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**EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR LANGUAGE MINORITY  
STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS:  
AN ASSESSMENT**

A Thesis in  
Educational Theory and Policy

by

Marcela A. K. Movit

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The thesis of Marcela A. K. Movit was reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Dana Mitra  
Assistant Professor of Education  
Thesis Advisor  
Co-Chair of Committee

Kai Schafft  
Assistant Professor of Education and Rural Sociology  
Co-Chair of Committee

David Baker  
Professor of Education and Sociology

Jacqueline Stefkovich  
Professor of Educational Administration

Almeida J. Toribio  
Professor of Linguistics and Spanish Linguistics

Gerald LeTendre  
Professor of Education  
Professor In Charge of Educational Theory & Policy Program

\*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

## **ABSTRACT**

As the number of immigrants increases, American schools face the challenge of how to meet the needs of a growing language minority student population. This study uses qualitative methods to consider this issue and, more importantly, to answer the question, “To what extent do schools provide students from various linguistic backgrounds with equal educational opportunities?” Key informant interviews with school district personnel examine the details behind schools’ programmatic response to an increasingly linguistically diverse student body. From speaking to teachers, instructional coordinators, principals, and vice principals, it is clear that equal educational opportunity does not exist for all students with limited English proficiency (LEP). However, it is not the result of a lack of caring; the schools’ faculty and staff make every effort, and at times even go beyond what is required of them, to provide students with the closest semblance to equal educational opportunity possible. The inability to provide equal educational opportunity is an effect of schools’ position within the educational societal sector. Despite teachers’ and administrators’ best efforts, their capacity to give students equal educational opportunity is limited to what the external factors—namely, policy makers and parents—will allow. Because the impact of these outside forces on schools’ ability to meet their LEP students’ needs is so great, it is necessary to change the way these factors influence schools if advancements are to be made toward providing provide equal educational opportunity.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

With the continued influx of immigrants to the United States, meeting students' diverse needs has become more of a challenge for schools than ever before. The growing immigrant population and the large number of languages immigrants bring with them are an increasing source of diversity in schools (Han, Baker, Rodriguez, & Quinn, 1997; 1994; O'Hare, 1992). Over 4.5 million students with limited English proficiency (LEP) were enrolled in public schools during the 2000/01 school year.<sup>1</sup> Sixty-seven percent of them were enrolled at the elementary level, where they represented more than eleven percent of the total student body (Kindler, 2002). This large population of students has special needs that schools are now forced to address.

Although the federal government has mandated effective educational programs as a means of meeting LEP students' needs across the country, as discussed below, these students are not distributed evenly (*English language learner students in U.S. public schools: 1994 and 2000*, 2004, p. 1). Two major tendencies have been observed in immigration patterns, each presenting different challenges for developing such programs (Han et al., 1997; Pollard & O'Hare, 1999). The first trend is that over half of LEP students are in schools with large LEP populations, often with a variety of language

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the literature uses the term "English language learners" or ELLs to refer to these students (for example, Thomas & Collier, 1997). However, within the district that is the focus of this study, the Houston Independent School District (HISD), the term used for these students is LEP. For the sake of consistency, I have adopted the same term for this study.

backgrounds represented. Han et al. (1997) found that 62 percent of public schools with a large minority student enrollment, defined as 20 percent or more of the student body, have LEP students. Furthermore, “LEP students make up 9 percent of the total enrollment of high-minority schools, compared to 1 percent at low-minority schools” (Han et al., 1997, p. 7), which are those schools with less than 20 percent minority student enrollment. The second pattern is that other LEP students are in schools where there are very few students who are not proficient in English. Over 65 percent of low-minority schools have no LEP students enrolled (Han et al., 1997). These disparate circumstances make it difficult to create a single formula for how schools can ensure equal educational opportunity for all language minority students. As August and Hakuta (1997) note, “different approaches are necessary [to meet the needs of LEP students] because of the great diversity of conditions faced by schools” (p. 174, quoted in McKay, 2000).

Despite the differences that exist, there is a clear directive from the federal government, in the form of Supreme Court decisions and federal legislation, that schools must take measures to protect the rights of language minority students.<sup>2</sup> While each addresses a slightly different issue, at the heart of each of these political or judicial decisions is the question of how to provide LEP students with equal educational opportunity. The precedents and regulations set by these rulings and pieces of legislation require schools to provide quality resources within schools for LEP students as a means of increasing their English proficiency, and, as a result, their academic achievement, regardless of their native language.

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<sup>2</sup> These are discussed further detail in Chapter 3.

In addition to the rules set by the federal government, research suggests several characteristics that any English language acquisition program must have for it to be effective in helping students to increase their English proficiency. Program assessment studies show that high-quality programs are necessary to promote academic achievement among all LEP students (August & Hakuta, 1997; Collier, 1992; López & Tashakkori, 2003; Senesac, 2002; Thomas & Collier, 1997; 2002). Thomas and Collier (2002) explain that a program can only be considered “high-quality” if it is

effective (at least 3-4 NCE [normal curve equivalent] gains per year more than mainstream students are gaining per year), well implemented, not segregated, and sustained long enough (5-6 years) for the typical 25 NCE achievement gap between [LEP students] and native-English speakers to be closed (p. 8).

The Ramirez Report goes one step further, concluding that the most effective language acquisition programs are those that stress the importance of the student’s native language and culture (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991). Jim Cummins (1998; Dicker, 2000) reiterates this point, emphasizing that these programs must provide “a sense of empowerment among culturally diverse students and communities by challenging the devaluation of students’ identities in the wider society” (p.1, quoted in Dicker, 2000, p. 61). Valenzuela (1999) warns that appropriate support of LEP students’ native language—recognizing and reinforcing the value of the language, for example—is crucial as these students learn English. The knowledge students gain as they acquire proficiency can contribute to and strengthen fluency in a first language—additive bilingualism. However, if students are taught that their native language is of less value than English, acquisition of the new language can have the opposite effect—subtractive bilingualism—and result in the loss of native language proficiency (Valenzuela, 1999). Thus, if schools

hope to provide their LEP students with equal educational opportunity as they help them acquire English, the programs in which they invest must be of high quality and promote additive bilingualism for all of their students if they are to have the intended effect

In implementing English language acquisition programs it is also necessary to consider cultural differences. The distinct experiences of various groups within the comprehensive LEP label highlight the need to look beyond this broad category when making decisions about how to help these students learn English. For example, the widespread teaching of English to students is a relatively new occurrence in Vietnam. However, economic turmoil and persecution caused many Vietnamese families to seek refuge in the United States. Upon arrival, many new immigrants found that they were “ill-equipped to adapt quickly to an English-speaking society” (Chung, 2000, p. 223). As a result, the Vietnamese, like other Southeast Asians, are more likely to have LEP than other language minority students (Chung, 2000). In contrast, American society has greatly influenced Cuban culture since the end of the eighteenth century. The heavy concentration of Cubans in Miami-Dade County has allowed them to maintain the use of their native language as an economic resource. They have transformed Miami into a bilingual city, which eases the transition for new immigrants (Otheguy, Garcia, & Roca, 2000). By collapsing these and other distinct cultures and heritages into a single category, schools are unable to consider the specific needs of individuals that may be overlooked in decisions on how to provide equal educational opportunity.

It is clear that the increasing number of non-English languages spoken by Americans is becoming a progressively greater source of diversity in schools. A simple panacea may not be enough to meet the needs of the various groups within the single LEP

label. McKay (2000) asserts that “educators need to examine the language learner as a multifaceted individual” (p. 395) if they are to provide equal educational opportunity. However, the challenges schools face as they struggle to meet the needs of students from different backgrounds are further complicated by the demands placed on them from external sources, such as the government and the community. This study will examine which program components schools choose to help their LEP students acquire English and identify the community goals, demographics, and resources that play the largest role in determining schools’ selections.

### **Research Questions**

This study examines the extent to which schools provide all of their LEP students with equal educational opportunity and considers the factors that increase or constrain schools’ abilities to meet the linguistic needs of their language minority population. The dissertation is guided by one overarching question: “To what extent do schools provide students from various linguistic backgrounds with equal educational opportunities?” In exploring this question, other questions that helped to deepen my understanding included: What role do the various levels of education policy makers play in determining how schools meet the needs of their LEP students? How influential are parents in decisions regarding the methods schools use to help their children increase their English proficiency? To what extent are schools able to adapt their English language acquisition programs to their specific LEP populations?

I address these questions through an in-depth study of individual schools' conceptual approaches to diminishing the barriers to equal educational opportunity for language minority students. I conducted open-ended interviews with personnel from the Houston Independent School District;<sup>3</sup> the data from these interviews were coded and analyzed for common themes. Through this research, I gained an understanding of the challenges schools face as they strive to provide LEP students with equal educational opportunity. As discussed in the following chapters, this research provides insight into how schools try to use English language acquisition programs to meet their students' diverse linguistic needs, given the variation in native languages spoken by the student population. It also elucidates some of the external factors that influence schools' ability to provide LEP students with equal educational opportunities.

### **Dissertation Outline**

This dissertation proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the literature that is most relevant to this dissertation. It presents the on-going discussion regarding the meaning of equal educational opportunity to provide an understanding of the social and political context in which schools must work. I then briefly introduce the most common English language acquisition programs schools implement as a means of helping LEP students learn English and giving them access to equal educational opportunity. I then consider the role of culture in how students and their families interact with schools and propose that

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 5 presents a discussion of how this district and this data-collection method were selected.

my research presents a cross-cultural comparison that is missing from the existing literature.

The context in which the study is situated is presented in Chapter 3. I introduce the history of language policy in the United States to establish that the struggle of ensuring that LEP students learn English is not a modern phenomenon. I then discuss more recent demographic changes—at the national, state, and district level—that have made it more crucial than ever before that schools help LEP students acquire English proficiency as a means of providing them with equal educational opportunity. I also look at the policies at each level of government that deal with LEP students.

Chapter 4 discusses the conceptual framework of this study. I present theories on second language acquisition and organizations that inform this research. I consider the opposing pressures placed on schools—meeting students' needs while complying with the demands of external forces. I present a graphic representation of the delicate balance schools must create

Chapter 5 outlines the qualitative research design. I look at the decisions made in selecting the school district and the individual schools. I discuss the instrument used to conduct the study—an interview protocol with ten open-ended questions. I present the analytical methods used in this study. I consider issues of validity and generalizability, as well as the limitations of the study.

Chapter 6 looks at the lessons learned from the methodological choices made. While the original categories into which I had grouped the schools were not useful for understanding how schools met the needs of LEP students, a common theme arose from the studies when they were considered as a group. I reflect on the lack of equal

educational opportunity that I found consistently across the schools. I present alternative explanations for this observed phenomenon but am able to dismiss them. I propose a model for understanding the results of the study that draws on the one discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 7 discusses the influence of policy makers at the district, state, and federal levels on how schools address the linguistic needs of their LEP populations. I suggest that the greatest effect of the district can be seen in the centralization of policies, specifically in dealing with the English language acquisition programs implemented in schools. The state's role is felt most heavily in the standardized testing done in schools, along with the accompanying curriculum, and the English proficiency assessments. It is through The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that the federal government seems to exert the majority of its authority. Together, these policies and laws greatly constrain schools' ability to meet LEP students' linguistic needs and schools' resources.

Similarly, Chapter 8 reflects on the role parents play in schools' ability to provide students with equal educational opportunity. I present the observed phenomenon: parents choose to waive their children's right to receive help in learning English. I consider several possible explanations for this decision, as suggested by the participants in this study. I look at the impact of this choice on schools' ability to provide students with equal educational opportunity.

Schools' commitment to providing students with this right despite externally imposed constraints is the focus of Chapter 9. I consider two manifestations of this dedication: new administrators who make changes at their respective schools and a principal who goes beyond what is legally necessary to meet students' needs. I present

the practical implications of the lessons that can be learned from the four schools discussed.

Chapter 10 presents the policy implications of the findings of this research. I look at the different levels of policy makers and suggest changes that will improve schools' ability to meet the needs of their LEP students. At the district level, I recommend creating a partnership with parents that will give both schools and parents a better understanding of how to help students learn English. The state must provide programs that will train bilingual education teachers for languages other than Spanish so that students of other languages can also have access to highly qualified teachers. I suggest that the federal government reconsider the strict guidelines under NCLB for testing LEP students and provide more accommodations for them, as well as revisit the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Lau v. Nichols* to maximize the number of students whose needs will be met. I discuss the implications of this study for the field.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Fifty years after the landmark case of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, many of the most salient issues raised by this case remain unsolved, including the dilemma of how to guarantee equal educational opportunity to all students. The discussions among educators on how to ensure this right are often limited to race and color while the question of national origin is frequently ignored altogether. However, changes in our country's demographics have forced researchers, educators, and policy makers to reconsider this issue. With the growing immigrant population, the number of non-English languages spoken by Americans is increasing; the 2000 Census coded "380 categories of single languages or language families" (*Language Use and English-Speaking Ability: Census 2000 Brief*, 2003, p. 2). This linguistic diversity is becoming a progressively greater source of multiculturalism in schools. As those with limited English proficiency become a growing presence in the United States, making an explicit guarantee of equal educational opportunity for LEP students is increasingly necessary.

In this chapter, I critically analyze some of the issues surrounding schools' efforts to provide LEP students with equal educational opportunity. I begin by examining the concept of equal educational opportunity and the lack of clarity in the literature as to the precise definition of the term. This analysis provides the reader with an understanding of the larger political and social context in which this discussion is embedded. I then consider the various programs that have resulted from schools' efforts to help students

learn English. Next, I address the issue of how cultural differences among students impact the effectiveness of these English language acquisition programs. I conclude with a brief discussion of how my research fits into the existing literature.

### **Understanding Equal Educational Opportunity**

“Equal educational opportunity” has become a common catchphrase throughout academia among those who debate the purpose of education and schooling. In these discussions, many refer to Title IV of the Civil Rights Act despite the absence of the expression from the terminology of the legislation’s provisions. Nowhere in the Act, or in any other statute, is the meaning of the phrase made explicit. The lack of a specific legal or legislative definition for the term forces each generation of educators to determine how to provide “equal educational opportunity” for their students. They must identify who should be allowed to reap the benefits and how to implement policies that will support the interpretation. Thus, rather than something that can be defined easily using the dictionary, “equal educational opportunity” is a term that is socially constructed and has been politically contested; it has been used to both advance and undermine various political agendas.

Nevertheless, the history of the development of the perception of the term for schools and among educators, as described by David Gamson (2005), has been almost cyclical. As different interest groups exert their influences, the understanding of what “equal educational opportunity” entails has changed within and across generations. Its meaning has shifted to accommodate the particular social and political situations of the

time (Brick, 2005). However, the interpretations of the term tend to be repeated, as can be seen in the emergence of a similar perspective both in the Progressive Era and during the Revolution.

For the teachers of the Progressive Era, providing students with equal educational opportunity involved an increase in the use of tests and measurements. Educators sought a means of improving the terrible conditions of mass schooling that had existed in the previous era. They saw testing as the ideal means of moving toward a system that was better able to help students learn. The sentiment of the time was best articulated by the superintendent of Boston schools in 1908 who said that “what will make [schools] democratic is to provide opportunity for all to receive education as will fit them *equally well (sic)* for their particular life work” (Oakes, 1985). By promoting testing as a means of providing equal educational opportunity, the reformers were able to legitimize the public the changes they implemented.

The Progressive Era’s emphasis on fitting education to an individual’s ability was not unique. Over one hundred years earlier, Thomas Jefferson proposed that education could not create talents that did not already exist and “believed that schools should function to select those who had received superior value and wisdom” (Brick, 2005, p. 166). He did not discriminate based on status, as “youths of genius... [were sown] as liberally among the poor as the rich” (Jefferson, 1943, p. 667, as quoted in Brick, 2005, p. 170). Instead, at a time when resources were scarce in the colonies, Jefferson advocated educating only those who would be able to advance the Revolutionary cause. In this way, he used equal educational opportunity to support his political cause.

In addition to the political implications such as those described above, how one understands “equal educational opportunity” has practical consequences. The question of how to guarantee this right has become of increasing concern in some circles as researchers have discovered that “policies may not impact all groups of students the same” (Daniel L. Duke, 1989, p. 8). This raises the issue of how to ensure equal educational opportunity. The traditional view of how competition must be regulated if equality of opportunity is to be achieved focuses solely on procedural fairness; no one can be excluded from the competition based solely on particular characteristics that they possess (Jacobs, 2004). For example, in the case of schools, no one can be prohibited from attending simply because they are Hispanic or Asian. John Rawls (1971) and his contemporary liberal political philosophers introduced what was seen as an innovative approach by including background fairness to the original paradigm. With this addition, concerns over how the initial starting position of competitors or pre-existing inequalities affect fairness were raised. Schools must implement programs which ensure that a lack of English proficiency does not prevent students from receiving a meaningful education. Using what he terms the “level playing field” approach, Lesley Jacobs (2004) went one step further. He proposed a three-dimensional model, holding that procedural fairness, background fairness, and stakes fairness all must exist for equality of opportunity to be possible. The inclusion of this last factor places emphasis on the need to consider what the winners gain from the competition. This serves to problematize questions of what children miss if they do not have high quality education. If policies affect children differently, care must be taken to provide procedural, background, and stakes fairness if schools are to provide them with equal educational opportunity.

## **Two Opposing Views: “Pragmatic” and “Democratic”**

The modern generation finds itself torn primarily between two opposing, and equally valid, views of how to provide “equal educational opportunity”: the pragmatic method and the democratic method. The “pragmatic” approach holds that the expectations for a student should only be set as high as that student’s abilities will allow. In contrast, the “democratic” position understands the term to mean that all students are provided with the same resources; students decide if and how they will utilize what they are given. With regard to LEP students, the underlying question is whether the program used to help LEP students learn English should vary by the students’ ability to acquire English proficiency or whether all LEP students must be given the same treatment for equal educational opportunity to exist.

The “pragmatic” understanding stipulates that “opportunities for success could be equalized by offering different groups of students programs suited to their backgrounds and probable futures” (Oakes, 1985, p. 32). This perspective is closely aligned with the ideas of Jefferson and the Progressive Era reformers discussed above. Its effects can be seen in the importance placed in high schools on vocational education as a means of preparing some students—typically minority students who come from families with low socioeconomic status—for their future careers (Kliebard, 1986). Supporters of this view hold that these vocational programs provide students with a strong sense of morality, help to socialize them, and make them more productive workers.

In contrast, opponents of the pragmatic perspective argue that this industrial curriculum was created to defend the differentiation of the school curricula to include these tracks (Oakes, 1985). A fear of the imposition of a program that does not consider

students' individual strengths may lead some to prefer a more democratic approach. This position reflects the ideals of Charles Eliot: "from common and equal educational experiences would come an intelligent American citizenry" (1985, p. 24). One of the ideas on which secondary education was based until early in the twentieth century was that the high school was a place to train all students' intellects for what their futures may hold (Oakes, 1985). The important responsibility of identifying "equal educational opportunity" for this generation has been placed on the shoulders of educators with little definitive guidance from the past.

### **Understanding Equal Educational Opportunity for This Study**

Because disagreement exists over the definition of "equal educational opportunity," it is important to define how this term is to be understood for the purpose of this study. In doing this, I explicitly set the guidelines by which I will determine whether or not schools are providing their LEP students with this right. However, my selection of one approach over another should not be understood as a value judgment. It merely allows me to set criteria by which to answer my research question. Defining the term for the purpose of this study also is crucial to the reader's understanding of the research as a whole and particularly the conclusions drawn.

In this study, "equal educational opportunity" is understood using the more democratic approach. The term is understood to suggest that schools provide all students who demonstrate the same need with the same resources, allowing the students or their parents to determine the extent to which these resources are utilized. Thus, in the context of this study, if all students with limited English proficiency (LEP) are offered the same

English language acquisition program or programs, equal educational opportunity would be actualized. The students and parents would be permitted to choose the method through which the student will learn English. The use of this democratic definition is supported by theories of language acquisition which demonstrate that students acquire English, or any second language, in the same way.

### **English Language Acquisition Programs**

Providing equal educational opportunity is difficult as students come to school with such diverse backgrounds. The linguistic needs of LEP students make it even more challenging to provide them with equal educational opportunity. For these students, not only must schools address the common issues that mainstream students have, schools also have the responsibility for helping LEP students learn English so that they may succeed academically. To achieve this goal, schools implement English language acquisition programs that are intended to provide the necessary assistance for LEP students to achieve English proficiency.

One principal dimension along which English language acquisition programs vary is the amount of native language instruction utilized by each (Alanis, 2000).<sup>4</sup> While slight variations may exist in the precise implementation of the techniques, most programs fall into four general categories: (1) English immersion, (2) English as a Second Language,

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<sup>4</sup> Some may believe that English language acquisition programs can be distinguished by which group of language minority students each serves best. However, this is not the case. As discussed in Chapter 4, second language acquisition theories suggest that each of these methods of instruction can be utilized with students of any language background with the same success.

(3) bilingual education, and (4) two-way bilingual education or dual immersion. Figure 2-1 illustrates the differences in the amount of native language instruction used in each of these four types of programs. Proponents of each of these methods claim that their technique is the most effective means of helping students learn English (Alanis, 2000; Crawford, 1998; Krashen, 1999; Lu, 1998; Ovando & Collier, 1985; Porter, 1998). However, each method has its strengths and weaknesses in terms of how well it helps students increase their English proficiency. By weighing these, rather than depending on the students' native language, schools can make informed decisions on which to implement.

