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Sharing Stories: Insights on the Holistic Experiences of Latino ELLs

By

Wendy M. Bryant

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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To Chona, Larry, Michaela, Samantha, Sofia & Xochilh,

Thank you for trusting me with your stories.

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Abstract

Through interviewing local students, this thesis seeks to understand the experiences of Latino English Language Learners (ELLs) in high school. National research and test results suggest that Latino ELLs are both failing and being underserved in a number of categories, including school completion with “the highest rates of drop out among all students” (Edl, Jones, & Estell, 2008, p. 39). These findings are also substantiated by the testing statistics reported at state and local levels. By interviewing six students who are directly affected by changing policies and testing approaches, this study will discuss and give voice to the academic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal experiences of these students. Furthermore, their accounts will be compared to national research and findings to begin telling part of the story of language learners in the state where I reside: Oregon. These stories are a powerful resource for educators seeking to better understand the needs and experiences of their students.

Sharing Stories: Insights on the Holistic Experiences of Latino ELLs

To the best of my knowledge there was nothing unusual about that Friday morning, until I stood and pressed the buzzer to alert the driver of my stop. I noted being the only one standing even though my stop was usually crammed with people trying to get off, but I dismissed the thought and continued to press the small red button. As the ring resounded through the bus, every man, woman, and child turned around to stare at me, the lone white girl in a sea of slightly tanner Argentines.

The bus driver yelled back to me in Spanish, but in my state of panic all I could understand was the obvious: I had done *something* wrong. In a helpful spirit my fellow passengers joined in a chorus of Spanish explanations. Confused and horrified, I simply crawled back into my seat until a sweet old woman slowly explained to me in Spanish that there was a protest blocking the street and my stop would be a little different today.

While I was surrounded by chaos and embarrassment, this was the precise moment when everything clicked in my head: Latinos in the United States deal with this everyday. From language barriers and misunderstandings, to cultural differences and discrimination. Throughout my time in Rosario, Argentina I continually noted how it felt to be in the minority, while I was also keenly aware of my social capital as an English speaking American.

Upon returning to Oregon, I began to further explore the feelings I had encountered in South America. I began to tutor local high schoolers; the majority of whom were Latinos and language learners. I witnessed firsthand their successes and struggles. I helped them fight to learn English, I listened as they told me stories about

being bullied, and I encouraged them to embrace their identity. In an effort to better understand their experiences, my own life and thinking have been reoriented.

Understanding the Broader Context

Linguistic and cultural diversity among students has long been present for educators as they have endeavored to incorporate the unique needs of their students into the classroom setting. Recently, as immigration from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and other regions has increased, the range of academic needs have also increased. “The Latino population is the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic subgroup in the United States, growing at a rate of about 4.5 times the rate for the rest of the population between 1990 and 2000” (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004, p. 129). Unlike past waves of immigrants, who were older, these children are entering the school system in unprecedented numbers. Currently, “more than one in five students in the United States is a Latino; the US census projects more than 28 percent of all school-age youth will be Latino by 2025” (Gándara, 2010, p. 60). This creates a unique classroom environment as students with varying levels of English proficiency and distinct cultural backgrounds are being immersed into the educational system.

Whether students have been receiving instruction for a multiple years or mere months, the secondary level creates an interesting and telling environment for understanding the successes and failures of language instruction. Throughout high school the effects of language acquisition become evident as students continue to navigate the school system, endure social stigmatizations, and explore their personal identity. The

results of English instruction and education policy come to fruition during these years (Castro-Olivo, Preciado, Sanford, & Perry, 2011, p. 161). Statistically, Latino students confront a variety of barriers that challenge their achievement throughout high school.

The dynamics of a child's family and community play a significant role in the success of students in school. Many Latino youth attend schools with limited funding and live in unsafe neighborhoods, which reduces their access to educational resources (Gándara, 2010). Currently, the dropout rate of Latinos is approximately twice that of all other ethnic groups and "Latino students have the lowest post secondary enrollment rates in the United States" (Benner, 2011, p. 557). These alarming statistics demonstrate the existence of significant barriers for Latinos.

Academically, students are expected to pass rigorous federal testing, but many lack the language proficiency and support to perform well on these tests. Statistically, Latino parents have significantly lower levels of educational achievement as compared to other ethnic groups (Contreras & Gándara, 2009; Schmid, 2001). Lacking a parent educational model, Latino youth face further academic barriers as they struggle to advocate for themselves and navigate the school system.

The formal education of parents is also deeply connected with social class and economic power. Latino families have a significantly lower annual income as compared to non-Latino parents (Martinez et al, 2010, p. 137). This has direct consequences for students as many are encouraged to work to provide family income, which may detract from the importance of school. Furthermore, income dictates the neighborhoods they live in, the peers they interact with, and ultimately the resources available to Latino students.

While parents and neighborhoods may support students culturally, many lack the knowledge to advocate for their students and help them navigate the school system.

Latinos are segregated both in the classroom environment and within social groups. Cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic variances contribute to Latinos being among the most segregated students within schools today (Gándara, 2010). This segregation not only stigmatizes students, it also limits their achievement as they lack regular informal experiences with their English speaking peers. Furthermore, these students also miss valuable interactions with their teachers who are essential as they learn to decode the system.

Currently, “language proficiency, more than ethnicity, is the key factor for either struggling in school or having lowered teacher views, or perhaps both” (Edl, Jones, & Estell, 2008, p. 43). Lacking proficiency in English, the instructional language, students struggle to remain interested in education and to graduate. They “fare poorly in U.S. schools, never really catching up with their English-speaking peers, and thus are prone to drop out of school” (Contreras & Gándara, 2009, p. 33). Language is deeply bound to identity and status, creating a barrier within the classroom, amongst peers, and internally as students struggle to understand their identity.

Furthermore, a new group of ELLs is emerging in education today. Laurie Olsen’s (2010) report describes the current situation of Long Term English Learners (LTEL) in California. She classifies these students as receiving language support for more than six years and cites over half (59%) of all California ELLs as meeting this qualification (p. 1). While they possess a high level of social language, these students appear to be “stuck” at

the intermediate English proficiency level; they demonstrate weak academic language skills. As a student group, they have many unique needs and significant gaps in background knowledge. These students are increasingly becoming the norm as language learners stall in their acquisition of English.

With President George W. Bush's 2001 creation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the stakes and pressures on ELLs intensified tremendously. A lofty goal was also created at this time, calling for 100% of students to meet the national standards in Math and Reading by the year 2014. "The federal No Child Left Behind Act designates English Learners as a 'significant subgroup,' shining a light on the persistent underachievement of English Learners, and adding urgency and pressure upon school districts to provide the instruction, curricula and supports needed to make real the promise of educational access and opportunity" (Olsen, 2010, p. 6). However, for students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) -- the federal government's terminology for ELLs -- taking a standardized test in a foreign language is not only stressful and daunting, it is inaccurate (Wright, 2010). Without proficiency in English, the language in which the tests are administered, ELLs lack the chance to demonstrate their content knowledge. With only two years remaining until the looming deadline, the pressure to increase test scores is at an all time high.

Between state testing and language proficiency assessments, ELLs are among the most tested students in the educational system (Wright, 2010, p. 111). Given this rapid rise in testing students have been reduced to a singular statistic as their test scores help determine the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of the school. Failing to meet AYP has

significant consequences for schools as they are threatened with decreased funding, replacing staff, or government restructuring. Producing annual school report cards for the community to compare the test results of students has perpetuated an environment in which test results are perceived as accurately representing the quality of a school's education. With specific attention to ELLs, these statistics are increasingly misleading and further ensnared in political debates.

Government officials, educators, and the general public project a variety of opinions as to who is responsible for the achievement of language learners, what the best language instruction model, and how much funding should be allotted to language acquisition. Political movements, such as "U.S. English" are growing in membership and promote English as the official language of the United States (Schmid, 2001). "English Only" movements such as this are challenging the status of bilingual education in schools.

This tension is further demonstrated by the persistent debate over how to teach ELLs within the school system. Dozens of different programs have been enacted around the country, ranging from "dual immersion" to "sink or swim." Commonly, the financial costs, the promised rate of reclassification as English Language Proficient, and the test results of students are used as weights in the argument of which English instructional model is best suited for each community. However, these debates quickly become ensnared with scapegoating and xenophobia, losing sight of the students involved and their unique experiences as language learners.

The Purpose of This Study

Through interviewing local students, this thesis seeks to understand the experiences of Latino ELLs in high school. Increasingly, students are immersed in a school climate of testing and pressure to obtain the often elusive label of “English language proficient,” the federal term for achievement among language learners. National research and test results suggest that Latino ELLs are failing and are being underserved in a number of categories, including school completion with “the highest rates of drop out among all students” (Edl et al., 2008, p. 39). These findings are also substantiated by the testing statistics reported at state and local levels. By interviewing students who are directly affected by changing policies and testing approaches, this study will discuss their experiences and perspectives, giving them a voice. Furthermore, the accounts of these students will be compared to national research and findings to begin telling part of the story of language learners in the state where I reside: Oregon. These stories and recommendations can be a powerful resource for educators seeking to better understand the needs and experiences of their students.

In researching national findings regarding ELLs and Latino students, three categorical needs stood out: academic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. First, the unique academic needs of these students create linguistic challenges (Gándara, 2009) and limited course options (Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, it is important to consider the interpersonal dynamic as seen through social, cultural and familial influences on these students’ lives. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the intrapersonal connection as confidence among ELLs is essential, and yet extremely vulnerable due to the complex

factors that teenage Latinos must face. Daily these students encounter discrimination, feel alienation, and are regarded as inferior by their peers and even by their teachers, all of which affects their self-perception.

Review of Literature

Significant research has been presented regarding the needs of Latino students and English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States. This review of literature will explore some of the general barriers Latino students face, the current language programs used in schools, the unique needs of Long Term English Learners (LTELs), and the effects of NCLB on language learners. These findings will then be compared to the individual accounts of students at Corvallis High School to demonstrate the unique experiences and realities of these students.

A variety of barriers challenge Latino ELLs throughout their education. Latino students have limited access to resources as they are economically and racially segregated for some, if not most, of their schooling. Also, many students struggle academically as they lack adequate educational resources and struggle to understand the language of the classroom. Interpersonally, being a language learner also has significant impacts on friend groups and family dynamics. Moreover, as we will see, a substantial number of Latino ELLs struggle with depression and grapple with their identity. Latinos who are ELLs or LTELs also experience significant linguistic isolation and a variety of language barriers. These issues will be explored in the following discussion.

