

THE FUTURE CAN BE PERFECT!: EXPLORING EDUCATORS' EXPECTATIONS OF
THEIR MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Studies have shown that teachers' expectations of their students strongly affect the outcomes of their performance in the classroom and, in turn, their career paths as adults. Specific studies have demonstrated that immigrants and English learner students acutely experience the effects of low expectations from their educators. This qualitative narrative inquiry examines educators' expectations of immigrant and English learner middle school students and attempts an intervention with the intention of raising those expectations. Educators are asked about their existing expectations, provided samples of students' narratives about their imagined successful futures, then reflect on whether their expectations shifted and, if so, how. Their responses are restoried into coherent narratives demonstrating their thought processes and highlighting their expectations. In contrast to participants in other studies, the participants here all entered the study with reasonably high expectations. As a result, all participants described either no change in expectations or shifting from high to higher based on students' writing capabilities and specific details in their stories. It was concluded that disseminating students' stories to educators outside of the English as a second language classroom can affect educators' expectations.

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CHAPTER 1

Problem Statement

Inspiring educators are often portrayed in popular media. Perhaps films which tell stories of teachers changing lives for the better like *The Dead Poet's Society* or *Freedom Writers* come to mind. More recently, the sitcom *Mr. Iglesias* on Netflix features a high school history teacher who courageously advocates for his students and has open conversations with his class on difficult topics such as colonization and cultural appropriation. Hopefully all readers of this paper have had the good fortune of being placed in classes with such teachers who sparked interest – dare we even say joy – in learning. An optimistic view of our education system allows us to envision teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school staff who care for the entire well-being of students, doing what they can to lift self-esteem and communicate high expectations for students' futures.

But what do K-12 educators actually expect of their students? Is it high grades? Is it to go on to college and graduate with a degree? Or is it simply to be successful after finishing high school - whatever they may look like for an individual student? Are those expectations the same for all students? When considering race, gender, cultural background, and linguistic differences, there is evidence (to be discussed next) pointing to the idea that teachers have biases and therefore different expectations of their students based on these factors.

This problem is well documented in research and has even made the news. In an article for NPR (National Public Radio) Spiegel (2012) cited a study by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) about how the expectation that male students will be disruptive in class can create a loop of negative interactions between the teacher and the male student. This can lead to the student's disengagement and, consequently, a lack of learning. Rubies-Davies et. al (2006) found that

“ethnicity may be a factor in teachers’ expectations” (p.439). They postulated that different expectations for different ethnicities may be caused in part by “societal stereotypes.” More recently, Gershensen and Papageorge (2022) wrote for Education Next about how teacher expectations affected educational outcomes differently for Black students versus white students. They used “survey data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS), which was conducted by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics.” They found that white teachers typically have lower expectations for Black students when compared to Black teachers’ expectations of the same student “at the same point in time.”

It is concerning that teachers hold different levels of expectations for different students based on factors that students cannot control. An individual does not choose their sex, race, or ethnic background. An individual has little or no control over their national or linguistic identities – especially as a K – 12 student, but even more so as a student who is a member of an immigrant or refugee family. Teachers’ holding varying expectations of their students based on inherent traits that make them different from the teacher is a troubling issue in the field of education.

English Language Learners and Low Expectations

English Learner Label

One of the identifying factors that can affect a teachers’ expectations of a student is their language learner status. Students who speak other languages before English may be labeled differently in different areas of the United States – LEP (limited English proficient), ELL (English language learner), EL (English learner), or the more recent and asset-based term, ML (multilingual learner). For this paper, I will refer to these students as ELLs because that is the term most commonly used in the district where the study is conducted (though they are currently

transitioning to the term ML). A student's status as an ELL can affect teachers' expectations of their performance (Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2010).

Immigrant Status

Often going hand in hand with the label of ELL is a student's status as an immigrant. Even if the student was born in the United States but arrives at school speaking another language because it is the language their family speaks at home, teachers and other faculty may assume immigrant status for the student and their guardians. Dabach et al (2018) note that a student's status as an immigrant – particularly of Latino descent – can adversely affect a teacher's expectations.

Teacher expectations matter because they affect students' academic performance (Gershensen and Papageorge, 2022; Speigel, 2012). Suarez-Orozco et. al (2010) note in their study of trajectories for newcomer (students who are very new to the United States) ELLs that “when students encounter school contexts where... low teacher expectations are the norm, they are at high risk for disengagement” (p.603). Academic performance affects a student's ability to earn a higher income because attaining higher levels of education equates to earning a higher income in most cases (Wolla & Sullivan, 2017). A family's income and socio-economic status is commonly known to affect a student's performance as well (Ul Hassan & Akbar, 2020; Destin et. al, 2019; King, 2021). If a student does not perform well at school, a teacher may lower their expectations further, causing more poor performance. Thus, the cycle of low expectations and poverty is reified.

Poverty and Low Expectations

The cycle of poverty and low expectations particularly affects the immigrant and ELL population of a school. When a student is labeled as an ELL, a teacher may not expect them to perform well

in class due to a language barrier (Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2010), cultural differences – including how academic engagement and understanding is assessed (Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2010), or perhaps some other factor(s) that have not been named in the literature reviewed to do this research. However, perhaps the difference in expectations is due in some part to ELL and immigrant students experiencing various barriers to sharing their stories (Enciso, 2011). Dabach et al (2018) “focused on teachers’ explanations of their Latino immigrant students’ trajectories” (p.48) and “highlight the need for examining whether teachers’ explanations are fixed or contingent” (p.48). Putting this all together, the problem is that immigrant/ELL students are often not offered space to communicate their stories, so it is not clear if teachers’ expectations are contingent on knowing those stories or not.

Importance of the Problem

This problem matters on a national scale in the United States. For one, at the time of writing this chapter in the fall of 2022, the latest number of foreign-born individuals in the U.S. was 47 million (McHugh & Zeigler, 2022). Many of these individuals are bound to be school age children from homes whose first language is not English. Others who do not speak English in their home may have children who grow up never speaking English until they enter a public school. The current size of the foreign-born population makes these things likely, but these hypotheses are not supported by researched data – unlike the following figures that make the importance of the problem of educators’ low expectations potentially adversely affecting immigrant/ELL youth apparent.

The study was conducted in the State of Washington. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, students labeled as “English learners” accounted for 11.7% of all

students in 2019 (the most recent data at the time of writing). This means that more than 11 in every 100 students in a school in Washington State do not speak English as their first language, need additional academic supports, and have a higher likelihood of experiencing the effects of low expectations from their teachers and other faculty members.

Local Context

More specifically, the site of the study (a middle school in Washington) is reported to have 18.9% of students labeled as English learners in the 2021 – 2022 school year - the most recent data available (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.). This means 1 in 5 students was an ELL that school year. The school had roughly 900 students enrolled and about 50 teachers. Assuming equal distribution of students in a given class period, mathematically speaking, this works out to an average class size of 18. In one class, 3 – 4 students were likely ELLs. Each teacher has five classes per day. That means 15 – 20 students an average teacher sees per day is an ELL. Remember that an average class size is 18. This means that if we put them all together, an *entire classroom of students* per teacher, per day, is potentially suffering from low expectations due to their linguistic difference, race, or cultural background – whether the teacher realizes it or not.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry is to interrupt the cycle of the effects of low expectations possibly placed upon immigrant/ELL students by amplifying the voices of these students and giving them opportunities to share their higher goals and aspirations with teachers and other staff members in the 2022 – 2024 school years. I examine the possibility of shifting teacher expectations through targeted assignments in my classroom that are then shared with participating teachers and other school staff.

Tran and Birman (2017) call for “further research with different populations...” and “to use other research methods to investigate... teacher expectations across populations and schools” (p.731). Though the scope of this study does not include multiple schools, various populations are potentially represented. The ELL population of the site includes students of Middle Eastern, Asian, African, and European backgrounds as well as Latinx students. Therefore, this study works to provide more information in this regard.

In addition, Dabach et. al (2018) specifically call for more studies to examine whether or not teacher expectations are fixed or contingent. Not only does this study interrogate the nature of teacher expectations, it also further investigates teachers’ thinking behind their answers. If an educator’s expectations are fixed, why is that so? If an educator’s expectations can shift, what causes that shift?

Researcher Positionality

Researcher Background

I am from an almost-rural, but still suburban area of Alabama. The area is very politically conservative, and most residents strictly adhere to the Evangelical Christian belief system. I am also gay. These details matter to a reader of my study because growing up in a small, conservative, Christian town as a gay person strongly influenced my worldview – which in turn strongly influences my research choices.

Whether true or not, I internalized a belief that people would expect less good and more bad of me because I am a gay man. Among the expectations I heard of gay people from my family, church group, and peers at school include, but are not limited to: gay people are going to hell; gay people want to destroy America; gay people die lonely; gay people want to hurt children; gay people have an agenda and want to indoctrinate those around them; gay people are

carelessly promiscuous and therefore all of them must have sexually-related diseases. As a teenager, hearing these things repeatedly with force and vitriol caused me to internalize low expectations for my life quality in many areas including spirituality, romance, family, friendships, and professional aspirations. I came to believe the things they said were likely true for me. Many decisions I made after realizing and accepting that I was gay were based on trying to prevent any of those things from being true.

From my small hometown in Alabama, I moved to South Korea. I lived and taught in public schools there for nearly nine years. I spent two years in Incheon and six and a half in the mega-city of Seoul. South Korea also has a mostly-Christian, conservative population. I use the term “conservative” to mean they adhere to the traditional heteronormative ways of living that Americans are familiar with, and few Koreans I interacted with in my time there were open to discussions of views that varied from their own in that regard. Even the physical size of the country is only a few square kilometers different from the State of Alabama. The parallels in cultures served to reinforce the low expectations I had internalized.

Fortunately, I did not internalize the low expectations of others as self-expectations. Despite the things I had heard about myself, I held myself to higher standards in hopes of avoiding the pitfalls of life I had been trained to believe await every gay man. I consider myself a successful educator for this point in my career. I do not believe I am done learning and advancing in the field, but to be in my thirteenth year of teaching (as of the 2022-23 school year) on the tail end of a doctoral degree with the title of lead teacher in the Multilingual (describing students who speak more than one language) Learner teacher department at my school where I currently teach in Washington state, I am doing well.

In the next section, it will become clear why all these aspects matter. I will delineate the connections between my background and my positionality.

Researcher Roles

Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) define researcher positionality as “the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study—the community, the organization or the participant group” (p.628). Using their definition, I believe that there are many important facets of my position in this research to make explicitly clear to both readers and to participants. I will explain the following positions as they pertain to conducting my research: ELL teacher, colleague, supervisee, gay man, doctoral student, white man, English speaker.

ELL Teacher

As I see it, my primary role, both in my research and in my school, is ELL teacher. First and foremost, I work to understand students from their various cultural and linguistic backgrounds and perspectives. I plan lessons and assessments in efforts to boost their self-esteem as new learners of the English language or as long-term English learners who are still struggling to be successful in school because of the language barrier.

Part of my role as an ELL teacher is to provide equitable access to school information and resources to families who do not speak English at home. This includes reaching out to families via district translation services to make sure they are getting communication from the school regarding their student(s) in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways. I also remind other school staff to try and provide documents in lesser-represented languages.

As it pertains specifically to my research, I am the teacher of the students who participate in my research. Their assignments are graded according to district and state guidelines and are

aligned with state language arts standards and/or WIDA¹ (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) standards. There is a duty to inform students that some of their work could be used for my research, but I have the responsibility to make it explicitly clear to them that the choice is theirs. If they did not want their assignments used as data in the study, it was not, and their choice had no effect on their grade one way or the other.

I also have a responsibility to connect with parents in culturally appropriate ways regarding the study. Because of the age of the students (11 – 14), parents were informed that a study was happening and that they were able to deny the inclusion of their child’s information and/or assignments at any time. My position in the school as a teacher requires communication with families, but my position as the teacher-researcher requires more steps to ensure transparency and ethical practices.

Colleague

I interview teachers, counselors, and administration staff who participate. As a colleague who is presumably working toward the same goal of quality education for all students, I must assume positive intent on behalf of colleague-participants. I must also be sensitive to the fact that we sometimes work closely in various capacities in the school’s systems, so they may be wary of their answers in interviews or of participating at all.

Supervisee

I must keep in mind the hierarchy of positions when conducting this study. For the most part, the participants and I are parallel in terms of authority in the building. Teachers and counselors have no position higher or lower than the other in our district. However, when

¹ Washington joined the WIDA consortium and began using WIDA standards in addition to state language arts standards for ELL classroom instruction in the 2021 – 2022 school year.

interviewing the administrator participant, I am cognizant of the fact that this person has influence over my evaluation, my current job, and possibly my career path.

Gay Man

My position as a gay man is very important in this research. As I mentioned, one of the low expectations I internalized in my youth is that gay people seek to harm children. I also mentioned that almost every decision I have made after realizing and accepting that I am gay has been to prevent any of those things from becoming true for me. I also cannot help but keep in the back of my mind that any given person – student, parent, or colleague – could be holding this biased expectation against me.

As such, I am very careful about proceeding with the study regarding the children. I feel a strong need to regularly and consistently interrogate my own practices as both an ELL teacher and a researcher to make sure that no one believes my actions harm the children – especially due to me being gay. This is, perhaps, not something I should or need to be concerned about, but hearing presumably heterosexual people voice this type of concern around me and my current position as a teacher has created this concern for me.

Additionally, my mind is still living in the politically and religiously conservative areas of the world that I have lived most of my life in. I have been living in a much more liberal area of the world in Washington State since August of 2021. At the time of writing this chapter, that is only a little over a year, so my mentality has not had time to catch up with my current context. I now teach in an area that leans more politically liberal. In my school – which is also my research site – there are seven educators who are open about their LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other) orientations and to date I have witnessed little animosity or microaggressions from either staff or students. Contrary to my experience in both the

Southern U.S. and in South Korea, I have not heard of or witnessed any silencing of LGBTQ+ identities among staff or students in the school. Though I do not foresee my orientation causing any conflict within the study's context, it is constantly in the forefront of my mind.

