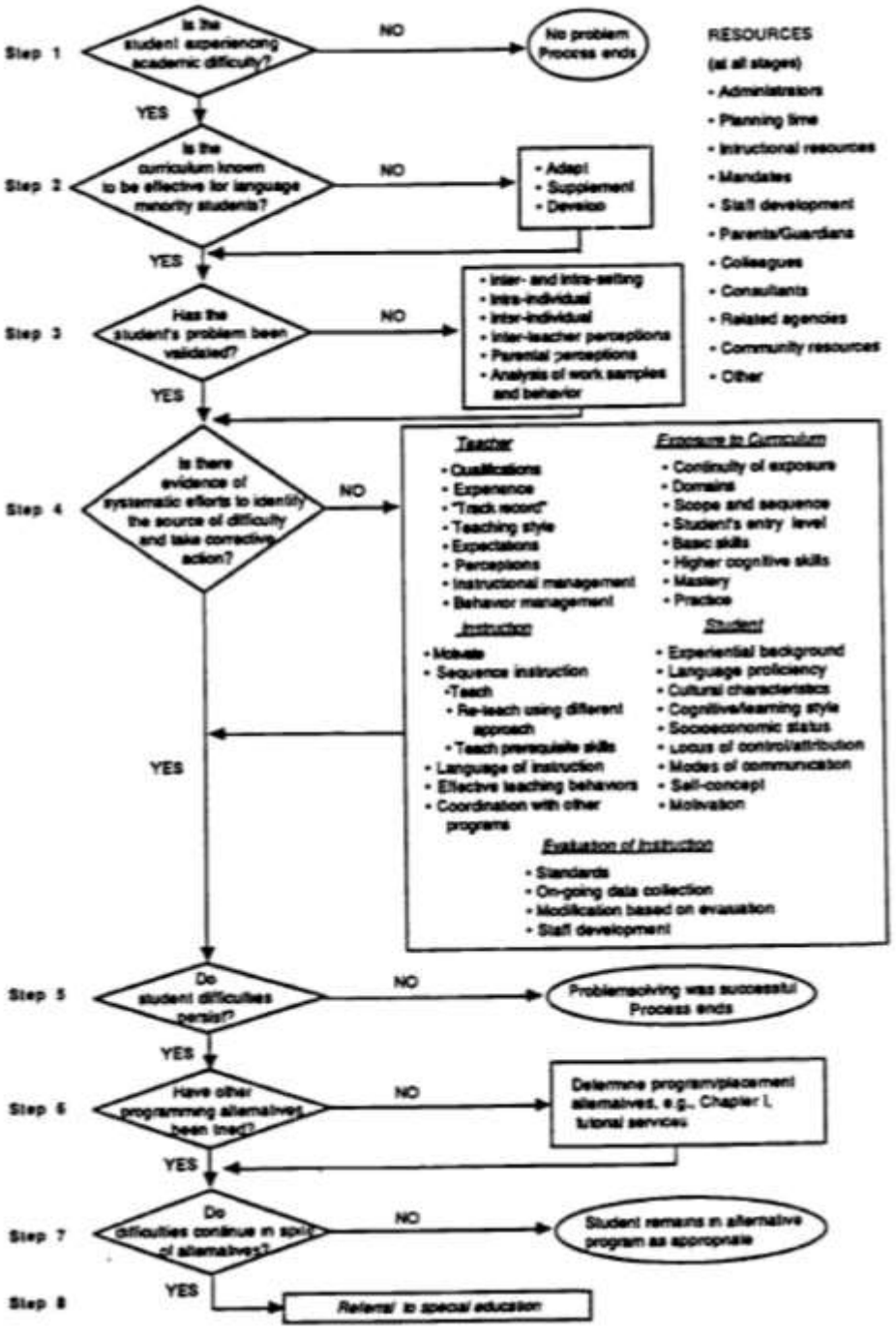
Appendix A

Preventing Inappropriate Placements of Language Minority Students in Special Education: A Prereferral Process

Figure 1

Preventing Inappropriate Placements of Language Minority Students in Special Education: A Prereferral Process