Limited Resources

In order to better understand the daily experiences and challenges ELLs encounter, it is important to acknowledge the socioeconomic status of Latinos. Contreras and Gándara (2009) report the poverty rate for Hispanic children to be 12% more than white children (p. 59). This plays a significant role in determining what resources are available to families and students. From neighborhoods and access to quality schools, to lack of health care and medical problems, these resources have a variety of influences on the educational story of Latinos.

Housing location is important in determining many factors of a child's life. Schools, friend groups, and access to educational resources are all dictated by where a child lives. Latino students frequently live in unsafe neighborhoods and attend schools with limited funding (Gándara, 2010). In turn, their friend groups are more likely to consist of students who are low performing or on the path towards dropping out (Contreras & Gándara, 2009). These factors have significant consequences on a child's schooling experience and are especially detrimental with regards to second language acquisition.

Socioeconomic barriers extend beyond the neighborhood and into the homes of Latinos. "Latino parents have, on average, the lowest education level of any major ethnic group in the US -- more than 40% of Latina mothers of public school children have less than a high school education compared with less than 6% for white mothers and a little more than 18% for African American mothers" (Gándara, 2010, p. 62). Maternal and paternal education levels have natural consequences for the economic class of the

families, which can greatly impact students. Lacking formal education, parents struggle to advocate for their students and are less equipped to help them navigate the complex and often foreign educational system. This, in turn, increasingly makes dreams of high school graduation and higher education difficult to achieve.

High poverty, language barriers, and immigration status play a significant role in the daily life of students. Martinez (2004) found these to be contributing factors of higher dropout rates among Latinos as compared to their peers. Contreras and Gándara (2009) further explored the issue of high Latino dropout rates, which they correlated with poverty, being raised in a single parent household, and mothers who were unmarried at the time of birth (p. 67). Together, these authors demonstrate the significant impacts socioeconomic factors have on Latino schooling.

Segregation

Racial and ethnic segregation is another important element in understanding the experiences of Latino youth. Second only to white students, Latino children are the most segregated student population in the United States (Gándara, 2010; Hill & Torres, 2010). This isolation is significant considering white families increasingly choose to enroll their children in private institutions with more resources, whereas Latino students are frequently concentrated in metropolitan centers and attend predominantly minority schools with limited funding (Gándara, 2010; Schmid, 2001). Thus, Latino students attend schools that are significantly underfunded (Hill & Torres, 2010; Olsen, 2010;

Contreras & Gándara, 2009) and lack meaningful, daily interaction with other student populations (Gándara, 2010).

Segregation and limited resources have significant consequences on the education of Latinos. These realities create avenues for inequitable schooling as compared to their peers, limit access to higher education, and affect the language development of Latino students. While, “direct language instruction is important for English learners -- a practice that most likely involves some segregation on the basis of language proficiency -- using English with English-speaking peers in natural and academic settings is equally important” (Gándara, 2010, p. 63). These peer models are an essential part of language development, an element which is frequently missing in the education of segregated schools.

Language proficiency is a significant source of segregation and subtractive policies for Latino students. Paradoxically, being limited in English can create a void in informal English interactions, and generates stigmatization as students are “pulled-out” of their regular classes for English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction (Gándara, 2010). Valenzuela (1999) validates this observation in stating that ESL classes “provide an illusion of inclusion, but the institutional message they convey is that Spanish is a second-rate language and that the goals of bilingualism and biculturalism are neither worthwhile nor expedient” (pp. 162-163). Without an additive environment that openly and fully supports both cultures and languages, stigmas about Latino ELLs are perpetuated by the removal of students from the mainstream schedule for specialized instruction.

The effects of this segregation reach beyond school resources. Academic achievement and motivation are also closely tied to segregation and culture (Gándara, 2010; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010). As students are separated between and within schools, cultural stigmas begin to increase as conversations become increasingly “us” and “them.” In her 2010 article regarding Latino barriers, Gándara notes children are acutely aware of the positive stereotypes associated with being white and the societal view that students of color are not as cognitively competent as white and Asian students (p. 61).

Furthermore, within school Latinos are segregated, devalued, and often stigmatized by their teachers. The racial and linguistic segregation creates an environment of “subtractive schooling” for Latino students. In spending three years studying the “politics of caring” at a large, urban high school in Texas, Angela Valenzuela’s (1999) work reveals the compelling experiences of both immigrant and Mexican-American students. Her book quickly identified the presence of a “subtractive ideology” among educators. Within a system of subtractive educational policies students’ identities are stripped from them; culturally, linguistically, and academically they are pressured to conform to an educational mold (Valenzuela, 1999). School becomes unrelated to the lives of students, irrelevant to their futures, and quantitatively test-driven.

Academics: Educational Challenges

Valenzuela (1999) notes the struggle between students who feel their teachers and school neglect them, and school personnel who feel their students do not care about their education. The author refers to this contrast as the tension between aesthetic learning and

authentic caring. This observation contributed to her thesis that schools and educators are not effectively caring for students. Teachers' assumptions were frequently based on the physical appearance or dress of students, as well as their behavior in school. The appearance of students helped teachers justify punitive actions and assumptions based on their misconceptions that their students did not care about school, and therefore they -- as teachers -- did not need to care about them (Valenzuela, 1999).

These negative perspectives continue to be demonstrated as teachers consistently rate Latino ELLs as being less academically and socially competent than English proficient Latinos and European Americans (Edl et al., 2008). These preconceived notions have alarming implications as to the teaching strategies of educators and their responsibility to promote achievement amongst their students. As studies have further revealed "teacher perceptions and expectations for students correlate highly with the grades they award students" (Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010, p. 252). Furthermore, "teachers praise Latino students less, even for correct answers; behave less favorably toward them; and penalize them for lower levels of English proficiency" (Hill & Torres, 2010, p. 98). The consequences of these perceptions and actions are two-fold: assumptions made by teachers effect the way they instruct their classes and interact with their students, and students internalize these negative perceptions and achieve in ways consistent with them (Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010).

Often the low achievement rates, academic struggles, and high dropout rates of Latinos are dismissed as being solely a language acquisition problem. However, language may not be, in itself, the core of the problem (Contreras & Gándara 2009; Castro-Olivo et

al., 2011). Rather, language is a barrier to equitable schooling and is deeply interconnected with identity and status (Contreras & Gándara, 2009). Similarly, Delpit (1995) makes a significant claim about the English language in stating, “[M]embers of society need access to dominant discourses to (legally) have access to economic power” (p. 552). In other words, speaking a standard version of the English language is interlaced with economic and social capital. For ELLs, developing language skills are confounded by limited material resources, social segregation, and negative teacher perceptions.

Interpersonal: Family Dynamics & Friend Groups

At home, Latino parents report barriers to school access and difficulty helping their children with homework because of language barriers (Martinez, 2004). This is difficult for students who lack the academic support and resources at home to which many of their peers have regular access (Gándara, 2010). Latino parents also report being disappointed by the school system as their expectations of U.S. schooling is different than the reality their children experience (Hill & Torres, 2010); parents struggle to communicate and gain the respect of teachers and school administrators, creating another barrier for Latino students.

In an effort to adopt the cultural customs of the United States, Latino youth are pressured to assimilate themselves to their new environment. Valenzuela (1999) refers to this process as “subtractive assimilation” because “its widespread application negatively impacts the economic and political integration of minorities” (p. 25). Without reinforcing

an immigrant's linguistic skills and native culture, assimilation alienates family members and has significant consequences for family dynamics (Martinez, 2004). Children who seek to abandon their native culture may alienate their parents. In contrast, some parents encourage their children to adopt the mainstream culture in hopes the social and economic power associated with the United States will ensure them a better future.

Students who choose not to assimilate, or who struggle to fit in with the mainstream culture may be misunderstood by their teachers and their peers. With regard to student behavior in school, Valenzuela (1999) discusses the silence and sheepish behavior of Latino students in stating, "... [T]heir silence and politeness before exploitative social superiors largely reflects their structurally disempowered position in society." (p. 140). Latino youth are hesitant to speak in class and to ask their teachers for help. This behavior reflects their feelings of having less social power than their peers.

Regarding friend groups, teachers have consistently rated Latino ELLs lower than their classmates in terms of social abilities and interpersonal relationships (Martinez, 2004). In observing student interactions, teachers may attribute Latinos using Spanish to interact with their peers -- which can limit the variety of friend groups -- to having limited social abilities. Language and cultural barriers have been found to limit friend groups and peer interaction, a finding which is heightened with school segregation (Benner, 2011). These friendships and interactions are essential not only for the emotional wellbeing of students, but also for their educational achievement. "Latino students, who like other ethnic groups tend to hang out with friends who are in their own ethnicity and who live in their neighborhoods, are more likely to be with students who are

low performing or dropouts” (Contreras & Gándara, 2009 p. 75). These peer groups affect daily interactions and activities of students, as well as school achievement, and the pursuit of higher education.

What is more, exclusive friend groups can further foster discrimination as peers become divided by language and culture. Latinos are frequently segregated and discriminated against when they stumble with English, have a strong accent, or listen to different music. These feelings of discrimination are present among peers and throughout the daily lives of Latino youth. Martinez et al. (2004) notes, “50% of Latino students reported having experienced discrimination for being Latino or observed this type of discrimination occurring to someone else” (p. 137). While discrimination between culture and ethnic groups is painfully common in the United States, an important divide exists amongst Latinos in the United States. This is the deep and growing chasm between Mexican immigrant youth and “Chicano,” or U.S.-born, youth.

Fractions between these two groups are often sparked based on fluency and literacy in English. Chicanos -- defined here as students with Mexican heritage who have been born and raised in the United States -- typically have a better foundation for the English language, whereas immigrant students may have a foreign accent and may struggle with language acquisition. Valenzuela (1999) suggests this divide is exacerbated in relation to social capital, or the social ties between students and resources.

Lilia D. Monzó and Robert Rueda (2009) further explore the power, privilege and status of the English language as it relates to immigration. The researchers spent two years studying the connection between language and identity amongst Latino immigrant

children. They note the unequal power relations which children are immersed in. As compared to their native English speaking peers, Latino ELLs assumed the identity of “passing for white” in their attempt to preserve their sense of dignity in an English speaking community (Monzó & Rueda, 2009, p. 22). As Latino students grapple with the conflicting instincts of speaking Spanish or passing for English fluent, language has become synonymous with identity.

Intrapersonal: Identity Development

Benner’s (2011) longitudinal study examined feelings of loneliness amongst Latinos for two years. She identified three classifications of loneliness: consistently low, low but increasing, and chronically high. Mobility between these classifications was seen to be linked to language brokering (translating for another party), language use, and school mobility among the students (Benner, 2011, p. 556). Given the nature of their family’s economic and immigration status, Latino students frequently switch schools or miss significant periods of the school year while visiting relatives out of the country. Furthermore, language barriers maintain a constant presence in the lives of Latinos and often dictate friend groups (Benner, 2011). Thus, as Benner discovered, Latino youth, as compared to European American, African American, Asian American, and Native American youth, are at greater risk for socio-emotional distress.