Doctoral Student

Knowing that I am researching as a student and not as a professional researcher adds another layer of concern for me. This position also requires me to carefully examine my methods and practices to ensure participants are treated ethically, fairly, and in culturally appropriate ways (defined by participants if and when possible) because I do not consider myself an expert in conducting research, analyzing data, or reporting findings. Being cognizant of acting as a researcher provides more checks and balances to my process.

I also know that I am conducting this research as a student and have no intentions of carrying on this research after I am finished with my program. How does this facet of my position influence my research? I do not want to put time, effort, energy, and emotion into a project that I find meaningful only to make it acceptable to professors who will judge it and then lay it to the side when I am done. Throughout this project, I should remember my role as a student, but also must think ahead to how I will use the findings and conclusions in meaningful ways for my participants and other similar individuals.

White Man

I used to think that race should not be important when qualifying interactions among humans, but my thinking has evolved over the years to a different view. As a white man, I cannot recall experiencing overt racism or prejudice in the U.S. I also believed myself to be non-biased and not racist. Then I experienced overt racism while living in Korea as a non-Korean, white immigrant. I realized then that race does matter and it does influence interactions among people,

whether explicitly or not. I also realized that life can be very different when living as a racial and linguistic minority in a system that you cannot navigate due to a lack of cultural and linguistic proficiency.

To address my positionality as a white male working in a colonized country, “I carry a privilege I cannot negate” (Mignolo, 2018). White people have historically held power in the U.S. I am a white teacher in a classroom consisting 100% of students who are classified in the U.S. as non-white. Many terms can apply: Hispanic, Latinx, Asian, mixed race, or Middle Eastern. I must bear in mind that even if I do not intend to hold power over participants as a white person, the current structure of U.S. society dictates that I do. I believe this places added responsibility on me as the teacher-researcher to make transparent and explicit efforts to share power throughout the research process.

English Speaker

Being a native speaker of the language of the research and the language of the classroom affords me another layer of power in this context. When interacting with educator participants, this is not an issue as they are all native English speakers to my knowledge. However, every student who participates speaks at least one other language, and few if any speak English as their first language. Therefore, this position requires that I remain vigilant of linguistic differences and complexities as student participants craft their assignments and respond to interview questions, being careful not to use my combined identities as English speaker and English teacher to influence or inappropriately reword their responses.

Research Questions

- 1) What happens when a teacher facilitates a reflection process about educators’ expectations for their immigrant/ELL students?

- 2) What future do educators imagine for their immigrant/ELL students?
- 3) (How, if at all) do teachers' expectations of English learners change by integrating students' voices and stories of their goals and aspirations into the curriculum?

Theoretical Framework

To provide structure to the study, I adopt and adapt Kim's (2016) idea of levels of theory. Kim explains three levels of theory at work when constructing a study (pp. 33 – 35). Macro-level theory is the overarching interpretive paradigm the researcher works within. Meso-level theory narrows the school of thought to appropriate methods for the study within the parameters of the selected macro-level theory. Micro-level theory influences the content of the study and is the specific lens the researcher uses to analyze and interpret the data.

I structure my study with poststructuralism as the macro-theory. I narrow the focus through critical theory at the meso-level. I then base research design and interpretations at the micro-level through the lenses of postcolonial theory and social imagination.

Poststructuralism

Kim (2016) explains that:

poststructuralism informs narrative researchers who cast doubt on classical notions of truth, reality, meaning and knowledge, who seek to interrogate power relations appearing in narratives and stories, and who attend to the ramifications of multiple truths in an effort to reject the meta-narrative or the universal truth (p.59)

Poststructuralism ticks all the boxes as an umbrella theory for this study. I intend to interrogate the power relations at work as educators become aware of a) their possible hidden low expectations and b) the effects of their low expectations. The educators who participate in this study serve as gatekeepers of knowledge on how to be successful in society. They hold

information (or know how to find information) on trade schools, colleges, and other paths to successful careers.

I also intend to “attend to the ramifications of multiple truths... in an effort to reject the universal truth” (Kim, 2016, p.59). In this context, the universal truth that an educator participant might subscribe to is viewed as, “Immigrant/ELL students are less likely than their native-English speakers to have successful futures.” The ramifications are reifications of cyclical poverty and academic underachievement for immigrants, and non-native English speakers in U.S. society. Another truth I seek to attend to is that while the universal truth potentially held by educators is dismal, immigrant/ELL students may hold more optimistic views for themselves and deserve the same quality and offerings of knowledge and services as their native-English-speaking peers.

Poststructuralism “attends to questions of language, power, and desire in ways that emphasize the context in which meaning is produced while challenging all universal truth” and “challenges assumptions that give rise to binary thinking” and “situates the subject in a complex intersection of social forces and practices in a discourse” (Kim, 2016, p.61). Language and power are prominent in this study. The student participants are enrolled in my class because they have been identified as speaking a different language. Because they speak a different language and are also enrolled in an English learner class, they may be at risk of suffering from a false “universal truth” held by various staff members.

Possibilities for “assumptions that give rise to binary thinking” (Kim, 2016, p.61) abound in this study and I seek to challenge as many of those assumptions as possible. By nature of the situation “in a complex intersection of social forces and practices” (Kim, 2016, p.61), student participants are likely to experience being labeled with binary terms. Some of the binary terms,

phrases, and labels that could arise in the study are: English speaker/English learner; immigrant/American; likely to fail/likely to succeed; can read/can't read; can write/can't write.

Most importantly, “poststructuralism attends to questions of... desire” (Kim, 2016, p.61). Current structures may have educators hypothesizing that their immigrant/ELL students do not have desires for successful futures (Dabach et. al, 2018). It may be that the student participants have goals in mind already or that they have not yet considered what they desire. These are questions that are addressed in this study.

Storytelling

Enciso's (2011) self-reflection demonstrates a crucial aspect of using storytelling in the classroom. Upon reviewing her field notes, she realized she had “revalued” a student's story as a “correct” answer when he connected his personal experience – a facet of his funds of knowledge (Moll et. al, 1992) – to the concepts being taught in a literature circle. Rather than appreciating his story as a part of his life or his sharing of the story as fulfilling a need to be heard, she recognized only that he had answered correctly and then moved on. Enciso (2011) reflects on this action as a loss of opportunity to engage the student in deeper and more challenging critical reviews of the literature being discussed.

There are three primary aims for this study. First, I provide space and opportunity in my classroom for students' stories. Second, I attempt to share these stories with other educators. Third, I ask educators to reflect on their thinking and whether hearing the students' stories has caused a shift in their thinking. Critical theory provides a basis for all three of these aims.

Anticolonial Theory

At first, I oscillated between decolonial theory and postcolonial theory guiding my research. I wondered if I must choose one or if I could somehow combine the two to form a

symbiosis whereby each one feeds the other. The source of this struggle is the idea that **de**coloniality necessitates movement towards dismantling structures built by colonization (Ruíz, forthcoming) where as **post**coloniality leans more toward working within the structures built by colonization to make them more equitable (Ruíz, forthcoming). Dismantling structures is beyond the scope of my project, but some core tenets of decoloniality resonate with me.

Mignolo (2018) describes decoloniality as “a form of struggle... for the possibilities of the otherwise.” The struggle in this project is evident through the critical literacy lens, and the entire point of this research is to work toward “the otherwise.” Decolonial processes in education are processes of delinking (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014) from the dominant group and working “in the entanglement and differential of power” (p.196). Intersecting with these processes, postcolonial ideas call for marginalized groups to reclaim their cultures and literacies (Perry, 2020). These are all goals of the proposed project and therefore a combination of de/postcolonial theory is appropriate. In the end, the term **anti**coloniality seemed more appropriate for describing one of the theoretical orientations of the project.

Imagination

Returning to Mignolo’s (2018) point that decoloniality is “a form of struggle... for the possibilities of the otherwise,” a type of social imagination is required to work that “otherwise.” How can one work toward something different in society without first imagining what it is they are working toward?

Imagination can “serve as a space of contestation...” (Hanna, Harford, & Saldivar, 2016, p.8 – 9). Bhabha (1994) touches on this same idea, explaining that “...to dwell in ‘the beyond’ ...[is] *to touch the future on its hither side*. In that sense, then, the intervening space

‘beyond’, becomes a space of intervention in the here and now” (p. 7). Bhaba’s (1994) “beyond” is where my students can “contest” the low expectations they may experience from others.

All participants in this study engage with imagination in some form. The students write about their imagined successful futures. Teachers talk about what they imagine for the students. The research imagines what might be different as a result of the research. Imagination theory serves this project well by linking with critical theory. All participants can imagine a future where this project impacts even a small part of society for the better.

Organization of the Study

Participants

Students in grades 6 – 8 who are labeled as an English learner participated in this study by writing about their goals and aspirations. Teachers, counselors, and administrators participated in interviews, by viewing students’ products or presentations, and by member-checking their imagined narratives after they were initially drafted.

Research Activities

Students respond to a prompt asking them to imagine a successful future. They write the story of successfully reaching their goals and aspirations. They create presentations in any form they choose to share with the class and other educators in the building. During this process, I – as the teacher-researcher – guide them through constructing a narrative with exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, and a resolution.

Over the course of three focus group meetings, educators describe their general expectations of students, then describe their expectations of a specific student based on limited information given by the interviewer. Educators then read or view the students’ narrative of their

predicted successful future and discuss with the interviewer. Educators then describe if and how their expectations for that specific student changed and why.

Educators may also discuss another time when their expectations of a student changed. They describe the story of what happened to cause the change. This data is analyzed for mentions of learning of the students' future goals and aspirations to see if there are any connections between knowing that part of the student and their change in expectations.

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

Teachers' expectations and their effects on students' performance and educational outcomes have been researched at length (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006; Dabach et. al, 2018). There is no debate in the literature to date against the conclusion that expectations and outcomes are directly correlated. This study aims primarily to interrupt the cycle of low expectations of ELL/immigrant students by providing a platform for them to share their goals and aspirations with educators who may have otherwise never known them. Therefore, this chapter explores the literature on teachers' expectations of students, students' expectations of teachers, ELL/immigrant students' educational and professional goals, and possible reasons as to why there is a disconnect between what students expect and aspire to be and what educators expect of them.

Finding the Literature

Search terms

To find literature on the relevant topics, theories, and populations being examined, the following terms were searched: immigrant, English learner, student, literacy, expectations, imagined futures, refugees, ELL, ESL, English as a Second Language, second language learning. The terms were entered in various combinations in hopes of producing various results.

Other Methods

Some articles cited were assigned readings for classes. Others were found as cited in articles read for classes or those that were selected for reading through the search process using the key terms previously listed.

Themes

In the following sections, I delineate and connect the findings in the literature I have reviewed which inspired and informed the formation of this research. Three major themes emerged. The first is that expectations matter. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) introduce their seminal study on teachers' expectations by referring to research projects dating as far back as the late 1800s which support the idea that expectations affect performance and outcomes in various professions and facets of life. Secondly, expectations differ - there is often a clash of culture when students and educators come from different backgrounds. Third, attribution theory appears to play a major role in teachers' thinking and formation of expectations. However, there is also an incongruence between what educators believe attributes to a students' educational success or failure and what actually does. Last, immigrant/ELL students have goals and aspirations that educators are not aware of for various reasons. The lack of awareness of these goals could be a factor contributing to educators' low expectations of these students. Figure 2.1 shows the contributing factors to start the cycle and figure 2.2 illustrates how expectations and outcomes are interlocked.

These ideas connect and flow in a circular motion to influence each other. Educators have their expectations, but attribute these expectations and outcomes to factors outside of their locus of control. Then, even if these students have goals that exceed educators' expectations, they are less likely to reach them due to the expectations held by the educators and educators' ignorance to the fact that their expectations are influencing both immediate and long-term outcomes. The literature alludes to this cycle over and over again.

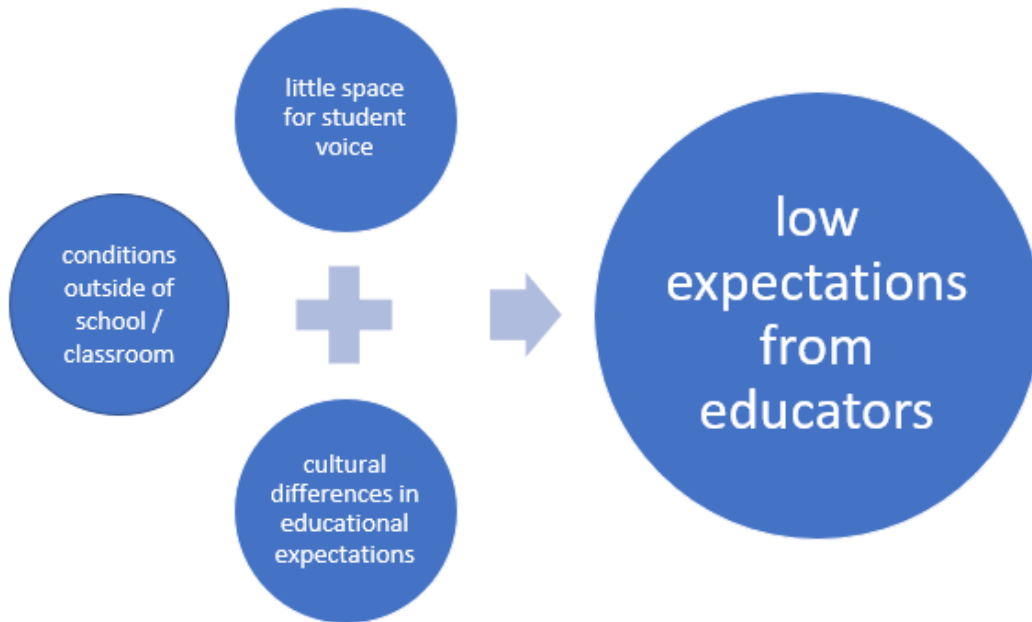


Figure 2.1. Factors possibly contributing to educators' low expectations of immigrant/ELL students.



Figure 2.2. The interlocking cycle of low expectations, poor educational outcomes, and poverty.