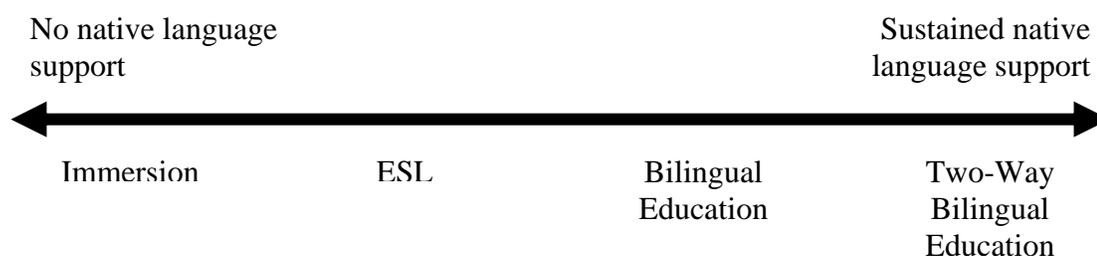


Fig. 2-1: Amount of Native Language Support in Different Language Programs

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Instruction is entirely in English in schools that implement the *English immersion* program. The underlying principle is that maximum exposure to the language maximizes the speed of the learning process. In some classrooms, students are taught English and subject materials using “sheltered English”—language that is simplified. However, it is more common for students to be placed in mainstream classrooms with little assistance. This type of program accommodates students from many language backgrounds at the

same time as there is no native language instruction. Critics often refer to English immersion as the “sink or swim” method; “students are expected to learn quickly and succeed by ‘swimming’ or not adapt quickly enough, fail miserably, and ‘sink’ (Movit & Deil-Amen, 2007, p. 145).

As in the English immersion model, English is the primary language of instruction in *English as a Second Language (ESL)* classrooms. “Shelter English” is used to help students from many different language backgrounds at the same time increase their English proficiency. However, teachers who use this method provide some native language support to students as a scaffolding technique. At some schools, students attend ESL for only a portion of the day, during which they focus only on English skills, and participate in mainstream classes for the rest of the day. Other schools provide full-time ESL classroom in which students are taught English and their academic subjects (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2002; Movit & Deil-Amen, 2007, p. 145).

Teachers provide instruction in both the native language and English in *transitional bilingual education* programs. In the early grades the native language is used more often to ensure that students do not fail to learn the material simply because they do not understand English, but “a certain amount of each day is spent on developing English skills” (Movit & Deil-Amen, 2007, p. 145). As students gain English proficiency each year, the amount of native language instruction is decreased, and the amount of English used is increased correspondingly. Within five to seven years, students are deemed to be sufficiently proficient in English to be placed in a mainstream classroom. Because native language instruction plays such a large part in these programs, they can only be used to

help speakers of a single language at a time (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2002; Movit & Deil-Amen, 2007).

Instruction in *two-way bilingual education* classrooms is given in two languages to students, half of whom are dominant in one language and half of whom are dominant in the other, with the goal that the students become proficient in both languages. This approach is also sometimes called dual-immersion or dual-language. Students tend to begin the program no later than first grade so that all students are achieving similar levels of proficiency at the same time. Teachers often “team-teach,” with each one responsible to teach in only one of the languages. As with the traditional bilingual education program, the two-way bilingual program can only help speakers of one language at a time to learn English (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2002).

### **The Intervening Role of Culture**

The previous sections have explored the meaning of “equal educational opportunity” and considered the different English language acquisition programs used to provide LEP students with this right. While these do play a crucial role in determining schools’ efforts to meet the needs of their LEP students, equally influential is the reaction of the recipients of these mandates. The degree to which parents allow schools to help their children learn English shapes how well schools can carry out this responsibility. Parents’ decisions regarding their children’s education are colored in part by their culture.

Culture, defined loosely as “the underlying knowledge (e.g., rules and structure of the system, symbols and their interpretation, and how these pieces fit together) held by

members” (McCargar, 1993, p. 192) of a group, plays a significant role in how one interacts in social setting such as school. Culture shapes one’s needs and wants; as a result, members of different cultural groups have different value systems (Wilson, 1989). It also influences the expectations one has for schools. For example, cultural differences exist in what the understood roles of students and teachers are (McCargar, 1993). While it is extrinsically developed and passed along, it is inherited and becomes internalized by the individual. The greater society sees the culture as an intrinsic part of the character of individuals from that group.

As with “equal educational opportunity,” many interpretations exist for the word “culture.”<sup>5</sup> However, this term is much less politically divisive. For the purpose of this dissertation, Keesing’s (1981) understanding of the word is utilized:

[A]n idealized body of competence differentially distributed in a population yet partially realized in the minds of individuals.... Even though no one native actor knows all of the culture, and each has a variant version of the code, culture in this view is ordered not simply as a collection of symbols fitted together by the analyst but as a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires and processes information and creates internal models of reality (p. 59, quoted in McCargar, 1993, p. 192).

### **Fitting into the Larger Picture**

The research discussed in this chapter represents only a fraction of the literature on how schools help students increase their English language proficiency; namely, equal educational opportunity, English language acquisition programs, and the role of students’ cultures. Nonetheless, from this overview, it is apparent that research in these areas

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<sup>5</sup> Kroeber and Kluchohn (1952) provide a list of over one hundred definitions.

primarily addresses minority groups in two ways. Much of it focuses on the issues of a single minority group. Other writings discuss minorities as a conglomerate and fail to distinguish between the needs of sub-groups within a larger category that have been labeled simply “Hispanics” or “Asians.”<sup>6</sup> There is a distinct lack of cross-cultural analyses that consider the perspectives and needs of multiple, yet distinct, minority groups.

Many studies on language acquisition focus on the influence of culture one group at a time. Cho (2000), for example, explores the importance Korean Americans place on heritage language maintenance as a means of creating a stronger ethnic identity and sense of belonging. Hispanic students were the focus of Lee’s (1999) research on these students’ view on bilingual education; 90 percent of these students felt that this program helped them to achieve academically. Lao’s (2004) study of Chinese-English bilingual education finds that Chinese-dominant parents support these programs as a means of strengthening their children’s native language as they learn. Vietnamese parents were the focus of comparable research conducted by Young and Tran (1999). While the title of González’s (2001) article on the effects of socioeconomic status and sociocultural factors on students’ ability to succeed in school makes it seem like it has a much broader scope, the language minority children on which it primarily focuses are from a single group: Hispanics. Similarly, the English language learners in López and Tashakkori’s (2003) mixed method study on the successes and failures of different bilingual education programs are all Hispanic students. By focusing on a single language minority group,

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<sup>6</sup> Yet others like Cardelle-Elawar (1996) and Minicucci (1993) use even broader terms such as “minorities” or “LEP students” that do not take into account any cultural differences.

these studies highlight the importance of culture, but little can be understood about the influences of culture beyond that particular group.

Other researchers have utilized a broader scope, studying the effects of culture on education for two or more groups. Lee (2002) compares Chinese-American and Korean-American students to underscore the importance of recognizing and appreciating differences in the cultures and needs of Asian-American groups. The purpose of Smith-Hefner's (1990) article is similar; she stresses that Southeast Asian refugees from diverse cultures come to school with very different backgrounds, and their education must be tailored accordingly. A commonly held belief—that students have different learning styles—is given new meaning as Park (2002) places it in a cultural context and identifies the culture-based preferences of Armenian, Hmong, Korean, Mexican, and Vietnamese students. These studies provide insight into how cultural differences influence students' experiences in schools.

Although these studies represent merely a sample of the literature that exists on the effects of culture on education and students' experiences, they are indicative of the extent of the existing literature and demonstrate a trend in what is missing in the literature. They highlight the important role culture plays in schools and act as a reminder that educators and policy makers must be mindful of cultural differences as they make their decisions. However, the existing literature does not present any cross-cultural comparisons of how schools are helping students learn English and the implications for equal educational opportunity. By filling this gap in the literature, this study will enhance the current understanding of why schools' efforts to meet the linguistic needs of all their LEP students, and in doing so provide them with equal educational opportunity, have

been unsuccessful. Practitioners may recognize themselves in the stories I share, finding both empathy and suggestions for how to face the challenge of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse LEP population. This study also will inform policy by raising awareness of the negative effect—the restriction of schools’ ability to provide equal educational opportunity for LEP students—of well-intentioned regulations. Most of all, I feel that this research can provide support for the importance of working collaboratively to help the growing number of LEP students in this country achieve the English proficiency that is necessary for their academic success.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Context**

Although the United States currently has no official language, English has become the country's *lingua franca*. "The United States, a land of immigrants from every corner of the world, has been strengthened and unified because its newcomers have historically chosen ultimately to forgo their native language for the English language" (*Legislative History: Sen. Hayakawa's Speech*, 2003). Immigrants to this country realize the need to adopt the new language because of the economic and social advancement with which it could provide them (Porter, 1996).

Many of today's schools have taken on the responsibility of helping LEP students to learn English as a means of providing equal educational opportunity. However, this has not always been the case. Although the United States was founded by immigrants, the country's language policies have been hostile at times toward those who wished to provide students with extra help as they worked to acquire proficiency in the (un)official language of their new homeland. These periods of opposition have been cyclically counterbalanced by intervals of strong support for such programs. Despite the differences in the purpose of the policies implemented throughout history, they have dictated how all students were to be treated and continue to do so.

This chapter provides a snapshot of the context in which the schools in this study struggle to meet the needs of their LEP population. It helps to demonstrate that these schools and HISD are not the only ones confronted with this challenge, making a case for

the generalizability of this study. I begin with a short discussion of the history of language policy in the United States to illustrate that the difficulty schools have with helping their students learn English is not a modern phenomenon. I then discuss some of the more recent changes in American language policy that have had the greatest impact on how schools across the country help students acquire English proficiency. Next I present the recent demographic changes that have been observed within HISD that have made it even more crucial that LEP students' needs be met; in this section I also introduce the district's policies regarding how schools are to help students acquire English proficiency. I consider the broader context of the state, introducing similar changes and policies at the state level. The following section goes one step further, looking at the changing demographics of the nation as a whole and the policies with which schools across the country must comply.

### **A Brief History of American Language Policy**

The struggle to determine how to best meet the needs of linguistically diverse student populations is not a recent development. While some believe that this concern is a modern phenomenon (for example Porter, 1996), James Crawford (1995) explains that the “[m]elting pot mythology obscures the diversity of cultures that have flourished in North America since the colonial period” (p. 21). Educators have been plagued for centuries with the question of how to help their LEP students increase their English proficiency to a level that will allow these students to achieve academically.

From the time that Jamestown was founded in 1607 until the signing of the Declaration of Independence, there was a steady stream of new immigrants to the British colonies who wanted to explore the promise of the New World. Because the majority were from England, the primary language of instruction used in schoolhouses throughout the colonies was English. Nevertheless, in recognition of the diversity represented among the newcomers, some schools provided instruction for students in other languages, including German and some Native American languages (Crawford, 1995).

Despite the founding fathers' own recent immigration to the New World, altruism did not always guide decisions on how to provide English instruction or accommodate the needs of a diverse population. There was a widespread fear "that Anglo supremacy would be threatened by the large [minority] linguistic, cultural, and political presence" (Freeman, 1998, p. 34). Thus, the purpose of teaching English to students was not a desire to provide equal educational opportunity to students of all language backgrounds as much as to prevent against what Thomas Jefferson feared might come to pass; namely, "that new European arrivals would bring anti-democratic principles and 'with their language... transmit [these principles] to their children'" (Donegan, 1996).

Despite the fears of some that the use of languages other than English would cause a breakdown in the newly established civil, democratic society (Freeman, 1998), "[e]vidence suggests that the framers of the United States Constitution believed that in a democracy government should leave language choices up to the people" (Crawford, 1995, p. 22). Although the desired end goal among educators was always linguistic assimilation, forcing this integration was thought to be counterproductive. While a lull in the number of immigrants in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century allowed the issue of language to fade

temporarily, it was rushed to the forefront once again as new waves of immigration began to arrive in the 1830s. Although Noah Webster's idea that lingual unity would be the only way to keep the country together was still prominent, the majority of legislators understood the importance of accommodating speakers of other languages. To this end, more than a dozen states passed laws that provided instruction in a language other than English (Crawford, 1995).

The pendulum soon began to swing the other way, and towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a revival of nativism in the United States. Americanization and the English language quickly became less of a choice and more of a directive. The U.S. Bureau of Education became a supporter of and activist for these ideas, and many educators in high positions followed suit (Crawford, 1995).

With the turn of the century, "the vast numbers of...immigrants had made the issue of assimilation critical" (Donegan, 1996). Around 1890, California, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Georgia passed laws that made the use of languages other than English in conducting public affairs illegal (Trueba, 1989). Soon after, the Nationality Act of 1906, which required the ability to understand English as a condition of naturalization, became the first piece of federal language legislation passed in the United States (Crawford, 1995).

During World War I, the limited tolerance that had existed for other languages began to deteriorate, and German-speakers felt the brunt of this. "Several states passed laws and emergency decrees banning German speech in the classroom, in church, in public meetings, even on the telephone" (Crawford, 1995, p. 28). Some cities imposed hefty fines for anyone who spoke German on the street. German textbooks were burned

by mobs or sold for pennies (Crawford, 1995). These anti-German incidents were the physical manifestation of a deeply rooted attitude that was verbalized by President Theodore Roosevelt in his address to the American Defense Society in 1919 (Freeman, 1998):

[W]e have room for but one language in this country and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house (Crawford, 1995, p. 28).

Closely aligned with the idea of Americanization, he felt that it was necessary to give immigrants the opportunity to learn English, but those that could not do so within five years were to be deported (Crawford, 1995).

After the war, fifteen states passed laws making English the official language in schools. Nonetheless, the Supreme Court worked to maintain the rights of language minorities. The Court's rulings were best summarized in the decision of *Meyer v.*

*Nebraska* (1923):

[t]he protection of the Constitution extends to all, those who speak other languages as well as to those born with English on the tongue. Perhaps it would be highly advantageous if all had a ready understanding of our ordinary speech, but this cannot be coerced by methods which conflict with the Constitution—a desirable end cannot be promoted by prohibited means.

Yet, in spite of this ruling and the fact that the initial force of Americanization had started to die down by 1923, the resonating effects of years of xenophobia remained, with feelings of unfriendliness toward immigrants made even more apparent by the passage of strict immigration quotas (Crawford, 1995).

Through the 1960s, many educators used a deficit-model to describe their students who spoke more than one language. Bilingualism was seen as “a disorder that could be

corrected through instruction in a standard major language” (Freeman, 1998, p. 41). To this end, there was a push for the standardization of the expectation that schools would act as the primary method of socializing immigrants into proper American culture (Arias & Casanova, 1993), an expansion of the trend that had begun at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Total immersion into English was thought to be the best way to cure the deficit that occurred in bilingual students.

Although the view of bilingualism as something to be remedied was widespread, the Civil Rights Movement brought the issue of language rights to the forefront, emphasizing minority participation and ethnic pride (Freeman, 1998). For many it became “a civil rights issue and also a means of obtaining heightened respect for their culture, an instrument for fighting discrimination against non-English-speaking groups, and a device for obtaining jobs and increasing the Hispanics’ political leverage” (Duigman, 1998, p. 2). As the number of immigrants increased (*Table 1. Nativity of the Population and Place of Birth of the Native Population: 1850 to 1990*, 1999), the issue became even more pressing and relevant.

Nevertheless, the need to help non-native English speakers learn English has posed a challenge for American schools throughout the country’s history. Despite the wide variety in languages spoken in the colonies before they were officially united, many tried to maintain the superiority of the English language by protesting against the use of other languages in schools. Between 1776 and 1849, as the young nation tried to gain credibility in the world, unity across the former colonies was seen as a key component; to accomplish this, many thought that the use of a single language was essential. The huge influx of immigrants between 1850 and 1919 led many Americans to demand lingual

conformity. There was a general lull in the fight over bilingual education from the end of World War I until 1960, with advocates standing by as several states passed laws prohibiting the use of languages other than English. Between 1960 and 1980, the Civil Rights Movement helped to lift the oppression that many language minority students felt.<sup>7</sup> The difficulty of determining which methods to use to increase the English proficiency of LEP students is one that American educators have faced since even before the education system was established.

### **Pertinent Recent Changes in Language Policy**

The language policy pendulum continues to swing. Some of the most recent changes in language policy demonstrate the challenges faced by educators as they struggle to determine how to ensure that students are provided with equal educational opportunities. Just as supporters of bilingual education and English as a Second Language programs began to see progress towards their cause, legislation was passed that was more favorable for the “English Only” cause. The remedies provided by *Lau v. Nichols*, which many hailed as victory for bilingual education, were undone in two states by reforms.

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<sup>7</sup> Several laws and court cases were responsible for this change. Of particular importance was the *Lau v. Nichols* case discussed in the following section. Other relevant laws and cases from this period are addressed below in the section, “The United States of America.”

### ***Lau v. Nichols*: The Supreme Court's Landmark Decision**

When the Civil Rights Act was adopted in 1964, it was meant to protect against discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin. By that time, *Brown v. Board*, had already upheld the validity of race and color as characteristics by which discrimination was prohibited. In contrast, despite the inclusion of “national origin” in the terms of the Civil Rights Act, the issue of country of origin, particularly with regards to its linguistic ramifications, had not been judicially endorsed, making the grounds on which it stood rather shaky.

The “national origin” aspect soon had the chance to stand against judicial scrutiny in the landmark case of *Lau v. Nichols*. As Diane Ravitch (1983) notes, not long after the Civil Rights Act was passed, “[t]he idea that schools... provided equal opportunity for American youth to improve themselves and succeed on the basis of individual ability without regard to their origins was scorned” (p. 271). In March 1970, roughly five years after the Civil Rights Act was adopted, a suit was filed in the Federal District Court in San Francisco against the Board of Education (Shender, 1976) on behalf of all the students in the district who were not being taught English: “(1) 1,790 Chinese-American school children who spoke no English and were taught none, and (2) 1,066 Chinese-American school children who spoke no English but received some remedial instruction in English” (Biegel & Slayton, 1997). In testing the guarantee against discrimination based on country of origin, the case had implications for the right to equal educational opportunities for all immigrant students.

Although the Supreme Court's ultimate decision has linked the *Lau v. Nichols* case to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, it was the students' rights under the Fourteenth

Amendment that the plaintiffs' lawyers maintained were being violated. Their complaint, as paraphrased by Judge Shirley Hufstедler of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, was that

[a]ccess to education offered by the public schools is completely foreclosed to these children who cannot comprehend any of it. They are functionally deaf and mute...These Chinese children are not separated from their English speaking classmates by state-erected walls of brick and mortar (Cf. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) 347 U.S. 483), but the language barrier, which the state helps to maintain, insulates the children from their classmates as effectively as any physical bulwarks. Indeed, these children are more isolated from equal educational opportunity than were those physically segregated African Americans in *Brown*; because these children cannot communicate at all with their classmates or their teachers (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1973, p. 48).

The plaintiffs claimed that the lack of effective English language instruction destined them to join the ranks of the high schools dropouts and the unemployed. They felt that this was a denial of equal protection under the law.

The lack of equal protection was a problem that the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) had discovered the same year. Having conducted several Title VI compliance reviews in school districts with large ethnic minority populations, the OCR found

a number of common practices which have the effect of denying equality of educational opportunity to Spanish-surnamed pupils.... [and that s]imilar practices which have the effect of discrimination on the basis of national origin exist in other locations with respect to disadvantaged pupils from other national origin-minority groups, for example, Chinese or Portuguese (Office for Civil Rights, 1970).

Despite the guarantees of the Civil Rights Act, schools were slow to change their ways. Immigrant students in classrooms across the country were lacking adequate English instruction, which resulted in their inability to gain a meaningful education and effectively cut them off from the possibility of achieving academically. In response, the

OCR wrote a memorandum addressing this issue that was directed specifically at school districts with more than five percent national origin-minority group children (Office for Civil Rights, 1970). In clarifying the position of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the OCR's message was clear: "discrimination against children who were 'deficient in English language skills' violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act" (Ravitch, 1983, p. 273). By not providing students with limited English proficiency the adequate English language instruction that was necessary to allow them to participate fully in the classroom, the OCR held, schools were denying students the equal opportunities the Civil Rights Act legally granted them.

Although the case was brought forward with claims of infringements of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Supreme Court decided that it did not need to rely on the Constitution to make its decision as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act provided sufficient guidance. In delivering the majority opinion for the Court, Justice William O. Douglas highlighted California Education Code § 71 and § 8573. These sections designate English as the basic language of instruction and mandate that students may not graduate from high school without demonstrating proficiency in English, respectively. Douglas explained that

Under these state-imposed standards there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education. Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the educational program, he must already have acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education. We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974).

Because students who did not speak English received fewer benefits from their time spent in the classroom than those who were fluent in the language, the majority of the Supreme Court determined that this was a case of discrimination on the basis of national origin and that the San Francisco United School District was in violation of the guidelines set out by the OCR in the May 25, 1974 memorandum. Thus, the Court reversed the original decision on the case and returned it to a lower court to decide on how to best resolve the situation for the plaintiffs (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974).

Because the remedies would affect the way that immigrant students were treated in schools across the country, the decision-making was kept at the federal level. An expert task force designated by the Education Commissioner of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) set the guidelines on how schools were to rectify any discrimination that existed on the basis of national origin. These regulations were originally titled “Task Force Findings Specifying Remedies Available for Eliminating Past Educational Practices Ruled Unlawful Under *Lau v. Nichols*,” but were later known as the “Lau Remedies.” They recommended that students in the primary grades be taught in their dominant language until they were proficient enough in English to participate meaningfully in a mainstream classroom—a bilingual education approach. English as a Second Language (ESL) programs could be used as well, but schools that chose to rely solely on ESL were required to prove that their program was able to teach students English as well as the recommended bilingual education program would. Although the “Lau Remedies” were never formally adopted as legislation, they have become the *de facto* terms under which schools operate (Lyons, 1992).

## **Sweeping Changes in California and Massachusetts**

Arguably the most contentious language policy reforms over the past few years have been those that bar the use of bilingual education from all classrooms and demand that English be the only language used for instruction. Led by policy entrepreneur Ron Unz, this “English Only” movement is working to gain influence state by state. Among the first to be persuaded to change were California and Massachusetts.<sup>8</sup>

Proposition 227 was passed in California in 1998 with 61 percent voting in favor of the mandate for “English Only” instruction and 39 percent voting against it (Crawford, 1997). Under the guidelines of this proposition, Chapter 3 of the general provisions of the California education code was amended to require that all students be taught English in English language classrooms. Specifically, “[c]hildren who are English learners shall be educated through sheltered English immersion during a temporary transition period not normally intended to exceed one year” (“English Language Education,” Section 305). As receiving education in English has been deemed a right, parents may take legal action in the event that they feel that the rights guaranteed under this proposition are violated. Parents who feel that the program is not meeting their child’s needs, however, are given the option to sign a waiver requesting that their child be provided with a different method of instruction, such as bilingual education, after the student has been enrolled in the English immersion classroom for thirty days. With the successful adoption of Proposition 227, a window opened for similar policies to be implemented in other states.