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Appendix B

Description of the English Language Learner/Special Education Collaborative Problem Solving Process

Collaboration with Special Education/ELL

From : Laura Salem Tue, Feb 03, 2015 04:00 PM

Subject : Collaboration with Special Education/ELL

To :

Cc :

Hi ,

I have been working with and to streamline the collaborative problem solving process between ELL and Special Education. We have recently worked through this process with a student at and were wondering if we might be able to work through the same process at the elementary level with a student at . We would ask that you identify a student that is currently in ELL that teachers have concerns about academically. This could be a student that has been stuck at the same ELL level for more than 2 years, is not showing adequate growth in grade level curriculum and/or assessments, etc. If this is something that you would be willing to do with us, please let me know. We have met with the team to work through this process and are still refining it. Working with your staff would help to give us additional considerations, particularly when working with an elementary aged student. Let me know if you need more information.

Thank you,

Laura

"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen." Winston Churchill

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Title:
English Language Learners and Special Education: One District's Journey through the Collaborative Problem Solving Process

Purpose of Research:
The pre-referral process used in schools to potential identify if students qualify for Special Education involves many complex decisions. English Language Learners (ELL) who are involved in the pre-referral process bring additional complexities to this decision making process. The goal of this research is to understand the perception of professionals who are involved in this process. The data collected will be used to inform school personnel of ways to improve their practices of serving ELL students who are involved in the pre-referral process. This project is being completed for purposes of UNL degree-granting requirements and is not being specifically commissioned by the Lincoln Public Schools to answer a question.

Procedures:
You will be asked to participate in one interview that will be approximately 30 minutes in length. This interview will focus on your perceptions of English Language Learners in the pre-referral process. The face-to-face interview will be conducted either at your school or a convenient public place of your choosing, for example, the public library or a coffee shop.

Benefits:
You will experience the potential benefits of a short reflection on the pre-referral process while completing the interview. The results will inform ways in which school districts can improve the pre-referral process and how they support ELL students.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks to you for participating. To assure that there are no risks, participants will not be able to be identified of their participation in the interview. Your responses will only be reported through the use of pseudonyms and generalized data. If you experience distress in any form, the researcher will provide local counseling resources.

Confidentiality:
With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interviews. You are not expected to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. I will be transcribing our interview. Your identify will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law and your identify will not be revealed in the final manuscript. Any information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The transcribed data will be kept on a secured, password protected computer of the primary researcher. Only me, and my doctoral advisor (Dr. Lehmanowsky), will have access to the transcribed data.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Sometimes study participants have questions or concerns about their rights. In that case you should call the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, Lincoln Public Schools or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you agree to participate, please contact me at laura.s.salem@gmail.com and we will schedule a face-to-face interview. At the time of the interview, we will review this consent form and if you choose to participate, you will sign it at that time. You will receive a copy of this consent form at the interview. If you have any questions about the study or procedures for data collection, please contact me at 402-770-4133 or at 402-436-1982 or email me at laura.s.salem@gmail.com.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

I have read the procedure described above for the study of describing the experience of the pre-referral process for English Language Learners. I agree to participate in the study and have received a copy of this description.

___ I agree to be audiotaped for this interview.

___ I do not agree to be audiotaped for this interview.

Signature of Participant:

_____

Date:

_____

Name and Phone Number of Investigator(s)

Laura Salem, Principal Investigator Office: 402-436-1982
Mary Beth Lehmanowsky, Secondary Investigator Office: 402-472-3466

Appendix D

Recruitment Letter

October 4, 2015

Dear Colleague,

The number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in our schools is growing at an alarming rate. Schools have reported that there are often complications in determining if an ELL student needs supports through Special Education. I need your professional insight on this problem. As part of my dissertation research for UNL, I am studying educator's perceptions of ELLs in the pre-referral process. Your responses will be helpful in improving the service to this unique population of students. Attached you will find a letter of informed consent for your review. If you choose to participate, please contact me via email (laura.s.salem@gmail.com) by October 18, 2015, and we can set up a time for an interview. At the interview, we will review the consent form, and if you choose to participate, you will sign it and receive a copy at our meeting. The recorded interview will last approximately 30 minutes. There is no compensation for your participation, but you will have an opportunity to reflect on the pre-referral process for ELLs in your school. There are no known risks involved in your participation. Your responses will be kept confidential and cannot be traced back to you or your school. The data will be reported as a generalized description to inform ways of improving the pre-referral process for ELL students.