Expectations Matter

This section cites multiple studies which found that educators' expectations matter because they can have deleterious or bolstering effects on students' performance and post-K-12 educational and occupational outcomes - particularly for students who do not speak the majority language. One noteworthy study points to this being an international phenomenon which crosses boundaries of language, culture, and ethnic identities. It is not unique in an American context. I discuss the work by Dabach et. al (2018) that inspired my research activities. They primarily focused on educators' expectations and their effects on Latino students. I then make connections to other works which have examined similar ideas in other corners of the world, with members of other cultures, and in various age groups.

In a study in Córdoba (Spain), García-Fernández et. al (2021) found that early childhood, elementary, and high school teachers all showed a "lack of confidence in non-native students" (p.1). They also interpret their findings to mean "that the teacher's thinking is *prophetic* (emphasis in original)" (p.7). The teachers' "lack of confidence" was found to translate to real-life outcomes as they also found "continuously... that foreign-origin students present lower performance than their Spanish peers..." (p.7). Immigrant and multilingual learners seem to share similar struggles both abroad and in the United States.

Dabach et. al (2018) discuss the effects of educators' low expectations for students of Latino descent in American elementary, middle, and high schools. The researchers cite Weinstein's (2002) work which found that beliefs can often "serve to maintain reality" (Dabach et. al, 2018, p.39). If the current reality is that immigrant/ELL students are not achieving academic success and therefore not achieving occupational success, then educators' expectations of these students could perpetuate that reality.

However, Dabach et. al (2018) also state that beliefs can *alter* reality (p.39, emphasis in original). This coincides with medical studies cited by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) in which patients' physical health was altered based solely on what they believed. As a prime example, in chapter two of their book, they write about a patient who was told he could not be cured because they did not know what his ailment was. After a specialist was called in and named it "moribundus" (meaning that the patient would die) and the patient overheard it, his condition began to improve. The patient did not know the true meaning of the word, so he operated under the expectation that if his condition had a name, he would get better. Thus, he did get better because he expected to. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) cite hundreds more similar studies in their book before specifically discussing the effects of expectations in education. In their own work in an educational context, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that there was an increase in IQ test scores for students whose teachers were told they showed great potential, even though the students' names were chosen at random and there actually were no prior indicators of those students' abilities - neither high nor low.

There are cases in which educators' high expectations are documented along with their positive effects. Goodwin and Stanton (2022) studied a teacher of newcomer English learners who expected her students to engage in rigorous academic tasks and topics. These students helped design the curriculum and discussed current social issues in English. Her expectations and practices produced exceptional outcomes for her students with a high percentage of them testing out of English as a second language (ESL) services on the state proficiency test, most of them graduating from high school, and several continuing their education in colleges despite the statistical un-likelihoods for their demographics. The outcomes of these students are

demonstrative of the positive reasons why educators' expectations matter. High expectations can lead to positive long-term results for students.

Expectations Differ

It often happens that educators' and students' expectations of what it means to be a student are not congruent (Koirala, 2019; Suh 2019). Koirala (2019) specifically explores the differences in how adult Bhutanese refugee English learners view autonomous learning pedagogies. Their life experiences and cultural backgrounds affect their perspectives on what education should look like. These students believed that the teacher's responsibility was to lead the class the entire time while students took in information. From their perspective, working independently to demonstrate mastery was not appropriate use of instructional time. These views often do not align with Western pedagogical practices, causing students to dislike their English classes and to view their teachers as ineffective. Though the participants in Koirala's (2019) study are adults and the participants in my study are middle school students, many of the concepts apply because the student-participants in my study come from other countries with various cultural backgrounds and educational expectations. It is possible that student-participant and educator-participant expectations do not align.

Koirala (2019) points out that Western educators often regard autonomous learning as the ultimate goal for learners. Personally, I agree. In my classroom, I have spent instructional time coaching students on how to use resources like dictionary web sites, digital translators, and metacognitive reading strategies with the ultimate goal being that they will be able to take more control of their learning. However, Koirala (2019) also notes that these practices "may be culturally inappropriate to non-Western learners who are accustomed to teacher-led instruction

(p. 3). The author further explains that if “students’ *perceptions* of teachers’ scaffolding behavior are incompatible... they may question the credibility of the teacher” (p. 4).

I would argue that this does not only apply to autonomous learning pedagogies, nor does the questioning flow in only one direction. The primary takeaway from Koirala’s (2019) work as it applies to the present study is that between English learners and American teachers, there are differences in beliefs about education and differences in culture which may be contradictory. The contradiction can lead to both educators and students misunderstanding each other and each forming low expectations or unfavorable views of the other.

There are not only differences in how students and educators expect a classroom to operate, but also in how learners are to acquire knowledge and demonstrate mastery of content and concepts. The New London Group (1996) asks, “What is appropriate education... for immigrants who do not speak the national language, for speakers of non-standard dialects" (p.61)? The group astutely called for a redesign of curriculum and teaching to address the diversity in today’s classrooms - including for immigrant and ELL students. I interpret their proposals to mean that educators should provide opportunities for students of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to engage with academic content in culturally relevant and meaningful ways. For example, if a student’s educational background has heavily focused on oral language production such as speeches, presentations, or retellings, the student should have an opportunity in their American classroom to do the same.

However, there are systemic barriers to educators embracing this approach. Standardized testing creates classroom environments where teachers focus on addressing the standards provided by their state or district. If the standard calls for a student to be able to produce a written essay in a certain format, then the teacher must use instructional minutes to coach

students on how to craft a written essay. There is little time left to allow for culturally relevant demonstrations of mastery. Practically speaking, the system - to a certain extent - creates educators' expectations for them

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory (Artiles, 1996; Weiner, 1986, 2010, as cited in Dabach et. al, 2018) claims that “teachers’ explanations of students’ success or failure can affect their motivation to help students” (p.39). Why is attribution theory not discussed in detail in the previous chapter or in the following methods section as influencing this study? The theory has expounded how educators explain students’ poor academic performance in relation to any factor that could be attributed to their educational outcomes (Dabach, et. al, 2018). This study is not looking to explore attribution theory in more detail nor change educators’ perceptions as to the root causes of poor academic performance. Rather, the aim of the study is to determine if educators’ expectations can be shifted higher by learning students’ goals and hearing their stories. Therefore, the theory is not relevant to the shape of this study, but is an inextricable thread in the discussion around the issues that have led to this problem in our schools today.

Rodriguez (2012) conducted a case study at a school with an 80% English learner population. In this study, the principal found that “many teachers did not have high expectations for students” citing their lack of English proficiency and low socio-economic status as reasons why the students were not able to participate in a more rigorous curriculum. Prior to the principal’s various interventions, the teachers at this school never considered their own expectations and biases as factors contributing to the students’ academic success.

Educators in Rodriguez’s (2012) study also stated that they perceived the families of their immigrant/ELL students to place low value on education. This was included as a contributing

factor to the low academic success rate for this demographic. However, Leo (2021) conducted an ethnographic study that produced findings to counter this belief. The families of students in this study did value education, but also explicitly understood structural barriers for immigrants in the U.S. The families cited several of these and some of them had domino effects on the childrens' education and, therefore occupational options.

Among the barriers discussed in Leo's (2012) study were parents' lack of English proficiency and cultural knowledge which made it difficult to navigate the medical system and other important things like job searches. Because the parents could not speak English, but their school-aged children could, the children were often expected to translate documents and coordinate vital events like medical appointments. Some parents in these families explained that the credentials they had earned in their home countries such as college degrees and professional licenses were not accepted in the U.S., so they were forced to redo their education or take lower-paying jobs. This resulted in high-school aged students taking after-school jobs to help purchase groceries and pay rent, which then led to poor performance in school due to physical exhaustion. Therefore, there is empirical evidence to show that poor academic performance in this demographic may in fact be attributed to family and household situations, but not for the reasons that educators in other studies (Rodriguez, 2012; García-Fernández et. al, 2021) have otherwise assumed.

In another context, Suh (2019) explains that college faculty members' "expectations are often based upon assumptions about students' previous academic experiences" (p.3). Though Suh writes specifically about adult college students, the concept is transferable to a public K-12 educational setting. For example, in middle school, content-area teachers and other educators often assume that all students have educational background and are able to read at least at a basic

level in their home language and therefore do not offer phonics or decoding instruction. (I have informally discussed this with colleagues at the middle school where I teach on numerous occasions and they all have said they do not teach basic reading lessons.) However, some students do come from backgrounds with interrupted, very little, or no prior formal schooling and have therefore never learned basic reading skills. Educators' expectations and assumptions often do not mirror reality.

These incongruencies can often be attributed to unrealized cultural differences. Suh (2019) speaks of American educators' push towards students' autonomy in learning, but explains that not all students believe autonomous learning is appropriate. In some cultures, the students expect the teachers to lecture and provide information while the students simply absorb and memorize information. Culturally, the expectations of student behavior and performance are at odds between students from those cultures and many American educators. The educators may then attribute poor performance or outcomes to cultural differences, but not examine their own practices in culturally responsive teaching.

García-Fernández et. al (2021) do not discuss attribution theory explicitly, but do administer a survey to their teacher participants to gauge what factors those teachers believe most affect student performance. For the statement, "The students' possibilities for academic success are conditioned by the type of family to which they belong," 75% of respondents agreed. One statement was, "The teachers' expectations about the students exert a decisive influence on their academic results." Only about one-third of teachers agreed. The responses to these statements indicate a tendency for teachers to either ignore or be unaware of their expectations and how they affect their students. The teachers in this study tended to attribute students' success more to family and home life than to teachers' expectations.

Silencing of Aspirations

Appadurai (2004) explains that those who live in poverty often do not have “the capacity to aspire” because they do not have the opportunities to develop the capacity. He writes that it is “not because of any cognitive deficit... but because the capacity to aspire... thrives and survives on practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation” (p.69). I would like to make an analogy here. Rather than monetary poverty, think of immigrant/ELL students as individuals who come to school with a different sort of poverty (though some may actually live in monetary poverty as well). Though these students bring their rich lived experiences, cultures, and home language backgrounds to their educational setting, they still have a certain knowledge poverty; they may lack knowledge of English, American school culture, American pop culture (frequently referenced in middle school classrooms), and American systems in general. If they enter an American school with this sort of knowledge poverty, then their capacity to aspire is hindered because their time is typically spent intensively acquiring English language skills as well as cultural knowledge and understanding. This is compounded by the fact that their teachers and other educators in the building may not hold these students to the same higher expectations they have for the students’ native-English-speaking peers (Rodriguez, 2012; Dabach et. al, 2018). Thus, for these students, the capacity to aspire is not developed or, even worse, goes completely unacknowledged. Despite the underdevelopment or unacknowledgement, the capacity to aspire does still exist among America’s ELL/immigrant students.

Enciso (2011) explains that ELL students’ voices and stories are often not valued in school unless their story can “be interpreted as evidence of predetermined curricular knowledge” (p.25). (This is related to the previously discussed idea that educators often operate with the assumption that their students have had prior education and that their classroom content and

norms were similar to the educator's expectations and prior experience (Suh, 2019).) Enciso (2011) also presents evidence that even when immigrant/ELL students are given opportunities to share their stories in class, they still are not heard by most educators or their mainstream peers because they are typically given the space to use their voices in the ELL classroom which is usually in a different physical location.

Thus, if a student in this population has a story to tell about their goals, aspirations, or imagined successful future, the space where they are able to talk about it is likely not among educators who are most likely to hold lower expectations of them. Their capacity to aspire is likely only nurtured in the ELL classroom. However, in a typical middle school, that will likely be for two out of six periods per day. Therefore, for these students, over 60% of the school day is spent in spaces where their voices are undervalued - if heard at all, so they are unlikely to have the opportunity to counter the low expectations that an educator may hold by sharing their stories.

Bringing It All Together

The current study aims primarily to interrupt the cycle of detrimental effects of educators' low expectations on educational and occupational outcomes for immigrant/ELL students. The literature illustrates that educators' expectations matter because their expectations influence their interactions with students and ultimately affect students' future trajectories (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Dabach et. al, 2018).

There is evidence in the literature that when teachers know more about students and their home lives, their expectations get higher. Rodriguez (2012) writes of educators expressing low expectations, but a principal negating those expectations by getting the school's staff more

integrated with the community. A landmark study by Moll et. al (1992) demonstrated that when educators know more about students' backgrounds and cultures, they have greater potential to be better educators for those students. Hence, if immigrant/ELL students are provided space to use their voices and tell their stories, it is likely that their teachers and other influential school staff (namely administrators and counselors) will raise their expectations and educational outcomes for these students will improve.

de Boer, Timmermans, and & van der Werf (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 19 teacher expectation interventions. Their study had many limitations, but two points in their discussion are noteworthy for the present research. First, they found in the literature that it is possible to raise teacher expectations with interventions. Secondly, "the type of intervention (behavioural, awareness, or beliefs) was not necessarily related to the intervention effect" (p. 195). There was no study in this review that incorporated interventions similar to having students communicate their future goals and aspirations to school staff. Despite that, their conclusions suggest that the present research has potential to be effective and that the specific intervention of sharing students' stories could have positive impacts.

Not knowing goals and aspirations leads to low expectations (which I have demonstrated through linking prior research to be detrimental to educational performance and long-term outcomes). The goals being unknown can be largely attributed to a lack of opportunities for students to discuss them with their educators. Thus, the methods of this study work to build a bridge between students and educators which allows their stories to be heard through their words and, to the extent possible, through their chosen method.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Qualitative Approach: Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is – on the surface - exactly what it sounds like. It “uses stories to understand the meaning of human actions and experiences” (Kim, 2016, p.11). However, it is not as simple as it sounds. It is a process of diving deeper into a snapshot of someone’s life or into a particular perspective on an event or phenomenon.

Narrative inquiry is also a powerful, multi-layered method that, when utilized strategically and intentionally, can work to interrupt entire systems and paradigmatic ways of thinking. Kim (2016) reminds us that the “telling of a story is always bound up with power... and domination” (p.7) and that “human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices based on narrative structures” (p.10). Narrative is so powerful that Bruce (2008) claims human beings do not just make stories – the stories also make us (p. 323).