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<sup>8</sup> A similar statute was proposed and passed in Arizona in 2000 (“Proposition 203: English language education for children in public schools,” 2000).

Taking advantage of this window, Question 2 was brought before voters in Massachusetts in 2002 and was passed with 70 percent of the vote (Vaishnav, 2002). Very similar to Proposition 227 in its provisions, Question 2 “replace[d] the [previous] state law providing for transitional bilingual education in public schools with a law requiring that, with limited exceptions, all public school children must be taught English by being taught all subjects in English and being placed in English language classrooms” (Texas Education Agency Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1998). Contrary to the previously implemented programs, students are to remain in the sheltered English classroom for no more than one year before being completely mainstreamed. Yearly testing of students is to be conducted completely in English. Parents are given the right to take legal action to ensure that their child is receiving instruction in English only. A small loophole was created to allow parents to sign a yearly waiver of the student’s right to this instruction, permitting some small semblance of bilingual education to occur. Nonetheless, for the majority of English learners, the law implemented with the passage of Question 2 meant the end of bilingual education.

With the recent success of “English Only” laws, the issue of how to provide LEP students with equal educational opportunity has gained attention once again. These policies place limitations on the programs schools may implement to help their LEP students learn English. With the rigidity they impose, schools are less able to adapt their methods to the specific needs of their particular LEP population.

## **Houston Independent School District**

This study look specifically at how the issue of helping students to acquire English proficiency is addressed within a single school district: Houston Independent School District (HISD). This district is the largest public school system in Texas, serving roughly 22% of the state's students (Texas Education Agency, 2006a), and is the seventh largest system in the United States. During the 2006-2007 school year, HISD was serving 202,936 students, 81,071 of whom are in grades one through five. Because of the large size of its student body, the district is organized into five geographic regions: North, East, South, West, and Central) (Houston Independent School District, 2007a).

Within the school district, minority groups form the majority. Hispanics comprise 59.3% of the student body. African American students represent another 29.2%. Asian students make up another 3.1%, while Anglos are only 8.3% of the student population in the district (Houston Independent School District, 2007a).

The LEP population of HISD is sizable, with over 55,000 students, or roughly one in four, classified as such. As described already, there are several programs offered within the district to help these students acquire English language proficiency. 18.7% of HISD students participate in some sort of bilingual education program while 7.1% learn English through an ESL program (Houston Independent School District, 2007a).

Recognizing the shifting needs of the district's students in a rapidly changing society, the HISD Board of Education (1990) published a report that outlines its beliefs about and visions of the necessary reforms of the school system's structure. With the increasing diversity within the student population, the Board felt that it was necessary to

provide a flexibility that a highly centralized system would not allow. The new structure they resolved to create would be one that:

(1) is built on the relationship between the teacher and the student; (2) is decentralized and features shared decision-making [specifically, being responsive to the community]; (3) is focused on performance, not compliance [recognizing that “compliance with massive state or district rules restricts innovation”]; (4) requires a common core of academic subjects for all students (1990 HISD Board of Education, 1990).

These beliefs were reaffirmed in the addendum written by the 2001 HISD Board of Education, which stressed a vision of providing equal educational opportunity for all by giving each child “instruction designed to meet his or her unique learning needs” (2001 HISD Board of Education, 2001).

To meet students’ needs most effectively, HISD implemented a district-wide policy of decentralization that is meant to “establish equity of resources for HISD students” (2001 HISD Board of Education, 2001). To give schools the financial flexibility that they need, the district worked to give 80 percent of the funds designated for schools directly to the schools. A new school funding formula was created that takes into account cost of accommodating the needs of different types of students. In this weighted student formula, schools get an additional .10 per LEP student in any English language acquisition program (2001 HISD Board of Education, 2001).<sup>9</sup>

The idea that “[t]hose who work directly with students make the most-informed decisions about educational programs and initiatives” (2001 HISD Board of Education, 2001) is not limited to financial choices. Principals across the district are given more

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<sup>9</sup> Whether or not this is enough to meet these students’ needs is beyond the scope of this paper, as is the question of how whether or not the money allocated for a single pupil is spent only on meeting that student’s needs.

freedom of choice than ever before. However, restrictions set by state law and district policy, particularly with regard to state-mandated services including Special Education and LEP programs, may not be overlooked. Additionally, at each campus a Shared-Decision-Making-Committee made of faculty and staff members, parents, community members, and business partners is involved in setting the school's goals, including a budget, and ensuring that they are met (2001 HISD Board of Education, 2001). These efforts to decentralize the district go one step beyond the idea on proposed by Duke and Canady (1991) that "the policies which exert the greatest impact on the lives of students tend to be those that are developed locally rather than at state and national levels" (p. 17).

Nonetheless, one of the primary goals of the district's Multilingual Programs department is to ensure that HISD schools are in compliance with the policies set by the federal and state government with regards to LEP students.<sup>10</sup> To this end,

all elementary schools in HISD are required to offer, in accordance with state law (TEC 29.051 and Chapter 89.1201-1265), a bilingual program for LEP students in PK through elementary grades whose home language is spoken by twenty or more (>20) students in any single grade in the entire school district. All elementary schools in HISD are required to offer, in accordance with state law, an ESL program for LEP students in PK through elementary grades whose home language is spoken by twenty or less (<20) students in any single grade in the entire school district (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005, p. I-13).

By monitoring the number of LEP students who speak each language, the school district ensures that it provides the appropriate English language acquisition programs. Because of the large Hispanic population, Spanish/English bilingual programs are the most common programs within the district. They are the primary English language acquisition

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<sup>10</sup> The specific guidelines to which they strive to adhere can be found in Appendix C.

program for LEP Spanish-speaking students. The recent growth in the size of the Vietnamese-, Chinese-, Arabic-, and Urdu-speaking populations has led to a need for bilingual education programs for these students as well. However, schools are only required to provide these if the resources to do so are available. ESL may be used as an alternative for these students. Although 1999 HISD bilingual education policy provides parents with the right to decide whether or not to allow their child to participate in a particular English language acquisition program, schools must follow the regulations outlined above to remain in compliance with district and state mandates.

To abide by the guidelines, each elementary school is charged with selecting the English language acquisition programs they feel best meet the needs of their particular student body. They must make this choice from the various options provided by the district, as seen in Figures 3-1 and 3-2 (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005, p. I-15-I-16).

Type of Program	Grades	Target Students
<p><b>TRADITIONAL BILINGUAL PROGRAM (TBP)</b>  <b>Goal: Mainstream into English</b>  <b>Languages: Spanish/English or Vietnamese/English</b>  Features: The TBP is a bilingual program model whereby <b>LEP students</b> receive primary language instruction for concept development while acquiring English. English instruction increases annually through Gr. 3. At Gr. 4-5/6, students who entered the program prior to Gr. 3 progress into the pre-exit phase of the program which emphasizes English instruction while maintaining introduction or reinforcement of concepts in the primary language. Students, who entered the program at Gr. 3 or after, may remain in the bilingual program or progress into the pre-exit phase of the program based on LPAC recommendation. Students who meet program exit requirements anytime between Gr. 1-5/6 are reclassified as non-LEP and must be mainstreamed into the all English curriculum.</p>	<p>Elem. PK-5  (and 6 if in elem.)</p>	<p>LEP</p>
<p><b>DEVELOPMENTAL BILINGUAL PROGRAM (DBP)</b>  <b>Goal: Promote bilingualism and biliteracy</b>  <b>Languages: Spanish/English or Vietnamese/English</b>  Features: The DBP is a bilingual program model whereby <b>LEP students</b> are allowed to fully develop and maintain their native language while learning English. Language arts and content subjects are taught in the primary language in the early grades (PK-3). English instruction increases gradually throughout the elementary grades until reaching a level of proficiency in both languages that leads to <b>a 50% native language curriculum and 50% English curriculum at grades 4-5</b>. In Gr. 4-5/6, concepts can be introduced or reinforced in the non-target language. Students who meet program exit requirements anytime between Gr. 1-5/6 are reclassified as non-LEP but may remain in the program with parent permission based on space availability.</p>	<p>Elem. PK-5  (and 6 if in elem.)</p>	<p>LEP</p>
<p><b>*TWO-WAY BILINGUAL/IMMERSION PROGRAM</b>  <b>Goal: Promote bilingualism and biliteracy</b>  <b>Languages: Spanish/English</b>  Features: The TWBIP is a bilingual program model whereby equal combinations of LEP &amp; FEP (fluent English proficiency) students are taught together in an effort to develop full bilingualism and biliteracy for both groups. All participating students receive instruction in language arts and content subjects primarily in Spanish in the early grades (K-3), and gradually increase their English instruction until reaching a level of proficiency in both languages that leads to <b>a 50% Spanish/ 50% English curriculum in Grades 4-5/6</b>. In Gr. 4-5/6, concepts can be introduced or reinforced in the non-target language. Students who meet program exit requirements anytime between Gr. 1-5/6 are reclassified as non-LEP but may remain in the program with parent permission.  *Careful study of program implementation guidelines, including the participation of late enrollees, and required school commitment is needed prior to implementing this program. Offering this program must not prohibit any LEP student from receiving bilingual instruction.</p>	<p>Elem. PK-5  (and 6 if in elem.)</p>	<p>LEP &amp; FEP together</p>

Fig. 3-1: Bilingual education programs provided by HISD

Type of Program	Grades	Target Students
<p><b>**ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE</b>  <b>Goal: Acquisition of English skills</b>  Features: Focus is on intensive instruction in language arts and content, taught in English using ESL methods, designed to develop students' proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Progression takes LEP students through a sequence of ESL objectives based on their ESL instructional level.</p> <p>**Offering this program at the elementary grades for LEP students in language groups in which the district has &gt;20 students requires special permission from the State Commissioner of Education (an "Exception from the Required Bilingual Education Program"). Requirements for requesting an exception are in Section I, Chapter 6. Offering this program for Spanish-speaking LEPs at elementary grades must be considered "temporary" until such time that sufficient bilingual teachers are available.</p>	PK-12  (Elem = spkrs. of other lang.)  (Sec. = all LEP)	LEP

Fig. 3-2: Alternative English language acquisition programs provided by HISD

Exceptions to the regulations may only be granted on a temporary basis. These must be requested from the State Commissioner of Education on a limited-year basis with a written explanation for the schools' non-compliance. A waiver must be obtained in cases where

- LEP students whose home language is Spanish who are **not** enrolled in a Spanish/English bilingual program **BUT** are enrolled in an ESL program [emphasis in the original text] (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005, p. I-20).
- LEP students whose home language is Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, or Urdu, who are **not** enrolled in a bilingual program (English/Other Language) **BUT** are enrolled in an ESL program [emphasis in the original text] (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005, p. I-20).

To meet the needs of the district's increasingly linguistically diverse student body, the district has implemented policies such as decentralization and guidelines regarding LEP students. The purpose of these policies is to fulfill the district's mission of "strengthen[ing] the social and economic foundations of Houston by assuring that

students achieve their full academic potential.” The district’s efforts to decentralize provide schools with the ability to adapt to the linguistic needs of their particular student body. By providing specific English language acquisition programs from which schools are to choose, the district tries to guarantee that the instruction LEP students receive utilizes effective methods. With these policies, the district strives to create an environment in which schools are able to meet the challenge posed by the diversity within their LEP populations. However, HISD is not the only district that has encountered the changing demographics described here; across the state, other school districts have found that the number of LEP students they have is growing as well.

### **The State of Texas**

The changes in the demographics of Houston, described above, generally reflect the transformation seen throughout the state of Texas. Historically Anglos have not been an overwhelming majority in the state—65.7 percent in 1980 and 60.6 percent in 1990—but the numbers for this group have dropped significantly for this group; in 2000 the percentage of Anglos in the state was down to 53.1. In contrast, most minority groups in the state have experienced growth. The proportion of Hispanics has surged from representing roughly one quarter (25.6 percent) of the population of Texas in 1990 to nearly one third (32 percent) in 2000 (Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer, 2006a). In that same time frame, Asians have grown from 1.84 percent of the population to 2.74 percent (Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer, 2006c; 2006d). The number of speakers of languages other than English

increased from just under four million in 1990 to six million in 2000. Only African Americans have had a different demographic pattern than the general population. While this group grew from 283,818 in 1990 to 445,293 in 2000, the percentage of the Texan population that they represent has remained constant at 11.6 percent (Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer, 2006b). Nevertheless, it appears that soon Anglos will no longer be the majority in Texas.

Similar demographic changes occurred in Texas schools. During the 2005-2006 school year, 4.5 million students were enrolled in Texas public schools (Texas Education Agency, 2006a). This represents a significant increase in the number of students over the last ten years—nineteen percent since the 1995-1996 school year—and 40.2 percent growth since 1987. The Texas Education Agency expects that the number only will continue to climb (Texas Education Agency, 2006b). This growth in numbers is accompanied by a change in the composition of the state's student population, which reflects the change seen in the state's general population. While Anglo students were no longer the majority during the 1995-1996 school year, they were still the largest ethnic group at 46 percent. Hispanic students comprised 37 percent of the student body. Ten years later, these groups' percentages and presence had switched, with Hispanics accounting for 45 percent of all students and Anglos representing 37 percent of the student population (Texas Education Agency, 2006b). The ethnic composition of the state's student population for the 2005-2006 school year can be seen in Figure 3-3, (generated from Texas Education Agency, 2006a).

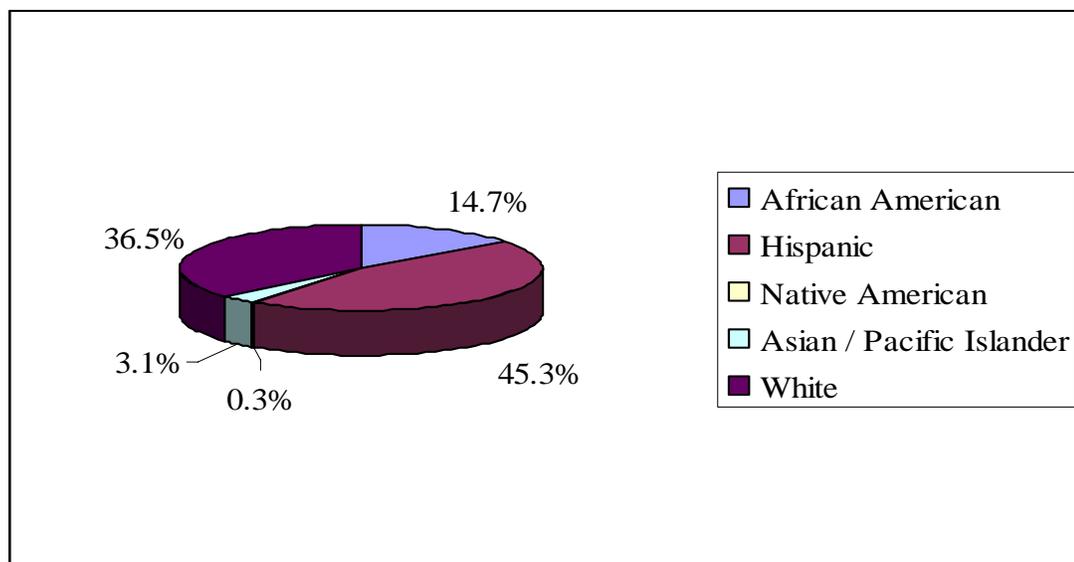


Fig. 3-3: Ethnic Distribution in Texas Schools: 2005-2006 School Year.

Because LEP students do not fall neatly into a single ethnic group, the demographic changes described above do not necessarily translate into changes in the representation of these students. However, in this case, the number of non-English speaking students, which comprise a relatively small proportion of the total number enrolled in Texas public schools, has grown. Between the 2002-2003 and the 2005-2006 school years, the number of LEP students has increased from 14.8 percent of all students in the state to 15.7 percent. Although this change of less than one percent may seem unimpressive, it is significant in its implications; this growth rate has led to predictions that Hispanics will account for 66 percent of students in public elementary and secondary schools by 2040 and those classified as “Other” will comprise another 6 percent (Murdock et al., 2002).

In response to the increasing demands caused by such growth, the Texas Education Agency—the organization charged with the mission of “provid[ing] leadership, guidance, and resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students” (Texas Education Agency, 2006b) in Texas—has implemented several specialized programs to meet students’ needs. In a recent reevaluation of the organization’s strategic plan, TEA recognized the significance of the changing demographics within schools. It stressed the need to focus on approaches that are particularly attentive to “students requiring supplemental resources, unique student needs, and the need to have a multi-cultural approach to a common set of expectations and goals” (Texas Education Agency, 2006b). To this end, the Texas Education Code requires that all LEP students be given the opportunity to participate in bilingual education or an ESL program. In 2000, 49% of LEP students were enrolled in a traditional or developmental bilingual education program, and 38% took part in an ESL program. While not all students take advantage of these programs, TEA provides English language acquisition programs for those who want the assistance.

More specifically, through the Texas Education Code’s Chapter 29 Sub-section B, TEA makes explicit its belief that students are unable to participate successfully in the state’s schools. It also expresses its faith in English language acquisition programs to meet the linguistic needs of LEP students and help them acquire the language skills necessary for moving into the mainstream.

Therefore, in accordance with the policy of the state to ensure equal educational opportunity to every student, and in recognition of the educational needs of students of limited English proficiency, this subchapter provides for the establishment of bilingual education and special language programs in the public schools and provides

supplemental financial assistance to help school districts meet the extra costs of the programs ("Texas Education Code,").

However, these programs are only required in districts where 20 or more students who are LEP and have the same language background are in the same grade level. The state prescribes bilingual education for elementary school students; bilingual education, ESL or some other transitional language instruction for middle school students; and ESL for high school students. These programs must be multicultural in nature and be considerate of students' academic and family backgrounds. Additionally, to enhance students' experiences, LEP students are to be integrated with non-LEP students in non-academic subjects such as art, music, and physical education. In short, schools and school districts are given the responsibility of "providing a full opportunity for all students to become competent in speaking, reading, writing, and comprehending the English language" ("Texas Education Code,").

The increasing diversity among the LEP students in Texas schools make it necessary for the state to implement policies that will guide schools and school districts as they strive to meet the linguistic needs of these students. The state provides specific guidelines for how schools are to help LEP students learn English. By mandating that schools assist their language minority students to increase their English proficiency, the state demonstrates its recognition of the need to help the growing minority to achieve academic success. It also acknowledges that the number of LEP students in Texas will continue to increase, a trend that also can be seen across the nation.

## The United States of America

As seen in Houston and Texas, the composition of the United States is changing rapidly. While Anglos continue to be the majority, the decline in their numbers and growth of others—as seen in Table 3-1—suggests that there soon may be a shift. In 2000 Anglos made up 69.5 percent of the population, the percentage had fallen to 67.4 by 2004, and this drop is expected to continue. In contrast, the numbers are growing among minority groups. African Americans represented 13.4 percent of the population in 2004 as compared to 13.2 percent four years earlier. This is a change of 5.7 percent. Hispanics have shown a large amount of growth as well; their numbers are up to 14.1 percent from 12.5 percent in 2000—an increase of 17 percent. While this number seems impressive, it is difficult to calculate exactly how large this group really is because the growth of this group is due in part to illegal immigration. The number of Asians has swelled from 4.3 percent to 4.8 percent, and they are said to be the fastest growing minority group (*Race and Hispanic Origin in 2004*, 2006). Accompanying this growth among minorities has been an increase in the number of people who speak a language other than English in the home; it rose 47 percent between 1990 and 2000, from 32 million people over the age of five to almost 47 million people (*English language learner students in U.S. public schools: 1994 and 2000*, 2004). With predictions that these trends will continue, it can be expected that minority groups will soon become the majority in this country.

Table 3-1: Changing U.S. Demographics

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>April 1, 2000</b>	<b>July 1, 2004</b>	<b>Change 2000 to 2004</b>
Anglo	195,577.0	197,840.8	1.2%
African American	37,105.0	39,232.5	5.7%
Hispanic	35,306.3	41,322.1	17.0%
Asian	12,006.7	13,956.6	16.2%

Source: *Race and Hispanic Origin in 2004*. (2006) U.S. Census Bureau.

These changes in demographics can also be seen in the student populations of American schools. Of the roughly 49.5 million students enrolled in first through twelfth grade, only 60 percent of them were Anglo in 2003, compared to 79 percent in 1970. The percentage of African Americans had increased from fourteen percent to sixteen percent in that same time period. The number of Hispanics in elementary and high school had grown from six percent in 1970 to eighteen percent in 2003. Because the 1970 census included what is now termed “Other” in the Asian category, a direct numerical comparison for this group is not possible. However, Asians and “Others” comprised one percent of the student body in 1970, and Asians alone accounted for four percent in 2003, indicating definitively that there growth for this group (*School Enrollment in 2003*, 2006). As in the general population, these changes have led to an increase in the number of LEP students. The number rose from roughly two million during the 1993-1994 school year to just over three million in 1999-2000 (*English language learner students in U.S. public schools: 1994 and 2000*, 2004). Figure 3-4 (recreated from *The Growing Numbers of Limited English Proficient Students: 1994/95 - 2004/05*, 2006) demonstrates that the percentage by which the LEP student population grew between the 1994/95 and 2004/05 school years far exceeds the growth experienced in the overall K-12 population. Non-

native English speakers represent an increasing proportion of schools' student bodies, as they do in the general population of the United States.