This loneliness, and lack of close friends, has been linked to increased depression, hostility, antisocial behaviors, anxiety, poor self-esteem, and even suicide (Vaquera, 2009). Latinos are also more likely to portray problem behaviors such as depression,

anxiety, self-injury (Benner, 2011). Consequences of isolation were further linked to lower academic performance and less enjoyment of school (Benner, 2011). Students' perception of school is important to academic success, peer interaction, and help-seeking behavior (Benner, 2011; Vaquera, 2009). In turn, these social relationships are essential for school belonging (Vaquera, 2009) and student achievement (Benner, 2011).

Social, cultural, and familial relationships also play a significant role in the formation of ethnic identity is another crucial element of the experiences of Latino youth. Monzó & Rueda (2009) observe ethnic "identities are produced in the process of participation in cultural activity" (p. 24). Having access to rich cultural experiences encourages youth to understand their history and their cultural identity. Furthermore, incorporating these cultural interactions into the schooling of students creates a foundation for mutual understanding and empowerment among all students. However, as Valenzuela (1999) discusses, "[schools] are organized formally and informally in ways that fracture students' cultural and ethnic identities, creating social, linguistic, and cultural divisions among the students and between the students and the staff" (p. 5). These divisions create barriers and encourage students to adopt the dominate culture in order to conform.

Pressure to acculturate encourages students to "act white" to protect themselves from shame and discrimination (Monzó & Rueda, 2009; Contreras & Gándara, 2009). Monzó and Rueda (2009) define this concept as children observing and adopting the dominant culture in an effort to resist being socially labeled as an ELL, which they perceive as being inferior. In acting white language learners attempt to hide their cultural

and linguistic identities in order to adopt the mainstream norms, further demonstrating the social status of English.

Language Programs

Establishing effective English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs has been a difficult challenge at both educational and political levels. The costs of educational models, the rate at which they promise to reclassify students into mainstream classes, and the political implications are all factors in selecting a language instruction program. Often times this has resulted in gaps of student knowledge or subtractive educational policies.

Valenzuela (1999) explains, “even bilingual education programs that explicitly attend to the linguistic needs of minority youth can be and typically are, subtractive if they do not reinforce students’ native language skills and cultural identity” (Valenzuela, p. 25). In contrast to these subtractive, negative policies, Gándara (2010) calls for an increase in bicultural and bilingual education that develops the native language of students. She notes the need for highly qualified teachers and adequate facilities for this student group (Gándara, 2010). These characteristics are essential for student success in English acquisition, broader content knowledge, and self-efficacy.

“ELs (English Learners) represent 11% of the overall school-aged population in the United States, with more than 79% of them being of Latino origin” (Castro-Olivo et al., 2011, p. 161; Wright, 2010). In response to this linguistic diversity, a variety of programs have been implemented in an attempt to increase the achievement of ELs or

English Language Learners (ELLs). Some programs focus on bilingual and bicultural education, while others promote students reaching English proficiency as fast as possible. For the purpose of this study, three distinct programs will be compared: Submersion, English Language Development, and Dual Language Bilingual.

The Submersion, or Sink-or-Swim, model does not provide resources to language learners. Instead, students are placed in mainstream, English only classrooms with no language instruction or support. Teachers in this scenario are not trained in English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies. While this approach violates federal law, it is extremely common in schools today (Wright, 2010, p. 104).

English Language Development (ELD) is one of the most popular language instruction models providing specific English instruction for English language learners. At the high school level, ELD classes typically replace an elective class for ELLs. This program model can serve the needs of diverse language populations and requires a trained ESL teacher to instruct the language classes. This model is unique in being able to serve students without requiring a bilingual instructor, but the “pull-out” method can stigmatize students and it does not build upon the student’s primary language (Wright, 2010, p. 82-83).

While ELD programs help students acquire English and content skills, it fails to address the broader, holistic needs of these students. Researchers have found a significant relationship between the number of years a student receives ELD instruction and lowered social-emotional and academic performance (Castro-Olivo et al., 2011, p. 169). Self-esteem and self-efficacy exhibit a strong relationship with academic success (p. 162).

These findings support the call for educators to care about the interpersonal and intrapersonal needs of students (Valenzuela, 1999).

In response to these needs Dual Language, or Two-Way Bilingual, programs seek to develop strong proficiency in the students' first and second languages. Half the students are native English speakers, and half are native speakers from another language group. Instruction is provided in both languages and requires trained bilingual teachers who are also trained in the languages. This program continues past elementary school and encourages peer interaction to share language resources. This model most effectively creates a positive, bicultural environment for all students and is effective in promoting high academic achievement for both groups. However, the model requires balanced levels of native languages, as well as bilingual teachers. Furthermore, despite efforts to create a shared environment, language-majority students may maintain a privileged language status because of the broader social standing of English (Wright, 2010, pp. 92-96).

These are three programs, of the many currently in use today, demonstrating the variety of approaches used to teach language learners. Each model carries with it distinct advantages and disadvantages, which appeal to different schools throughout the nation. The vast range of programs and ways in which they are used by schools and districts alike has made it difficult to establish a national standard or program. Furthermore, while standards for language learners and the services available for them exist, their implementation varies drastically from school to school.

Long Term English Learners

As minority populations continue to rise, and the presence of ELLs becomes more apparent in today's schools, a new trend is beginning to emerge: Long Term English Learners (LTELs). Focusing her research on the California schooling system, Laurie Olsen (2010) reports on the current reality of LTELs. According to this study, LTELs are students who have been receiving English instruction for six or more years without being reclassified as Fluent English Proficient. In 2010, LTELs accounted for 59% of secondary school ELLs in California (p. 1).

The characteristics and needs of these students are very unique. They are not progressing in levels of English language proficiency, they typically have a grade point average less than 2.0, and "by eighth grade, students who are still classified as English Learners demonstrate some of the lowest performance of any student group" (p. 21). As these students advance in school the language demands become more rigorous. They find themselves lacking the academic skills in English necessary to perform in more advanced classes. Consequently, LTELs frequently have significant gaps in content knowledge.

Developing the content knowledge of all ELLs, and especially LTELs, is essential to their success in school. It is important that educators recognize the needs of LTELs as being distinct from both newcomer ELLs and struggling native English speakers. Olsen (2010) stresses the urgency in finding solutions to the challenges facing LTELs. She suggests addressing the four domains of language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), building upon skills and recognizing gaps in knowledge, developing students' native language, and challenging them with relevant curriculum (Olsen, 2010).

In her report, Olsen (2010) identifies several linguistic characteristics of high school LTELs. Many are orally bilingual and high functioning in social settings, while possessing weak academic language. During their tenure as ELLs these students have become “stuck” at the intermediate level (Wright, 2010, p. 82) and have become invisible in school, disengaging in class and passively performing. The majority of LTELs dream of going to college but are unprepared given significant gaps in their background knowledge. Finally, many are discouraged, burnt out, and contemplating dropping out of school (Olsen, 2010; Castro-Olivo et al., 2011). These findings serve as “testimony to the fact that something has gone wrong along the way” (Olsen, 2010, p. 14) and are essential in understanding the experiences of high school ELLs.

No Child Left Behind

The 2001 establishment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act had significant implications for all students, especially ELLs. As a subgroup of NCLB testing, English Language Learners -- as a whole -- have been consistently failing standardized tests since the installation of federal NCLB guidelines. Students who lack English proficiency are defined as Limited English Proficient (LEP) at the national level; by definition they have not yet reached fluency in English. However, the standardized tests they are required to pass are conducted in English, thus students are left trying to decipher questions in a foreign language and are not able to demonstrate their content knowledge (Wright, 2010, p. 118).

Valenzuela's (1999) research routinely references students who remark schooling is unrelated to their lives, irrelevant to their futures, and quantitatively test-driven. The situation in schools is generally perceived to have worsened since Valenzuela's study. Under pressure to fulfill the NCLB goal of all students passing standardized tests by 2014, teachers have increasingly been to teaching to the test instead of focusing on meaningful educational experiences. Furthermore, between state exams, national testing and language proficiency assessments, ELLs are the most tested group of students in today's schooling system (Wright, 2010, p. 111). This has significant impacts on both their confidence as a student and their time spent receiving instruction in the classroom. Paradoxically, the students who most desperately need instruction to improve their content and language skills are the same ones who are taking standardized tests.

Oregon

This study looks at how these national findings, as discussed in the review of literature, play out at the local level by investigating the experiences of students at Corvallis High School in Oregon. Statewide, the population of Latinos is rising significantly, which is changing the composition of classrooms. According to the 2010 census, the population of Oregon is approximately 3.8 million residents; 450,000 (11.7%) of which identify as being of Hispanic origin. Data reveals this is a population increase of over 63% from the previous census in 2000. These demographic changes are significant when discussing the schooling experiences of Oregon's youth.

It is important to understand the Latino population within Oregon is primarily composed of residents from Mexico: “78% of Latino families in Oregon trace their family roots to Mexico, with most of the remaining 22% tracing their roots to other countries in Central and South America” (Martinez et al., 2010, p. 135). The experiences of Mexican immigrants are often different from other migrants. Being relatively close to their native country, many immigrant families from Mexico choose to return for extended visits with relatives. As we will see, these visits and strong ties to Mexico have significant impacts on the schooling of Latinos in Oregon.

Corvallis

Corvallis High School (CHS) is one of two high schools located in Corvallis, Oregon. According to the 2010 census, 55,000 people -- approximately 4,000 of which are Latinos, with 75% of those identifying as Mexican -- reside in this college town located in the heart of the Willamette Valley. Home to Oregon State University, Corvallis attracts university students and intellectuals alike, creating a community which values education and knowledge. Over 90% of Corvallis residents hold a high school diploma, and over 50% possess a bachelor’s degree (CHS School Profile). Given this, the culture of the city is highly intelligent.

The Corvallis School District currently serves approximately 7,000 students. The district consists of eight elementary schools, one charter school, two middle schools, two high schools, and one alternative high school. During the 2011-2012 school year 1,195 students were enrolled in CHS, with 25% of these students being identified as Talented

and Gifted (TAG) and 6.5% receiving ELD services (CHS School Profile).

Approximately 30% of Corvallis High School students receive Free and Reduced Lunch assistance, as reported by the school district.