An integral aspect of narrative inquiry is thoughtful practice on the part of the researcher. There are many important characteristics of the process, but two are most essential. First is the empowerment of the participants. Typically, researchers collect data and then interpret the data through their lenses and report findings. However, narrative inquirers share power and collaborate with their participants to report and interpret data (Kim, 2016; Bruce, 2008). The second most essential characteristic is closely tied to the first; it is “a movement away from a position of objectivity” because “narrative inquirers recognize that the researcher and researched... are in relationship with each other” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p.6). Narrative inquiry is a subjective approach to research because the researcher forms relationships with the participants and seeks to empower stakeholders in varying ways. In working to empower others, it is impossible to remain objective and impartial.

I, as the researcher, am looking for a space to amplify the voices of students from marginalized groups and relay their stories. Prior to the study, I also optimistically expected that student participants' stories would affect educator participants' stories by causing a reflection on implicit thinking about immigrant/ELL students. This thinking influences professional practices. In this project, educators have a forum to express the stories of their experiences which led to their ways of thinking, if their thinking shifts, and what does or does not cause a shift in thinking. Therefore, I argue that narrative inquiry is the most fitting methodology for my study.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The goal of this qualitative narrative inquiry is to investigate teachers' expectations of immigrant/ELL students and ways in which low expectations may be countered and elevated in a public middle school in Washington.

This study primarily aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What happens when a teacher facilitates a multi-phase reflection process about educators' expectations for their immigrant/ELL students?
- 2) What future do educators imagine for their immigrant/ELL students?
- 3) (How, if at all) do teachers' expectations of English learners change by integrating students' voices and stories of their goals and aspirations into the curriculum?

Researcher's Role

There are three roles I take on that potentially influence the research: colleague, teacher, and advocate. I name and discuss these specific roles because they affect various aspects of the project, including methods of data collection, participant recruitment, and the communication and presentation of findings and conclusions.

Colleague. This project is considered “backyard research” (Kim, 2016) as I work in the school where I conduct the research. I recruit and interview teachers that I routinely interact with in various capacities (cross-content professional learning communities, miscellaneous committees, and more). I keep my role as a colleague in mind as I facilitate conversations and discuss viewpoints because of the host of potential issues that backyard research comes with (addressed later with potential ethical issues).

Teacher. I recruit students from my class to participate in my project. I am keenly aware of the power structure in place. As the teacher – specifically a white, male teacher who speaks and teaches the dominant language of instruction (which is not the student-participant’s first language), it is my responsibility to ensure students feel safe throughout the research process. I make it explicitly clear that their initial participation, non-participation, or withdrawal from the study does not affect their grade or any other aspect of their school lives.

Advocate. The role of advocate is one I take on every day, regardless of research-related activities. I am not an impartial researcher. When students enter my classroom, I begin to think of them not just as students, but as *my* students. I feel a responsibility to watch over their school lives and make sure I am doing everything in my power to boost them to success. Pertaining to this study, my role of advocate materializes as a messenger for communicating students’ stories and a provider of space for voices to be heard.

A danger this role presents is bias towards educator-participants. Previous research detailing educators’ low expectations of immigrant/ELL students (Dabach et. al, 2018) and students from different racial backgrounds from the teacher (Gershensen and Papageorge, 2022) has influenced my views and motivations before even starting this project. Examining my own

internal bias leads me to intentionally look for educator-participant responses that demonstrate higher expectations of immigrant/ELL students than I anticipate.

Context

The study takes place in a racially diverse and multicultural middle school in a suburban area of Washington State. The diversity among the students and staff is easily seen and often is explicitly celebrated. Female students who follow the Muslim faith wear hijabs; some who have recently immigrated from Afghanistan wear clothing styles that are traditionally Afghani. They asked for space for midday prayers and were accommodated by the administration team. Multiple languages can be seen posted on signage and heard from students as they converse in the hallways – Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Pashto, Farsi, Korean, Japanese, Ukrainian, and Russian are a few among the many languages spoken by students.

I have been teaching students identified as English language learners at this school since September of 2021. While there are currently two other ELL teachers on staff, only two of their five class periods are exclusively dedicated to language development services for ELLs. I am the only full-time ELL teacher at this school with 180 students identified as ELL (approximately 20% of the school).

In August of 2022, I took the role of ELL department lead teacher. I had conversations with teachers in various departments and capacities prior to being the head of the department, but having the title of lead ELL teacher invited a deluge of questions and requests for help in accommodating our ELL students in other classes. I have had extensive conversations with staff members in different roles (administration, counseling, community liaison, the school nurse, the librarian, and more) about our ELL population. I have had the opportunity to hear concerns and to assist in developing higher-quality instruction for our ELL population across content areas. All

of this has given me a better emic understanding of the school's culture surrounding ELL education and the teachers' opinions of the students' abilities.

It is crucial to note here that this specific context is appropriate for this study precisely because of the conversations I have been privy to due to my role as the only full-time ELL teacher and subsequently as the lead teacher of the department. I have heard statements from teachers that contradict what I observe in class. These statements include things like, "They are not motivated" about a student who will plead for more time to finish a task in some classes because despite their best, concentrated efforts, they could not finish in the allotted time. I heard, "He can't read. Like at all," about a student who read a seventh-grade level text and independently wrote a paragraph in another teacher's class.

The discrepancy between teachers' statements and observable student performance in this context begs several questions – primarily the previously stated research questions. It is a context ripe with opportunities to investigate teacher expectations, their effects, and what happens when these students are given opportunities to share the stories of their imagined successful futures as well as their abilities to communicate those stories in English.

Participants

Educators

"Narrative inquiry research is best for capturing the detailed stories... of a single individual or... a small number of individuals" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.71). As recommended in narrative inquiry literature, I recruit five participants for my study to keep the number of individuals small. There are many different roles educators take on in a school – administration, counseling, teaching, and other services – so I believe it is important to gather insight from various

perspectives within the school as educators in each of these roles affect a student's school experiences and educational outcomes differently.

Of the five educator participants, three are teachers. None are certified to teach ELL, though they all have extensive experience teaching ELLs due to the demographics and scheduling practices of our school. One is a special education teacher because our school has a significant number of students who are dual identified for both special education and English language development services.

The remaining two educator participants are one counselor and one administrator. These perspectives are important to include in the study because of how people in these roles can potentially serve as gatekeepers. In their study on educators' expectations of Latino immigrant students, Dabach et al. (2018) uncovered one view that educators "just focus on them learning English and so people don't go out of their way to let them know about it [college]" (p.45), illustrating that educators' gatekeeping of information due to their expectations can adversely affect students' futures. Counselors are often the individuals in a school that communicate processes for applying for college and often work closely with administration. Therefore, it is important to include these perspectives when investigating educators' expectations of this population.

Students

Students from my class participate in this study on a voluntary basis by allowing their work. The writing and projects they produce as regular class assignments are presented to educator participants and paired with information from student participants' school profiles such as test scores, grades, English learner status, and race. The only information presented to

educator participants is what is available for all teachers to access in the school or district database.

Data Sources and Data Collection

Student Work

In the first step of this study, students answer the following prompt: “What is your dream? Imagine you are older and have already become successful at what you want to do. Think about the steps you took to make that dream come true. Tell the story of how you achieved that dream. Include challenges you meet along the way and how you overcome those challenges.”

Next, students go through the writing process to construct a personal narrative in first person to tell their story. Writing the essay is a necessary part of the project to address state writing standards (because this is completed as an in-class assignment) as well as to prepare these students for their standardized English proficiency test. However, to honor the multicultural composition of the class and allow students to tell their stories in any other way they see fit, I ask students to present their narrative in any other form they choose (art, music, dramatic reading, animation, etc.) in addition to the written component.

Interviews with Educators

I conduct interviews with diverse educators in various positions in the school (see *Appendix*). The first interview is intended to uncover their general expectations of immigrant/ELL students in their classes and beyond the K-12 education system as well as initial expectations of specific students based on demographic and academic information with names of students kept anonymous. Information is anonymously presented in a chart such as table 3.1.

Demographics	Grades	iReady	WIDA ACCESS
Grade:	Language Arts:	Reading:	Overall:
Ethnicity:	Math:	Math:	
Language:	Science:		
	Social Studies:		

Table 3.1: How student information is presented to educator participants for the initial interview. [iReady is the program the school district uses to assess a student’s grade level abilities in reading and mathematics. WIDA ACCESS is the acronym for the standardized English proficiency test for English learners.]

Then I ask teachers to explain what their expectations for this student might be in a class period, in a school day, and after high school based only on this information.

In the second session, I remind educators of what we spoke about before and ask possible follow-up questions after reviewing the data from the first interview. I then present the work (personal narrative, other form of presentation, or both, depending on the student’s consent²) of the same student showing the student’s imagined future accomplishments and achieved aspirations. I ask the educators to share their thoughts on the work and what their (perhaps new) expectations are. I investigate any emerging shifts in expectations or lack thereof.

Data Analysis

“Narrative researchers try to interpret meanings through an analysis of plotlines, thematic structures, social and cultural referents” (Kim, 2016, p.190). Following a model used by Yussen and Ozcan (1997; as cited in Creswell and Poth, 2018), I examine educator participants’ responses for pieces of a narrative that fit into each element of a plot: exposition, rising action (with a conflict), climax, falling action, and resolution. Each of these elements is coded in data

² If the student produced a recording, I obtain additional consent to play the recording for another educator as faces and voices may be identifiable to educator participants. If additional consent is not obtained, only the written narrative is shared with the other educator and the name of the student participant is not revealed.

generated by educator participants. I now describe what I look for in the data as it pertains to each plot element. (See table 3.2.)

Research Question	Plot Element	Potential Example
<p>1) What happens when a teacher facilitates a multi-phase reflection process about educators' expectations for their immigrant/ELL students?</p> <p>2) What future do educators imagine for their immigrant/ELL students?</p>	Exposition	<p>- I expect all students to have a goal.</p> <p>- I don't know what to expect from my ELLs.</p>
<p>2) What future do educators imagine for their immigrant/ELL students?</p> <p>3) (How, if at all) do teachers' expectations of English learners change by integrating students' voices and stories of their goals and aspirations into the curriculum?</p>	Conflict	<p>- I (do not) have these expectations because....</p> <p>- My expectations do not match what the student says because...</p> <p>- I already knew this about the student. I held high expectations because...</p>
<p>3) (How, if at all) do teachers' expectations of English learners change by integrating students' voices and stories into the curriculum?</p>	Rising Action	<p>- I see the difference in my expectations and what the student presents because...</p> <p>- I see little difference in my expectations and what the student presents because...</p>
<p>3) (How, if at all) do teachers' expectations of English learners change by integrating students' voices and stories into the curriculum?</p>	Climax	<p>- My expectations have change changed because...</p> <p>- My expectations have not changed because...</p>
<p>3) (How, if at all) do teachers' expectations of English learners change by integrating students' voices and stories into the curriculum?</p>	Falling Action	<p>- I consider this (non) change to be important because...</p>

3) (How, if at all) do teachers' expectations of English learners change by integrating students' voices and stories into the curriculum?	Resolution	My future practices in teaching ELL students (will not) be different in that...
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Validation Strategies

I have many concerns about what I extract from the stories of participants and how I interpret their words. One warning I heard from instructors many times while constructing this study was that it appears I am assuming a deficit view of teachers and villainizing them before I begin. An additional, personal concern is making sure I accurately tell the stories of the participants; I aspire to word their thoughts and experiences accurately and respectfully. I address both issues in my validation strategies.

Negative Case Analysis

My purpose statement has been criticized for naming “low expectations” from educators. This phrase is inspired by previous research (Dabach et. al, 2018) as well as my own experience with colleagues, but is not intended to be a criticism of teachers who are genuinely working to inspire and assist their students. That said, I enter the study with an open mind and realize that some participants may bring higher expectations of their students to the research. It is possible that they provide evidence to counter the idea that educators hold lower expectations of immigrant/ELL students.

If participants do provide evidence that their expectations of immigrant/ELL students are higher than I anticipated, then I consider this evidence to provide “points of intrigue” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.261) worthy of an in-depth discussion because they counter what previous

researchers have found. Through a process Creswell & Poth (2018) dub “negative case analysis,” I intentionally scour the data for evidence that participants’ expectations are, in fact, high and that those expectations have positive influences on how the participants interact with and support immigrant/ELL students.

Member Checking

Member checking is a step in the research process in which all findings and interpretations are returned to participants so they can review the material and make judgments on the accuracy and credibility of what the researcher intends to present (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p.261). Student participants have no reason to view or make judgements about what I present in findings because their work is not interpreted for use in the findings. However, educator participants’ words and actions are interpreted and put into story form, so they have reason to be informed of what is presented in the findings and to have their voices incorporated in how their stories are told.

Creswell and Poth (2018) do not recommend taking raw data (in this study, interview transcripts and written responses) back to participants. Therefore, educator participants are given drafts of their stories and time to read and make comments. If there is any discrepancy in what is written in the draft and what the participant feels is accurate, I work with them for a better understanding of their stories to write an account that better represents their stories from their points of view.