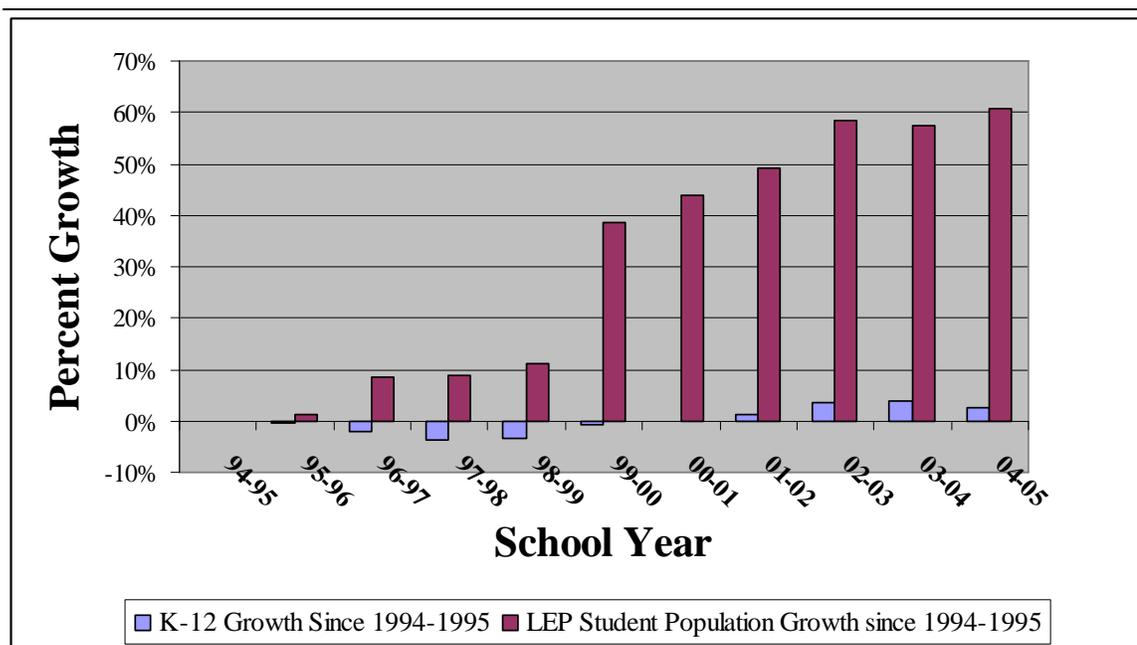


Fig. 3-4: The Growing Numbers of Limited English Proficient Students (1994/95-2004/05)

As previously discussed, the issue of how to best meet the needs of all LEP students has been highly contested throughout American history. However, the recent demographic changes have forced the issue of meeting the linguistic needs of a diverse student population to the forefront of educational policy in the United States. The grave importance of the issue has led the Supreme Court to rule on several cases regarding LEP students. Recently there also has been much debate on the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on this particular population. These Court- and federally-mandated guidelines set the boundaries for what can and must be provided by schools across the nation for students who are learning English.

Despite the differences that exist, there is a clear directive from the federal government, in the form of Supreme Court decisions and federal legislation, that schools must take measures to protect the rights of language minority students. The implementation of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 represented the federal government's first acknowledgment that LEP students had special needs and that it was the schools' responsibility to meet these needs (Ovando & Collier, 1985). As discussed above, the landmark *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) decision required schools to provide all LEP students with an English acquisition program. The need for high quality English acquisition programs was upheld in *Ríos v. Read* (1978).<sup>11</sup> *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) "makes clear that [school] districts have a dual obligation to teach English and to provide access to academic-content instruction" (Valdés, 2001, p. 14).<sup>12</sup> Funds from Chapter I of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act have helped to establish and maintain

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<sup>11</sup> Rosa María Ríos and other Puerto Rican parents brought forth a law suit against the Patchogue-Medford School District on behalf of their children, alleging that the efforts made by the district to help their children learn English were insufficient and failed to provide equal educational opportunity as required under the fourteenth amendment to the and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Overturning a verdict from 1977, the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York ruled that the English language acquisition programs the school district had in place were insufficient because of a lack of appropriate methods for identifying, monitoring, and exiting students. While the Court was clear that its intention was not to ensure that all students were bilingual, the district was to enroll students in programs that helped them learn English "until they [had] attained sufficient proficiency in English to be instructed along with English-speaking students of comparable intelligence" (*Ríos v. Read*, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> Roy C. Castañeda filed suit against the Raymondville, Texas Independent School District (RISD) on behalf of his daughters, claiming that the district was using discriminatory practices in its ability grouping systems, hiring of faculty and administrators, and inadequate bilingual education programs. He identified the latter specifically as an obstacle to equal educational opportunity. The original complaint also named the Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) as a defendant, but this was dismissed before the appeal was made. An amended complaint added the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to the list of defendants. The case was originally tried in 1978. The U.S. Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit, Unit A, ruled in 1981 that although the bilingual education program did not violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, RISD was required to conduct an inquest to determine the reason for the language deficiencies of some of the district's teachers and acquire a valid Spanish language achievement test for assessing students in the bilingual education program. Furthermore, the district court was to investigate the district's history to determine whether or not RISD had discriminated against Mexican-Americans in the past and the extent to which the effects of this discrimination had been remedied.

these programs (Ovando & Collier, 1985). The precedents and regulations set by these rulings and pieces of legislation require schools to provide quality resources within schools for these students as a means of increasing English proficiency.

More recently, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was implemented to increase schools' accountability for students' success. While many aspects of the legislation have been called into question, the effects of the policy on LEP students has led to particularly charged debates. Under the Act, states must conduct yearly statewide assessments of student achievement in the areas of reading, math, and science. Some feel that it is unfair to use standardized tests to comply with this requirement for LEP students as the scores would reflect students' proficiency in English rather than the material. However, others claim that in exempting these students from taking the tests, the government is failing the students by not holding schools accountable for ensuring that the students are achieving adequate yearly progress. As the legislation stands, LEP students must be included in the testing, although some accommodations are made for them.<sup>13</sup> With this policy, the needs of LEP students can no longer be ignored.

Across the country, the number of language minority students is growing. As this trend continues, it becomes increasingly important that the linguistic needs of LEP students be met. By providing these students with the linguistic resources they need to achieve English proficiency, LEP students will receive the opportunity to succeed academically.

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<sup>13</sup> Students may be exempted from taking the exam in English for two years. After that period of time, waivers may be granted on a case by case basis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Conceptual Framework**

At the heart of this study are the two competing pressures that schools struggle to balance as they strive to provide students with equal educational opportunity. The first of these is how students learn; as school policies are created and implemented, schools must consider the manner in which students acquire knowledge. However, schools' ability to shape their regulations around students' needs is constrained by the organizational structure of the educational system. External sources often prevent schools from providing students with the necessary resources. As schools are pulled in these two opposing directions, they must maintain an equilibrium that satisfies both their social and political obligations.

In determining how to efficiently meet the demands of these responsibilities, applicable theories provide school administrators with an appropriate conceptual framework from which to make important decisions regarding equal educational opportunity. With regard to LEP students, language acquisition theories offer crucial insight into how to give these students the meaningful access that is necessary for equal educational opportunity. An understanding of the neo-institutional theory of organizations heightens schools' awareness of the limitations placed on them by the surrounding structure. Drawing from the body of literature on these two types of theory, schools are able to make informed decisions on how to help their LEP students learn English while remaining in compliance with federal, state, and district policy.

The remainder of this chapter introduces two categories of theory, which together form the conceptual framework that acts as a lens through which my research can best be understood. The first section addresses the question of how students learn—or more specifically, how LEP students learn English—by looking at several language acquisition theories. In presenting these, I formulate the argument that the lack of distinction these theories make between students of various backgrounds suggests that schools can both meet their LEP students' needs and provide equal educational opportunity by using the same type of English language acquisition program. The second section establishes the structural obstacles schools face in their efforts to help students learn, as suggested by neo-institutional theory. I consider the implications of the organizational field in which schools are located for their ability to make available to students the resources necessary for increasing English proficiency. I conclude with a brief discussion of the impact of schools' conflicting responsibilities on their policies that provide or withhold equal educational opportunity for LEP students.<sup>14</sup>

### **Fundamental Principles of Second Language Acquisition**

As discussed below, theories on second language acquisition show that it is the characteristic of being human, rather than having a particular linguistic background, that determines one's ability to acquire another language. While differences in the learning styles of students from various countries could cause some discrepancies (2002, for example), the underlying principles by which students acquire language are similar

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<sup>14</sup> The ideas introduced here will be elaborated on further in subsequent chapters.

enough that the effect would be minimal. A method that effectively helps speakers of one language learn English should be equally effective at teaching speakers of another language English; one's native background has no impact on the efficacy of an English language acquisition program. Thus, from a practical perspective, linguistic background should not determine the type of program implemented. Instead, any differences in the programs schools utilize to help LEP students from different linguistic backgrounds acquire English are not supported by theories of second language acquisition.

### **Universal Grammar Theory**

There are apparent differences between languages that could suggest that some English language acquisition programs may be more appropriate for certain students. However, all languages have an underlying commonality that allows speakers of any language to acquire another one. Chomsky has proposed the term "universal grammar" to describe this phenomenon. It refers to "that system of principles and structures that are the prerequisites for acquisition of language, and to which every language necessarily conforms" (Osiatynski, 1984). These shared characteristics are believed to be an inherent part of the human mind. Chomsky's theory, supported by the ideas of connectionism and parallel distributed processing (PDP) (Rumelhart, McClelland, & the PDP Research Group, 1987), suggests that being human is the only prerequisite for the capacity to learn language. Speakers of various languages are equally capable of acquiring proficiency in a target language. Thus, if schools choose to use different methods to help LEP students from various countries learn English, the decision would be based not on a divergence in students' abilities but on schools' preferences.

## **Comprehension Hypothesis**

Just as the theory of “Universal Grammar” explains how the capacity of the human brain enables humans to learn any language, Krashen’s “Comprehension Hypothesis” describes the external circumstances that enable speakers of any language to acquire a target language. This theory, formerly known as the “Input Hypothesis,” holds that one must understand the verbal and non-verbal cues used to convey a message if he or she is to learn the language (Krashen, 2004).

The best methods [of language acquisition] are... those that supply ‘comprehensible input’ in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are ‘ready’, recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production (Schütz, 2002).

In other words, holding up an apple and saying the word “manzana” is a more effective way of teaching the Spanish word for “apple” than simply repeating the word “manzana.” The former provides students with stimuli that they are able to comprehend, utilizing scaffolding as a teaching technique, while the latter leaves the students to draw their own conclusions about what the word could mean. Krashen (2004) suggests that any student has the capacity to acquire a language, regardless of his linguistic background, if he or she is taught under the proper external conditions. In an environment that allows students to grasp the concepts being conveyed to them, speakers of any language have a greater chance of learning the target language. Therefore, by providing some students with comprehensible input as they strive to increase their English proficiency while denying others these same conditions, schools create unequal educational opportunities for these two groups.

## Common Underlying Proficiency

In addition to human capacity and comprehensible input, the transferability of skills between languages is the same regardless of what one's native language may be. Cummins' (1981) theory on Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) goes one step beyond Chomsky's idea that all languages conform to a "Universal Grammar." It suggests that the system of principles and structures that are common to all languages allows skills and proficiency gained in one language to transfer easily when a second language is acquired; these do not have to be relearned. Cummins describes this phenomenon as a "dual iceberg," seen in Figure 4-1 (Cummins, 1983): every language is different on the surface, but they all have a common base that allows speakers of one language to acquire another.

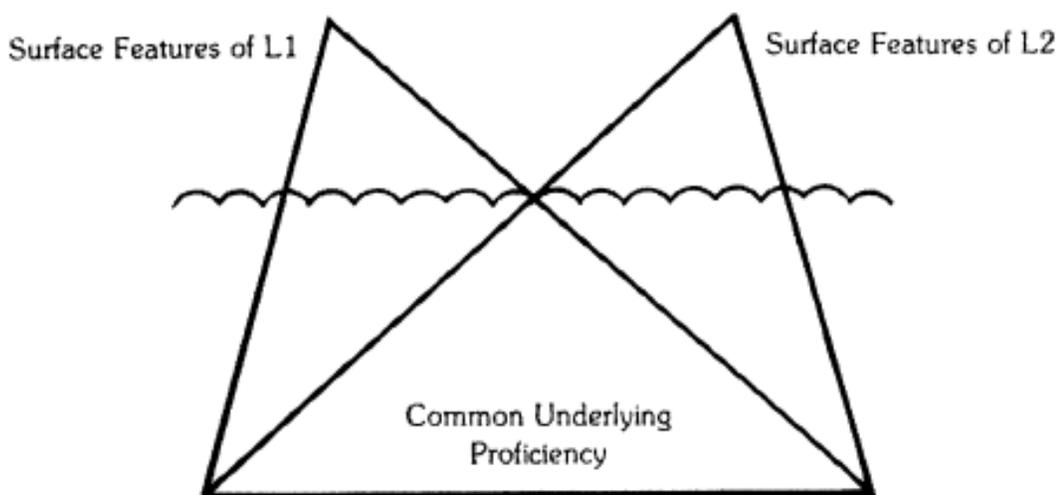


Fig. 4-1: "Dual Iceberg" Representation of Bilingual Proficiency

As with the "Comprehension Hypothesis," the idea of CUP has implications for how to best help students increase their English proficiency, regardless of their language

background. Using the example described above, students who are familiar with apples can easily transfer their knowledge about apples from their native language to the target language. However, students who have never seen an apple before would not understand the concept being taught (an apple is a source of nutrition, it grows on a tree, etc.), making it more difficult for them to learn the word “manzana.” Similarly, students who read well in their first language already have the fundamental skills necessary to learn how to read in English, no matter what their native language may be. Much more effort must be put into helping a LEP student who does not know how to read in his native language learn how to read English because the basics are not understood yet (Cummins, 1981). It is the skills and knowledge that students bring with them that determine their ability to succeed within a given English language acquisition program, not the language they speak at home. Placement of students based on the latter rather than the former represents a failure to provide students with equal educational opportunities.

### **Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills vs. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency**

The previous three theories described characteristics that enable students to acquire a second language and make a case for giving all LEP students the same English language acquisition program options as a means of providing them with equal educational opportunities. Cummins’ (2003) distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) provides further support for the latter idea. However, Cummins warns of a common mistake schools make with regard to all LEP students. He cautions that students do not

acquire language as quickly as it may appear. While students may gain enough BICS to communicate on the playground or in the hallway within six months, this does not signify that the student is sufficiently proficient to be able to work successfully in a mainstream classroom. Unlike BICS, students require a minimum of five years—about the same amount of time it takes to fully acquire one’s native language—to acquire the necessary CALP. Many schools neglect to acknowledge the “different time periods typically required by immigrant children to acquire conversational fluency in their second language as compared to grade-appropriate academic proficiency in that language” (2003). By exiting students from the English language acquisition program before they have become sufficiently proficient, schools fail to meet students’ linguistic needs and to provide them with equal educational opportunities; this holds true for speakers of any language.

### **Defining Schools Using Neo-Institutional Theory**

The term “organization” can be applied to entities with very different structures and behaviors (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). They can comprise an institution entirely or in part (Jepperson, 1991). They can be large or small. They may be centralized or decentralized (Meyer, Scott, & Strang, 1987). Despite this diversity, an organization can be understood to be “a packaged social technology, with accompanying rules and instruction for its incorporation and employment in a social setting” (Jepperson, 1991, p. 147). The organization that serves as the focus of this study is the school.

One defining characteristic of an organization is that it is “deliberately constructed and reconstructed to seek specific goals” (Etzioni, 1964, p. 3). These goals are determined by the organization’s vision of its future (Etzioni, 1964). However, some organizations are challenged by the phenomenon of “goal displacement.” Despite having set goals, organizations may find it necessary to act in ways that do not necessarily help them to achieve these (Brint & Karabel, 1991). Often external influences cause this displacement. For example, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, schools may be unable to act on their goal of providing students with equal educational opportunity because of prohibitive outside factors.

One reason that external sources have so much authority is that an organization does not exist in isolation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens, 1979). Rather, it must work cooperatively with other organizations to accomplish its goal. Together, these organizations form what Scott and Meyer (1991) term “a societal sector.”<sup>15</sup> They define it as

(1) a collection of organizations operating in the same domain, as identified by the similarity of their services, products or functions, (2) together with those organizations that critically influence the performance of the focal organizations: for example, major suppliers and customers, owners and regulators, funding sources and competitors (Scott & Meyer, 1991, p. 117).

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<sup>15</sup> Scott and Meyer’s (1991) concept of a “societal sector” is not unique. Hirsch’s (1972; 1985) “industry system,” Benson’s (1975) “interorganizational network,” DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) “organizational field,” and Scott’s (1987) “functional organizational field” connote similar ideas. However, the specific inclusion of the organizations that aid or hinder the activities of the focal organizations in Meyer and Scott’s conception of these ideas makes “societal sector” the most applicable of these terms for this research.

Within the education societal sector, schools serve the common purpose of educating students, while the federal government, state governments, and school districts play an important role in determining how schools are able to serve their students.

United by a common function, focal organizations within a given societal sector become increasingly homogenized. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) use Hawley's (1968) concept of isomorphism to describe this phenomenon. They explain that there "is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 149). With regard to schools, isomorphism can be seen in the increasing similarity in schools' policies regarding meeting students' needs as the result of the guidelines set by the federal, state, and district governments.

According to DiMaggio and Powell (1991), there are three types of isomorphism that lead to organizational change. Coercive isomorphism refers to changes that are a result of demands from the community or political pressure exerted by an organization—such as the federal government—on which the focal organization—a school, for example—depends. Uncertainty about how to best address a situation may cause an organization to model itself after another organization that has overcome the same challenges, as occurs with mimetic isomorphism; many car companies copied Ford's assembly to increase their production. As the members of a particular occupation work to determine the conditions and methods that are to define their work, normative isomorphism occurs with the increase of professionalization, as with teachers or the Major League Baseball Players' Association. These three mechanisms are not always empirically distinguishable as more than one can come into play in a given situation.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of this discussion, it is the conditions of coercive isomorphism that are particularly of interest; they help to explain how schools' position in their societal sector affects their ability to individualize their policies to their students.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) note that both political and social pressures can lead to coercive isomorphism. As they explain, “[i]n some circumstances, organizational change is a direct response to government mandate” (p. 150). For example, the No Child Left Behind Act caused schools to modify their methods.<sup>16</sup> At other times, it can result from insistent appeals from the community that changes be made (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This is manifested in schools in the undeniable influence parents have on what schools teach.<sup>17</sup> These external factors are powerful forces that can induce changes in how schools are able to adapt to and meet their students' needs.

Despite having the potential to heavily influence focal organizations, the outsider organizations in a societal sector may not exert their authority to the fullest extent possible. Throughout the history of the education system in the United States, the degree to which the government has chosen to apply its power has changed greatly. Although states provided some broad guidelines for how schools were to operate through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, decisions on funding and schooling were primarily made at the school or district level (Meyer et al., 1987). In an effort to find the single best system (Tyack, 1974), urban reformers began consolidating schools into larger districts. The intention of these reformers was to allow for the creation of “a single sovereign board representing the entire community [that would manage] the schools

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<sup>16</sup> A more in-depth discussion of these changes can be found in Chapters 3 and 7.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 8 for further discussion of parents' influence on schools.

through a more efficient, bureaucratic district office” (Meyer et al., 1987, p. 189). The result was a highly bureaucratic system, which became even more structured as the states and federal government began to take on greater authority. With these changes, the external control of schools’ ability to meet students’ needs increased dramatically.

Through the twentieth century, the state expanded its influence within the education system. Its role of determining the basics such as compulsory attendance and teacher certification soon grew to include “curriculum, accreditation, setting minimum standards, personnel certification, and meeting the needs of special groups” (Meyer et al., 1987, p. 190). While some variation exists from state to state in the authority exerted over education, particularly with regard to funding, there has been a steady increase in states’ involvement in the methods schools implement to help their students learn.

In contrast to the state, the role of the federal government traditionally was minimal. However, beginning with the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies, it became more involved, primarily through its funding efforts. By providing financial support for highly specialized programs such as cooperative education and special education, the federal government has been able to influence the measures schools take to meet the needs of their students (Meyer et al., 1987).

Despite the increasing authority of other levels of government, the district ultimately determines how the state and federal mandates will be implemented at the school level. In its role of mediator, the district plays a crucial role in school reform (Elmore & Burney, 1997; 1998; Massell & Goertz, 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Duke (1989) notes that “the policies which exert the

greatest impact on the lives of students tend to be those that are developed locally, rather than at the state and national levels” (p. 17).

Nevertheless, within the modern organizational structure of the education system, the roles and influences of various levels of government often overlap. As Marsh (2000) notes, the blurring of the boundaries of the areas of influence of governing bodies makes it difficult to determine who should be credited with making schools more effective. Specifically, “what level of the system rightly claims responsibility for certain impacts when they may have existed prior to the development of a new... policy or program?” (Marsh, 2000, p. 3). For example, some school districts provided students with bilingual education even before the federal government mandated that all districts with more than twenty students at a single grade level that had limited English proficiency had to provide these students with native language instruction. While the federal government provided the legal clout behind the policy, some of the school districts had been providing the necessary resources much earlier. With the increasing role within the education system of the federal and state governments, the overlaps between their influences and that of the school district can only be expected to increase. As a result, the control of external factors over schools will grow and further constrain schools’ ability to provide for their students’ particular needs.

As these outside forces strive to establish their own realm of influence, the greatest amount of contention regards the district and how important its role is with regard to how schools help students learn. Some researchers have tried to discredit the importance of the district as an agent of change within the education system (including Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Elmore, 1993;

Massell & Goertz, 1999). In the face of this criticism, a growing number of studies have reasserted the crucial influence of districts. This body of literature contains research that falls into two categories based on the district relation that is its focus: district-state or district-school (Marsh, 2000). The latter has the greatest implications for this research, and some of the results regarding this relationship are discussed here.

In reviewing the literature on district-school relations (see Elmore & Burney, 1999; Goldring & Hallinger, 1992; Massell & Goertz, 1999; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; 1988), Marsh (2000) identified several factors that “explain why districts were more or less able to enact improvements in teaching and learning” (p. 9). These include capacity, balance between central authority and school autonomy, and leadership. Each of these provides a partial understanding of the characteristics that must exist for a district to successfully execute a policy.

The district has the responsibility of affording schools with the capacity to implement the regulations it gives them. Districts must provide teachers and administrators with human capital—in the form of knowledge and skills—they need to implement the desired changes (Rosenholtz, 1991). It is also crucial that districts create a normative culture between and among schools to ensure that the necessary social capital exists (McLaughlin, 1992). Schools also must have both time and materials, or physical capital, available to them for a reform to be successful (David, 1990; Fullan, 2000). Without these three forms of capital, it is unlikely that schools will be successful in applying the district’s reforms.