Thank you for your consideration,

Laura Salem

Appendix E

English Language Learner Collaborative Problem-Solving Process Forms

(Meeting 1 and Meeting 2)

ELL Collaborative Problem Solving Process

Meeting 1

Purpose: *The purpose of this meeting is to define and prioritize the concern(s), determine a data gathering system and intervention.*

Student Name:_____ Grade:_____ Referring Teacher:_____

Date of Meeting:_____

Attending:

ELL Student Progress Documentation form (completed by ELL teacher)

Student File Review Form (completed by school psych)

1. **Student Strengths**

2. **Identify Student Concerns** *(At this time, clarifying questions will be asked)*

Adapted from Colorado Department of Education

www.cde.state.co.us/HealthandWellness/BrainInjury.htm

Reading:

___ **Letter Recognition**	___ **Sight Word Recognition**	___ **Reading Decoding**
___ **Reading Comprehension**	___ **Reading Fluency (rate)**	___ **Reading Accuracy**
___ **Identifying Main Idea**	___ **Remembering details**	

Math:

___ **Number Recognition**	___ **Number Constancy**	___ **Addition**
___ **Subtraction**	___ **Multiplication**	___ **Division**
___ **Word Problems**	___ **Math Fluency**	___ **Problem-solving**
___ **Money/time/measurement**	___ **Multiple-step math problems**	

Writing:

___ **Spelling**	___ **Capitalization**	___ **Punctuation**

___ Generating Ideas **___ Editing** **___ Vocabulary**
___ Grammar **___ Organization/sequence**
___ Writes incomplete sentences
___ Using transition words
___ Using a variety of simple and compound or complex sentences

Language:
___ Following multiple step directions
___ Following one-step directions
___ Uses shorter sentences
___ Grammatical errors in speech/written work
___ Vocabulary knowledge & usage
___ Expressing thoughts orally
___ Expanding answers/adding details
___ Understanding figurative language
___ Using non-specific vocabulary
___ Finding the "right words" to say
___ Understanding new ideas
___ Maintaining a topic of conversation
___ Understanding facial expressions/gestures/body language
___ Leaving off word endings when speaking or reading

Behavior:
___ Asking for help when needed
___ Attendance/Tardiness
___ Attention during instruction
___ Bullying others
___ Task completion
___ Remaining in seat/assigned area
___ Study skills
___ Following Directions
___ Blurts out
___ Nervousness/worries
___ Overall organization
___ Unprepared for class
___ Bringing needed materials to class
___ Makes frequents requests to leave class
___ Taking responsibility for own behavior
___ Perfectionist
___ Prosocial Behavior
___ Social awareness

Attention:
___ Focusing on teacher/instruction
___ Orienting to speaker/board
___ Resisting subtle classroom distractions
___ Sustaining attention for long periods
___ Loses train of thought
___ Loses place when working or reading

___ Taking notes while listening
___ Attending to more than one task
___ Switching between activities smoothly
___ Stamina for long academic tasks/tests

Memory:
***Short Term Memory*:**
___ Repeating back simple info just presented
___ Copying from board w/o frequently looking up
___ Asking for info to be repeated
___ Completing simple 2-step problems
___ Repeating/explaining simple activities previously learned on same day

***Working Memory*:**
___ Completing thought process in writing assignments
___ Summarizing story/test
___ Multi-tasking with accuracy
___ Completing multistep problems-especially in math/science
___ Copying from board/note-taking while being taught

Long Term Memory:
___ Explaining previously learned material/facts
___ Recalling school events from previous week
___ Remembering routines
___ Remembering vocabulary words
___ Drawing/recognizing previously learned pictures or diagrams