Structure of the Findings

In the findings, I present several narratives, all of which include the traditional plot elements (as previously listed) illustrated in figure 3.1. Thus, I employ the narrative mode of analysis as explained by Kim (2016). I take information from focus group sessions and written responses to

construct individual participants' narratives "into a coherent whole" story (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.15 as cited in Kim, 2016). Findings are restoried (Kim, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018) so that

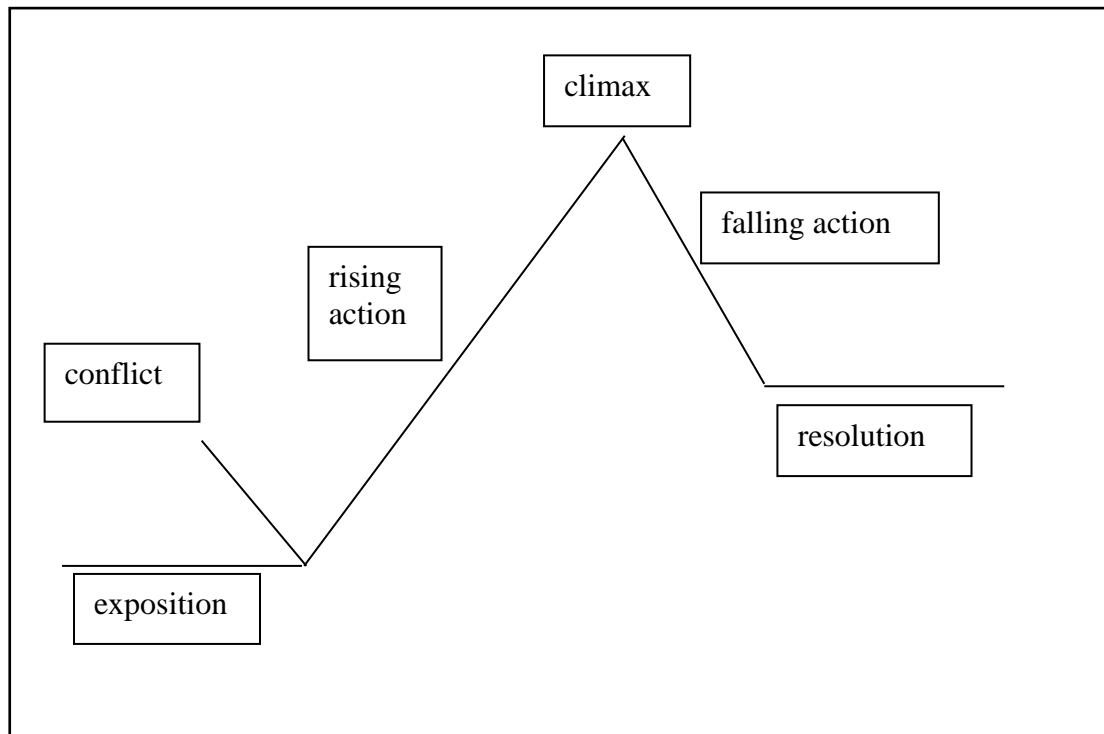


Figure 3.1: A visual representation of the structure of a narrative derived from Harris (n.d.).

readers can make chronological sense of what educators thought before and after learning about students' future goals and aspirations.

Narrative smoothing (Kim, 2016) is the process in which the researcher uses five strategies to present the findings of a narrative inquiry in story form to the reader: focus, omission, addition, appropriation, and transposition (p.192). I utilize these strategies to structure the narratives of participants because the raw data does not always materialize in chronological order or in any form of a story. To make the development of the plot clear to readers, I employ limited creative license through the process of narrative smoothing.

Potential Ethical Issues

Student-Teacher Relationship

I acknowledge the power dynamic that exists between teachers and students, particularly at the middle school level. I make it clear that student participation in this study has no effect whatsoever on their grades or any other aspect of school life. Participation is completely voluntary, and students are allowed to remove their work and data from the study at any time.

Professional Relationships. I also acknowledge that because this is backyard research (Kim, 2016), the nature of professional relationships may influence data. Relationships may be impacted by participation in the study because I work with these colleagues in various capacities. I explain to educator participants that participation has no effect on our working relationship and that all data will be kept confidential.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the rationale for conducting this research as a narrative inquiry. I have explained how I analyze data in this study – searching for the elements of plot in participant’s responses. I then detail the plan to restory the responses into a coherent and chronological narrative to present as findings. In the next chapter, I present the narratives produced from the data and the findings.

Chapter 4: Restorying Teachers' Narratives of Student' Potential

Introduction

This chapter presents data in the form of short narratives that were crafted based on participants' answers in interviews. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using Yussen and Ozcan's (1997) model for labeling the elements of a plot. I restory (Kim, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018) responses "into a coherent whole" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.15 as cited in Kim, 2016) using creative license and narrative smoothing (Kim 2016). Participants were given a copy of their own narrative to read and were asked to communicate any misrepresentations, misunderstandings, or any content that they felt may not be an accurate reflection of their experiences and words during this research process. To date, no participants have submitted comments or requests for revisions.

First, I present some basic background on the participants' professional profile, but do not reveal specific information in order to protect their anonymity as much as possible. Pseudonyms are used to this effect. I then present the narrative in its final form as accepted and confirmed by the participant. For reference and clarity, I cite pertinent quotes from transcripts to support the reasoning behind the construction of the narrative.

Students' Narratives of Their Imagined Successful Futures

Student 1

A sixth grade, intermediate-level student wrote about becoming a successful video game coder. He gave himself a pseudonym in the first line of the story (and then must have forgotten what it was because he changed it at the end). He seemed to have exceptionally mature insight into the world of the working person as he expressed joy at getting the job, but also disappointment in realizing that he would be bound to a working schedule for many years to come. As his teacher, I

did not expect him to write as much or as well as he did. I was pleasantly surprised with his punctuation and idiomatic expressions (“That’s the way the cookie crumbles.”).

Prompt

Imagine yourself as already successful. You have achieved your dream of becoming a great, successful _____. How did you do it?

Response

"Get a job Timmy!" My mother said, I rushed to print out my resume at staples and then rushed into the Tech Gaming store. The manager said "Do you have any experience or some coding projects you can show me?". I rushed home and then went online and searched up coding lessons.

I did everything the teacher asked but a week later I started to get tired of going to lessons all day. But another week later I went to the Tech Gaming store again. And this time I showed them my work and they were impressed with it. They hired me to code some new games and help with other huge projects.

I rushed home to tell my mother about the great news and she was filled with excitement. She said "Great job Jim! Now get ready for the first day of work!". I got dressed up in a suit and got ready for work. I rushed to Tech Gaming once again. I work for a few hours and a week I get paid.

I was filled with emotions and rushed home to tell my mother about the great news "Mom! I got my first paycheck!" My mother said "Great job! But now you have to do this everyday!" I quickly changed my emotions and said "Ugh". But I guess that's how the cookie crumbles.

Student 2

A seventh-grade, intermediate-level student wrote about becoming a successful fashion designer.

Because she is one year older than Student 1, I had expected her to write more, but I also saw her working diligently throughout the timespan of this project. Even with my coaching as the teacher and the option to ask classmates for help and ideas, this was the best she could produce in a few days. I felt it was important to include her story to show the range of abilities inside the

intermediate classes and to demonstrate that even though students may produce less voluminous writing, they still have their own aspirations and motivations for achievement.

Prompt

Imagine yourself as already successful. You have achieved your dream of becoming a great, successful _____. How did you do it?

Response

I was 20 years old when I saw a fashion designer magazine. Then I wanted to become one so I took fashion designer school. But the hard part was sewing and I did not know how to sew and then I took sewing class and it was hard. But I finally learned how to do it. I posted it and I was waiting for an order. Then I got so many orders and I was so thankful that people ordered. And that's how I became a successful fashion designer.

Student 3

I have known student three since her first day in school in the States. When she first arrived, she could speak no English beyond greetings and a few numbers, but she was not determined to let that stop her from making progress. In my experience, few students progress in English acquisition at such an exponential rate. Because I knew her and her history, I asked if she used a translator to write this. Her response was something to the effect of, "For a few words. I wrote almost all myself, but I didn't know some words, so I had to translate." I told her that was exactly what I had expected for her level and time learning English – to do her best and then use a translator on a few words when needed. I felt it was important to share her imagined successful future with other educators to show the height of what is possible for English learners.

Prompt

Imagine yourself as already successful. You have achieved your dream of becoming a great, successful _____. How did you do it?

Response

When I was 10 I decided to be a doctor because I really like this job. I like to save people's lives so I decided to go to school and take medical class. I was so good at this but I have a problem. I'm not good in math class because It's really hard for me. So I decide to take extra math classes. This helped me a lot and I was finally able to pass math. I was very happy because I was finally going to be able to graduate and get a job. And the day came when I graduated and got my medical degree. A few months passed and I finally got a job at a hospital. So now I am a great doctor.

Participating Educators and Their Narratives

Liz – A Values-Based Educator

Demographics

Liz teaches a self-contained special education class of mixed grade levels, 6 - 8. Her students come from a variety of backgrounds, including English learners, and have a variety of learning, physical, and communication disabilities that strongly affect their educational experiences. In her interview, she spoke at length about being a values-based educator, nurturing autonomy within students, and maintaining a “these kids can” attitude in regards to her expectations of them.

Restoried Narrative

Do my students feel safe? Do they feel a sense of belonging in my classroom? These are the guiding questions for me as I start my daily grind as an educator in a self-contained classroom full of wonderfully unique students who qualify for special education services. Under those umbrella questions come the questions that fine-tune my decision-making process as I go

through the day: How can I support each child's social and emotional well-being? What accommodations and modifications do I need to execute in my practice today? Most importantly, how can I do these things while making sure that each child in my care is honored, respected, and feels a sense of dignity? In my opinion, my greatest failure as an educator would be to make a student feel lesser than.

First and foremost, I strive to meet students' needs. I first tend to their physical needs to the best of my ability. I ask each student if they had a chance to brush their teeth, wash their face, and eat breakfast. If they answer no to any of those, I ask no more questions and provide them with what they need. Luckily, I have a sink in my classroom, so I can easily allow time for them to take care of themselves if they don't want to go to the crowded restroom.

Next on my list is to check the environment in my classroom. For example, I know that Jessica is a high-needs student who feels safer when she can see the door and windows and know who is coming in before they enter the room. It is not my place to understand the need. It is my place to know the need and do the best I can to meet it, so I make sure my windows are not obstructed and she can know who is coming in a little before they open the door.

After making sure all students feel safe, then I can begin to seriously consider my academic and behavioral expectations *for the day*. I emphasize *for the day* because I firmly believe that daily expectations *have* to be flexible, particularly with the population that I serve. My operational philosophy as an educator is to hold firm to the high expectations of the end goals I have for students: to hold themselves accountable for their actions and their growth (both social-emotionally and academically), to take perspectives of others, to have empathy for others, to feel a sense of belonging, and to be empowered. However, with those standards remaining consistently high, I also understand that humans have good days and bad days.

Today, my heart broke for twelve-year-old Juan. During our morning check-in, he told me that he didn't sleep well last night. I asked if he felt comfortable telling me more, and he shared that his Terret's ticks kept him up all night.

"I begged my mom to tie my arms to the bed so I wouldn't hit myself, but she wouldn't listen," he confided in me.

I knew in that moment that my expectations of him today could not be the same as they were yesterday. First, he was physically exhausted due to circumstances beyond his control. Secondly, he was mentally and emotionally exhausted from the conflict with his mom and from trying to cope with his syndrome. Those factors have zero effect on how I expect him to treat others or what I think he is overall capable of over the course of the school year, but it would be unfair for me to think he could focus on his academics today as well as he did yesterday.

"Juan, I'm so sorry you didn't rest well. If you need to take a few minutes to close your eyes today or if you need something else to help you get through the day, please let me know. I'll do what I can to help you make it through." I realize that if I hold him to the same expectations I had yesterday – when he came in happy and said he rested well – that he might be down on himself and it might move him two steps backwards in academic, social, and emotional progress.

Today, I'm so grateful that even though I am a cog in a system that I feel is outdated because it was designed to prepare kids for an industrialized workforce, I have a special situation in my classroom where I can be extremely flexible with the accommodations, timing, content, and overall educational experiences of my students. I am glad to be in a position where I can provide Juan with time to recover from his tiresome night.

I know that he has potential to be a successful and productive member of our community. I have high hopes that Juan, despite his disability and the challenges that come along with it, will

put the same effort into creating a successful future for himself as he did in creating a comfortable environment for himself today. If, as a child, he can advocate for himself to his teacher and express what he needs, then he will continue to develop this and other skills to achieve great things. I hope I get to see what amazing things he goes on to do after he is no longer my student.

Data Excerpts in the Restorying: Transcript Citations

The following are some of the excerpts from Liz’s interview transcript that inspired the narrative.

1. “...we're taking into account...a level of belonging and safety. I'm taking into account their social and emotional well-being. I'm taking into account their sensory and fine motor needs. I'm taking into account their processing levels. I'm taking into account the accommodations and modifications outlined. I also wanna make sure that... I have to honor the student and provide an environment that holds levels of respect and dignity. So these accommodations are seen in a way that a student never feels lesser than.”

2. “If they didn't have a chance to brush their teeth, wash their face, et cetera, all of the hygiene components, we want to make sure just like Maslow's hierarchy is being addressed first thing. From there. Using trauma-informed practices, I have to ensure that my instructional components honor what allows for the environment to feel safe.”

3. “If they didn't have a chance to brush their teeth, wash their face, et cetera, all of the hygiene components, we want to make sure just like Maslow's hierarchy is being addressed first thing.

From there. Using trauma-informed practices, I have to ensure that my instructional components honor what allows for the environment to feel safe.”

4. “I try to be a filter and I try to be a shield so that their experiences, because fair isn't equal and everything is different. And I love the fact that there's diversity in my classroom. But I want that diversity to be celebrated and not seen as like additional work.”

5. “I don't believe that our public school system is built to... Well, it's based on industrialization. And I don't think that, for me, that's, if I saw A's across the board, I would think like, oh, this, like, it must, from what it sounds like, it must be really hard to get an A's in school, in my opinion.”

Samantha – A Concerned Educator

Demographics

Samantha is an experienced science teacher. This school year (2023 - 24), she is teaching 8th grade classes, but has taught other grade levels before. She has had many English learners in her classes throughout her career. Common themes in her interview answers included: wanting to do more for her English learners, not knowing how to do more for English learners, and the idea of a faulty educational system that does not allow educators to do all that they wish to do in terms of supporting their students of various backgrounds and abilities.

Restoried Narrative

I am overwhelmed. I know that doesn't make me unique as an educator in today's system in America, but that doesn't make it any less true. I strive to be a great teacher, but sometimes the challenges to get to where I want to be seem insurmountable. One of the biggest challenges is

overcoming the language barriers that come with teaching students from other countries. I love my English learners and I want to help them, but when I have five different languages represented and they all have varying levels of English and first-language proficiency, it is impossible to give individual students the help they need and deserve.

It's nearing the end of the first grading period of the school year. I have to give myself a pep talk at the beginning of each day. I tell myself: Remember that students are individuals and not all students will always give their best effort. Your brand new ELL newcomers like Carlita might work hard, but they will naturally not be able to do the same things in English as your intermediate students like Yolanda and Yuri. While work production expectations can differ based on abilities, effort expectations must stay the same.