Corvallis High School boasts multiple Advanced Placement (AP) courses, honors classes, as well as courses available for college credit. Although nationwide Latinos are the most likely to attend a school in impoverished districts (Hill & Torres, 2010; Gándara, 2010; Olsen, 2010; Contreras & Gándara, 2009), the facilities available for Latino students at Corvallis High School seem to be of higher quality. The current school building was constructed within the past ten years, making it one of the most modern and innovative schools in the district.

Given this, the expectations and opportunities available to students at CHS abound. Students routinely score higher on state testing and SATs than both the Oregon and national averages, and multiple students have received national merit awards (CHS School Profile). However, according to the 2010-2011 AYP report, Latino ELLs are consistently failing to graduate in four years, to be included in AP or honors classes, and to attend college. This stark contrast amongst student achievement makes Corvallis High School an interesting piece of the national narrative.

Methodology

This study utilizes student interviews to share the experiences of Latino ELLs at Corvallis High School. Participating students were informed of the study by their ELD teacher and asked to participate in four group interviews with the researcher. The

interviews lasted one hour and were conducted in the conference room of the school's main office during allotted mentoring times. These mentoring slots are built into the master schedule and provide time for students to meet with advisers and receive academic support.

The initial meeting was not recorded because the participants had not been given consent forms (Appendix A & B) in advance. The attending students, Samantha, Xochilth, Sofia, and Silvestre, were given consent forms to be signed by themselves and a legal parent or guardian. Chona and Larry are both 18 years old and were able to participate upon signing their consent form; Michaela, who is 15, was given a form by her teacher and came to her first group interview with a signed consent form.

In addition to receiving consent forms, during the introductory meeting students were introduced to the research project, chose their individual pseudonyms, and completed a basic questionnaire (Appendix C). The questionnaires provided the information used to complete their student profiles. Participants included information about their length of time as a student in ELD classes and what their future goals are. They also ranked extracurricular activities (Appendix D), and reported the highest level of education obtained by their parents.

The following three meetings consisted of interviews that were audio recorded with each week's discussion focusing on different subject area of the thesis: academic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. At each meeting students were informed of the day's discussion topic and given a list of potential or guiding questions in both English and Spanish. Interviews were conducted primarily in English, with students answering in

English, Spanish, or a combination of the two. After each meeting the researcher transcribed the interview recordings.

All of the participants were born in Mexico. Students range in age from 15 to 18 and have varying levels of English proficiency, residency in the United States, and years taking ELD classes. The attendance of students varied from week to week as interviews were conducted (see Table 1). Two female students attended all four of the meetings, and three others missed only one session. The males included in the study were not present for the final interviews. Larry, who was present for the “Academic” discussion did not participate much in that day’s conversation, nor did he continue with the project. Silvestre was unable to get his consent form signed by his parents. As a result, only females attended the final two interviews conducted: the interpersonal and intrapersonal interviews.

Table 1: Participant Attendance

	Introduction 11/03/2011	Academic 11/10/2011	Interpersonal 11/17/2011	Intrapersonal 12/01/2011
Chona		x	x	x
Samantha	x	x	x	x
Xochilth	x	x	x	x
Sofia	x		x	x
Michaela		x	x	x
Larry		x		
Silvestre	x			

Student Profiles

Chona is an 18 year old female. She first moved to the United States when she was a few months old and then returned to Mexico at age three. When she was six years old she moved back to the States and has been living in Oregon ever since. She has been taking ELD classes for the past eleven years and prefers to use Spanish to communicate with her parents. Amongst friends and siblings, Chona uses a mix of Spanish and English. She does not know the highest level of education achieved by her parents. She would like to attend college after high school to study Nursing. Chona ranked work, family, and friends as the top priorities in her life.

Samantha is an 18 year old female. She has been taking ELD classes for twelve years and uses Spanish to communicate with her parents and her friends. Samantha moved to the United States when she was six years old. Like Chona, she does not know the highest level of formal education achieved by her parents. After high school she would like to attend college and study Psychology. Samantha ranked school as the most important part of her life, followed by preparing for college and her boyfriend.

Xochilth is a 16 year old female. She came to the United States when she was fourteen years old and has been taking ELD classes for two years. She communicates with her parents in Spanish, and with her friends she uses both Spanish and English. Her parents have both received a high school education. She would like to go to college and become a Nutritionist in the future. Xochilth listed family, school, and friends as her top priorities.

Sofia is a 16 year old female. She also moved to the States when she was fourteen and has been taking ELD classes for one year. She uses Spanish to communicate with her parents and a combination of Spanish and English to communicate with friends. Middle school is the highest level of education received by her parents. Sofia would like to attend college and study Business or Psychology. Family, school, and preparing for college ranked top on her priority list.

Michaela is a 15 year old female who moved to the States when she was thirteen. She has been taking ELD classes for two years and uses a mixture of English and Spanish, listed as “Spanglish,” to communicate with her parents and friends. Her parents went to college and she would like to do the same in order to become a Chef. Family, school, and work were listed as Michaela’s top priorities.

Larry is an 18 year old male. He has been taking ELD classes for six months and communicates with his parents and friends in Spanish. His limited time learning English may help explain his limited participation in the study. The highest level of education received by his parents is middle school. Larry would like to attend college to study Music Education. School, work, and family ranked highest on his priority list.

Sharing Stories

I met with students weekly in November 2011. Our discussions began as simple conversations about their schooling experiences but during the course of our meetings, the students began to open up more. The following accounts are commentary from their personal stories as they develop academically, interpersonally, and intrapersonally.

The Role of English

During our first meeting I asked the students many questions related to academics -- a subject area they all knew well and felt comfortable sharing about. Several themes emerged as we began discussing their experiences as high school language learners. Students commented about feeling as though they were only learning English, but lacking content growth, which they acknowledged as being detrimental to their pursuit of higher education. Xochilth remarked, "For example when I go to Mexico my brother, the oldest, is like, 'What do you know about this, about like history and that?' And I don't know anything. And he's like, 'What're you learning in America!?' And I'm not, I'm not really learning anything. That's the truth."

Xochilth not only acknowledged her schooling's emphasis on learning English, she also commented on how her lack of education and general knowledge is affecting her future studies.

I'm not saying that Mexico's better, but I know that the education is better. I don't want to study in college here, I want to go to Mexico, but I know that I have to study really hard [be]cause in Mexico there's another level of education. I went in the summer and I took a test and they told me that if I want to study in that university I have to take more classes to get the credits... 'cause here I'm not, I'm not learning anything really. The only thing I'm learning that is anything is English, that's it.

In preparing for higher education, Xochilth is acutely aware of the gaps in her knowledge and education.

Xochilth's remarks resonated with many of the students as they anticipated graduating in the coming years.

Chona: Yeah, but we can just graduate and be like, "Oh yeah, I just graduated."

And then they'll say, "*¿Y qué aprendiste?*" *Uhh... No me acuerdo.* ("And what did you learn?" Uhh... I don't remember.)

Samantha: Yeah, that happens.

Chona: *¿Y por qué graduastes [sic]? ¿Oh, no más porque se hace la*

tarea?" (And why did you graduate? Oh, only because you did the homework?)

Only months away from graduation, as seniors Chona and Samantha are both aware, and concerned, about their schooling's heavy emphasis on English education. In spending so much of their school day focusing on ELD and simply getting by in their content classes, many of the students fear the impacts this will have on their pursuit of higher education.

Higher Education

Recognizing gaps in their education, the students had mixed feelings about going to college. Samantha and Chona, who are both graduating this year, did not think higher education would be possible. On the other hand, Xochilth, Sofia, and Michaela still have clear dreams and aspirations for attending college after graduating in the next two to three years.

Samantha: I know people who didn't graduate from high school and they still go to the same jobs as other people do, so... You're supposed to go to college but we need money. And some of us are immigrants so it's harder. So it's, you, you're like, I don't know, it's complicated. It's not that I don't want to, it's just I don't see that happening.

Xochilh: Why not?!

Samantha: Money! Papers (referring to citizenship documents)! And all that.

Sofia: *That's* why you have to believe in yourself!

Michaela: Yeah! You have to show them that you can.

The theme of longing to return to Mexico was common among all of the students, except Samantha. Frequently when discussing college, students mentioned a variety of barriers and dreams, including not having enough money, not having the proper documentation, and missing Mexico. While Xochilh feels encouraged to pursue any form of higher education, Chona is aware of how her plan for her future differs from the one her parents envision.

Chona: I wanna... okay this is what I want. I wanna finish high school, work for three or five months and then go back to Mexico. And probably go to college over there, work, get married, have kids...

Sofia: The point is that in Mexico the school's cheaper than here.

Chona: Yeah, and I told my dad that. He doesn't want me to leave to Mexico.

Okay, twelve years that I haven't been to Mexico. I'm tired of being here, doing nothing.

Xochilth: At the beginning, I told [my parents] I was going to leave here to go to the university in Mexico. And actually, they are thinking about it now, because I'm a junior right now and I have to be looking for the universities in Mexico right now. My mom has encouraged me to go there. She doesn't care if it's here or in Mexico, she just wants me to finish school and have a really good career. My dad is, I think he thinks the same. But I have a sister and a brother in Mexico and I have no problem living there because I'm going to live with my sister and my brother. But I feel bad because my mom, because I know that she doesn't wanna be here and I'm going to leave her alone. That's the only part that I feel bad about. But the thing that I have always said is that I'm wasting my time. I'm just learning English. I'm not learning anything better and I'm just wasting my time. I know that one day I'm gonna regret it. English is not everything in life!

While their parents have differing opinions about the educational futures of their children, the students were clear in expressing their desires to learn more than English as well as to one day return to Mexico. This directly contrasts the perspective which assumes Latino students are excited and grateful to be living the United States and learning English. For many students, the decision to move here was not their choice.

These feelings are reflected in Xochilth's closing comment, which demonstrates the strong feelings many immigrant students have about living in the United States and learning English. Feeling as though she is wasting her time, she clearly articulates her desires to learn more than English. This is an important element of the narrative, which is often overlooked.

Learning English

While the students remarked they spend their time in school exclusively learning English, they receive mixed messages about the proper way to use the language in school. Each student has had experience with ELD classes; some have received ELD instruction for multiple years and others have just recently entered the classes. The majority of the students believe the extra instruction helps them with their content classes, but they also commented on the mixed messages they receive from teachers. Samantha started the discussion in stating:

I have Creative Writing and that teacher, he says stuff that are [*sic*] some new things to me, but I still remember my ELD teacher and what she says. That's how sometimes it helps, with new stuff. But sometimes it's, it's hard 'cause like the other day, he was teaching and he was saying things differently and my ELD teacher was saying... We were studying the same thing but they were different. And I was confused 'cause my English teacher was teaching me this and the English-English teacher was saying other stuff and I was confused. I was like, "They're not teaching me what I need to know in my other English classes."