Processing Speed:
___ Responding to verbal directions/questions quickly
___ Keeping pace with class
___ Slow reading (control for comprehension)
___ Completing tests/tasks on time
___ Quickly finishing timed tasks accurately
___ Recalling simple information quickly
___ Writing or drawing speed
___ Speech rate
___ Physical movement
___ Sometimes seems confused after simple information is provided-not due to attention or memory

Executive Functioning:
___ Organization of materials
___ Organization of thoughts in writing/speech
___ Shifting from subject to subject
___ Keeping and utilizing planner or schedule
___ Writing or drawing a basic outline of process (ex. logical paragraph)
___ Difficulty learning new concepts
___ Difficulty understanding simple stories or concepts
___ Explaining plans to meet an assignment, task, deadline, or activity

___ Focusing for appropriate period of time
___ After a short assigned problem, explaining the logic used in problem solving
___ When engaged in a problem solving task, using feedback to help in the process (self-monitoring progress)
___ Quickly adjusting to changes in routine
___ Keeping track of place when working on task or when reading
___ Motivation
___ Impulsivity
___ Common sense/judgment
___ Perspective taking/empathy
___ Following rules
___ Overall attention
___ Emotional/behavioral regulation
___ Creativity/Concept Formation
___ Sense of time passing
___ On topic/reciprocal dialogue
___ Sudden or Inappropriate Emotions

<u>Visual-Spatial/Perceptual:</u>
___ Skills puzzles/blocks
___ Understanding right vs. left and up vs. down
___ Grossly distorted drawings that are directly copied
___ Spatial breaks in drawing
___ Ignores one side of paper while writing or drawing/coloring

3. Pinpoint 1-2 priority concerns (review existing data)

4. Brainstorm potential interventions

5. Based on prioritized concerns, choose intervention.

Priority Concern	Describe Intervention	Who will implement?	Where and When will it be implemented?	How will it be monitored?	What is the goal?

6. Schedule next meeting *(The purpose of the next meeting will be to review student progress. Generally about 4-6 weeks after the first meeting)*

Date	
Time	
Location	

ELL Collaborative Problem Solving Process

Meeting 2

Purpose: *The purpose of this meeting is to review student progress*

Student Name:_____ Date of Meeting:_____

Attending:

Student Name:_____ Grade:_____ Referring Teacher:_____

1. Review interventions and data

Priority Concern	Describe Intervention	Who will implement?	Where and When will it be implemented?	How will it be monitored?	What is the goal?

2. Determine next steps

_____Continue intervention and data collection as is

_____Modify intervention and data collection as described below.

Priority Concern	**Describe Intervention**	**Who will implement?**	**Where and When will it be implemented?**	**How will it be monitored?**	**What is the goal?**

3. Schedule next meeting *(The purpose of the next meeting will be to review student progress)*

~generally about 4 weeks~

Date	
Time	
Location	

Repeat step 2 as needed.

Appendix F

Student Assistance Team (SAT) K-12 Parent Interview Form

STUDENT ASSISTANCE TEAM - ELL/LEP PARENT INTERVIEW

Student Name	ID#
Grade	Birth Date
Age	Sex
Country of Birth	Home Language
Current ELL Level	Length of time in current ELL level
ELL teacher(s)	General Ed. teacher(s)

Current ELL assessment scores:

Speaking/Listening _____Reading _____ Writing _____ _____

_____

Is an interpreter needed? Yes _____ No _____

1. Does the student **read and write in the home language**?

2. What is the number of **years of schooling** in the home language, and what was the last grade completed?

3. Describe the **schooling experience prior to** arriving in the United States (i.e. number of years of school, grades attended, language of instruction, description of school day, etc.)

4. Describe the **schooling experience after** arriving the in the United States (i.e. ELL, Bilingual, English-speaking regular education, number of years of school, grades attended, language of instruction, description of school day, etc.)

5. Describe your **child's strengths.**

6. Describe any **health/medical issues** that may impact the student's ability to learn/relate to others. (i.e. mother's health during pregnancy, student's serious illness, injuries, accidents, etc.)