I can't help but wonder if I'm supporting Yolanda and Yuri as much as I should. I always feel that I should do more, but I don't know where to begin. I remember that I reached out to our ELL teacher and check to see if he responded to my email. I don't really have time to read these writing samples he has shared with me, but maybe it will be enlightening to see what these kids do outside of my class.

I decide to open the Google docs linked in the email and quickly scan their essays. I'm pleasantly surprised!

Both students seem to have put strong effort into their writing about achieving future goals. As I read, I wonder if they were given extra supports like sentence stems and paragraph frames? I realize that can't be what happened because their stories are so different. If they were copying sentence starters, then they would have at least more phrases in common in their writing. I didn't know an intermediate ELL student could produce writing like this on their own. Have I not been holding high enough expectations of them from the start?

The revelation that not only can they write this much, but that they can do it with this degree of accuracy makes me wonder what is happening in my class. I have so many questions. Am I not supporting them enough in science content? Am I not giving them enough support in English for science? Or are the students not doing their part to meet me halfway with their best effort?

I can't help but reflect on past experiences. I remember a few years back when Pablo, a beginner-level ELL took his project very seriously. He would not draw the comic strip we had assigned. He opted to do a more academic written report. I think about Fatima, the one Arabic speaker that sticks out in my memory from my years of teaching. She worked so hard, so consistently, and she was able to achieve so much even though she came in with very little English.

Answers to my questions must lie somewhere in the middle. I know that each student who enters my classroom is a unique individual, regardless of their English proficiency level or other factors in their background. When I think of my ELL students, I know that some will give their strongest effort and others will get by with doing the least amount of work possible, which sometimes means no schoolwork at all. Some of them will outshine our native English speakers in terms of effort and pride in their work and others will settle for giving nothing.

While a student's effort in engaging with their education is crucial to their success, it does not diminish the importance of my effort as their educator. I still have a responsibility to differentiate and accommodate materials for them. The system is broken, and I will never feel like I have enough time, training, or ability to support these kids who deserve it because my planning time is limited and there is a never-ending checklist of paperwork, grading, lesson planning, emailing, family contact, and research that must be done.

I close my email and the writing samples from Yuri and Yolanda. I take a deep breath and clench my jaw in determination. I won't be perfect. I won't be able to support them as much as I want every day. But today I can do more. Today I will spend some time thinking creatively about how to support them in today's lesson. I will put it on my checklist for tomorrow. And the day after that. And the day after that. Even on the days I don't do it well or when I don't do it at all, it will be there, and I will be thinking about how I can help them get to where they want to be in the future.

Data Excerpts in the Restorying: Transcript Citations

1. "I imagine that our students, since they're in middle school, are probably going to be in a place after high school that they can do whatever they like if they're wanting to go to college... Just whether they can acquire enough language that quickly in order to be able to handle something like college coursework. I don't know what kind of accommodations there are in college for English language learners."

2. "I don't know if ability is the right word, but there's such a wide range of our ML students so that my expectations for a brand new newcomer might be different than for an intermediate student... I don't know if ability is the right word, but there's such a wide range of our ML students so that my expectations for a brand new newcomer might be different than for an intermediate student."

3. "There's such a wide range too with student effort as well. Cause I had a couple of beginners who did a project recently and I think they're both still in the beginner category and they did a better project than many of my native English speakers did, because they worked really hard on

it... it's very mixed. I have some English learners who are extremely hard workers and I have some who engage very little. Very mixed.”

4. “My impression is that the student is just not getting the help they need from me and their general, you know, assuming they're in my class, me and the general ed teachers - that they could do more if we were able to support them better in the classroom.”

5. “...my expectations just went up because they're using pretty sophisticated sentence structure and vocabulary. And my guess would be if they're able to write this well, then they're probably able to read OK and they should be able to access information in their other classes maybe more easily than I thought.”

Benjamin – Administrator with Asset-Based Views

Demographics

Benjamin is an assistant principal who has been an administrator at the same middle school for several years. His background is in math education. Benjamin communicated several times that students being able to operate in more than one language is a lifelong benefit for them. He referred to differentiated supports and scaffolds for English learners based on proficiency levels and explicitly stated that he holds equal expectations for both ELLs and native-English-speaking students.

Restoried Narrative

Envious. I am somewhat envious of our students who are English learners. I watch them when I am observing teachers' classes and I see our students who are new to doing school in English using computers, phones, friends, body language, and any other resource they can think of to communicate and engage with the lesson. I know students who are newer to doing school in

English lean on those supports more so than students who have been in the U.S. longer or who have obtained a higher level of proficiency. I am envious because I see so much potential and so much opportunity lying ahead of them. I can't help but wonder what other career avenues I might have explored if I had had the opportunity to grow up bilingual.

As I observe Estefany in Ms. Overture's family and consumer science class, I am thoroughly impressed with her ability to move back and forth between languages. She takes in information in English from Ms. Overture, then translates instructions into Spanish to help a friend who is sitting next to her. She explains how to start using a sewing machine and the friend seems to be grateful for the translation help.

I think about my friends who are professionals in other fields who get paid more because they have communication skills in multiple languages. I imagine Estefany in a position to do very well for herself if she leverages her bilingualism for career advancement. She can reach a broader audience than I can because she has two languages and two cultural backgrounds to draw from. I can see she truly has potential to be whatever she wants to be as long as she keeps that desire for learning and maintains the work ethic I see in her during this class period.

My thoughts wander to the friend Estefany helped. Estefany's friend's eyes are darting in a few directions. She is clearly either confused or hesitant about something. First, she looks at the written instructions (all in English, of course) from Ms. Overture who is currently coaching a student on **not** sewing their thumb to the apron they made. Estefany's friend either gathers that Ms. Overture is busy or feels too shy to ask for help. Estefany is now deep in the work of following her pattern, checking her instructions, and wrestling with her sewing machine. It seems that Estefany's friend is cognizant that no one is available to assist her at the moment.

I don't know what the problem might be, but I want to help. I motion to her

Chromebook and mime typing. It looks like she has had an “ah-ha moment.” She opens her computer and begins to peck at her keyboard. She might need extra time on this assignment because she needs to translate, but I see that she is making the effort to follow along and do the best she can.

I am always impressed when I see these students work hard to overcome the extra barriers they face in their education. I have always known that most students are capable of anything - particularly our English learners. They just need the right supports at the right time to reach their full potential. Then they might outshine me one day when they are leveraging their abilities in multiple languages.

My introspection concerning my linguistic envy is interrupted by a call on my radio that I am needed in the office. I have to cut the observation a little short. I check in with Ms. Overture to make sure no fingers or other appendages have been sewn to aprons, and she chuckles. I leave the room and move on to the next item on today’s agenda.

Data Excerpts in the Restorying: Transcript Citations

1. “The expectations for ML students in a school day probably align generally to expectations for all students within a school day. There are some areas where they differ. Some of them are probably smaller things, such as how they're using tools and technology and resources to support their learning.”

2. “Well, my hopes would be that... Having the skills of being able to communicate in more than one language was that students post high school have found a way to engage with society, some type of career or field or practice, and that they're able to reach and serve or support a much broader group of individuals than someone who is not multilingual like myself. My hope will also be that they are leveraging those additional skills to make more money because they can do

like I can talk to a certain amount of people just right now in person and they can do it times.

Right? Two times five times how many languages and reach more and so that region of impact I think should have you know, like monetary value.”

3. “I think that effort and then that diversity of skill with any type of focus leads itself to some type of positive outcomes. The level of support that students might need to kind of get there may vary.”

4. “I would expect from the student that with those scores that there's some, a good amount of effort that has probably been put in so that they can have at an eighth grade, especially to get a two in science and language arts, that shows me that I could expect that desire to try to learn more and like, hey, like they are really putting in the work...”

5. “I think this student could be whatever they wanted to be. I think to have eighth grade, a one in math, maybe that is not their strong subject area. So maybe I wouldn't necessarily expect a career like something super heavy math focused...”

Stephanie – An Empathetic Educator

Demographics

Stephanie is one of the younger teachers at her school. As of the 2023 - 2024 school year, she has less than five years of experience. She teaches P.E. and health. Though her teaching experience is still in its early stages, she speaks of much experience with English learners in her classes. She also relates to her ELLs and their experiences with empathy as she had a similar

experience. Though she is not Hispanic and spoke English at home as a child, her family sent her to a special program to attend school in Spanish from kindergarten through eighth grade. When she got to high school, taking academic classes in English was a shock to her system because even though she had the background knowledge for her core subjects, she did not know academic terms in English. Her story is one of empathy and understanding.

Restoried Narrative

One of the many things they don't tell you when you decide to become a middle school P.E. teacher is that one day a student may lock themselves in a port-a-potty that happens to be near the field and will refuse to come out. You will have no idea what to do because you can't leave them out there, but you can't let all your other students go back inside unsupervised. They don't tell you that you will often rely on luck and the good graces of administrators who will be flexible in times like those when you are faced with impossible choices.

They mention that you will have some English learners. They throw in a few strategies that might be helpful in instruction. What they don't tell you is that some of these kids from other countries are not as proficient as we might expect with technology and may not be able to read and write in their first language. They don't tell you how most days you will feel like you are just not doing enough.

Luckily, the vast majority of the English learner population at my school is Spanish-speaking and I had the opportunity to attend school in Spanish for several years. I can speak Spanish with these kids and support them in ways that most of our other staff cannot. I also have the insider perspective of what it's like to try doing school in another language. I know it's not easy and I know that using Google Translate is helpful, but not enough.

Today, I am asking my health class to complete a simple project on Google Classroom. I have given them a template, so all they have to do is copy and paste and then fill in their own ideas. It's about halfway through second period, and I notice that Alejandro is still staring at the template document. He typically tries to do most of the classwork, so I meander to his desk and ask what's going on.

"I don't know how to do this," he responds.

"What do you mean? Just copy and paste and then use your own ideas. Remember how we talked about this stuff for a couple of days already? Go back to your notes." I try to encourage him to use his resources and figure it out through a productive struggle.

"No, I mean I don't know how to do that part in this part." He pointed from the template to his own digital document.

I stare at him for a second while his words sink in. I realize that he doesn't know how to copy and paste. I am also acutely aware that he didn't use the term "copy and paste." I wonder if that is because he's an English learner?

"Oh! No problem! Let me show you real quick." I coach him through it.

I learn through his ideas in his project that he is interested in being a doctor one day. I would not have guessed that from his current grades and sometimes lackadaisical attitude in class. I know he is fairly proficient in English, but I also know he struggles sometimes due to the language differences, so I thought he might give up on school.

I realize now - not just because of his classwork, but also because he finally admitted he needed more help - that I should always remember the ones who will persevere. Some of these students will push through the tough times while learning English and adjusting to school and life in another country. They will achieve great things.

I tend to reflect on my practice and think that I am not doing enough. I feel like I should do more to help our English Learners, but I feel spread so thin. I know that even our dedicated ELL department teachers don't have all the resources they need to do the best they can. I decide to keep it simple.

I learned a lot from this interaction with Alejandro. I will make instructions more clear. I will make them more visual. I should not assume that all students are proficient with technology and will offer more guided steps on how to accomplish tasks with computers. Ultimately, I want to show up in the best and brightest ways for my English learners, but I have to keep realistic expectations of myself. I may not hit home runs with differentiation and tiered supports for every student, but I can take these "copy and paste" moments and encourage learning one step at a time.

Data Excerpts in the Restorying: Transcript Citations

1. "...as teachers getting information like that, we would see that 2.5 WIDA score. And have a yellow flag for sure, meaning that student is definitely gonna be either behind in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and need extra supports. They'll probably struggle in class."

2. "...it's interesting to me too seeing the ELL score as a 3.5 because given being in a class where the supports are made for those students, they're obviously above standard and passing. But then in gen ed classes, most of the three out of the four gen ed classes, the student is below standard, showing that either the supports are lacking or just being in a gen ed setting. ...they are falling through the cracks. ...If grades are low, obviously graduation would be a concern."

3. When asked of a particular student, “How likely do you think it is that they would go for a college education?,” Stephanie responded, “...probably not very likely. Just based on my experience of how tough it is for ELL students to, one, have to deal with the English language, which is very difficult to learn . And I have personal experience with that because I was in K-12 Spanish immersion. So... I struggle with reading and writing in English because I was in science class, which was all in Spanish, math class, which was all in Spanish. science, or science, what am I missing? History, which was all in Spanish. And then come middle school and high school, I got a little taste of what RLL students get to experience is all of a sudden it's all in English and I don't know what they're talking about.”

4. “I'm thinking of all the struggles they're facing now and all the supports they're not getting... well obviously they're not going to be successful. But what's tough to remember is a lot of these kids do persevere. And when they understand that the supports are really there to help them instead of limit them, that, too, can help them be successful. But yeah, it's good to see things like this right now where students are sharing their goals and things they want to accomplish.”

5. “I checked in with students and found that a specific ML [ELL] student was staring at their computer and didn't know or understand how to copy and paste. And I didn't realize, I made the assumption, right, that everyone knew how to do that and they did understand English enough. At that point, I had gotten to know them. But I assumed that they knew how to do it, and I didn't realize that I needed to teach them how to do it. So my expectations were altered, and I have definitely changed my teaching overall to make it more visual, simplified instructions, and made

sure to do frequent check-ins with those who aren't necessarily asking for help, but might need it one-on-one, like that student did.”

Vivian – A Caring Counselor

Demographics

Vivian is an experienced school counselor with a diverse background. She is originally from the South, but currently works in a public school in Washington State. She has worked as a special education teacher, transitioned to serving as a high school counselor, then decided to move to counseling students in the middle grades. A large focus of her answers in the interviews was expecting students from other countries to make a strong effort in learning the language, engaging in their academics, and learning and adjusting to the environment and culture. Vivian clearly cares about her students and believes they all have great potential.

Restoried Narrative

I adore my kids. I see so much potential in each and every one of them. At the end of every day in my office, my hope is that each child I came in contact with felt encouraged, appreciated, and - most of all - loved unconditionally. Sometimes, though, it is *tough*. It is not tough to love them, but it is tough to make them feel it because they interpret words and receive my actions differently. Today was not an easy day, but I had a moment that will remain with me throughout the rest of my career, and possibly my life because I had a stark reminder to be cognizant of not only different personal interpretations, but also language and culture differences.