Samantha's comment demonstrates the potential benefits of ELD classes as she was making connections with discussions in her other classes. However, she also refers to a difficult disconnect as she receives mixed signals regarding English instruction from her content and ELD teachers. The others were quick to agree with her remarks about confusion and feeling as though they were not learning what they needed to know.

Chona: Yes, and that's where they get us confused 'cause we go to a classroom and they show us how to do things their way and then we go to another classroom and it's different. So you can't put everything together, and you ask yourself what's the real meaning to each word... It's hard to understand what they're talking about it. It's really hard. 'Cause they say different, like so many different words.

Michaela: 'Cause you know, we can understand in Spanish so if you explain the things in English we probably will not.

Xochilth: It is because we have the most part of... of our education in Mexico. So we came here and we don't anything about it and it's really different and the language is a problem.

Learning academic English is a difficult endeavor for many of the students. This challenge is intensified as the students receive confusing instructions from their teachers regarding how to properly use English. While ELD classes help the students with English acquisition, language learners long for consistency between teachers and classrooms.

Teacher Perceptions

The difficulties of not knowing English extend beyond not understanding lectures and discussions in class. The students felt their teachers had negative perceptions of them, and they expressed experiencing double standards because of their status as both language learners and as Mexicans. Here, Samantha and Chona comment on the

difficulties of keeping up in class, and how their teachers react when they ask for extra help:

Samantha: Our Science teacher, he talks and talks and talks... and talks...

(laughter) And when we, like as Mexicans we don't understand anything. When we go in for something he's like, "Weren't you guys paying attention?" I mean, we were, but it's like, I don't know.

Chona: It's hard.

Samantha: It's hard to understand. Especially if the new students that barely, or are learning English, they can't... it's hard to understand what the teacher is saying and if they ask for help the teachers like, "Well, you have to be paying attention." And that's how some students are embarrassed to ask questions or like to be there... Many of us we don't understand something and the teacher gets boring with their talking and talking and we don't get it. We stop trying to learn. We stop and just talk with kids. 'Cause we do that. And I know a lot of *us* we do that. Like Mexicans, we do that a lot. We are too shy. Like me, well especially me, I think I'm really shy with teachers and then I'm too scared to ask for help.

For Samantha and Chona, understanding long lectures in their second language is difficult, even though they both have been living in the United States and taking ELD classes for over ten years. Samantha found it easy to relate to new immigrants who are just beginning to learn English. However, they felt their teachers lacked this same compassion and willingness to help them as language learners. Being denied help has caused them to shy away from asking questions, or even going to class.

Xochilth experienced a similar form of discrimination in one of her classes. She was partnered with a native English speaking student and she felt a double standard from her teacher. “Like, we’re in a normal class but there’s some Mexicans. And if the Mexican is going to the class everyday, and does his homework everyday, but there’s an American who doesn’t go to the classes everyday, who doesn’t do the homework but he’ll pass the class. And the Mexican? No. *Me pasó eso* (that happened to me).”

Michaela shared of a recent time she felt judged by her teacher. After spending three months in Mexico she returned to classes at CHS and was struggling to pass her classes. She had lost some of her English skills and was having a difficult time in class. She was approached by one of her teachers after showing up at school with a lip piercing.

Michaela: When I came back from Mexico, my schedule was all crazy and my English was gone. I was getting again into school and my classes were hard. And my teacher, they [*sic*] called me and it was a day after I got my piercing (*points to lip piercing*) and she was like, “Ah, are you getting rebel or something? ‘Cause you have a piercing and your grades are low.” And I was like, “I’m trying. I’m trying, [my English] it’s just not good and I have hard classes.” But she said, “Oh, is there a problem with your dad?” And I was like, “No.” “Is there a problem with your brother?” “No.” “With your friends? ‘Cause you get [*sic*] a piercing and your grades are bad!” And I was like, “What’s the problem with my piercing?”

While her teacher could be applauded for being observant, Michaela felt judged by her assumption that her poor grades were a result of rebellious behavior or family problems. Her teacher failed to understand the deeper language, cultural, and scheduling

challenges Michaela was facing as she was immersed in an English environment again. Instead of becoming defeated by this interaction, Michaela was motivated to achieve more stating, “I had really good grades in Mexico. And here, I have really bad grades. But I believe in myself. I was failing all my classes and I was like, ‘Oh, I’m gonna show [my teacher] that I can do this.’” She was able to transform a negative, difficult experience into an empowering and motivating achievement for herself.

Discrimination

Like many teenagers, the students I interviewed loathe practicing public speaking in class. However for language learners, this anxiety is heightened by language barriers and the student composition of the classroom. In these public speaking scenarios, issues of accent and language were frequently recounted as areas of discrimination for the students.

Each of the participants was quick to share about a time when they felt judged and different. Samantha shared about giving presentations in class:

Some of us try hard. And don’t just give up so easy. I’m a really shy person to present in front of people but if I have to to get my grade up I will just do it, even though I’m dying inside -- I do it. And I get really embarrassed, cause when I get nervous my language gets worse and... I don’t even understand myself, what I’m saying or reading.

Giving presentations in English was not only intimidating to Samantha, she was also acutely aware of how nerves affect her language skills.

Samantha went on to explain how she feels judged and discriminated against by her peers in these situations.

There's these two girls that are in my Creative Writing class, and we have to present every Friday, and the two girls are in front of [my friend and I], and [my friend] told me that they were making fun of me. Then when it was my friend's turn, I was sitting and I was watching them make fun of her too. That's why when I get in front of people I'm really nervous, and I see those girls and I know they're talking and it's like, "Ughh! I wanna punch them!"

Samantha's story shows both the discrimination she feels as well as the anger which builds up inside of her. During her daily classes she not only has to try harder than most of her peers to understand the content, but she also struggles to receive extra help from teachers and feels discriminated against by her fellow students.

Chona shared a time when she had a similar experience with discrimination. After years of being made fun of for her accent and language skills, she found herself in a powerful position in her Spanish class.

Not that I'm mean or anything, but if I'm the only Mexican there and they're struggling, I wanna go up in the front of the classroom and be like, "You know how you feel? I feel..." and be proud of myself. 'Cause they can see how we feel when we're like the only Mexicans who are in English class trying to figure it out. It's something that's really hard.

Taking Spanish classes has allowed Chona's classmates to experience some of the challenges ELLs face everyday. In seeing her peers struggle with learning a foreign

language and being hesitant to ask questions in class, Chona finds herself in a rare position of social power. When fully explored, these contexts create a unique opportunity for mutual understanding among students.

Dropping Out

During my first meeting with the students I casually asked them who had considered dropping out. With affirming nods and raised hands they each acknowledged thoughts of dropping out of high school. Xochilth, Samantha, Michaela admitted they still contemplate dropping out on a regular basis. I prompted them as to why and Chona responded:

Well, okay so, I'm a super senior¹, so I have to graduate this year. But last year I was like, "I'm not going back to school. I'm gonna dropout." But my parents were like, "No, you have to graduate." But they think school... it's easy for them. But school, it's hard. It's hard. So I told them, and I even told my counselor and my teachers I was gonna dropout. But they talked to me and they were like, "No, you're not gonna do anything. Like if you wanna go to college or be someone, you have to finish high school." So I decided to stay, but I still wanna dropout.

Having the support and encouragement of her teachers, counselor, and parents was essential in Chona deciding to stay a fifth year and get her diploma. For many of the students the persistence of their parents is the main reason they are still in school. After

¹ Chona transferred to CHS from another local high school. Throughout her schooling she has struggled to maintain her grades and has been suspended in the past. For these reasons, she was unable to finish in the standard four years.

immigrating to the United States from Mexico, the students are aware of how much their parents sacrificed so they could have a chance at a better life -- and a high school diploma is seen as an essential piece of this quest. However, the students were also keenly aware of the disconnect between their parents' dreams for them and the realities of the difficulties they face in school.

Chona: And if I do, if I wanna get help from my parents, they don't understand, they don't understand...

Michaela: They're like, "*No, mi hijo. Yo no sé eso.*" (No, my child. I don't know that.)

Chona: Not always. "*No mi hija, pues cuando yo estaba en la escuela...*" (No, my daughter, well when I was in school...) So it's hard, and it gets on my nerves.

Unlike many of their peers, when these students have questions about homework or need help navigating the school system, a language barrier prevents their parents from helping to their full potential. While their parents are not able to help them with homework or assignments, they consistently pressure them to graduate. For many immigrant students their parents came to the United States seeking a better future for their children, and a central part of this dream is their child's graduation from high school. Samantha laughed at the difficult pressures they face, "But it's funny when [my parents] say, 'You need to graduate,' and blah-blah-blah, like it's easy and it's not."

Education in Mexico

Multiple students interviewed have spent significant time living and attending school in Mexico. Given this, they have strong impressions of both schooling systems. Xochilth and Sofia, who have spent the most extensive time living in Mexico, described the differences to me.

Sofia: Almost every month there is a meeting for the parents. Like the tests for the month and there is a meeting and the teachers talk with your parents about how you're doing. And here it's only the conferences. There is a lot of students here, and in Mexico we are separated by groups and then our parents go through the group and then our teachers talk with them.

Xochilth: [In Mexico] since the beginning of your first year, your classmates are the same.

Sofia: Yeah, you have the same group.

This concept of group was an important aspect of our conversation. In being with the same group of students for multiple years, they grew to know each other in a familial sense. They looked out for one another and tried to help each other succeed in school.

Sofia and Xochilth have both learned how education in the United States is treated as an individual achievement. While group work is valued and utilized, the final grade inevitably falls on the shoulders of the individual.

This familial characteristic of education in Mexico also extends into the biological family life of students. They went on to explain how their teachers in Mexico knew them, and their parents, deeply.

Xochilh: You have to be with [your classmates] for years to graduate. So your parents and your classmates know each other. At the beginning of the year the teacher is trying to know you, to know your parents. So by the end of the year she or he knows very good [*sic*] your parents and yourself. She knows your parents. So she can talk, like she's confident with your parents. And if you have problems in the classes, she asks for your parents to talk.

Sofia: Yeah, and here our parents don't even know who are counselor is. They don't even know him or her. They don't know the teachers, they are not friends with the classmates... they just know Maria².

Differences in language, culture, and school systems create a distance between teachers and Latino parents in the United States. This limits parents' involvement in their child's education -- a reality which makes navigating the schooling system even more difficult for students. Furthermore, this disconnect is reflected at home as parents cannot relate to the everyday experiences of their children at school.

Family Tension and Division

Issues of acculturation and language acquisition create unique dynamics in the homes of Latinos. Some parents long for their children to retain their native culture, while others encourage them to abandon it in order to master the dominant culture. Parents become divided over which language to speak in the home and siblings fight over who has the better accent.