7. Describe any **academic or behavioral difficulties** at **previous** schools. (i.e. social, emotional, behavioral, cultural, academic)

8. Describe any academic or **behavioral concerns** you **currently** have about this student either at home or at school.

9. Discuss **life experience** that may impact student's ability to learn/relate to others. (i.e. number of countries lived in, number of schools attended, refugee camp stay, home country turmoil, separations from family, etc.)

10. Student's **speaking and listening abilities** in the home language (primary language spoken in the home):

- What language did this student first hear and use?

- How old was this student when he/she said their first words?
- What language does this student speak most frequently at home now . . .(may have changed from intake information):
    - To parents?
    - To siblings?
    - To friends?
- Was this student a fluent speaker of the home language when he/she was first exposed to English?
- Does this student pronounce words correctly in the home language? If not, what sounds are incorrect?
- Does this student often repeat sounds or struggle getting words out?
    - Never, Sometimes, Often, Always
- Does this student express him/herself easily in the home language?
- Does this student express him/herself in complete sentences or does he/she tend to use one-word responses?
- Does this student use vocabulary correctly in the home language?
- Can you understand your child when he/she tells you something? Can they tell a sequence of events in the correct order?
- Does this student initiate verbal interactions with family members and peers?
- Does this student stay on the topic of conversation?

- Does this student say things another way when he/she is not understood?
- Does this student use mostly gestures and other nonverbal communication rather than speech to communicate?
- Does this student easily **understand information** in the home language?
- Does this student follow simple directions in the home language?
- Does this student follow multiple step directions in the home language?
- Is this student slow to respond to questions or directions?
- Does this student often give inappropriate responses to questions?
- Does this student appear disorganized or confused much of the time?
- Does this student have difficulty remembering things?
- Does this student take others' needs or preferences into account?
- Does this student have difficulty paying attention?

11. Is there **anything else** that you would like us to know about your child?

Interview conducted by:

(Required: ELL Teacher and Speech-Language Pathologist and/or School Psychologist

Parent/Caregiver	
ELL Teacher	
Speech-Language Pathologist	
School Psychologist	
Interpreter	

Interview Date: _____

Appendix G

English Language Learner Student Progress Documentation Form

ELL Student Progress Documentation Form

Student Information Lookup

Legal Name:	ID:
Gender:	Birthday:
Grade:	Age:
ELL Level:	Birth Place:
Student Primary Language:	Family Primary Language:
US Entry Date:	Current School:
Non-US School:	US School:
US Born:	

ELL Information

ELL Level	Entry Date	Exit Date

ELDA: English Language Development Assessment

School	Grade	Year	R	L	W	S	Comp	Composite

Other Assessment Information

Assessment	Year	Scores
NeSA Reading		
ELL Entrance Scores		

Appendix H

Student File Review Form

Student File Review Form

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date:

MDT Referral history:

Dates of Evaluations	Outcome

Group Achievement Data

Average range for percentiles is 16th-84th percentile/Average range for stanines is 4-6

Test Given	Year	Total Reading	Reading Comp	Vocabulary	Total Math	Computation	Concepts	Total Language

CoGat (SAS)

Average range for percentiles is 16th-84th percentile/Average range for stanines is 4-6

Year	Verbal	Quantitative	Non-Verbal	Total

NESA Test Results

Year	NESA-R	NESA-M	NESA-W	NESA-S

Psychological Testing~IQ

Test Given	Year	VCI	PRI	WMI	PSI	FSIQ	Composite

Psychological Testing~Achievement

Test Given	Year	Reading Scores	Math Scores	Writing Scores

Psychological Testing~Behavior Information

Test Given	Year	Summary of Results

Grades

Year	English	Math	Science	SS	Reading	Other

Attendance History

Year	Grade	School Attended	Number of Absences	

Discipline

Year	Number of Referrals	Referral Summaries

Medical Information

Summary of Information

Relevant Transition Information

School	Summary of Info

Other Information