Mi-Jin is a Korean student who is in eighth grade. She came to my school last year, when she was in seventh grade. She knew some basic English at that time, but she could only

communicate in short and simple sentences. I had my usual new-student conference with her - you know, just a get-to-know-you conversation. I felt like we were off to a good start, and apparently so did she.

The next day, she brought me a Starbucks gift card. I was so moved that she felt like we had a good enough connection after just one short conversation that she wanted to give me something like that. “Oh, you *shouldn't* have!” I said - probably louder than I meant to - and gave her a side hug.

She grinned and bowed in her Korean style and shyly said, “Yes.” Then she went back to her class.

I heard from teachers that Mi-Jin was making progress in her classes and her English was improving. I was so proud of her! I called her to my office one day a month or two later to check in and tell her all the good things I was hearing. I checked emails and made to-do notes to myself while I waited for her to get there from her class, but she never made it. I tried again the next day, and the same thing happened. To my bewilderment, it happened a third time when I tried yet again.

I met with the teacher whose class I called her from the third time and the teacher said that Mi-Jin just refused to go. She would not, under any circumstances, go to see me in my office and had made that very clear to the teacher despite her limited English at that time. I decided not to press the issue because I learned very quickly in my counseling role that not every student will accept what I have to offer. Sometimes they come to me in their own time, but sometimes they refuse to take my guidance. I thought Mi-Jin might have just decided that I was not one she could talk to.

Fast forward to about a year later, which is today. Mi-Jin was passing through the office with a friend on the way to see our technology specialist about a chromebook issue. When I saw her, I just had to take the opportunity to speak.

“Mi-Jin! How have you been? I’ve heard such good things about you from your teachers! I was hoping you would stop by my office some time so I could tell you all the wonderful comments I’ve gotten about you!” I had only remembered how limited her English was when I finished what I was saying, but I was pleased to see that she had made so much progress in acquiring the language that she didn’t miss a beat.

“I thought you don’t like me,” she uttered with a confused look.

“What are you talking about?” I was shocked. And baffled. And speechless.

“I gave you a gift and you said I shouldn’t have. I thought I made you angry or did something wrong.”

“Oh, sweetie! No! That’s just an expression. It’s another way of saying something like, ‘I’m so surprised, but so happy,’ or ‘Thank you very much.’ I was touched and honored that you gave me a gift card.”

“Oh. I thought you asking me come to your office because I am trouble.”

“That breaks my heart. I guess we had a communication problem.”

“Yes. I understand now. In Korea, we say, ‘Don’t do again,’ but it mean we appreciate the gift, but do not want other person to feel pressure to do again. I think you mean like that.”

“That’s exactly right.”

I gave her a side hug and told her to stop by and see me after school for a quick check-in.

I was reminded that language and custom differences can truly be barriers in our schools. Despite those hurdles, Mi-Jin was doing and is continuing to do everything right. She is working

hard to improve her English so she can continue her education. She is also making connections between American culture and Korean culture in an attempt to adapt and adjust to her setting. I am so relieved to know that she and I can move forward with our counselor-student relationship now that we have figured this out.

More importantly, I am glad of the reminder that I need to be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences. While Mi-Jin was learning and adapting, it was also my job to adjust my speech and my presentation to meet her needs as a student under my care. This is a moment that will affect me both professionally and personally for many years to come.

Vivian - Data Excerpts in the Restorying: Transcript Citations

1. “I’ll tell you my expectations completely. It’s that they act like every other student; that they might they are mainstreamed. You know, I am of the special ed background - not that I’m comparing them to students with special needs, but they have special needs in that... English is not their first language. And so that just like every other student, you accommodate and you make sure, you know, all students' needs are met and it's our job to differentiate... I know that's a lot, but that is what we signed up for.”

2. “I expect the [ELL] students to ask questions. I expect the [ELL] students to learn how to trust us because I think trust is earned. So they have to feel like this is some place where I can be safe. They have to be a part of that, making this community safe. By their actions, they have to come to school, attend school. They have to learn the rules, you know? ...and I don't like to say rules, but learn the expectations of how we operate as a school to make this a functioning entity.”

3. "I had spent a lot of years in high school and I appreciated it, but I also wanted to catch the kids who were - that was my vision of coming to middle school - to do more teaching more educating about what you got coming ahead of you for high school teachers, counselors, educators to do the same to help students prepare for what's coming after that."

4. "Math is extremely difficult which... You know that's math is, so I'm not too surprised to see that and I think they'll be successful overall using everything else they have. ...it's not far off in my expectations. ...if they keep on this path, they will eventually exit out with high success."

5. "I don't change my hopes and expectations for every kid I meet. Because if I do, then that means I give up on kids. And they are developing, and they need every opportunity to grow and learn from mistakes, just like we do."

6. "I never give up on a kid. Even though I have high expectations and put stuff out there and they don't follow it, I just believe maybe I'm not the one to get to every kid."

7. "I had a kid to come in here to me and - I'm gonna just give you a little story real quick. I stopped working with her, like driving her, going to her. But then one day somebody else brought her here because she was having an issue. And she had her head down. And she said the other students made her come. And she said she didn't want to come. I said, no, she didn't want to come. She said, I didn't think you liked me. I said, no, I like you. I don't like your actions. I would never not be here for you, but I won't force you to take what I have to offer."

Chapter 5: Discussion and Reflection

Introduction

This study caused a shift in thoughts and expectations that I never anticipated - those of my own. In the middle of conducting this study, I began to realize that the trends emerging in the data I collected did not coincide with the trends I had read about in Dabach et. al (2018) - those that had inspired my project, and therefore did not match my expectations. During conversations with professors on my dissertation committee, the rationale behind my research and the subtext of what I wanted to investigate was interrogated from the perspective that teachers were being “villainized” before the study ever began.

My argument was that it was not *I* that was villainizing educators - it was the previous research. If the literature suggests this problem exists, then I had every right to probe the minds of educators in my community. I had undeniable justification based on previous educational research to attempt an intervention to break the cycle of low expectations that had been documented by researchers that came before me.

I argued to those on the committee that if the participants in my study told stories that did not correspond to previous research, that would also add to the literature on the topic. But this was not my expectation. I had honestly believed I would encounter thought processes similar to what I had read about from other researchers. After conducting the interviews and combing through the transcripts, what I found was antithetical to what I had expected. It is my hope now that upon reading the analysis and researcher reflections in this chapter that readers who are alongside me in the world of public education find the same beacons of optimism and hope in the stories of the participants that I did.

My Insights on Expected Outcomes

Amplify Student Voice

Enciso (2011) documents the ways in which immigrant/ELL students are more isolated and therefore their stories are less heard in schools. Students in mainstream classes who speak English fluently get more opportunities to tell their stories. Therefore, their teachers and peers are more aware of their lives at home and their future goals. One outcome of this study is the amplification of immigrant/ELL students' voices. Their stories – specifically about what they imagine for their futures – are hoisted across physical and systemic barriers to reach a broader audience.

Educators Examine Their Expectations

Not all educators regularly reflect on their practices or internal thought processes that affect their students. As a result of this study, educators examine their expectations – whatever those may be – and their implicit biases (or lack thereof) toward immigrant/ELL students. Educators are confronted with questions that challenge them to articulate precisely what it is they think their ELL students are capable of and/or will do and how those thoughts influence their professional practices.

Expectations Shift

I enter this study with the hope that all educator participants have high expectations of their immigrant/ELL students, but also knowing that previous research (Dabach et. al, 2018) clearly demonstrates that this is not the case. No matter where the educator's expectations were at the beginning of the study – low, indifferent, or high – an anticipated (hoped-for) outcome is that educators' expectations shift to high or higher than before.

Students Benefit

As a result of a shift to high or higher expectations, students benefit in many ways. Teachers may begin to teach to a higher standard to help ensure the students' success in their imagined trajectory. Counselors and administrators may begin to provide more access to information that bolsters success in our current educational system such as scholarship applications, how to apply for college, which high school or college programs would best match the student's goals, and more.

Summary of Shifts in Educator Expectations

This project began with intentions of interrupting the cycle of low expectations placed upon immigrant and English learner youth by disseminating their stories of their imagined successful futures to more educators outside of the ESL classroom. The writing prompt and the students' responses are in Appendices 2 - 5. Table 5.1 illustrates what each participant reported in their interview.

Educator participant	Change in expectations for student participants' performance
Liz - special education teacher	no change (already high)
Samantha - science teacher	low to high
Stephanie - health/P.E. teacher	high to higher
Benjamin - assistant principal	no change (already high)
Vivian - counselor	no change (already high)

Table 5.1. Reports of educator participants' change in expectations.

Only one participant explicitly stated during the interview that their expectations went from low to high. Only one participant expressed that their expectations shifted higher, but that

their expectations were high before beginning the interview, so they are categorized as “high to higher.” The other three expressed holding high expectations before reading students’ responses, but felt no change in their expectations after reading students’ responses. Those three participants explained that they already hold high expectations as part of their educational philosophies.

Nuances Within Trends

Varying Expectations Based on Daily Circumstances

It is important to note that three participants - Liz (special education teacher), Samantha (science teacher), and Benjamin (assistant principal) specifically mentioned that their expectations differ from student to student based on many factors. All three of these participants acknowledged varying levels of linguistic proficiencies among English learners or learning capabilities. Each participant referred to some form of “meet them where they’re at” philosophies in their interviews.

Liz, teaching a self-contained special education class, has many significant variables to consider on a daily basis and language learner status is just one of them. She speaks of setting and maintaining high expectations for each individual student, but those expectations might vary day to day based on any number of circumstances:

I have to think to myself, my expectations need to shift because this environment is not the same environment it was the day before. What is appropriate today is not appropriate to hold them to a level of something that puts their...academic output above their social, emotional, or behavioral sense of safety.

She adamantly expresses the importance of making steady progress for her learners with disabilities toward the goals of being self-sufficient to the highest extent possible and feeling safe and included in their communities:

...my expectations for students shift constantly if there's stuff going on impacting what goes on outside of this classroom. My expectations for students shift as I start to see mastery within them and confidence and independence grow. I will increase my expectations, because my expectations will always remain high, but how we get there in the long term is going to alter day to day, because mastery is long-term growth, and I'm not going to hold my students to any individual instance of trying to overcome a challenge.

Samantha and Benjamin make distinctions in their expectations in daily behavior based on a student's English proficiency level. Benjamin noted he expects newcomers and beginners to rely more heavily both on translation technology and other students to access the curriculum. He explained, "I would think that... use of computer or cell phone apps, just like Google Translate, I wouldn't necessarily expect to see that be as common for students who are not multilingual learners." In a similar fashion, Samantha said her expectation of a newcomer in her science class would be to do some copying and concentrating on increasing their vocabulary knowledge as opposed to completing longer English-only assignments. Samantha stated,

...there was a student last year...who didn't know how to write in her native language. And so often the expectation was that she was practicing writing words and maybe drawing pictures to go with the words. It depended on the assignment, but rather than coming up with sentences on her own or anything like that. And an intermediate student might be expected to be able to do most of what the other students are doing.

Samantha and Benjamin speak about the same challenges differently, but arrive at the same point: students with lower English proficiency levels are still expected to use the resources

available to them to access the curriculum and maximize their educational opportunities within their current abilities.

What is most important to note is that these three educators all express a “these kids can” attitude. They are sympathetic (if not empathetic) to the challenges English learners face and understand that they need additional tools and resources to show their best work and make progress.

Onus on Educators

Four out of five participants communicated a sense of responsibility to accommodate, differentiate, provide tools or resources, or to somehow meet students where they are in their educational journey, especially in correlation with where the students are in their English language development. They declare that teachers should be providing additional academic and linguistic supports for their language learners to ensure equitable access. This is in stark contrast to what has been noted in other studies - that many educators blamed low English proficiency, motivation, culture, and family structure for poor performance (Dabach et al, 2018; García-Fernández, C. M., García-Segura, S., & Gil-del-Pino, M. del., 2021). Some teacher participants even mentioned using specific interventions or accommodations to assist their ELLs in their classes.

Stephanie

Stephanie told a story from her personal experience about helping an ELL student who was not able to perform functions on their computer without one-on-one help. She followed that anecdote with a list of ways in which that experience altered her professional practice. “...and I have definitely changed my teaching overall to make it more visual, simplified instructions, and

made sure to do frequent check-ins with those who aren't necessarily asking for help, but might need it one-on-one, like that student did.”

I told her in the interview that I felt like much of what she was saying was putting responsibility on herself. I perceived that she was taking a considerable amount of burden for how and why her ELL students perform the way they do (or do not). This was her response:

I would say I definitely agree with that because you feel, I mean, as teachers, we're responsible for them. We're responsible for their learning and when they're not learning or not meeting expectations, then it is our job to do as much as possible... for those students.

Samantha

A notable statement from Samantha is about her own multilingualism: “...it’s not fair,...but my own small knowledge of Spanish helps some with Spanish language speakers.” The implication in the phrase “it’s not fair” is that speakers of other languages do not get the same level of help because she does not have the working knowledge. It seems as though Samantha uses what she does know of Spanish to assist her Spanish-speaking ELLs, and notices her inability to do that with other students.

When we discussed the grades of the first student participant, Samantha made an astute observation:

...if they're doing that well in their ELL class, it sounds like they're not getting the supports that they need in their general ed classes, quite honestly, because they're showing that they can accomplish more and do the work and engage more... My impression is that the student is just not getting the help they need from me and their general, you know, assuming they're in my class, me and the general ed teachers - that

they could do more if we were able to support them better in the classroom.

This is more evidence of educators in this study having a “these kids can” perspective combined with a sense of responsibility on the parts of educators to do more and provide more support.

She also noted that she is not able to “go around and help students who need help very much” because she is “always dealing with behaviors.” In this case, the term “behaviors” refers to distractions, off-task actions, and any other things going on that are taking away from instructional time. I interpret her statement to mean that her expectation of herself as an educator includes providing individual help during class time, but that she is often unable to meet her own self-expectations in academic support because she is spending more time with classroom management.