² *Maria (pseudonym used) is the bilingual (Spanish and English) family advocate at CHS.*

Xochilth's father came to the United States before the rest of the family. She later came with her mom and younger brother, and they have all lived here for over two years now. Her dad encourages her to speak English at all times because of her strong Mexican accent, which her brother makes fun of. As a middle schooler he has happily adopted the local culture and the English language, denying his Mexican roots. Xochilth, on the other hand, has stronger memories and ties to Mexico. She cannot bear to forget her culture or her language, so she struggles to maintain both and encourages her brother to do the same.

I have a brother, he goes to [a local middle school] and he looks like a white boy. At the beginning when we came here, he was always crying a lot 'cause he didn't want to be here. Now, he has friends, he has a lot of friends, they're like born here. They tell to my brother that he doesn't have to speak Spanish anymore and now he's like, "I'm American." I always fight with him 'cause he's like, "Don't talk in Spanish, talk in English!" When I'm speaking in English, he's like, "You have a Mexican accent!" And I always tell him, "You are Mexican too! Don't you remember the first time that we came here you were crying. Don't forget that." But he's like, "Whatever, I'm American now. I speak English." So, if I speak -- like -- French, I'm a French girl? I'm not. I'm a Mexican still. That's the problem.

Although Xochilth and her brother came to the United States together, they have had vastly different experiences with acculturation and language. As the oldest child to have made the move to the United States, Xochilth has both a clearer understanding of her native culture, as well as a self-assumed responsibility to preserve the culture within the

family -- even if her father and brother may disagree. The division between her brother and her, as well as between her parents, shows the tension language learners experience on a daily basis -- both in their homes and within school walls.

Xochilth also makes a distinct connection between language and identity in her remark about speaking French but not *being* French. For her, heritage and culture, more so than language, are sources of pride and help define who she is as a person. In her discussion she goes on to explore this connection further:

And that's the thing, I think that the middle school, well that age, is when you can change your mind. Like, if I had came here when I was in middle school, maybe I now could be like, "I'm not Mexican. I'm white," something like that. But now, because we're older, we have made up our mind. We know who we are. We know what we're gonna do. And what we can be! Like I can't say that I'm gonna be French, because I'm not and I know that.

Another thing that I notice, because you speak two languages, you are more mature. Now, I want to... like two years ago I just want[ed] to be playing around like a kid. And I feel like I want to do it now but I know that I, that it is just not time -- I have passed my... *mi niñez* (my childhood). When you speak two languages, when you have to give all your best, you have to grow up faster and forget all the things that you have been doing before and now be a responsible person. And don't forget who you are, don't forget that either. That's what I think. But now the problem with my brother is that he is forgetting what he is.

The maturity which Xochilth references as being a characteristic of being bilingual and bicultural is evident as she analyzes her familial experience. Age is an important factor in considering the unique experiences of immigrant students. Xochilth is proud of her culture and her native language; she has fought hard to learn English and succeed in school all the while remembering who she is and where she comes from.

Chicanos

While Xochilth is proud of her culture and her native Spanish language, many others at her school deny these qualities and discriminate against those who embrace them. The students each quickly recalled peers bullying or making fun of them for their accent, for the music they choose to listen to, or for their struggles with English. While Corvallis High School is a predominantly Caucasian school, the students were most hurt and angered by the remarks of their fellow minorities: Chicanos.

By way of context, the students I interviewed were all born outside the United States in Mexico. Some immigrated at a young age and have few memories of their birth country, while others have only been here a couple years. Chicanos, on the other hand, are born in the United States but have Mexican heritage. Their cultural histories are the same but the two subgroups can be deeply divided and at odds within school.

Xochilth: But it is not only white people who make us feel [discriminated against]. Also, the Mexicans.

Chona: Yeah! The Chicano people!

Samantha: Yeah! Our own race is! 'Cause if they know more English or they know how to speak better English, they start making fun of our accent.

Sofia: I feel more confident speaking with white people than with Mexicans.

Chona: The Chicano people, this is what they say: "You're so Mexican. You don't even know how to speak English..." Especially for the Mexicans that barely came from Mexico, the Chicano people, they *son más arrogantes* (they are more arrogant) and they try to show off more. When they're Mexicans too. I mean just because they were born here doesn't mean anything. They're still Mexican... And it bothers me, 'cause if you're own race is, like, racist to you, you know, when you're the same... The only thing is they speak more English and they were born here. What's different? That's not much.

This division between Chicanos and Mexican immigrants reveals hidden messages about the influence of American culture on the lives of Latino youth, as well as the status of the English language. English fluency and accents are the dominant sources for discrimination between Latino students. Many Chicano students have embraced the mainstream culture of the United States while avoiding their heritage. Meanwhile, immigrant students, like those interviewed, felt discriminated and judged because of their desire to preserve their native culture and language.

Depression

These social pressures to acculturate and feelings of discrimination seem to have had deeper psychological affects on the students. Several students shared about their

battles with depression throughout high school. Xochilth explained, “Seven months ago, I was like, I was sick but not sick... I was mentally sick.” Knowing she needed help, Xochilth went to the woman she trusted most, Maria, who suggested she meet with her counselor. Following her advice Xochilth set up an appointment. When she went in for help, Xochilth was disappointed when her counselor simply told her to be happy for being alive. Though she tried, Xochilth could not *choose* to be happy and she yet again found herself in Maria’s office looking for help.

She went back and reported what her counselor had suggested. A few days later Xochilth’s mom was at the school for parent-teacher conferences and Maria met with them to discuss the best way to support Xochilth.

[Maria] had talked to my counselor, that she [the counselor] needed to talk to me ‘cause I was really bad. ‘Cause a person who is depressed can do things that are really bad. So if a person is asking for help and the other person doesn’t give that help, they’re to blame. My counselor came and we were talking -- they made me cry and all that stuff -- and she promised me to bring a psychologist and she promised me... It was just one time the psychologist came to see me. It was only one. It was just once. I think my counselor has to do more but she didn’t, and Maria... I think she’s the one who’s helping us more than the counselors do.

Hearing Xochilth’s remarks about struggling to get the help she needed, Chona recounted a similar experience with depression and fighting for support.

I was cutting myself... like really bad. So I went to talk to my counselor and he was really rude. So Maria went and talked with my counselor and we got a

meeting and everything, but he said he was gonna get a psychologist but we knew he wouldn't get it. So we [Chona and Maria] went to the clinic and we found a psychologist and he comes every Thursday and sees me. And I see my [school] counselor every Tuesday and now he helps me.

Of all the group members, Chona consistently displayed the most gumption. Angered she wasn't receiving the services she so desperately needed, she met with her counselor and the vice principal to explain her side:

I was mad and I was crying. I was like, "You know why students kill themselves when they're depressed? You know why? 'Cause you guys -- counselors or teachers -- don't even pay attention to them. That's why there's so many kids killing themselves, 'cause they're depressed and they wanna talk to someone.... When I was depressed, it was bad. It's a bad thing to be depressed. So many things come through your mind, like you just wanna be dead. I got depressed so many times. I cut myself, my lips, to help the pain to go away. But it doesn't go away. And thanks to Maria I got my help and I have a psychologist. Yeah. I mean, I think the teachers here they have to pay more attention for [*sic*] the students. You know? They can see us but they don't know like what's inside of us, what do we have in mind... I understand there's a lot of people, but they have to help the kids. That's my opinion.

As Chona describes the emotional and physical pain of battling depression, she also pleads with teachers, counselors, and administrators to genuinely care for and listen to the students they work with. In relying on observation of student interactions and

behavior, rather than having honest conversations with students, teachers may miss many of their cries for help.

Help Seeking Behavior

Xochilth and Chona were both quick to acknowledge Maria as being central in their quest for help. She is the person students, especially Latinos, turn to when they need an advocate or someone to genuinely listen to them. She was essential as both Xochilth and Chona sought to get psychiatric help for their battles with depression. Chona explained:

Maria's been there. We go there because we feel more comfortable and we feel that we can talk. You can go talk to her and she'll listen and she will do something about your schedule or everything. And if you go talk to your counselor, they're gonna take like more than two weeks to do it.

Recently, Maria's hours were threatened to be cut. In response to decreasing Maria's hours Sofia explained,

Some teachers said that, "Oh, it's cause we want you to be independent. We don't want you just going with Maria, we want you to be independent." But my dad told her, "My daughter feels like Maria is her mom." I always go to Maria's [office] when I have a problem, cause she's the only one who understands me. She can help me.

As was evident during our discussion on depression, many of the students were critical of the reactions and support of their counselors; students thought counselors were either not

doing enough, were too slow to follow through, or were not listening to their real concerns. However, one student spoke up in defense of her counselor. Samantha is a fifth-year senior and she shared a positive experience working with her counselor to improve her Math grade.

Samantha: Okay, so *estoy de acuerdo con ellas en muchas cosas, pero* like I mean *yo también tenía problemas con la escuela y todo pero yo también* like... *he tenido buenos de acá, de todos. Porque, mi mamá sí conoce a mi counselor. Aunque ella habla puro inglés y mi mama puro español, sí la conoce. Porque, porque cuando yo tenía problemas con matemáticas, yo fui a mi counselor y me estaba ayudando... Y por eso, y por ella, me pasó mi clase de matemáticas el año pasado.* (I agree with them on a lot of things, but I mean I also had problems with the school and everything but I also like... I have had good counselors from here, good everything. Because, my mom she knows my counselor. Even though she only speaks English and my mom only Spanish, she knows her. Because, because when I had problems with Math, I went to my counselor and she was helping me... And because of that, and her, I passed my Math class last year.)

Xochilh: *Pero, tú fuiste a pedir la ayuda.* (But, you went to ask for help)

Samantha: *Por eso. Pero también si no vas a pedir...* (That's why! But also if you don't go to ask...)

Xochilh: *En México no, no necesitas pedir la ayuda, no.* (In Mexico no, you don't need to ask for help.)

Samantha: *Okay, está bien eso. Pero también tenía que aprender a pedir ayuda cuando una necesitas [sic] ayuda. Pues, vayan!* (That's good. But you also have to learn to ask for help when you need help. Come on!)

Throughout the interviews the students typically agreed and supported each other's commentary. However, there was a clear difference in opinion and experiences with regards to help-seeking behaviors. Xochilth and Chona critiqued the school counselors and felt they were not receiving enough support. While Samantha felt strongly they each needed to be proactive and independent in asking for help from counselors and teachers.

This difference in opinion could be attributed to the length of time each student has spent living in the United States. Samantha has spent the most consistent time in the U.S. and because of this she may be more accustomed to the independent and individualistic culture. Xochilth and Chona both have spent more time living in and visiting Mexico and may be expecting a more familial experience and support system.