While providing schools with the capacity to enact a policy is crucial to its success, the research regarding if and how much balance must exist between the central

authority and school autonomy is unclear (Marsh, 2000). Some studies have found that schools are best able to implement district guidelines when district leaders are able to maintain the proper balance between centralization and decentralization (Massell & Goertz, 1999). However, others, like Goldring and Hallinger (1992) hold that districts that use a mixture of centralized control for some areas and decentralized control for others was confusing and resulted in less success. With a lack of consensus among researchers, districts must carefully determine what blend of control works best for their schools.

The final crucial piece in successfully enacting policies is strong leadership in the form of an individual or small group of individuals that can successfully manage the changes that need to occur. Research consistently shows that a leader who can provide effective guidance is necessary for schools to move forward with a reform. The leader can offer the needed direction can be provided through active involvement (Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; 1988) or by setting an example (Rosenholtz, 1991). Positive leadership at the district-level better equips schools to implement the policies they are given.

### **Enabling and Constraining the Opportunities for Students**

As has already been discussed, schools must meet two conflicting demands. The broader society has charged them with the responsibility of helping students to reach their fullest potential using teaching methods that take into account how students learn. An opposing political pressure is applied by various levels of government that implement policies intended to influence how schools function. Together, these two forces determine

the extent to which schools are able to provide students with equal educational opportunity, as seen in Figure 4-2.

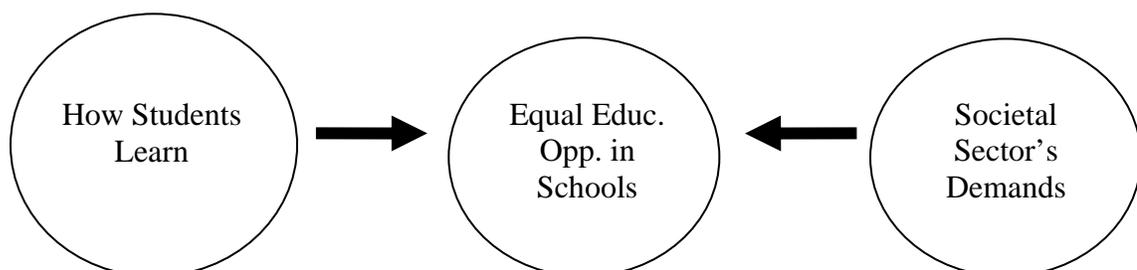


Fig. 4-2: Conceptual Framework

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Theories on second language acquisition provide schools with insight into how LEP students learn English. At the root of these theories is the idea that all students have the inherent capacity to acquire a new language, regardless of their linguistic background. Furthermore, no distinction is made regarding which LEP students benefit most from basic language teaching techniques. As a result, these theories dictate the type of environment—one in which students' native languages do not dictate the type of program provided to help them learn English—schools must create if they are to make equal educational opportunities available to all LEP students.

However, schools' ability to implement the policies suggested by second language acquisition theories is constrained by other organizations within their societal sector. The extent to which these external influences have taken an interest in and impacted the education of student has grown over the years, a trend that is expected to continue. Consequently, it is probable that schools will be even less able to meet their LEP students' needs or provide them with equal educational opportunities in the future.

Together, the theories presented in this chapter serve as a conceptual framework from which to understand the struggle schools face as they strive to provide students from various linguistic backgrounds with equal educational opportunities. However, many of the ideas discussed here remain abstract. The remainder of this dissertation serves to demonstrate how schools in one district work to balance students' needs with external demands in an effort to make equal educational opportunities available to all LEP students.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Research Methods and Procedures**

By undertaking a qualitative study of schools with varying LEP needs within the Houston Independent School District (HISD), it is possible to identify the attitudes, resource limitations, and political pressures educators must negotiate in their efforts to provide equal opportunities for LEP children. This research provides information on individual schools' philosophical and conceptual approaches to deciding which programs will be implemented. This chapter presents the methods used to collect and analyze the data necessary to determine whether there are differences in the ways schools help students acquire English proficiency. It begins with a description of the methodological approach of this study. I then clarify how the school district was selected. Next, the process used to gain access to the district, schools, and participants is explained. I move on to an explanation of how the schools and participants were selected. The seventh section looks at how the data were analyzed. I then address the issues of validity and generalizability. I conclude with a brief discussion of the limitations of the study and areas in which further research could be conducted to enhance the knowledge gained through this study.

## **A Grounded Theory Approach**

This study is designed to describe and discuss the different strategies schools use to help their students increase their English proficiency. The main purpose of this research is to highlight any differences that exist in the methods used for students from various backgrounds and identify the primary organizational components that contribute to any discrepancies. While the original focus of the study was a comparison between Hispanic and Asian students, through the course of the study it has become obvious that the methods schools use distinguish between Hispanic students and those who speak a language other than Spanish, with very little distinction between students in the latter group. The organizational components include mandates from the federal and state government, school district policies, and the allocation of financial resources.

The existing literature on English language acquisition programs in the United States tends to focus on individual language minority groups. Because the present study sought to provide a comparison of how schools help students from various language backgrounds to learn English, there was little theory in the current literature from which to base the research. This seemed problematic at first but may have been an ideal situation; in grounded theory, one must gather and closely examine the data before forming a theory (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Rather than beginning research with a particular theory in mind, Creswell (1998) suggests that one create theory out of the data, present the theory using a visual representation, and demonstrate how this new theory relates to existing theories (see example in Creswell & Brown, 1992).

The conventional methods for completing a grounded theory study were crucial in conducting this research. The focus of this study was how schools have responded to the challenge of helping students from various language backgrounds learn English. This falls under the broad category of themes Creswell (1998) describes as conventional topics for grounded theory studies. Homogeneous groups are often the subjects in research that uses a grounded theory approach; although the schools in this study were not homogeneous when considered as a single group, the schools in each of the five categories were alike, as described below. The data collection methods were characteristic of grounded theory research: I conducted twenty to thirty interviews to collect data and recorded my data by following an interview protocol during the interview and oral memoing after the interview. I encountered typical grounded theory interviewing issues. These included the logistics of conducting the interview—how, when, and where to conduct it to obtain the best results—and questions of how open and honest participants were with their answers (Creswell, 1998).<sup>18</sup> Journaling after each interview was crucial to the development of the theory as it allowed me to reflect on what had been said in each interview and the effect of the data on the theory. The transcriptions of this memoing provided a record of the theory's development.

### **District Selection**

As the focus of this study is diversity within the LEP population of schools, the criteria for selecting the school district included having both a large LEP population and a

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<sup>18</sup> A more in-depth discussion of how these issues arose and were addressed is provided below.

large number of languages spoken by the LEP population. Because there was no set cut-off point of what constituted a large LEP population or a large number of languages, many cities across the country fit the description. However, growing up in Houston, attending Rice University as an undergraduate, and receiving a Masters degree in bilingual education from the University of Houston gave me a connection to and first hand knowledge of the Houston area and HISD schools, which made the selection of this district an opportune choice. This is not to say that my pre-existing knowledge about the case was the only determining factor.

The decision to focus on Houston was further justified by an on-going study, The Houston Area Survey, conducted by Dr. Stephen Klineberg of Rice University, that systematically monitors trends in attitudes and demographics in Houston. In this research, Klineberg (2002) noted a dramatic increase in the city's diversity; while roughly 10 percent of Houstonians were Hispanic, Asian or another non-Black minority in 1982, the number had grown to 34.5 percent by 2005. Furthermore, according to Klineberg, "[Houston] is at the forefront of the new diversity that is reconstructing the social and political landscape of urban America" (Klineberg, 2002). This position has forced Houston's leaders to address the issues raised by its changing demographics that other cities around the country will soon encounter. Thus, it can be expected that Houston's successes and failures in facing these new challenges will be serve as models from which others can learn how to adapt to the situation.

The changes in the city's general population also are reflected in the student body of the Houston Independent School District. As the number of immigrants increases, so does the number of students whose native language is not English. The growing linguistic

diversity in the city reflected in the many languages seen on billboards represents a growing challenge for HISD; namely, teaching English to children with very diverse linguistic backgrounds as a means of helping them to achieve in school. While other cities and school districts have faced similar problems, HISD's size has forced it to deal with more linguistic diversity than most, yet it is not so large that different sections of the district opt to act independently.

### **Gaining Access**

The nature of the district, which made it an attractive location for this particular study, also makes it appealing to many other researchers. Rather than allowing any interested party to conduct a study, the school district requires each researcher to obtain formal permission to use the district's resources. The "guidelines [the district uses] seek to balance the need for advancement through research with the need for uninterrupted instructional activities for maximal student learning. In addition, by requiring an approval process, this... acts to assure the protection of staff and student rights" (*Permission to Conduct Research in the Houston Independent School District; Procedures for Requesting*, 2001).

The process of gaining access began with the submission of a request for permission to conduct research. This document summarizes in three to four pages the proposed study, its theoretical basis, and its potential contribution to research in

education and to the school district.<sup>19</sup> The request, along with the research proposal, was sent to the Research Committee, which meets once a month to review the requests they have received. The Committee then votes to approve, recommend changes to or deny approval of the request (*Permission to Conduct Research in the Houston Independent School District; Procedures for Requesting*, 2001).

The Research Committee conditionally approved the first submission of the request to conduct the study. The names of the schools that would comprise the focus of the research were not listed in the original request because the selection of these schools required data the district had in order to select them. With the assistance of a research specialist from the district's Department of Research and Accountability, I obtained the data and was able to provide the list of schools that I hoped to use in the study. With this added information, the Committee granted me permission to conduct the research.

As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe, “[g]etting permission to conduct the study involves more than getting an official blessing” (p. 76). The school district itself reminds researchers that gaining access is a multistep process as each school principal has the right to determine whether his or her school will participate in the research. To ensure that the study could move forward, the principal at each school was contacted to ask for his or her permission. For those principals whose e-mail addresses were published online, this request was made electronically. Contact with the others was made through telephone calls with varying degrees of success. In some instances, several calls had to be made before the principal could be reached. Some schools were able to provide the

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<sup>19</sup> The permission request can be found in its entirety in Appendix A.

principal's e-mail address over the telephone, suggesting that that would be the most effective way to reach him or her, while others were unable to give out this information, citing security reasons. In four instances the principal refused permission to include his or her school; in each case the reason given was a lack of time for an additional commitment. Including the four schools selected as replacements, access was granted to nineteen schools.

### **School Selection**

Limited resources made it impossible to include every school in HISD in the study. Because of the variability in how schools approach students at different levels of education, the scope of the study was restricted to experiences within elementary schools. The largest number of different types of English language acquisition programs used is found at the elementary school-level as the majority of middle and high schools only offer ESL and no bilingual education. The large number of elementary schools also provided a greater population from which to select the sample than middle or high schools would have. The confounding effect of exchange students that might be a concern with high schools was not an issue because of the students' young age. Elementary schools are also the focus of the majority of research. Additionally, the decision was made at an early stage that the interviews would concentrate on schools that serve this age group for consistency; the original research design included the use of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, which only provides data on students in kindergarten through third grade.

The two crucial variables that were used to identify schools in this study were the size of the LEP population within the school and the amount of variability within the LEP population of the school. The size of the LEP population could determine how pressing it is for a school to help all their students learn English and the methods they use to achieve this goal. While HISD's regulations dictate that all schools must help their students learn English as rapidly as individually possible (Lao, 2004), the need to allocate resources as efficiently as possible would lead a school with only one LEP student to address the needs of its LEP population in a much different way than a school whose population is 75 percent LEP would. Similarly, the amount of variability within the LEP population of the school may play a role in a school's decision to implement one type of English language acquisition program over another. Again, HISD has specific policies regarding which program schools should choose, but these act more as general guidelines than directives. Schools in which Spanish-speakers comprise the entire LEP population must determine how to meet the needs of a single language minority group; schools whose LEP population speaks many languages must determine how to serve each group equally. Together these two variables create the challenge for schools that this study explored.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) compiles "individual student level data on Texas public school students" (Texas Education Agency Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1998, p. 2) into a single database known as the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Among other things, including data on finances, attendance, discipline, and school leaving, PEIMS contains data on the demographics of individual schools.

PEIMS demographic data for schools in HISD were provided by the district in the form of several spreadsheets. The files specified the number of LEP students at each of HISD's 182 elementary school campuses, the total number of students at each school, the native languages of students at each campus, and the number of students who spoke each of those languages. The data were cleansed to remove the seventeen "excluded schools" (defined by HISD as schools that closed, will close, represent an alternative educational setting, or have limited grade levels) the two schools that had no LEP students, as the populations of these schools were not representative of the populations that are the focus of this study.

The data on the number of LEP students at each elementary school campus and the total number of students at each school were used to calculate the percent of the total student body that is LEP at each school. The schools were divided into three quantiles. Schools with percentages higher than 52.22 were deemed to have a large LEP population. Those with percentages lower than 16.86 were labeled as having a small LEP population. Schools that fell in the range between the two extremes were labeled as having a medium-sized LEP population.

Drawing from the data on the native languages of students at each campus and the number of students who spoke each of those languages, the number of speakers of the largest minority language at each school was divided by the total number of speakers of languages other than English to determine the predominance of the largest minority language at that school. The schools in which a single group comprised the LEP population were removed from the sample as these schools do not have the diversity within their LEP population that is of primary interest for this research. As the original

focus of this research was the differences between Hispanics and Asians, schools in which a language spoken by one of these ethnicities was not represented were also removed because they did not contain the type of population that was to be the subject of this study.<sup>20</sup> The remaining schools were divided into three equal quantiles. Schools in which a single language was spoken by more than 97.6 percent of the LEP students were labeled as having low diversity within the LEP population. Those in which no single language was spoken by more than 84.02 percent of the LEP students was labeled as having a highly diverse LEP population. Schools that fell in the range between the two extremes were labeled as having a medium amount of diversity within the LEP population.

The schools' labels were used to group them into nine categories. While the ideal study would have included schools from each of these nine groups, limited resources made it necessary to reduce this number. Nonetheless, I wanted to ensure that the processes of schools along as much of the spectrum as possible were still included. For this reason, the schools that fell into the extremes categories (large LEP population with high diversity, large LEP population with low diversity, small LEP population with high diversity, small LEP population with low diversity) or were in the group that fell in the middle for both dimensions were considered for the final sample, as designated by the shading in Figure 5-1. There were five schools that had large LEP populations with high diversity, thirteen schools that had large LEP populations with low diversity, seventeen schools that had small LEP population with high diversity, one school that had a small

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<sup>20</sup> This may have resulted in the removal of a school that later would have proven to be interesting for this study.

LEP population with low diversity, and eight schools that had medium-sized LEP populations with a medium amount of diversity. The experiences of the schools in these five groups were meant to represent those of schools along the entire spectrum.

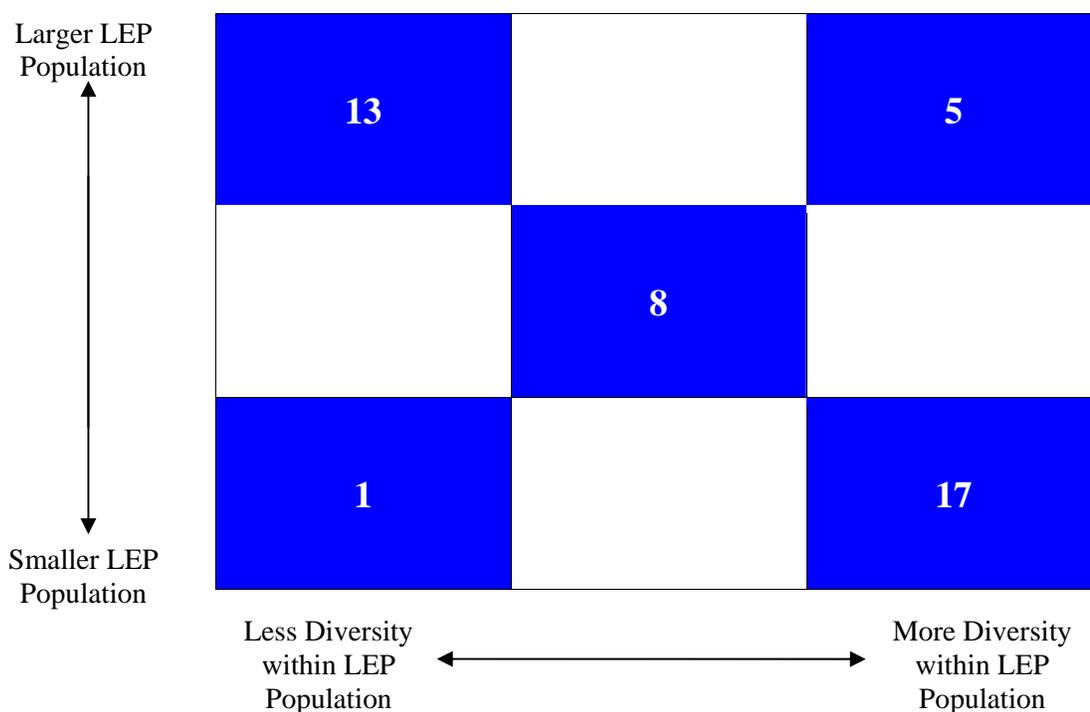


Fig. 5-1: Categories for Selecting Schools

Because of restrictions on resources, the original intent was to select twenty schools. With five categories from which to choose, the ideal would have been to include four schools from each category. As there was only one school that had a small LEP population with low diversity, that school was selected to participate in the study. Schools were selected purposefully from each of the remaining four categories to maximize the variability in the types of language programs used in the sample. If more than one school within a category used the same combination of programs, random

selection was used to choose among them. In total, four schools from the large LEP population with high diversity category, five schools from the large LEP population with low diversity category, five schools from the small LEP population with high diversity category, one school from the small LEP population with low diversity category, and four schools from the middle category were selected to participate in the study for a total of nineteen schools.

The principal at each school was contacted either by telephone or through e-mail to request his or her permission to include the school in the study. Permission was granted in all but four cases: one school with a large LEP population with high diversity, two schools with a small LEP population with high diversity category, and one school with a medium-sized LEP population with a medium amount of diversity. The reason given for not granting access to the school was a lack of time and over-commitment on the part of the school in all four cases. Each of these schools was replaced in the sample by another school that was randomly selected among those that mostly closely fit the characteristics of the school that was originally selected.

In the end, nineteen elementary schools located throughout HISD were included in this study.<sup>21</sup> As suggested by the selection criteria discussed above, they represented a wide range of student populations and had varying degrees of diversity, as seen in Table 5-1.<sup>22</sup> Four schools have over 1,000 students, fourteen schools have between 500 and 1,000 students, and one school has less than 500 students. Sixteen of the schools have Title I programs. Seven of them have some type of magnet program. Four are located in

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<sup>21</sup> The names of the schools used in this study have been changed to maintain participant anonymity.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix D for a more complete description of the schools in this study.

the southwest region of HISD, three are in the district's west region, two are in the southeast region, two are in the east region, two are in the west central region, two are in the northwest region, and the north central, south, and central regions all have one each, as does the alternative administrative region. Eight schools have both traditional bilingual education and ESL, five have developmental bilingual education and ESL, two have two-way bilingual education and ESL, two have only ESL, one has both traditional and developmental bilingual education in addition to ESL, and one has both developmental and two-way bilingual education in addition to ESL.

Table 5-1: School Characteristics

School Name	Size	Region	Title I	% LEP	# of Languages	Programs	% Bil. Ed.	% ESL	% Teachers
Boxer <sup>2</sup>	700	East	Yes	62	2	TBE, DBE, ESL	56	1	51
Boyd Academy <sup>5</sup>	1,100	Alternative	Yes	15	6	TBE, ESL	**	3	12
Chester <sup>1</sup>	1,100	West	Yes	53	17	TBE, ESL	38	14	36
Clements <sup>3</sup>	600	Central	No	16	15	TWBE, ESL	7	8	29
Connolly <sup>2</sup>	800	Southeast	Yes	65	2	DBE, ESL	59	3	48
Easton <sup>3</sup>	300	East	Yes	3	3	ESL	N/A	3	0
Gauthier <sup>2</sup>	600	N. Central	Yes	62	3	DBE, TWBE, ESL	60	1	50
Grant <sup>3</sup>	700	W. Central	No	17	22	TWBE, ESL	11	5	33
Greene <sup>5</sup>	500	Southwest	Yes	29	10	TBE, ESL	17	10	34
Grey <sup>1</sup>	800	West	Yes	57	18	TBE, ESL	38	16	51
Henry <sup>3</sup>	800	Southwest	Yes	13	10	TBE, ESL	8	4	20
Honey Creek <sup>2</sup>	500	Southwest	Yes	57	8	DBE, ESL	49	8	40
Jetters <sup>5</sup>	600	Southwest	Yes	52	13	DBE, ESL	44	6	35
Kaye <sup>2</sup>	1,000	South	Yes	62	3	DBE, ESL	57	1	58
Oster <sup>1</sup>	1,100	West	Yes	64	19	TBE, ESL	56	7	56
Pine Wood <sup>4</sup>	700	Northwest	Yes	9	3	TBE, ESL	4	2	0
Pleasant Pointe <sup>1</sup>	1,100	Southeast	Yes	62	4	DBE, ESL	47	12	50
Song <sup>3</sup>	600	W. Central	No	5	20	ESL	N/A	5	15
Yale <sup>5</sup>	600	Northwest	Yes	33	7	TBE, ESL	28	2	32

TBE = Traditional Bilingual Education

DBE = Developmental Bilingual Education

TWBE = Two-Way Bilingual Education

\*\* = Information not provided by HISD

<sup>1</sup> = Large LEP population with high diversity

<sup>2</sup> = Large LEP population with low diversity

<sup>3</sup> = Small LEP population with high diversity

<sup>4</sup> = Small LEP population with low diversity

<sup>5</sup> = Medium LEP population with medium diversity

Source: HISD Website. (Houston Independent School District, 2007b)

An alternative means of selecting the schools would have been to choose schools from the various regions across HISD using similar criteria to that described above. This would have provided more insight into the effects of the district's decentralization initiative,<sup>23</sup> specifically with regards to resource allocation. However, it may have detracted from the emphasis on the primary research question, shifting the focus to the issue of decentralization rather than linguistic diversity in schools. The final sample does include schools from various regions, so the data do provide some information on decentralization without it becoming the focal point of the research.

### **Participant Selection**

In the initial telephone call or e-mail used to gain access to the school, the principal was also asked to identify the person in charge of the English language acquisition program at the school. The principal provided contact information for the appropriate individual. A consent form was mailed to each potential interviewee.