Vivian

Like other participants, Vivian directly asserts that educators have the responsibility to make education accessible their English learners:

...they have special needs in that English is not their first language. ...just like [for] every other student, you accommodate and you make sure, you know, all students' needs are met and it's our job to differentiate, too. I know that's a lot, but that is what we signed up for.

She continues this train of thought later in her interview:

...just because it may be a student's first language doesn't mean that they learn it the way we present it. So we have to find different ways to present, especially for students who have special needs or who English is not their first language.

It is evident through Vivian’s answers that share’s other participants’ view of educators being responsible for adapting to the unique needs of their English learners.

Because of her position as a counselor, she went into specific expectations of herself in her role. She believes she is obligated to impart knowledge of what goes beyond the students' current grade level. When she served in a high school, she wanted her students to know what may lay beyond high school. She noticed a gap between what high school freshmen thought would be expected of them in high school and what teachers actually expected, so she decided to move to a middle school in an attempt to make a difference at an earlier stage of education by incorporating high school expectations into her counseling lessons and sessions. A large part of her attempt to meet students where they are is to pointedly let them know where they should be and where they are going.

Liz

Liz eloquently explained her daily routine in her interview. She used the opportunity to express her educational philosophy, the reasons behind her choices in lessons and accommodations, and even what she expects from families. She described how she attempts to bear much of the burden of making sure she is doing what needs to be done for students to have access to their education. There are so many direct quotes from Liz on this topic, but only the ones that mostly clearly illustrate her dedication without additional context from the interview are listed here:

- ...I try to be a filter and I try to be a shield...
- ...fair isn't equal and everything is different. And I love the fact that there's diversity in my classroom. But I want that diversity to be celebrated and not seen as additional work.
- ...if I'm not able to uphold my end of the bargain as an educator to provide the

resources or provide the strategies or create an environment which allows the students to thrive... I need to adjust.

- I have to use what's in my control to alter and address things that are not in my control for the sake of the students because they are kids.

It is very clear through Liz's statements that she sees it as her duty to provide appropriate accommodations and a responsive environment that encourages acceptance and growth.

Conclusions From All Educators

It is unmistakable from these four educators' statements that there is a pervading philosophy of educators having the onus for providing information, targeted supports and accommodations, and an environment conducive for learning. They each extensively spoke of what they expected of themselves, which indicates that each one takes their position as an educator seriously and strives to provide a quality education for all students, no matter their status as an English learner or immigrant. However, as will be introduced in the next section, the systemic structure they operate in often does not allow them to meet their own expectations or adhere to their own philosophies.

Broken System

I believe it to be common knowledge that most professionals in American public schools can cite an extensive list of grievances about how the current system is not working and can readily tell you their own ideas about how to make it better. It is never surprising to me to hear educators lament about the woes of non-effective disciplinary practices, an egregious lack of resources, and the endless amount of documentation that must be done. It was not novel to me that complaints about "the system" materialized in every single interview for this study. What was unforeseen was each educator's sharp and specific criticism for "the system" concerning how it does not

serve our English learner demographic. In the following section, I delineate specific complaints and highlight common threads among the educator participants' discussions.

Many Students, Few Adults

Samantha noted many challenges to providing the aid that English learners need. She mentioned that the school district does not provide paraprofessionals for the ESL students and that she has large classes. The circumstances that she finds herself teaching in are not hospitable for providing targeted support for language learners in a grade-level science class.

Liz also noted the lack of personnel. She spoke of how she is cognizant that there is a larger team in her classroom because of the paraprofessional support in special education classrooms. Therefore, she is able to delegate some tasks to others and get closer ensuring that each student is getting what they need to do their best. She also recognized that there is not that level of support for English learners in general education classrooms.

From the Top

Stephanie laments that the current educational system is not working like she thinks it should. Even as "a newer teacher," she has a keen awareness of what is not working:

I've been learning a lot as a newer teacher too, with y'all being my first experience with ELL teachers and conversations and reaching out to y'all as our supports, too, and just realizing that you guys don't have the supports you need to support our students and we as gen ed teachers are running the current supports we have then, and it isn't enough for our students, therefore it's a never-ending battle, and it's like pushing a rock up a hill. She describes the cycle of our building experts in the field (ELL teachers) not getting enough from the district or the state to implement a robust ELL program, which means that we do not

have what we need to support the content-area teachers, which leads to the content-area teachers not supporting our ELL students as they aspire to.

Study Intentions and Actual Outcomes

Amplify Student Voice

One of the original intentions of this study was to amplify student voice. Enciso (2011) explained that many ELL/immigrant students' stories are either heard by a very small portion of the school's staff and student population, or the stories go unheard altogether. One outcome I was hoping for was that more staff would hear the stories of this demographic. This was accomplished by sharing students' writing samples with educator participants. Students who would not normally speak up in their mainstream classes were able to share their thoughts through writing with other staff members.

Educators Examine Their Expectations

Other studies have delineated educators' expectations of their students and their effects (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006; Dabach et. al, 2018). Those studies helped inspire one objective of this study being that educators articulate their expectations and then think about them. All educators explicitly spoke on what they expected of ELL/immigrant students in general and then on what they expected of the specific student participants. It is apparent that participants did also examine their expectations through statements in the interviews.

Samantha asked why one student seemed to be doing well in their ELL support class, but not in their other classes. She added that a possible explanation is that other teachers aren't expecting enough from them - including herself. Stephanie specifically said, "What's tough to remember is that these kids do persevere." She realized that she often overlooked the expectation

of progress in the face of adversity and challenge for lower-proficiency students. To this end, the expected outcome of educators examining their own expectations was achieved.

Expectations Shift

Two educators explicitly state and confirm in an informal post-interview conversation that they did experience a shift. Samantha's expectations went from low to high. She explained that it was for a few reasons - she didn't know that intermediate-level ELL students could write that much or that they could write that well. Stephanie was inspired by students' stories and their willingness to push through and overcome challenges to accessing their education.

Students Benefit

It is not immediately evident that students have benefitted or will benefit from this study. However, both Samantha and Stephanie clearly stated that their expectations shifted higher. If that is the case, then both educators are more likely to provide more rigorous curriculum and lessons than before and more likely to provide guidance on requirements for future careers (Dabach, et. al, 2018). It is beyond the scope of this study to further investigate observable changes in educators' actions. Perhaps this would be worth looking into in a separate study.

Additional Thoughts

I was hopeful that educators with low expectations would experience a new awareness of the expectations they held and how those expectations can change based on knowing more about their students. However, the actual results were largely unanticipated as three of five educator participants experienced no change in expectations because they brought high expectations to the conversation originally. I believe this is a pivotal point to add to the discussion around this topic to demonstrate that there is a spectrum when it comes to educators' thought processes pertaining to what they expect of their students.

Explaining and Questioning the Unexpected

Educators' Personal Backgrounds

In their findings, Dabach et. al (2018) did not discuss specific educator participants' backgrounds. Therefore, it is not possible to say definitively that their political, religious, or cultural beliefs and affiliations had any influence on the data they provided for the study. However, some educators in the current study did disclose some information about their personal backgrounds that may provide an interesting insight into how they perceive their immigrant/ELL students and their expectations of them. Liz, Samantha, and Stephanie had interesting things to say.

Liz frequently spoke of being a “values-based educator” and that one of her values is “perspective taking.” She envisions herself in her students' positions which pushes her to consider their motivations and needs in their educational setting. Perhaps the educators in Dabach et. al's (2018) study may have provided different responses had they focused on perspective taking for their students.

Samantha told several anecdotes about ELL/immigrant students working hard to exceed expectations - even surpassing the expectations Samantha held of her native-English-speaking students. She had witnessed several success stories of English learners acquiring language quickly and/or working hard to improve their level of English proficiency. If educators in previous studies had been asked to recount success stories of their ELL/immigrant students, how might the data have been different?

Stephanie, the newest teacher of the three who participated, revealed that she deeply empathizes with our ELL students because of her own educational experience. She explained that she attended elementary and middle school in Spanish-only classes. Born to an English-

speaking family in the U.S., she never spoke Spanish at home, but learned it through going to school in her special program. For her, it was quite a shock when she got to high school and suddenly all of her classes were in English. She quickly realized that even though she had the background knowledge, the language difference added extra steps to her learning, thereby increasing the difficulty. Therefore, having had a similar educational experience to what many of our students face and coming through it to be a successful educator herself, she tends to keep higher expectations for ELL students.

Neither Benjamin nor Vivian revealed much about their backgrounds that seemed relevant to the expectations they currently hold for their ELL/immigrant students. In future studies, asking more pointed questions about an educator participant's life experiences and philosophies may provide more insight into how they develop and justify their expectations of students.

Educators' Responses

I noticed that four participants (Stephanie, Liz, Vivian, and Samantha) spoke about self-expectations. Looking at the transcripts, I clearly asked each one, "What are your expectations of your English learners?" The only time this question varied in phrasing was when I added a time specification (e.g., "during a class period," or "after high school"). However, each of them specifically spoke of what they have done, do, or believe they should do to better serve the ELL population in our school.

A few times, I had to repeat the question and ask them to focus on what they expect from the students. Some possible causes for responses about themselves could be: the question was not clear, the participant was focusing on themselves, the participant thought the research was aimed at what educators are doing for ELLs, or they thought they needed to explain more about

their teaching practices because I am a teacher in the building and they felt some trepidation about being judged or evaluated in some way based on their answers.

Anticolonial Thoughts

The data from participants citing the broken system was already discussed. However, the theme was so prevalent in the data, it warrants a secondary discussion. In the previous section on the broken system, I delineated several issues with how the current educational system is not conducive for educators to provide targeted supports for the English learners, even when they want to.

The key finding here is that *they want to*. Every single educator participant mentioned some form of modification or accommodation that would assist English learners with their educational progress. Each one mentioned barriers to doing so - not enough time, no other adults (paraprofessionals) in the room to manage things like materials and behavior, and a lack of prioritization “from the top” for our English learners. Nonetheless, the spirit of the discussion was consistently that these students could do more if we could do more.

There is an indication here that anticolonial thoughts permeate the philosophies of these educators even though they teach in a colonial system. Each participant encouraged multilingualism in the classroom through their discussions of using a translator (either technology or a live person such as a student’s peer), providing materials in a student’s first language when possible and relevant, and speaking to students in their first language when possible. There was not a modicum of evidence for an English-only or cultural erasure mindset. At least linguistically, these educators function in their roles with anticolonial beliefs, even if implicitly.

Reflection

Research Methodology

I went into each interview with a protocol, expecting to ask the same questions. I knew that individuals would give different answers which would lead to different questions, but there were important factors that I failed to consider. While general education teachers' (i.e., science and P.E.) days look similar to mine, the other educator participants' days are vastly different – not only from mine, but also from each other.

An administrator spends their day in various ways – observing teachers for evaluations, responding to behavioral incidents, contacting families about behavioral incidents, attending meetings, and coordinating programs and schedules for the school. A counselor may go to classes to deliver counseling lessons, but the majority of their day consists of meeting with students one-on-one and coordinating with other services in the community to provide students with mental, emotional, and physical needs (food, clothing, transportation, etc.) to better access their education. I had not considered how my questions about expectations in a class period and in a school day may be difficult for them to answer because their days and interactions are naturally not the same as a classroom teacher's. Were I to do the study again, I would reconsider my prepared questions based on the educator-participant's role in the school.

Similarly, the special education teacher participant has a self-contained class of a few students. I had not considered that she has the time to get to know her students and their families much better than any other person in the building does because most teachers see their students for about one hour a day as opposed to her class which meets for five hours per day. Given my nearly non-existent background in special education, I did not realize I had no idea what her daily situation is like and could not anticipate what her answers might lead to in the interview.

Similarly to the administrator and counselor roles, I would reconsider the phrasing of the questions and might add different ones based on the structure of her class. For example, I might have asked, “What is your expectation of a new student in your class who has very low proficiency in English?”

Conclusion

The data of this study point provide many points of optimism. It is undeniable that some educators hold low expectations for and biases toward their ELL/immigrant students. However, that cannot be a blanket statement generalized to how all American educators think of this demographic. It is clear from the stories of the educator participants in this study that many professionals in the field recognize the needs of ELL/immigrant students, call for more support in this area, and genuinely desire to do their part in aiding these students.

Dabach et. al’s (2018) work is what inspired me to pursue this study. I found the overall tone of the findings to be grim and felt infuriated that educators were expecting less of these students. The title of their work begins with “Future Perfect?” and they discuss how low expectations adversely affect America’s ELL/immigrant student population. Because of their findings and the other literature I read with similar ideas, I had expected to encounter initial low expectations from educator participants. Therefore, the original title of this study was “Freeing the Future: Subverting Educators’ Low Expectations.”

I could not see before - even when professors were plainly explaining and telling me - that the title held its own set of low expectations of educators. I had thought that they would tell me they did not expect much and then I would swoop in with my students’ stories to say something like, “See! They can and they will!” Then the participants would say, “Oh, I should have been expecting so much more all along!” I experienced a shift in my expectations of

educators. Rather than generalizing to all populations what I read in the literature, I now believe there is more to be considered on the other end of the spectrum – many educators do hold high expectations and are trying to do their best for English learners.

The final title of this study is a direct answer to Dabach et. al's (2018) title. It is meant to portray the sense of optimism that comes from realizing that many educators are truly holding higher expectations, not only of our students, but also of themselves in their professional practice. The exclamation mark is intended to replace the question mark of the study that came before. I proclaim loud and clear, especially for our ELL/immigrant students, "The Future Can Be Perfect!"

Appendix: Interview Protocol

Lead-off question: Describe, in general terms, the expectations you have for your English learners in a typical class period; in a school day; after high school.

Possible Follow-up questions:

1. What experiences have led you to hold these expectations?
2. How are these expectations different from what you expect of their native-English-speaking peers? If they are different, then why?

[Present table of information to participant.] After viewing this information about this English learner, what do you expect they will do after high school?

Take a look at this student's personal narrative about their goals for the future and how they plan to achieve them. What do you expect this student will do after high school?

Possible Follow-up questions:

1. How have your expectations changed from before?
2. If those expectations have changed, can you explain why?
3. Does the shift have anything to do with the work you viewed just now?
4. If so, what about the student's work has caused a change of expectations?

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