Discussion

The personal stories and experiences of these students provide insight on the broader struggles and challenges facing ELLs. As was demonstrated by the student stories, ELLs are confronted with a complex array of issues, from understanding the language used in the classroom, to tension within their families and conflicting messages about their personal identity. Educators cannot overlook the overarching effects of language on their students.

Parental Involvement in Education

Most of the students noted their parents had not graduated from high school. They were also acutely aware of their parents' dreams for their futures -- going to college, getting a good job, and having a better life. For many, their education was a deciding factor in their parents choosing to immigrate to the United States.

However, while they were aware of the high standards set by their parents, the students also acknowledged a disconnect between their parents' goals and the realities they face in school. As Hill and Torres (2010) discussed, the expectations that immigrant Latino parents have for schooling in the United States do not align with the educational experiences of their children.

Parents are excluded from being involved in their child's education through a variety of avenues -- from not being able to communicate with teachers and administrators, to not understanding the complex schooling system their child is navigating. This creates a divide between parent and child during a vulnerable and difficult time of their life.

The Importance of Mexico

The communal and familial nature of schooling in Mexico leaves immigrant students longing to return as they struggle to understand and navigate the individual focused schooling system of the United States. Valenzuela (1999) explores this division: "*Educación* is a conceptually broader term than its English language cognate [Education]. It refers to the family's role in inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and

personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning” (p. 23). As explored by Valenzuela, *educación* goes far beyond academics for immigrant students, it further emphasizes manners, being a good person, and contributing to society. This broad, holistic interpretation of education leaves many Mexican-immigrant students longing to return to Mexico.

Xochilth: If I were in Mexico, I think I would be more happy, and happy going to the school.

Chona: Cause you feel more at home. Here it’s like *estamos en lugar obscura* (we are in a dark place)... like we don’t feel like we’re home. It’s like we came here, we are here like...

Sofia: *Visitantes* (visitors).

Chona: Yeah, like we’re here visiting. We don’t feel that this belongs to us, that we don’t belong.

All the students interviewed were born in Mexico, and most have a strong desire to return to their birth country. Valenzuela (1999) observed similar student views during her study, she noted students feeling that “teachers in the United States are less committed to their students than they are in Mexico” (p. 120). This finding was overwhelmingly confirmed by Sofia and Xochilth as they compared their schooling experiences in the United States and Mexico. Learning to navigate the school system in the U.S. requires a significant cultural adjustment as students must learn to be independent and advocate for themselves. They need to ask for help instead of knowing

that the collective environment will be watching out for their best interests, as was the case in Mexico.

Furthermore, the memories and culture of Mexico remain strong within each of the participants and many see it as a dream location for pursuing higher education. Both the cost of university level courses in the United States, and not possessing the proper paperwork have caused these students to shy away from applying to colleges locally. This has significant consequences for the futures of students, and the entire Latino population, in the U.S.

The one exception to these longings to return to Mexico was Samantha. Of all the students interviewed, she has spent the most time living in the United States and has not been able to return to Mexico for visits. She expressed jealousy of the other students who made more frequent trips to visit family, and she was also the only student who had not considered returning to Mexico for higher education. While it is hard to know for certain, her lack of visits may have influenced her perspectives on returning to Mexico.

Sibling Tension and Language Identity

Tension within the family, as associated with language and culture, was a pressing concern for many of the students. Chona, Sofia, and Xochilth each shared stories of conflicts they have had with parents, siblings, cousins, and other family members as they have chosen to embrace Mexican culture and the Spanish language.

Xochilth was quick to notice the family dynamics and sibling tension that arises from language. She also made connections between language and identity as she

discussed her brother's preference to speak English and to further his quest to adopt the mainstream culture. Valenzuela (1999) comments on this aspect of language at length:

Language is one of the most powerful human resources needed to maintain a sense of self-identity and self-fulfillment. Without a full command of ones' own language, ethnic identity, the sharing of fundamental cultural values and norms, the social context of interpersonal communication that guides interactional understanding and the feeling of belonging within the group are not possible. (p. 169)

For Xochilth, language and culture have been fundamental in the development of her identity and self-efficacy. She values being bilingual and speaking Spanish but is also aware her identity goes deeper than simple grammar structures and conjugations.

Learning English or French will not change who she is. Rather, speaking Spanish is her way of embracing rich history and traditions; speaking Spanish is part of her identity.

Bilingual Maturity

The narratives of immigrant Latino language learners are complex. Between adjusting to a new culture, learning English, and grappling with their identity many feel pressure to mature faster than their peers. Many have faced a significant move to the United States and are socioeconomically segregated from the majority of their Caucasian peers. "Enduring lives of economic and emotional hardship has aged each of these students far beyond their years" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 137). They are forced to grow up faster than their classmates and take on extra responsibilities to help their families.

Xochilth commented about feeling pressured to mature than her peers because she is bilingual. In recently moving to the United States, having to translate for family members, learning a new language, and striving to achieve the high educational goals set by her parents, she has given up many childhood experiences. She longs to maintain her native culture and identity despite the challenges, which has caused her to take on more responsibility than most teenagers.

Tension with Chicanos

Language has a significant impact on a child's identity, and it also contributes to division among students. The unequal power relations (Monzó, 2010) of English and Spanish create tension between Latinos, both between those at different levels of English language proficiency, and also between those who embrace their linguistic skills and others who deny their native language. The tension between Chicanos and immigrant youth may be subtle to the outsider, but the roles are clearly defined for Latinos.

All of the students acknowledged the division, tension, and discrimination between themselves, as Mexican immigrants, and their Chicano peers. Their commentary was similar to Valenzuela's findings:

While immigrants see U.S.-born youth as "too Americanized" and as negligent for succumbing to the corrosive influences of the dominant culture, U.S.-born youth are either hostile or reticent, evading the subject of immigrants. ... [T]he capacity of individuals to manipulate their ethnic identity in educational settings is largely

mediated by a schooling process aimed at divesting youth of their *Mexicanidad* ["Mexican-ness"].” (1999, p. 163)

Here, Valenzuela suggests the schooling system contributes to this conflict among Latinos by encouraging students to separate from their culture and adopt the mainstream U.S. norms.

This process of dividing students from their Mexican culture happens at multiple levels for Latino immigrant students. As Xochilth and Sofia explained, the independent education of the United States is vastly different from the communal nature of schooling in Mexico. Individual teachers and school administrators also participate in this division process as they interrogate the behaviors of students, as happened to Michaela when she returned to school with a new piercing. Students also shared stories of teachers rebuking them for not understanding lengthy lectures during class. This pressure to adopt the mainstream culture was also evident as students relied heavily on the advocacy of Maria because school counselors were unresponsive to their needs. These attempts, whether conscious or unconscious, by educators and the schooling system further separate Latino immigrant students from their native culture and create avenues for tension with their Chicano peers.

Depression

Benner (2011) found correlations between being a Latino and increased symptoms of depression. Chona and Xochilth have both struggled with severe depression and had to fight to get the resources and help they needed. Their stories of physical harm

and passive counselors suggest more needs to be done to identify students who are dealing with psychosocial struggles, and to help them through this process.

The pressures and mixed messages language learners receive are complex and overwhelming. Vaquera (2009) further attributes symptoms of depression as being related to loneliness, lack of close friends, and limited friend groups. However, language isolation (Benner, 2011), discrimination (Martinez et al., 2010), and cultural differences (Gándara, 2010) make befriending peers a challenging task for ELLs. This paradox can leave many ELLs experiencing loneliness and displaying symptoms of emotional distress.

Discrimination

Feelings of subtle and explicit discrimination are prevalent in the lives of Latino ELLs. (Martinez et al., 2004). These feelings are influenced by a variety of factors: many students are stereotyped, feel discriminated against by teachers (Edl et al., 2008), and are culturally and linguistically segregated from their peers (Gándara, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, language learners are acutely aware of the positive stereotypes associated with being white, and the negative stereotypes associated with students of color (Gándara, 2010).

Negative stigmas are also associated with being pulled out of mainstream classes for ELD instruction (Valenzuela, 1999). While it may not be an obvious form of discrimination, this segregation perpetuates feelings of discrimination among ELLs. In her discussion about feeling a double standard from her teachers Xochilth mentions being

in a “*normal* class but there’s some Mexicans.” It is important to recognize her use of the term “normal” to refer to her mainstream content classes. This demonstrates Xochilth’s feelings of separation and discrimination as a language learner.

Learning English

All of the students described learning English as difficult and frustrating. Keeping up in class, paying attention during lectures, and having the courage to converse with classmates and teachers makes succeeding in school difficult for ELLs. Furthermore, for many ELLs, learning English is not something they chose for themselves. Xochilth was adamant in expressing her strong desires to learn more than English.

Meanwhile, Samantha and Chona discussed feeling confused by the mixed messages and instruction from their teachers. Lacking consistency between classrooms they struggled to understand how to properly use English. Xochilth also shared her story of requesting help from her teacher, only to be scolded for not paying attention during the lecture -- a difficult task when she is still learning the language of the classroom.

Michaela reflected on how she struggled to retain her English after she spent extensive time visiting relatives in Mexico. While she was determined to catch up with her classmates, her teacher was quick to jump to conclusions as to why she was struggling in class. It is important that educators understand the vast difficulties associated with English acquisition and the daily effects these have on ELLs.

Dropping Out

As previously discussed, national research states Latino ELLs have “the highest rates of drop out among all students” (Edl et al., 2008, p. 39), have the lowest post-secondary enrollment, and double the dropout rates of their peers (Benner, 2011). These findings were reflected in the comments of the students interviewed. Every student acknowledged having contemplated dropping out and many, especially Chona, still struggle to remain in school.

A variety of factors contribute to these alarming Latino dropout rates. High poverty rates, language barriers, limited educational resources, and immigration status each play a significant role in the schooling of Latinos (Martinez, 2004; Contreras & Gándara, 2009). Many feel pressure to work and help support their family, a responsibility which draws them away from school both physically and possibly mentally. As Xochilth mentioned, “I’m just learning English. I’m not learning anything [content] better and I’m just wasting my time. I know that one day I’m gonna regret it. English is not everything in life!” For many Latinos, schooling has literally become “English only education” and they struggle to find its purpose in their lives.

LTEL Students

Long Term English Learners are becoming more common in today’s schooling system. Olsen (2010) described LTELs as becoming invisible in school, disengaging in class and passively performing. Furthermore, many are discouraged, burnt out, and contemplating dropping out of high school.