The participants' positions within the school varied greatly. They included assistant principals, bilingual education teachers, and instructional coordinators. Although each individual had been identified as the person who was most knowledgeable about the school's English language acquisition program, their position in the school influenced the area with which they were most familiar.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This is described in detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>24</sup> For example, teachers were able to provide me with details about daily classroom activities with which others were less familiar, while principals and assistant principals were more familiar with the minutiae regarding student enrollment and placement.

At most schools, a single person was indicated as the appropriate contact. However, the principal of the school with a small LEP population and low diversity suggested three people to be interviewed together, including herself, and the principal of a school with a large LEP population and high diversity requested that one person in addition to herself take part in the study, but they would be interviewed separately. At another school with a large LEP population and high diversity, after finishing the interview, the participant recommended another person within the school who she thought would be able to provide me with more information; that person agreed to be interviewed and suggested yet another person with whom she thought I should speak, for a total of three interviews at that school.

In two cases, fewer interviews than were expected took place. The vice principal of one of the schools with a large LEP population and low diversity selected three teachers to participate in the research, but the interviews had to be rescheduled because of unforeseen circumstances that prevented the vice principal from informing the teachers about the research. On the day for which the interviews were rescheduled, the vice principal was unavailable and still had not shared with anyone the information about the research, but fortunately one teacher agreed to participate when she heard about the study. At another school with a large LEP population and low diversity, the participant was off campus for a meeting on the day for which the interview had been scheduled but had not informed me about what presumably was a change in her plans. Several attempts were made to reschedule the interview, but the participant could not be reached.

To gain a better understanding of the school district's philosophy, intentions, and goals, the director of HISD's Multilingual Programs Department was asked to

recommend an individual that could provide information on the district's stance on issues dealing with the schools' LEP population. She recommended interviewing the manager in charge of compliance for ESL and bilingual programs and the supervisor for ESL program development.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used to collect data was an interview protocol consisting of ten open-ended questions, the majority of which had several sub-questions.<sup>25</sup> This format was selected as it would provide me with the information I needed. It allowed me to capture the participants' immediate reactions to the questions before they were able to filter their responses, as they might do with a written survey. Asking direct questions gave me more insight into the thought processes behind actions much more than observations could provide. Through the conversations that grew out of the interview protocol, I had the flexibility of asking more probing follow-up questions when respondents shared thoughts on topics that I had not previously considered. The interview process also gave the participant the opportunity to add anything that had not been addressed directly.

The 25 participants were promised complete confidentiality and anonymity. The interviewees' participation was to be voluntary, and they were given the option to withdraw from taking part in the study at any time. None of the participants chose to do so. They were allowed also to decline to answer any question. No one declined to

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix B for protocol.

answer any questions, but a few interviewees admitted that they did not know the answer to some of the questions. They were promised that if they did agree to participate in this study, I would be the only person conducting the interview. Each interview was tape recorded and later transcribed to ensure that all the interviewee's views were recorded accurately. The tapes of the interviews will be destroyed within six months of the submission of the dissertation. Despite being advised of the tape recording, in three instances a participant asked if they were being taped before answering a question, often in a joking manner. In each case the response that followed was negative, leading me to believe that they were not saying it with the purpose of self-aggrandizement and that the tape recording did not have an effect on them. In one case a participant refused to be tape recorded, so every effort was made to capture her words in long-hand. This made conducting the interview much more difficult because it obligated me to concentrate so hard on what was being said that it was difficult to think ahead to which question needed to be asked next.

The 22 interviews were conducted in late January and early February. This timeframe placed the final ones roughly one week before the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exam, the state-wide standardized test, was given. This may have caused participants to place much more emphasis on the testing aspects of their curriculum than if the interviews had been conducted earlier in the year.

The location of each interview was selected by the interviewee to ensure that he or she felt at ease. The interviews with the participants from HISD's Multilingual Department took place at the HISD Hattie Mae White Administration Building. The school personnel were all interviewed at the individual's school campus, but the exact

location of the interview varied from person to person. The most common location was the interviewee's office, which was used in eleven cases. Three teachers opted to have the interview take place in their classroom. In two cases the interview was conducted in a room off the library. Someone else's office, the teachers' lounge, a conference room, a hallway, and an extra room that was part of the main office were each chosen for one interview.

Of the locations selected, only the teachers' lounge and the hallway were noisy and lacked privacy. The former was selected by the teacher from the school with a large LEP population and low diversity who agreed to participate in the study when she learned that the vice principal had forgotten to inform anyone about the research. Because she was kind enough to agree to be interviewed over her lunch break, I did not push for a change in venue. As it was the teachers' lounge, there were others in the room, some of whom made comments on what the interviewee said, but it was generally unobtrusive. At one of the schools with a small LEP population and high diversity, the participant arrived very late for the interview and had only a limited amount of time before she needed to teach, but she rejected my suggestion that they reschedule. The teacher's classroom was being used for other purposes, so the interview was conducted in the hallway. This location was extremely distracting as a maintenance man was vacuuming the multi-purpose room nearby, and groups of students walked by talking throughout most of the interview.

As none of the mailed consent forms were returned before the interviews were conducted, I began each interview by securing a signed copy of the consent form and providing the interviewee with a copy for their records. I then described the purpose of

the study in broad terms, explaining that I was interested in how schools are helping students who speak different languages to learn English and that it was my understanding that the participant was the school's expert on the topic. In this introduction, I also stressed that there were no wrong answers and that the interviewee could feel free to say, "I don't know," or "I'd rather not answer that," in response to any question. Reminding the participant that they were an expert on the topic while giving them the option to not answer questions about which they were uncertain was intended to help build the interviewee's confidence and create a sense of rapport. To help the participant ease into the interview, the first questions were personal, allowing the interviewee to talk about himself or herself. As they responded to these and subsequent questions, I made every effort to use positive body language, including smiling and nodding, to reinforce the idea that I was very interested in what was being said and put the participant at ease. At the end of each interview, I thanked the interviewee profusely and expressed that I would be unable to complete my study without the participant's help.

Each interview lasted roughly between thirty minutes and one hour, which was the timeframe I had provided them when they had agreed to participate in the study. The longest was an hour and twelve minutes, while the shortest was 23 minutes. The same protocol was followed for each interview. However, some participants were extremely talkative and elaborated every answer, and others preferred to be succinct. The amount of time which the respondents had been able to allocate to the interview also played a role. The interview with participant who arrived late was rushed to ensure that all of the questions were addressed during the short amount of time she had before class. Others had set aside their entire one-hour planning period, and most of the hour was used. The

interviews were all conducted entirely in English so that any quotes that I used would not lose anything in translation.

Immediately following each interview, I dictated into my digital recorder a summary of the main points from the interview as well as my impression of the experience. I also took this opportunity to reflect on the data collected thus far and consider any themes that seemed to arise from the interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

As a grounded theory study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the data analysis involved three pre-determined steps which allowed me to develop a theory from the data. The definition of theory used here is “plausible relations among concepts and sets of concepts” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 278). The data analysis process provided insight into these relations and helped me to create a set of criteria against which to evaluate results. This procedure involved three stages—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)—which break data down, conceptualize them, and put them back together through “data reduction” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While this reduction condenses data into concepts, the quotations included in the results and discussion provide the readers with insight into the data in their original form, despite some selection, allowing them to take part in the interpretive process (Stake, 1995).

With *open coding*, I determined the broad categories that emerge as I first began to consider the data. After collecting the data, I transcribed each interview and, as I did

so, began to look for key categories that became clear from the data. These initial categories were made broad intentionally to allow them to be saturated by the data collected. A constant comparative approach allowed me to check the categories against the data from each interview as I transcribed it. There were four recurring topics: the influence of various actors in the determination of how students' linguistic needs are met, the characteristics of the school's English language acquisition programs, the processes by which schools ensure that their LEP population is being served, and the context in which the English language acquisition program is embedded. Within each of these broad themes, properties were developed to reflect multiple aspects of the categories. Some of these properties were broken down further into specific dimensions; these were not on a continuum, as Creswell (1998) suggests they be, but rather were more specific facets of each property.

I began the *axial coding* phase by distinguishing the English language program as the focus, or central phenomenon, for this study. I then identified the actors and contextual factors that have the greatest influence on these programs. The various processes involved were outlined. Special attention was given to details of the organizational structure of the school and alternative and competing explanations of the research question. Differences between schools from the five original categories were highlighted as well. NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program, made it easier to organize recurring ideas from the interviews as a whole as well as issues that were particular to a specific group. This structured look at the themes allowed me to begin creating hypotheses about the primary factors that contribute to or prohibit schools' ability to meet the linguistic needs of their diverse LEP populations.

Finally, the central theme around which these hypotheses fit was identified through *selective coding*. Drawing on the recurring themes from the interviews, I wrote a brief memo discussing the effects of the organizational structure of the education system on schools' capacity to provide equal educational opportunities for LEP students. The importance of school district policy emerged as a key context that determined how schools met students' needs. Moving between the data from this study and the literature on organizational theory specifically dealing with schools, I created an *explanatory framework* (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in which the restrictions placed on or the latitudes allowed actors based on their role within the education system was described.

### **Validity**

While it is important than a researcher address issues of validity in any study, the current emphasis on the use of numbers to support claims has made it even more crucial that qualitative researchers address this subject. Because the primary instrument used to collect data in qualitative research—the human—is different, the methods of establishing validity in math and science are inappropriate. The constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1991) suggests an alternative to the stringent tests used in testing the validity of quantitative research. Rather than relying on the study's repeatability—which may be impossible in qualitative research, this model encourages the researcher simply to be honest in the presentation of research and present the bias and values that may have affected the outcome of the study. Just as it is important to build trust with one's

interview subjects, one must strive to establish a trusting relationship with one's audience. This can be accomplished by presenting an authentic account and interpretation of the data and identifying any personal biases or value judgments (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this study, my preconceptions became startlingly clear. While I consistently remind myself that the purpose of this study is not to determine which type of English language acquisition program is best, my training in bilingual education makes me tend to favor that method. This preference led me to assume that all parents at least want the option of enrolling their children in this type of classroom. This presumption initially prevented me from realizing the impact of cultural preferences on parents' demands.

Other preconceived notions can be seen in my research design. I believed that the categories "Hispanics" and "Asians" were sufficient to classify the majority LEP students into two significant and contrasting groups. While I was aware of the diversity encompassed by the latter term, I felt that it was necessary to allow for such a broad label for the two groups to have comparable numbers. Because I was only interested in these particular LEP students, I removed from the sample schools that did not have students who spoke a language that would classify them as a member of one of the groups.<sup>26</sup> Drawing on my impression that schools would address students' needs differently based on the size and composition of the total LEP population, I categorized the schools using strict criteria and selected a sample that represented the spectrum. While this was a valid

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<sup>26</sup> For example, a school with mostly Hispanic students and three French-speaking students would have been excluded even though the school would have faced the same issues of equal educational opportunity for the latter students if their native language had been of Asian-origin instead.

sampling technique based on my assumption, another method of choosing schools may have presented an even more interesting and representative sample.

Furthermore, although this study was conducted using a grounded theory approach, I began the research with an idea of the results I expected as I explored each of the research questions presented in Chapter 1. I believed that I would find that disparities do exist in the methods schools use to help students acquire English based on students' backgrounds; specifically, that schools focus their efforts primarily on helping their Hispanic students to learn English, giving other LEP students secondary consideration. I also felt that federal mandates would be discovered to be the most influential in schools' decisions, while parents' roles were minimal in the placement of their children in a particular program. Finally, I assumed that schools have the liberty to adjust their procedures to meet their students' needs, so any lack of equal educational opportunity I observed would be as a result of school policy.

While identifying one's preferences is important, this act alone does not suffice to confirm the validity of a study. One must also address the three types of threats to the validity of qualitative research (Maxwell, 1996). These threats can be classified as descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical.

Descriptive validity is threatened when data are described or reported inaccurately (Maxwell, 1996). I made every effort to ensure that this study is descriptively valid by digitally recording every interview (except for one, as described below) and transcribing each of them myself. Thus, the participants' views were recorded precisely, and descriptive validity was achieved.

As explained already, one participant refused to have her interview recorded. In that instance, I tried to transcribe the interviewee's words as they were said. Anything that was not captured as the participant was speaking was later digitally recorded in my memos. While there may be a question as to whether or not the data from this particular interview have descriptive validity, this single interview is not enough to cast doubt on the validity of the entire study.

Another possible threat to the validity of how a study is interpreted is "imposing one's own framework or meaning, rather than understanding the perspective of the people studied" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 89-90). To avoid this, I shared my questions with my co-chairs to get their feedback and piloted the interviews with colleagues who also gave me advice on how to make questions less leading so that interviewees are able to share their experiences freely. Throughout the interviews I asked participants to clarify their responses if I was unsure about what they meant. Every effort was made to ensure that only the participants' views were reflected in the responses and that I did not influence them in any way.

The third threat to validity in qualitative research is theoretical: ignoring alternative explanations for a given phenomenon. Because the original methodology entailed a single interview at each school, the theoretical validity seemed a little tenuous at first. However, the interviews with employees of the district's multilingual department provided an alternative source of information and made triangulation possible. Grouping the schools together had a similar effect.

## **Generalizability**

While “generalizability” is a focus of quantitative research, it plays a much less significant role in qualitative studies. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 3, the demographic changes seen in Houston can be found across the state and across the nation. Thus many of the lessons learned about how well HISD is providing its LEP students with equal educational opportunity are applicable in other districts around the country that find themselves faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of an increasingly linguistically diverse student body. While the specific policies that are in place may vary from one city to the next or one state to the next, the struggle is the same as the number of LEP students and diversity within this group continues to grow. Thus, the trends found in this study may be applicable to the situation in other cities.

## **Limitations**

Although the results of this study provide insight into a subject on which few studies have been done, the research itself does have some limitations. Houston Independent School District does seem to have a diverse student body that is fairly representative of the population of the nation as a whole, but another school district may have been even more typical. As an older district that has been challenged by issues of linguistic diversity for many years, HISD’s methods may be set in historical precedents that are less applicable in other situations. A school district for which these problems are relatively new would provide insight into more innovative ways that districts are addressing these. The position of the interviewees may have skewed their responses

slightly as they could have felt the need to respond in a certain way to protect themselves or their school, despite guarantees of confidentiality. The study's greatest limitation is that neither parents nor community members were interviewed; their perspectives were not fully captured and only second-hand accounts of their views were included.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Uniformity across the District**

One of the original goals of this research was to determine the effects of a school's demographics on the methods it used to help its LEP students acquire English proficiency. To this end, one of the first steps in the methodology involved categorizing schools based on two characteristics; namely, the size of the school's LEP student body and the degree of diversity within that population. Although nine groups of schools were formed, data from only five of these were examined to provide snapshots of schools at distinct points across the spectrum. This analysis was intended to determine how differences in schools' demographics, and therefore, in their students' needs, would affect the strategies schools used to help their students acquire English proficiency. However, as I discuss below, no important differences were found between schools in the five categories. Instead, the most striking result of this study was the lack of equal educational opportunity in almost every school across the various groups.

In this chapter, I establish my finding that factors other than the linguistic diversity of a school's LEP population determines schools' ability to provide these students with equal educational opportunity. I begin by discussing the small similarities that did exist among schools in each of my original categories; it quickly becomes apparent that these have little bearing on the larger issue of equal educational opportunity. I then highlight the theme that seems to be uniform across all of the schools in the study: the significant disparity that exists in the methods schools use to meet the

needs of LEP students from different linguistic backgrounds. I present two possible justifications for this disparity as well as the flaws inherent in them. I conclude by introducing a model that suggests two primary factors that influence how well schools are able to meet the needs of their LEP students.

### **Minimal Differences Exist between Categories of Schools**

The methods used in this study were designed to detect differences between schools with large LEP populations that were not very diverse, schools with small LEP populations that were very diverse, and schools that fell somewhere in between. However, close analysis of the data showed that the composition of a school's LEP population was not the primary determinant of which English language acquisition programs a school selected. Minimal differences were found between categories of schools as almost all schools provided bilingual education as the main method for their Hispanic students and ESL for their other LEP students. Instead, as discussed below, schools in all of the groups struggled to create the sense of balance, introduced in Chapter 4, between helping their students learn English and meeting the demands of external sources.

### **Large LEP Population with High Diversity**

These schools had LEP populations that comprised more than 52.22 percent of the school's student body. Within the LEP population, the largest language minority made

up less than 84.02 percent. Five HISD schools fit this description, and four were included in this study.

The high diversity within a large LEP population indicates that the schools have a significant LEP population that is ineligible for bilingual education because these students are not Hispanic. As the manager of compliance for HISD's multilingual programs department explained, "We don't have, you know, a hundred different bilingual programs." Nonetheless, these schools show a strong commitment to helping these students acquire English proficiency. The ESL Refugee Center coordinator at Chester shared,

[O]ur philosophy, though it is Bush's cliché, "No child left behind," but we do believe that no child should be left behind. This is our personal policy. We see to it that no child is left behind because it, we are taking care of the child's educational needs, emotional needs, and all teachers and administrators, especially administrators, are so committed to the well-being of the children that, if you summarize, I would say, that we are committed to the well-being of each child who crosses our threshold.

To accommodate the various needs of their non-Hispanic LEP students, these schools have developed strong ESL programs with the help of dedicated teachers. This was best illustrated by a comment made by the instructional coordinator from Grey:

The teachers just know that they have to do it no matter what. And they don't give up. You hear them sometimes, "Oh, you know, frustrated." But at the end of the year, when we see the results, when we see the scores, when we see, okay, many of them cry, "Oh my gosh! I didn't think I could do it!" They stress out themselves. But that's the main thing. And the teachers who don't feel committed, those are the ones who leave.

These schools did not abide by the definition of equal educational opportunity used for this study because they failed to provide the same English language acquisition programs

for all LEP students. Nonetheless, they remained devoted to the idea of meeting the needs of their language minority students to the extent possible.

### **Large LEP Population with Low Diversity**

These schools had LEP populations that comprised more than 52.22 percent of the school's student body. Within the LEP population, the largest language minority made up more than 97.6 percent. Within HISD twelve schools fit this description. Originally five of them were selected to participate in this study, but interviews were only conducted at four.

With such low diversity among the LEP population, it seemed possible that the one or two non-Hispanic LEP students would have been swept into the crowd. At Gauthier, the principal was unaware that there were students at her school who were classified as LEP but did not speak Spanish. In other interviews, the participants stressed repeatedly that they had very few speakers of other languages. The assistant principal at Connolly pointed out, "[W]e have so few [non-Hispanic LEP students]... and I'm talking *so* few. Like you would count them with one hand and you still have fingers left." At most of these schools, less than four percent of students participated in the ESL program. With such low numbers, it would be easy for students to fall through the cracks and for their needs to be ignored.

While Spanish/English bilingual education is the primary means through which the schools in this group meet the needs of their LEP population, they are committed to ensuring that all LEP students learn English. Much like at the schools with more diverse populations, teachers are the key to helping students acquire English proficiency. The

response provided by the instructional coordinator from Honey Creek to a question regarding the school's strengths was very telling:

[Our programs' strength is] the teachers. Knowing their material, knowing their students and what they need. It really basically boils down to the teachers because they, I mean, they're on the foreground. They get a chance to see daily what the children are needing, and they have a concern for all of them, in wanting them to learn and excel and be successful.

The lack of non-Spanish bilingual education programs in these schools prevents them from providing equal educational opportunity. However, as the bilingual teacher from Kaye expressed, they strive to meet the needs of their LEP students "[t]o the best of the ability of the program within the system."

### **Small LEP Population with High Diversity**

These schools had LEP populations that comprised less than 16.86 percent of the school's student body. Within the LEP population, the largest language minority made up less than 84.02 percent. Seventeen schools in the district fit this description, and four of those were included in this study.

Schools with very small LEP populations, such as the schools in this category, legally are not required to do anything to help their students learn English. Nonetheless, these schools were committed to meeting the needs of their LEP students and did implement English language acquisition programs. The challenge presented by the small size of the LEP population was expressed by the Title III coordinator from Easton, who explained that

what happens in schools that don't have large LEP populations is that lots of times they get left behind and slip through the cracks, and that's not a good thing. And that's what we try to avoid, but it's very difficult to hit all these kids like you're supposed to.

However, these schools showed a deep commitment to helping their LEP students increase their English proficiency. As the assistant principal at Henry revealed, the schools were driven by

just the need. The population was growing. We had quite a few kids that were coming to us for the first time in an English-speaking situation, and they were lost. They didn't have any grasp of the English language.

Having these programs in place required creativity. The bilingual education teacher from Clements shared that the principal "came to [the bilingual education teachers] and told [them], 'You're going to have to figure out something,' because she couldn't fund a classroom of twelve students. There was no way." A grant allowed them to implement a dual-language program that would meet needs of their Hispanic students. Similar circumstance and results were recounted by the assistant principal at Grant regarding the history of the school's dual-language program. Although the small size of the LEP population prohibited these schools from providing equal educational opportunity, they demonstrated a dedication to giving students as much assistance in learning English as the limited resources would allow.

### **Small LEP Population with Low Diversity**

The schools that fall into this category had LEP populations that comprised less than 16.86 percent of the school's student body. Within the LEP population, the largest language minority made up more than 97.6 percent. Of the schools in HISD, only one school met the criteria for this group.

Because there was only one school in this category, it is impossible to determine anything conclusive about these types of schools. Nevertheless, the transition Pine Wood

is currently undergoing is telling and provides insight into what other schools with similar traits would experience. As the assistant principal shared,

the history [of the school] is they had a very small Spanish speaking population here, and part of that is... kind of a lax effort to identify, and so there could be more, but the numbers have been so small traditionally here at this school that they don't really support having a full class at each grade level.

The new administrative team was determined to renew the school's emphasis on the needs of their LEP population.<sup>27</sup> The new principal and assistant principal recognized that

if you look at our scores, there's a huge gap there, achievement gap, between our LEP sub-group and our Hispanic sub-group and the school as a whole, so we need to address that, especially in grades three through five by supporting these students.

Because they had been at the school for less than a year at the time of the interview, no significant changes had been made yet, and LEP students were not receiving equal educational opportunity. However, the administrators were committed to meeting the needs of their LEP students as quickly and as thoroughly as possible.

### **Medium LEP Population with Medium Diversity**

These schools had LEP populations that comprised between 16.86 and 52.22 percent of the school's student body. Within the LEP population, the largest language minority made up between 84.02 and 97.6 percent. Eight schools in HISD met these criteria, and four of them were included here.

As the schools in this category were meant to represent the middle range of schools, they could have had very different ways of helping students acquire English

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 9 for a more in-depth discussion of Pine Wood's administrative team's efforts to address these needs.

proficiency. Instead, they showed the most uniformity in the methods they used to meet their LEP students needs. Three of the four have implemented traditional bilingual education and ESL programs, and the fourth—currently listed as having a developmental bilingual education program—is in the process of transitioning to the traditional method. This suggests that there may be a single most effective means of meeting the needs of the LEP students in schools with these particular characteristics.

However, the participants from these schools seemed aware that while their programs were working, they were not providing all LEP students with equal educational opportunity. These sentiments were expressed most clearly by the Bilingual/ESL instructional supervisor for the Roy feeder pattern, who said,

[The programs] are getting the children to where they need to be. But the ideal is to have a true bilingual program in every language because I think that when you teach children in their native language is when you really, when they really don't lose academic language, which is what the bilingual program does. That's the whole preface of the whole program. But I do think that they're doing a very effective job in the ESL. We have very strong ESL teachers that do a great job with the children.

While the participants recognized that their programs were not ideal, they felt that their school was effectively helping their LEP students increase their English proficiency. The assistant principal from Jeters explained, "I'm not telling you that it's perfect here because it's not, but I think we do a real good job with it.... I think our teachers do a really good job with it." Although these schools are meeting the linguistic needs of their LEP students as well as possible, the lack of bilingual education programs for non-Hispanic students prevents the schools from providing equal educational opportunity.

### **Equal Educational Opportunity: Fact or Fiction?**

Although there were few similarities that were distinct to the groups I constructed, a clear theme emerges when the schools were considered as a whole. Throughout the interviews with the school district and personnel, a persistent disparity is revealed in the resources made available to Hispanic students and those from other backgrounds. This is seen primarily in the type of English language acquisition program made available to each group.

In Chapter 1, I posed the question, “To what extent do schools provide students from various linguistic backgrounds with equal educational opportunities?” For the purpose of this research, equal educational opportunity was defined roughly as “the provision of the same resources for all students who demonstrate the same need.” It was determined that this condition only exists in schools where all LEP students are offered the same English language acquisition program or programs. Thus, it seems that the goal of providing all LEP students with equal educational opportunity has not been achieved.<sup>28</sup> While in most schools Hispanic students with limited English proficiency may be placed in bilingual education or ESL, speakers of other languages who are not fluent in English are provided with a single option: ESL. In only one of the 187 schools in the district is bilingual education provided for speakers of another language.<sup>29</sup> Across the district,

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<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, research suggests that the achievement gap between native speakers of English and LEP students is smaller in the United States than in other comparable countries (Hampden-Thompson & Johnston, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Johanson Elementary provides Vietnamese/English bilingual education for students pre-kindergarten through first grade. Although it was not part of the original sample, I made several attempts to reach the person in charge of the school’s English language acquisition programs as it would add an interesting perspective to the study. I was not able to contact this person.

students from different language backgrounds were given unequal opportunities to learn English—as discussed above—and, in turn, to succeed academically.

Under the definition used for this study, equal educational opportunity was present only at two schools, Easton Elementary and Song Elementary.<sup>30</sup> At these schools the same program—ESL—was used to serve all students who demonstrated the same need—LEP students who needed to learn English. This conclusion should not be understood as an endorsement of one type of English language acquisition program over another. Rather, it suggests a paradox: HISD claims to support bilingual education as the best means of teaching (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005); when asked if students in ESL are doing as well as those in bilingual education, the district’s ESL program development supervisor admitted, “Our data say no.” She referred to the longitudinal Thomas and Collier (1997) study that suggests that students who begin kindergarten with no English proficiency and are enrolled in ESL programs have far less academic success than those in bilingual education programs, as shown in Figure 6-1 (Thomas & Collier, 1997, p. 53). Nevertheless, the only schools in the district that are able to meet the goal of providing LEP students with equal educational opportunity are those whose only English language acquisition program is ESL.

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<sup>30</sup> While Johanson does have bilingual education for its Vietnamese LEP students through first grade, students are enrolled in ESL beginning in second grade. Because the school continues to offer Spanish/English bilingual education beyond first grade, Johanson does not provide its LEP students with equal educational opportunity.

- Program 1: Two-way developmental bilingual education (BE)  
 Program 2: One-way developmental BE, including ESL taught through academic content  
 Program 3: Transitional BE, including ESL taught through academic content  
 Program 4: Transitional BE, including ESL, both taught traditionally  
 Program 5: ESL taught through academic content using current approaches  
 Program 6: ESL pullout--taught traditionally

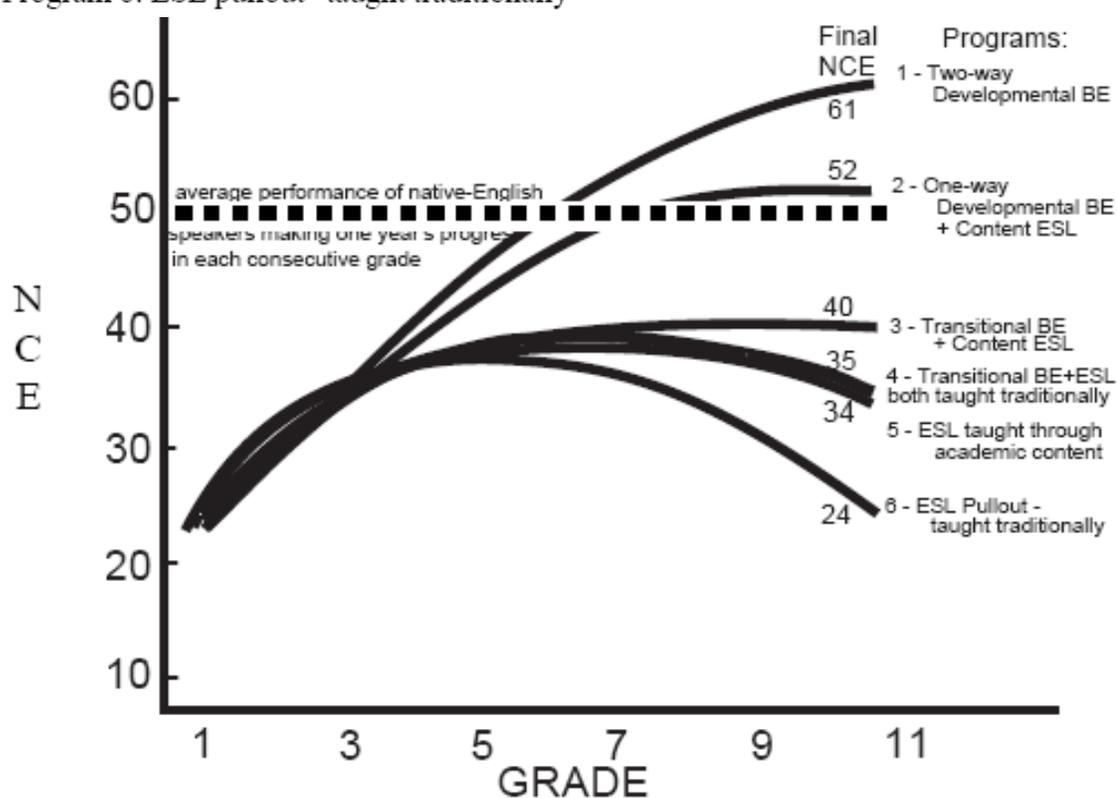


Fig. 6-1: Patterns of K-12 English learners' long-term achievement in NCEs on standardized tests in English reading compared across six program models

## **The Possibility of Equality**

Before stating conclusively that disparity exists in schools' efforts to help LEP students learn English, it is necessary to explore alternative explanations for the observed conditions that may serve to justify the disparities. This section looks at two assumptions on which this research is based and considers each in turn, presenting a hypothetical situation in which the given idea is false and then explaining why these circumstances would not occur. First, I consider the definition for "equal educational opportunity" that is used in this discussion. Because of resource limitations, the data were analyzed using only one meaning of this term. By not looking at both definitions, it is possible that the interpretation of what occurs in schools presented here is greatly restricted. I have also assumed for the purpose of this discussion that all students receive the same advantages from each type of program—a supposition based on the second language acquisition theories discussed in Chapter 4. However, perhaps some students do benefit more from one type of English language acquisition program than from another. These two alternative scenarios are considered below, but each of these explanations is found to be flawed and to not validate the observed discrepancies.

### **Alternative Definitions for Equal Educational Opportunity**

As discussed in an earlier chapter, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act fails to clearly define the term "equal educational opportunity," leaving it up to the social and political context of each generation to determine what it means. It is possible that HISD operates under a definition of this term that was not used in this study, opting for the pragmatic approach rather than the democratic view that guided this research. The district may

employ a definition that promotes setting the expectations for a child only as high as that child's abilities will allow, an equally valid way of understanding this term. If this were true, providing non-Spanish speaking LEP students with ESL as their only option would indicate that the district felt that these students would be incapable of learning English by any other method.

While it is plausible that this alternative definition of equal educational opportunity is the basis of the district's policy, it seems unlikely. The manager of bilingual education/ESL/Title III compliance for HISD's Multilingual Programs department expressed the district's philosophy as,

the district says that all of our children will learn and... [their] priority is that every child will learn... I think that they are willing to do whatever it takes for any child to do well in the district.... It's just all children will learn, and that's sort of the way that they convey their message.

Her comment suggests that the district's philosophy is that all students are able to succeed academically if they are given the proper resources. This echoes the definition of equal educational opportunity used throughout this research and is supported by HISD's stated core beliefs (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005). Furthermore, the district has implemented a bilingual education for Vietnamese students at one school. The existence of this program serves to discredit the idea that the district believes that non-Hispanic LEP students are unable to learn English through methods other than ESL. The manager of compliance also indicated that "[they] actually have the numbers possibly to look at in the future sometime an Arabic program, an Urdu program..." This implies a willingness to implement non-ESL programs for LEP students of additional linguistic backgrounds.

### **Some Students May Benefit More from ESL**

Some of the arguments in favor of and against the various types of English language acquisition programs were highlighted in an earlier chapter.<sup>31</sup> Because each method does have its benefits and disadvantages, one could argue that the district has determined that some students are better served by one program than others. The district's desire to provide students with the best methods was clearly stated by the manager of bilingual education/ESL/Title III compliance for the Multilingual Department: "our board of education made a priority that we were going to make sure that we had the best program models and that we were meeting the needs of our kids." This echoes the guidelines outlined in the district's Bilingual/ESL Program Guidelines (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005). Perhaps the positive effects of ESL are so great for non-Hispanic students that the district has concluded that using other programs would be a disservice to these students. If there was less of a distinction for Hispanic students, providing the option of bilingual education in addition to ESL would be acceptable. The district would be meeting the needs of the various groups using the methods that were best suited to those students.

However plausible this explanation may be, it is unlikely to be true. While the purpose of this research is not to determine the merits of one English language acquisition program over another, the district has a distinct preference for bilingual

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<sup>31</sup> In summary, English immersion offers maximum exposure to English but provides no native language support. ESL also uses English as the primary language of instruction, but some native language support may be provided; because LEP students of diverse linguistic backgrounds are in the same class, students do not always receive the same amount of native language support. Both transitional and two-way bilingual education give students sustained native language support, but these programs cannot serve speakers of more than one language at a time.

education over ESL. The district's Bilingual/ESL Program Guidelines (2005) specifies that "[b]ilingual education ensures that LEP students participate in a program that meets their linguistic and cognitive needs" (p. I-9). It cites Macia, Nishikawa, and Venegas' (1998) and Troyna's (1993) findings as evidence that "bilingual programs significantly increase academic achievement scores, foster positive self-concept and influence at-risk students to remain in school" (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005, p. I-9). Furthermore, as mentioned already, the district does have a Vietnamese bilingual education program in place at one school, and it is looking to implement non-Spanish bilingual education in others. The district personnel described the lack of certification for teachers in bilingual education for other languages as "not fair." They admitted that the data show that ESL programs are doing a poorer job of helping students to learn English than bilingual education programs, as mentioned above. Thus, the district seems to view bilingual education as the "best program model."

Nevertheless, as the manager of compliance shared, "[the district doesn't] have a hundred different bilingual programs." HISD's ESL program development supervisor added, "for the speakers of the other languages, they have an ESL program." Rather than providing non-Hispanic LEP students with the program that the district deems to be the most beneficial for all students, then, the district preventing these students from receiving the benefits of that method. Instead, students receive instruction through a method that falls short of the district's ideal in many ways.

ESL programs generally do not provide students with the native language support given to those students in bilingual education. While some would argue that this native language support is unnecessary and even detrimental to the student (Porter, 1998, for

example), this is not the underlying logic in the school district's policy. Hispanic students are able to choose this option. By not offering other LEP students bilingual education, the district is preventing them from participating "in a program that meets their linguistic and cognitive needs" (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005, p. I-9).

At schools with pull-out ESL programs, LEP students spend most of their day in a mainstream classroom. With only an hour or two spent in the ESL classroom, students are in an environment directed at helping them learn English for significantly less time than those in a bilingual classroom. Again, while some may claim that immersion is better, the fact remains that the students are not given the option of having a full day of support if their parents so choose. Students may not take part in a program that "significantly [increases] academic achievement scores" (Houston Independent School District Multilingual Programs Department, 2005, p. I-9), among other things.

Having ESL-certified mainstream classroom teachers does provide students with a teacher who is able to meet their needs throughout the day, but it does not provide students with the same learning environment as a bilingual classroom. Not only do these teachers not provide native language support, as already discussed, they must divide their attention between the mainstream students and the ESL students. Rather than consistently using strategies to help the entire classroom, they must shift back and forth between the ESL modifications and the mainstream lesson plan as they teach a single lesson. Thus, all students are forced to spend long periods of time waiting for the teacher to help them, which has negative affects on their achievement (Daniel L. Duke, 1989).

### **Moving Forward: Seeking an Explanation**

The results presented in this chapter demonstrate that equal educational opportunity does not exist for students from various language backgrounds. However, they also suggest that the lack of equal educational opportunity in schools may be a result of elements beyond their control. The following chapters explore the factors that determine the extent to which schools are able to help LEP students increase their English proficiency.

As discussed in Chapter 3, schools must maintain an equilibrium between two competing pressures: the need to consider how LEP students learn English and the need to satisfy the requirements imposed upon them by external forces. The frustration that results from struggling to create this balance was best expressed by the bilingual education teacher from Kaye, who in discussing testing in schools said,

[The students] pass that, but they can't read. And they get commended, it's true, because they know how to answer a test. Does the child know how to read? No. Do they understand what they're reading? No. Do they know how to write? No. But that's what the state wants to hear. That's what the media wants to hear. So it's a contradiction, it's a conflict between the teacher and the establishment because, as teachers, we don't care about what the state wants or what the district wants or what the principal wants. We want the child to learn. I don't care what standards you give me. I want the child to be reading the textbook, but it seems that they keep pulling against us. And we're always fighting. We are the advocates for the children, and they're always fighting against us with more tests and more paperwork and more this and more that.

Figure 6-2 draws on the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 4 to illustrate how these conflicting demands are manifested for the schools in this study. It serves to specify the external factors which determine the societal sector's demands on schools that conflict with the need to teach students in the way that they learn best.

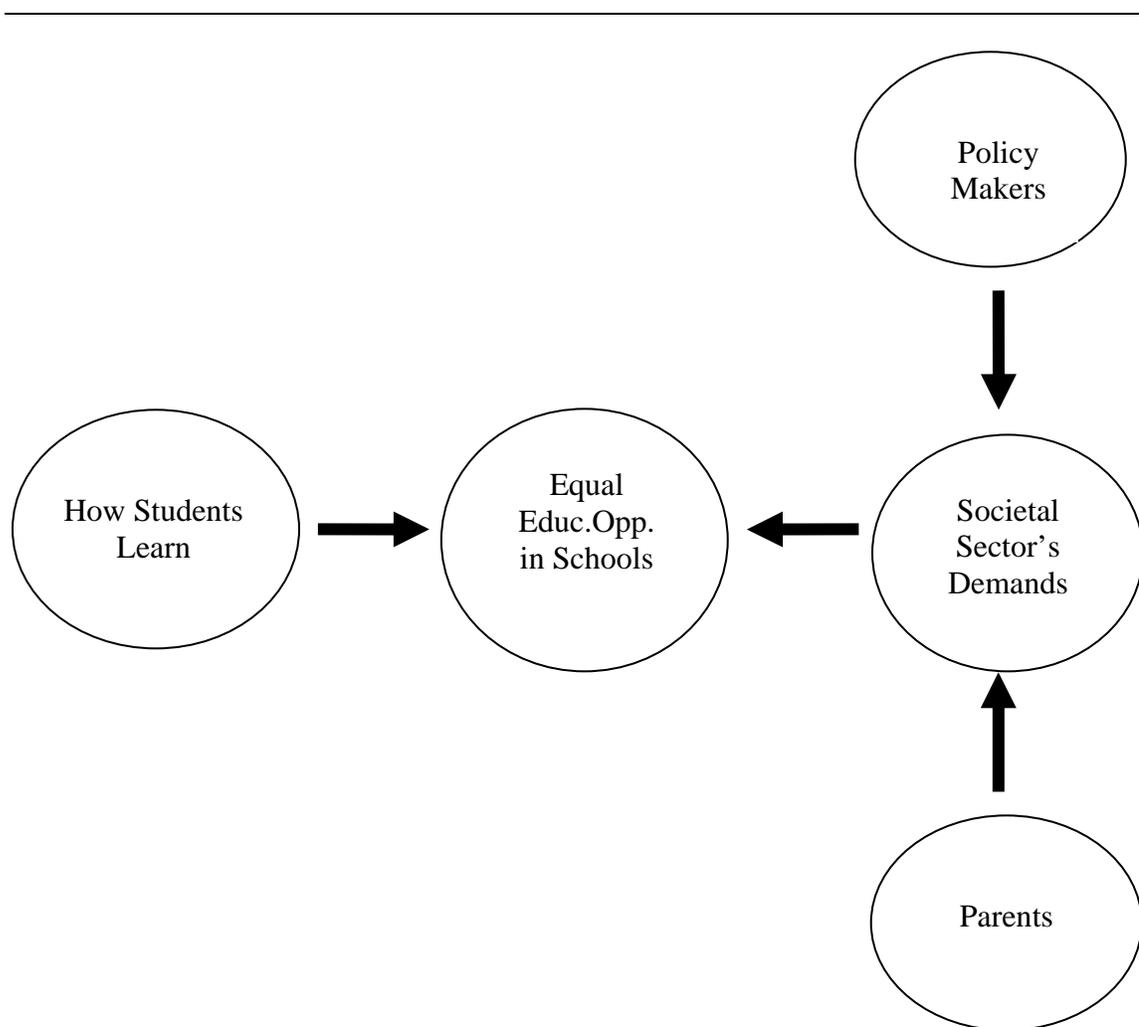


Fig. 6-2: Conflicting Pressures on Schools in this Study

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The first sources of pressure I discuss are the policies at the district, state, and federal levels that set guidelines for how schools are to help their LEP students increase their English proficiency. While these aim to ensure that students' needs are being met, they often limit schools' ability to adapt their programs to their particular LEP

populations. Chapter 7 presents a more complete discussion of the influence of policy makers.

Next, the cultures of the students and their families must be taken into consideration. In Chapter 8, I argue that parents play an attenuating role in how well schools are able to facilitate students' acquisition of the English language. Despite the schools' and government's best intentions, students cannot receive the assistance that can provide them with equal educational opportunities without parents' approval. Parents have the final decision in terms of the program in which their children are placed.

Lastly, schools have an ongoing dedication to providing students with equal educational opportunity. This commitment drives them to meet students' needs as much as possible. Schools make every effort possible within the limitations placed on them to adapt to the needs of their students. Chapter 9 explores the steps some schools have taken toward giving students equal educational opportunity and presents some of the practical implications of this study.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Policy Makers' Influence**

According to Scott and Meyer's (1991) definition of "societal sector," schools are the focal organizations whose performance is heavily influenced by external forces. A school's position within the education societal sector plays a significant role in determining both which services schools provide and how these services are provided. They must comply with the policy decisions made at each level of policy making: district, state, and federal. While mandates from the district were reported to have the most direct impact on schools, the effects of directives from the federal and state government cannot be ignored.

In this chapter, I discuss the influence of the one set of external factors—namely, policy makers at different levels—on the performance of schools in terms of the methods schools implement to meet the needs of their LEP students. Drawing on the responses provided through interviews, I discuss the policy mandated by the school district, state government, and federal government that most reflects the role played by that level of government. I present the school district as the level of policy making the participants in this study most often cited as the most influential, particularly in terms of its centralized control of schools. Interviewees viewed the state's primary role as that of an arbiter regarding which standardized test would be used for assessing LEP students. While no one specified how schools had changed since NCLB was implemented, the general consensus was that the Act was the means through which schools most felt the effect of

the federal government. I conclude with a brief discussion of the cumulative effects of these policies, in terms of organizational constraints and limited resources, on schools' ability to provide these students with equal educational opportunity

### **The (De)centralization of District Policy**

Many participants viewed the school district as the level of governance that had the greatest impact on the extent to which schools are able to meet the linguistic needs of their LEP populations. The importance of district policy was expressed by the principal of Grey Elementary as she urged the researcher to obtain, "a manual of all the guideline book from Multilingual Department of HISD," explaining "[t]hat is like the bible for all HISD school." This sentiment was echoed by the manager of compliance for HISD's Multilingual Programs department; throughout the interview she urged me to refer to the guideline book to learn more about the program models, monitoring schools and students, and exiting students, she concluded the interview by advising me, "I think what you really need to do is look over the guidelines. That's what you probably need to do [to get a better understanding of how schools are helping LEP students learn English]." Duke's (1989) view that proximity leads the district's policies to have the greatest effect was also voiced by the bilingual education teacher from Yale who felt that what she did in her classroom was most influenced by "[p]robably [the] district because, you know, that's the closest thing."