Chona and Samantha have both received ELD instruction for over ten years and are classified as LTELs. They are both fifth year seniors and have each seriously considered dropping out of school. While she once deeply cared about school and her education, Samantha acknowledged feeling defeated and becoming a more passive learner. “Sometimes I just give up. And then by doing that I’m not doing a good job saying I believe in myself, cause if I did I would try harder. Sometimes I’m just like whatever, I don’t care, and then after that I’m wondering why I don’t do good in school.”

After years of ELD and growing gaps in content areas, Samantha is burnt out and feels defeated by school. As Olsen (2010) suggests, it is essential that educators recognize the difficult narrative of LTELs and address the gaps in their education. While English is an important aspect of education for language learners, it cannot be the sole focus of their schooling experience.

Testing

While national research provides significant commentary about the negative effects of extensive testing, especially with regards to ELLs (Wright, 2010), the students interviewed did not seem to be aware of the extra testing burden placed upon them. Instead, it was seen as normal in their eyes. This could be a result of years of federal, state testing, along with language proficiency assessments. It could also reflect the limited time the researcher had to discuss issues with the students.

Conclusion

Latino ELLs account for a significant, and growing, portion of the student population in schools today and research continues to show Latino language learners are being underserved. Changing this story requires educators, administrators, and the broader community to better understand the narratives and experiences of these students.

While labeled as ELLs, the daily challenges language learners face extend far beyond learning the structure and grammar of English. Outside of the shelter of the ELD setting, students struggle to pay attention during lectures conducted in their second or third language, and are often times too intimidated to ask questions in class. Immigrant students also may have strong desires for community based learning similar to their schooling in Mexico. Furthermore, many students have limited access to educational resources at home, and Latino parents feel excluded from participating in the schooling of their children. These academic barriers are often overlooked by educators but have significant impacts on the educational success of Latinos.

Issues of language status abound throughout the hallways of school as students feel discrimination from their peers, and even from their teachers. At home, language status and tension create division among family members as some embrace the dominant language and culture, while others resist it and long to preserve their native culture. Language, in these contexts, is a barrier to interpersonal relationships between Latinos and their native English speaking peers, and also creates tension and division between family members.

Throughout these academic and social challenges Latino ELLs are simultaneously receiving cues of their limited social power as language learners. After years of being stigmatized for being a language learner, many Latino ELLs battle depression and have struggled to get the support and help they need from their counselors. Having the support and advocacy of school personnel, in this case the bilingual family advocate, is an essential element in the help seeking process of Latino students. In this context, language is a significant barrier to social power, to school resources, and to a positive perception of oneself.

The language status of ELLs is a substantial barrier academically, interpersonally, and intrapersonally. It is also a noteworthy characteristic of one's identity. Retaining, and building upon, the native language skills of language learners is an indispensable resource in their journey of learning English, and in their identity development. In affirming the linguistic capabilities ELLs already possess in their home language they will be empowered academically and culturally.

While on the cusp of graduating high school and pursuing higher education or employment, Latino ELLs seem unaware of the significant resource they possess in being bilingual. Instead of encouraging students as emerging bilinguals, schools -- pressured by federal testing -- divest ELLs of their native culture and language in the hope students may learn English more efficiently. In schools today extensive testing and quick solutions are respected more than the powerful experiences of the students these policies directly affect.

It is easy to make assumptions about language learners, however this thesis has shown the daily experiences of Latino ELLs are challenging and multidimensional. Educators and schools are being held to a standard of federal testing which does not reflect the complex and difficult schooling experiences these students are facing. Changing this narrative begins as educators and society alike begin to listen to the voices of marginalized students and value them as more important than the flawed tests they are required to take.

Further research

This study was conducted over the course of a month and students were interviewed three times. Further research would do well to increase the number and the length of discussion sessions. The group interviews may have been limited by language as the students predominantly spoke in English, thus conducting interviews in Spanish may provide deeper insights into the experiences of Latino ELLs.

Comparing and contrasting the experiences of immigrant Latino ELLs with their Chicano peers, or native English speaking peers, would generate an interesting narrative. As would investigating the presence of language and cultural tension between siblings and family members. Furthermore, interviewing teachers, administrators and parents, as well as observing classes, would also provide meaningful perspectives to create a more well-rounded piece of research.

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Appendix A

Participant~Parent Consent/Youth Assent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Wendy Bryant of Western Oregon University. The results of this study will be included in the investigator's Honors thesis. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before you decide whether to participate.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of English Language Learners (ELLs) at Corvallis High School with specific regards to how being an ELL affects the following classifications:

Academic: Content courses, testing, and college preparation

Interpersonal: Social impacts, friends, and family

Intrapersonal: Self-perception, culture, and personal identity

As a participant of this study you will be asked to participate in at least one of the following research activities:

- Audio recorded interviews (individual and/or group) with the researcher;
- Written commentary regarding personal experiences relating to the study;
- Completion of questionnaires as related to the study.

1. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. As a participant you have the right to choose not to respond to specific questions, to stop participating in any of the study activities at any time, and to withdraw from the study at any time.
2. Interviews will be recorded for the purposes of transcription and reference while further proceeding with this study. You have the right to cease recording and/or end the interview at any time.
3. You have the right to request to view your transcribed interview if you wish to clarify and/or elaborate further should you feel you have been misrepresented.
4. This study will be completed by June 2012. During this time, all interview recordings will be stored in a secure space and destroyed within a year of the study's completion.
5. As a participant your identity will be kept confidential and a pseudo-name and/or other coding will be used for the purposes of the research.
6. There will be no academic or monetary compensation for participating in this study.
7. In participating in this study you will be giving a voice to the experiences of ELLs. You may personally benefit from being involved in group discussions and from being given the opportunity to personally reflect on, and grow from, your experiences.
8. Furthermore, if at any time during this study you have concerns or questions regarding the research you may contact the researcher by way of phone or e-mail.

By signing below you are acknowledging your understanding and agreement to the terms and rights listed above. You will also be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Name (Printed) of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Name (Printed) of Legal Parent/Guardian
(If under 18 years of age)

Signature of Legal Parent/Guardian
(If under 18 years of age)

Date

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Should you have any questions or concerns throughout the course of the study, you may contact Ms. Bryant by phone or e-mail. If you have concerns regarding your treatment as a participant, you may contact the WOU Institutional Review Board at 503-838-9200 or irb@wou.edu.

Appendix B

Consentimiento del padre participante / Formulario de asentimiento del joven

Se le invita a participar en un estudio de investigación, el cual lo realizará Wendy Bryant, alumna de la Universidad Western Oregon. Los resultados de este estudio se incluirán en la tesis de la investigadora. Debe leer la siguiente información y hacer preguntas sobre cualquier cosa que no entienda antes de decidir si participa o no.

El propósito de este estudio es investigar las experiencias de los aprendices del idioma inglés (ELL por sus siglas en inglés) en la escuela secundaria de Corvallis considerando cómo el ser un ELL le afecta en los siguientes aspectos:

En lo académico: Contenido de los cursos, pruebas y preparación para la universidad

En lo interpersonal: Impactos sociales, los amigos y la familia

En lo intrapersonal: La auto-percepción, la cultura y la identidad personal

Como parte de este estudio se le pedirá participar al menos en una de las siguientes actividades de investigación:

- Entrevistas grabadas en audio (individual y/o grupal) con la investigadora
- Comentarios escritos sobre sus experiencias personales relacionadas con el estudio
- Llenar cuestionarios relacionados con el estudio.

1. La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. Como participante, usted tiene el derecho de no responder a preguntas concretas, a dejar de participar en cualquiera de las actividades de este estudio en cualquier momento y a retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento.
2. Las entrevistas serán grabadas para los efectos de transcripción y de referencia, mientras se continúe con este estudio. Usted tiene el derecho de dejar de participar y/o terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento.
3. Usted tiene el derecho de solicitar ver la entrevista transcrita si desea aclarar y/o elaborar más en caso de que sienta que su contribución ha sido tergiversada.
4. Este estudio será terminado aproximadamente en junio del 2012. Durante este tiempo, todas las grabaciones de las entrevistas serán almacenadas en un espacio seguro y serán destruidas al año siguiente de la finalización del estudio.
5. Como participante, su identidad se mantendrá en forma confidencial y se usará un seudónimo (nombre inventado) y/u otra codificación para los fines de la investigación.
6. No habrá compensación monetaria o académica por participar en este estudio.
7. Al participar en este estudio, usted le dará la voz a las experiencias de los estudiantes identificados como *ELLs*. Usted quizás se beneficiará de la participación en

discusiones de grupo y de tener la oportunidad de reflexionar personalmente sobre sus experiencias y crecer a partir de ellas.

8. Si en algún momento durante este estudio, usted tiene dudas o preguntas con respecto a la investigación, puede comunicarse por teléfono con la investigadora.

Al firmar debajo, usted reconoce su comprensión y está de acuerdo con los términos y los derechos mencionados anteriormente. También se le entregará una copia de este formulario de consentimiento para su registro.

Nombre (impreso) del participante

Firma del participante

Fecha

Nombre (impreso) del padre o de la madre o del guardián legal
(Si es menor de 18 años de edad)

Firma del padre o de la madre o del guardián
legal
(Si es menor de 18 años de edad)

Fecha

Este estudio ha sido revisado y aprobado por el Consejo de Revisión Institucional (IRB, por sus siglas en inglés) de la Universidad Western Oregon. Si tiene alguna pregunta o preocupación durante el curso del estudio, puede comunicarse con la Srta. Bryant por teléfono o correo electrónico. Si usted tiene preocupaciones con respecto a su tratamiento como participante, puede comunicarse con el Consejo de Revisión Institucional de WOU en el número telefónico 503-838-9200 o por correo electrónico: irb@wou.edu

Appendix C
Participant Survey

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: M or F
3. How many years have you been taking ELD classes? _____
4. What language do you use to communicate with your parents?

5. What language do you use to communicate with your siblings, friends, peers?

6. What is the highest level of education that your parent/guardian received? (*ie: high school, some college, etc.*)

7. Do you hope to go to college after graduating from Corvallis?

8. What do you want to be when you grow up?

9. Using the numbers 1 (highest) - 8 (lowest), rank the following based on priority in your life:

 Boyfriend/girlfriend _____
 College _____
 Family _____
 Friends _____
 School _____
 Sports _____
 Work _____
 Other (*please rank & specify*) _____, _____

Appendix D

Extracurricular activity rankings:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Chona	<i>Work</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Sports</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Boyfriend</i>
Larry	<i>School</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Sports</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Girlfriend</i>
Michaela	<i>Family</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Sports</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Boyfriend</i>
Samantha	<i>School</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Boyfriend</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Sports</i>
Sofia	<i>Family</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Boyfriend</i>	<i>Sports</i>
Xochilth	<i>Family</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Boyfriend</i>	<i>Sports</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Work</i>