Despite the school district's important position, it has made an effort to give the responsibility for decision making to the schools themselves, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Nonetheless, HISD appears to remain highly centralized, with the school district retaining much of the power to determine how schools meet the needs of their LEP students. While I cannot claim knowledge of the district's policies regarding other situations, its regulations regarding LEP students seem very standardized. The principal of Grey confirmed that "the multilingual department... gives [them] very strict guidelines and instruction of how to implement the program. And each teacher have all those information. So it's very clear cut." These policies provide details on how every school in the district is to identify these students, place them in the appropriate classroom setting, monitor their progress, and exit them from the program. The district does give schools some leeway—they may choose which of the three types of bilingual education they wish to implement, the procedures they use for LEP students are identical.

Even the language used by interviewees to describe the steps taken at their particular school for student placement was remarkably comparable, reflecting the extreme influence the district has on schools. The Title III coordinator from Song Elementary explained that the testing of students' English proficiency is "triggered by a home language survey. Every person that enters the school fills out a 'Home Language Survey.' If they put down on that survey that another language is spoken at home, then they are tested automatically." Similarly, the Title III coordinator from Easton noted that "what it goes by is a home language survey... and if they indicate on the home language survey that they speak another language, then it automatically comes, then I automatically have to test them." While this is a simple example, the standardization it demonstrates contradicts the district's stated goal of decentralization. However, these findings are not all together surprising; as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) note, "individual

efforts to deal rationally with uncertainty and constraint often lead, in the aggregate, to homogeneity in structure, culture, and output” (p. 147).

Nevertheless, the district has not failed completely in its attempts to become less centralized. Following the example provided by the state that allowed the district to adapt the state curriculum to the district’s needs, schools were permitted to adopt the curriculum with changes that best fit their students. They also were allowed to select the type of bilingual education program they felt would be best suited to help their LEP Spanish-speaking students to learn English. Despite the seeming rigidity of the system, there was some, albeit limited, flexibility in how the schools operated.

Although the district has prescribed Clarifying Learning to Enhance Achievement Results (CLEAR) as its specialized version of the state-adopted curriculum, there was some room for creativity and accommodation to fit schools’ needs. The principal of Gauthier described CLEAR as “a guiding force”—a sentiment expressed by others as well—explaining that “[i]t’s almost virtually impossible to do every single thing in CLEAR or the model lessons, so you have to pick and choose.” The bilingual teachers elaborated that they were able to select many of their own materials to accompany the school district’s. The teacher from Yale clarified, “[T]his [curriculum] is from the district. But I supplement with my stuff too... [We’re allowed to do that a]s long as we meet the objectives...” Thus, as long as the district-adopted curriculum generally was followed, schools could adapt their methods of implementation to meet their students’ particular needs.

Similarly, the schools were given some liberty in selecting the type of bilingual education program they wished to use. They were provided with the option of choosing

traditional, developmental or two-way based on what they felt would best meet the needs of their student bodies. Eight of the schools in this study selected the former. Five chose to implement a developmental bilingual education program. Only two felt that a two-way bilingual education program was appropriate for their students. Two others decided that their Spanish-speaking LEP population was too small for a bilingual education program. The remaining two elected to provide more than one kind of program for their students. However, as the principal from Oster Elementary indicated, the district provided the schools with some guidance in this decision:

[W]e have a bilingual supervisor, and that bilingual supervisor then would come out and meet with the team, whether it be the administrative team or SBMC or a group of teachers and talk to them about the programming, and then you had to make a decision. So I know that Ms. Brock, who was our bilingual supervisor at the time, was over here and met with somebody, but I'm not sure who made the decision [about which bilingual program to use].

The vice principal of Jeters Elementary elaborated on this idea of external guidance, explaining, "Some of our administrative heads came to us and proposed [developmental bilingual education] because I think that they've looked at, I guess, statistics." Ultimately, the responsibility for choosing the best program for their students lay with the schools themselves. Nonetheless, schools were not able to avoid the influence of the district on their performance in providing equal educational opportunity to their LEP students.

### **TAKS and TELPAS: The State's Influence**

While NCLB sets the assessment guidelines for the country, as discussed below, it is the state's policy that determines which test will be used to ensure that students are

achieving. In choosing the specific standardized test, the state also garners the power to mandate the curriculum. Thus, the state influences schools' ability to meet their LEP students' needs. As the assistant principal from Grant explained, "The state says, 'No child left behind. Second language learners need to be showing growth.' So then the state comes up with these tests and these policies, and then we have to do them."

The state has selected the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) as the means for testing the standards outlined in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)—the state-wide curriculum—for LEP and non-LEP students. As its name suggests, the purpose of this test is to ensure that students are acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve, in compliance with NCLB. One area in which students are required to demonstrate aptitude is English proficiency. To this end, "TEA... they have strict guidelines for ESL students, and we have to follow Texas Education Agency rulings, and what their guidelines are. They have a lot of regulations for ESL and Title III," explained the Title III coordinator at Easton.

However, many interviewees felt that the test and the regulations regarding LEP students did not have the effect of helping these students to achieve, as the state intended. Instead, participants felt that the test acted as an obstacle to students' success. The Title III coordinator of Pleasant Pointe conveyed this view most clearly when she said,

I wish... that education was like it used to be where we didn't have to deal with this test.... They started calling it a monster. It *is* a monster, especially for these bilingual kids who are trying to pick up the English and learn English and then having to take the test in English, it's just very difficult.

Many participants held pessimistic sentiments regarding the influence of the state on how they teach as a result of TAKS and are torn between their desire to help students learn

and the need to meet the requirements set by external forces—in this case, the state. The bilingual education teacher from Kaye poignantly noted that students may pass the test, but that does not indicate that they have the knowledge and skills the state expects; however, if they are able to achieve high scores,

that's what the state wants to hear. That's what the media wants to hear. So it's a contradiction, it's a conflict between the teacher and the establishment because, as teachers, we don't care about what the state wants or what the district wants or what the principal wants. We want the child to learn. I don't care what standards you give me. I want the child to be reading the textbook, but it seems that they keep pulling against us. And we're always fighting. We are the advocates for the children, and they're always fighting against us with more tests and more paperwork and more this and more that.

Much of the negativity stemmed from the perception that an excessive number of resources were being redirected from helping students learn English and the material to trying to ensure that students could pass the test. At Chester, for example, "Right now our tutorials are focusing on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, our TAKS test.... It's the main basis for the promotion standards in Texas," explained the school's Title I coordinator. With this emphasis on the test, the material students are taught is greatly limited. The principal at Gauthier revealed,

It's almost virtually impossible to do every single thing in CLEAR or the model lessons, so you have to pick and choose. We looked at the objectives that are TAKS-based. We looked at the objectives... and they will say, "This is tested. This is not." You better make sure that you cover those that are tested.

Nevertheless, the tutorials and targeted curriculum often are not enough to help students achieve at the necessary level. This concern was voiced by the assistant principal at Grant, who explained that, "for ESL we do notice that some of our kids having to take standardized testing or these TAKS testing may not always be as equipped as they need

to be able to pass these tests.” Because the TAKS tests is used to assess all students using norm-referenced criteria, the redistribution of resources away from helping LEP students learn English only serves to put them at a disadvantage and gives them fewer educational opportunities.

While the TAKS is taken by all students in Texas, the state also has mandated a test specifically for assessing LEP students’ progress in achieving English proficiency.

The Title I coordinator from Chester described the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) as

something that the state of Texas requires to measure the progress of our second language learners, their progress in acquiring English.... Because that’s how we measure whether students are progressing toward the goal of acquiring English.... it’s got four components. There’s listening, speaking, reading, and writing. And we assess their progress in all four areas in different kinds of instruments, and it’s all mandated by the state as far as what instruments we use to test them. But this year, a new thing they’re starting is each student is going to submit five writing samples in grades one through five.

The TELPAS is comprised of two parts: the Texas Observation Protocols (TOP), which assesses students’ listening, speaking, and writing skills in English, and the Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE), which assesses the students’ reading ability in English.

With a heavy observational component, there is much less pressure to teach to the test with the TELPAS. Emphasis is still placed on ensuring that students are achieving at increasingly higher levels. As the instructional coordinator at Grey explained, “every year we see also the progress. We make sure that we check.” However, because the schools’ funding does not depend upon students making adequate yearly progress in their English proficiency, it is a much lower stakes test. This may explain why there were fewer

negative reactions to TELPAS than to TAKS. The tests' constantly changing nature does lead to some frustration; a few echoed comments made by the assistant principal from Grant when she said

For us, for instance, TOP, I can't name a teacher who doesn't hate the process of it, and it changes every year, and it's a lot. Like this year, the new part of that test is grading writing samples, and it's very specific this year, which I understand because when we did it last year, it was kind of the first time.... I understand that you have to be accountable for students' learning and showing growth in English. I don't disagree with that. But this process is... It's really long for us.

Nonetheless, the TELPAS allows schools to monitor students' progress as they learn English and alerts the schools when the students have become sufficiently proficient to exit the English language acquisition program in which they are enrolled. By providing an efficient tool for identifying when a bilingual education or ESL classroom is no longer helpful, the state helps schools become better equipped to ensure that students are receiving an equal educational opportunity when the students are ready.

While the state does provide schools with an effective means of checking that LEP students are learning English, an area in which participants reported a distinct lack of help is the provision of qualified teachers. The hiring of teachers does fall into the realm of the district's charges, and as the ESL program supervisor admitted, "We did a really good job of finding Spanish language models, but we didn't always find great English models, speakers within that same group." However, it is the state's responsibility to offer certification programs that appropriately prepare teachers who are able to provide adequate instruction. Without qualified teachers who are certified to teach by the state of Texas, schools are unable to implement the programs they feel are necessary to help their LEP students learn English. At Grey, for example, the

instructional coordinator shared that one of the hindrances to the implementation of a Vietnamese/English bilingual education program at her school<sup>32</sup> was a lack of qualified teachers:

The only thing is we will need a lot of certified Vietnamese-speaking teachers, and that's hard. That would be the problem... I mean, we could. Yes. But that will be an initiative, you know, and try to get the Vietnamese certified teachers.

Nevertheless, the state seems to have fallen short in its duty to make available the necessary bilingual education programs. As HISD's manager of compliance explained,

[T]he reality is that the state also, on the other hand, doesn't provide a bilingual program in Urdu or Arabic.... So even though it's sort of like this thing where they want it, but how can we do it? I mean, how could you really do it except, "I'm an ESL teacher, and I have the other language"? It's really not fair that the other languages... And when the state doesn't do what they're supposed to do...

By not providing adequate bilingual education programs for teachers who would like to work with non-Hispanic LEP students, the state prevents schools from offering those LEP students with the same linguistic resources that are available to Spanish-speaking students.

### **Testing: A Federal Mandate**

While the directives of the federal government acted more like guidelines than specific rules, its regulations greatly affected the schools. When asked how the federal policies influenced the school's ability to meet the language needs of their LEP students,

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<sup>32</sup> Other reasons that the Vietnamese/English bilingual education program was not implemented at Grey are discussed in Chapter 8.

testing seemed to be on the forefront of the minds of many teachers and administrators. They often cited the guidelines specified under NCLB regarding standardized testing in schools and how this affected the extent to which they were able to help their students. Although “funding” was also provided as a common response to this question, the majority of interviewees described testing as the primary effect of the federal government on the education of LEP students.

There were mixed feelings toward the testing requirements under NCLB. As one of the interviewees from the Multilingual Department explained,

NCLB, the reauthorization of that money had made us to really have to focus a little bit more, and I think some of the data that we’re getting because of making adequate yearly progress or not making adequate yearly progress, teachers having to be certified, some of those other things that came through has helped the program.... it’s helping us, but, you know, I wouldn’t say that at the beginning we were all happy. You know how it is. “Oh no! More work! More this, more that”.... But on the other hand, can I say that those things were bad? No. I think everything that we’re doing is going eventually to have a positive effect on kids.

The new legislation has posed an additional challenge for schools that were already struggling to meet the needs of their LEP population.

However, not everyone had the same positive attitude toward the NCLB testing requirements and their effects on LEP students. The concern raised most often dealt with the strain on resources that resulted from the new guidelines. The Title I coordinator from Chester expressed her frustration by saying, “With the populations growing, and both support in the classroom and for the testing and the paperwork and all that stuff that goes with it, we just need more people to handle all that stuff.” Many respondents felt that the NCLB regulations added unnecessary stress to an already challenging situation.

The lack of resources was perceived to negatively affect teachers' ability to teach and, in turn, students' outcomes. Mainstream teachers often feel forced to teach to the test because constraints on the amount of time that they have to present the material does not allow them to incorporate additional topics into the curriculum (Smith, 1991; Chapman *et al.*, 1999). Bilingual education and ESL teachers face the same problem, yet the situation is exacerbated for them; they must teach LEP students both the subject matter and the language in the amount of time that mainstream students have to acquire only the material. As the bilingual education teacher from Greene explained,

Sometimes we complain about the tests that there's too many tests that we have to give to our students, and we feel like we lose a lot of precious time testing instead of teaching them. But, again, that is not in our hand or the principal's hands. That is... It comes from someone above us.

While NCLB does make some accommodations for LEP students' linguistic needs,<sup>33</sup> these often are not enough. As a result, instruction in bilingual education classes often was done in the native language through most of the year to help students learn the material and pass the exam; the focus was returned to learning English only after the exam was over. The Title III coordinator of Pleasant Pointe admitted with regret, "a lot of the teachers focus on this particular test.... They're preparing them to take this test and for them to pass this test in Spanish. So the English is forgotten until April, when school's out in May." A similar situation was described by the bilingual education teacher at Kaye:

right now I'm rushing to make sure that I get everything because the tests are in a couple of weeks, okay? But I know that as soon as the test is over, I'm going to have to go back and re-teach everything that I know that they

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<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 5 for a discussion of these accommodations.

didn't understand. But right now I have to make sure everything's been covered before the test.

Teachers in ESL classrooms do not have the option of providing their students with native language instruction, so they must focus on teaching the material and language as quickly and efficiently as possible. Although teachers would prefer not to “teach to the test,” many feel that the added strain on their limited resources as a result of NCLB often forces them to do so.

Although one of the intended effects of NCLB is to increase schools' accountability for student achievement, some respondents felt that it only had negative effects on the achievement of LEP students. Many echoed the apprehension voiced by the ESL Refugee Center Coordinator at Chester Elementary, who said,

[W]e have certain pressures. They are given exemptions from standardized testing for three years. And after three years they have to take the test. And in three years they have to learn social skills, they have to learn the alphabet, and then they have to learn academic language because those tests are pretty tough tests. Our American kids fail those tests. So that is a big challenge, okay?

For those students who are able to achieve a passing score on the tests, it is questionable as to whether those scores reflect learning on the part of the student. As the bilingual education teacher from Kaye explained,

we spend so much time... trying to get the kids ready for a test that, really, it's not going to show whether they know or they don't because I can teach a monkey how to answer a test. It's true! But that doesn't make a monkey knowledgeable about whatever it is that they're doing.... They pass that, but they can't read. And they get commended, it's true, because they know how to answer a test. Does the child know how to read? No. Do they understand what they're reading? No.

Many participants in the study felt that rather than allowing them to concentrate their efforts on helping students increase their English proficiency as a providing equal

educational opportunity, the federal government's NCLB policy required that they redirect their energy in less productive ways.

Some maintained a positive attitude about the new requirements, focusing not on the additional work it entailed but on the outcomes it would generate. Those who held this perspective tended to emphasize the importance of accountability. The assistant principal at Connolly voiced the recognition that "it does put some stress on teachers, but... it's something that is needed. At least to guarantee some uniformity across the nation." The inclusion of LEP students in the measure of schools' adequate yearly progress has forced schools to give greater importance to ensuring that these students acquire English proficiency and that their needs are not being ignored. The Title III coordinator expressed relief that

now the kids that are tested in the program, in the ESL program, are part of the AYP, adequate yearly progress, so they're figured into it all, so it's taken a little bit more of a forefront from what it used to.

While they recognized that compliance with the policy required more work, it has provided the schools and the district with more focused data. In turn, this data has allowed them to determine the extent to which they are helping their students to achieve and the areas on which to focus for improvement. Proponents recognize that they are subjecting students to a lot of testing; "it seems like that's the push," said the bilingual teacher from Yale. However, they understand these tests simply as a means of ensuring that students are achieving or, as the teacher from Yale expressed, "they're working for making sure their kids are successful, which of course we're all doing that anyway, but even more so." Despite the initial challenges in adapting to the new regulations, these respondents felt that the long term gains outweighed the short term difficulties.

### **Organizational Constraints and Limited Resources**

Schools work within a stringent organizational structure. In their position as focal organizations, schools are subject to policies created by others that impact the schools' ability to provide equal educational opportunity to their LEP students. Their freedom in decision-making is further restricted by limited resources. Thus, the observed lack of equal educational opportunity for LEP students can be attributed in part to the policy makers.

The school district has the most direct effect on schools. HISD has made efforts to decentralize, allowing the schools to select among three options for their bilingual education programs and to have some flexibility in their curriculum. Nonetheless, the major steps in meeting the needs of LEP students (identifying, monitoring, and exiting) are identical across the district. The restricted flexibility that is a result of the district's policies make schools less able to adapt to the needs of their particular LEP population and to provide them with equal educational opportunity.

The state government has selected the TAKS test as a means of assessing how well students have gained the knowledge and skills deemed necessary. To ensure success on the test, schools must redirect their resources away from helping students learn English and toward efforts intended to ensure that students will attain passing scores on the test. Furthermore, a lack of qualified bilingual education teachers for languages other than Spanish makes it difficult to provide non-Hispanic LEP students with this service. By causing schools to place less emphasis on helping LEP students acquire proficiency

and not providing proper teacher preparation programs, the state is contributing to a situation in which these students are not being given equal educational opportunity.

While the federal government's regulations tend to be broad in scope, they remain influential. Through No Child Left Behind, the federal government has mandated that all students must pass standardized tests. With only a limited amount of time available, bilingual education and ESL teachers struggle to create a balance that allows them to help students acquire an understanding of the material while learning the language. Under these conditions, it is even more challenging for schools to assist students to learn English and to provide them with equal educational opportunity.

## **Chapter 8**

### **The Perceived Role of Parents**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the school district, state government, and federal government have implemented several policies regarding the English language acquisition programs schools must provide for their LEP students. Nonetheless, this does not guarantee that these students will receive the help these programs are meant to give them. Participants in this study described parents as external factors that greatly influenced schools' ability to help students learn English. While schools can urge parents to allow their child to receive assistance as they acquire English proficiency, ultimately parents maintain the right to decide in which of the school's programs they would like their child to participate, if any. Thus, this chapter will demonstrate that parents play a crucial role in determining how much assistance students can receive and how well schools are able to meet LEP students' linguistic needs.

This chapter focuses on the reported influence of parents on the methods schools use to help their LEP students learn English.<sup>34</sup> In the first section I present respondents' views on the role parents play in determining in which program students are enrolled. I then present several explanations posited by interviewees regarding parents' decisions to

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<sup>34</sup> As noted in Chapter 4, the discussion of parents is based solely on the perceptions of school and district personnel rather than first-hand interviews. Because of limitations in resources, interviewing parents was not possible. Nevertheless, this does not weaken the analysis presented here. While speaking with parents would have enriched this research, this study focuses on schools' views of and reactions to the constraints imposed on them by external influences. The interviews conducted with personnel, which are discussed here, sufficiently inform this research.

waive their students' right to assistance in learning English, the most striking of which is cultural differences. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of parents' decisions on the schools' ability to provide all LEP students with equal educational opportunity, as mandated by the government.

### **Participants View Parents as a Hindrance to Students' Rights**

No matter how forceful a policy written at any level is intended to be, mandates alone cannot guarantee that a LEP student will be given access to a particular type of English language acquisition program. It is parents who have the ultimate authority to determine in which programs their children will participate. Without parents' permission, even the best programs will be ineffective as students are unable to take part in and benefit from them. Thus, the parents of LEP students have much of the responsibility for ensuring that schools are able to provide LEP students with equal educational opportunity.

While it seems counterintuitive that parents would refuse to allow their children to receive services that would be greatly beneficial, participants in this study consistently reported incidents in which parents did just that. HISD's manager of compliance for the Multilingual Programs department related one instance in which a parent refused to enroll his child in an English language acquisition program and denied that his child needed the help.

I remember having this little 13-year-old kid, and his father was telling me he didn't need the program model. This is ESL. So I brought him a history book, and I put it in front of him, and I said, "Do you think you could read this book?" And his father told me, "No, he's going to stay up

all night until he can read that book.” And I’m like, “Sir, it’s at ninth grade reading ability level.” “I don’t care. My son can do it.” That was his idea. And no matter what I said... I showed him this big fat book. And he was, his son could do it. And his son was sitting there going, “Hmm... Okay.”

While this parent wanted what was best for his son, he initially did not comprehend the negative effects of not allowing his son to participate in an English language acquisition program. The parent seemed to not grasp fully that his refusal of this assistance would require his child to perform at a level at which he was not yet capable.

The district personnel were not alone in their interaction with parents who felt that the schools’ English language acquisition programs were not necessary for children’s development of English proficiency. Other participants reported that the resistance they encountered to enrolling students in a program was most obvious in parents’ decision to indicate on the Home Language Survey that the only language spoken in the home was English when this was not the case. The bilingual education teacher from Clements described her experience as

We’ve had parents who know that if you check anything else besides English, you’re going to be tested, and the child probably will be LEP, and then they’re probably going to be identified as such, and then they’re going to have to go in an ESL classroom... Or especially, it especially comes from the Spanish speaking parents because they don’t want their children in a bilingual classroom, so they’re not truthful, and they just say all English.

While it is within the parents’ rights to make this decision, by not accurately reporting the students’ native language, parents prevent the schools from providing students with the appropriate program. Because the schools are unaware of the students’ needs and, thus, are unable to meet them, the negative effects of telling the school that the students’ native language is English quickly become apparent. The manager of compliance shared that in

the case she discussed, “about three weeks later, [the parent] came back and determined that yes, the ESL classes would be better.” At times, it is not until the teacher draws attention to the problems a student is having that parents reveal that another language is spoken at home. The bilingual education teacher from Yale explained that “once the child is in the classroom and, of course, if they’re struggling, obviously, I go to the parent and I say, ‘Hey, you know...’ And then usually they admit to me.” While only a few parents over the years had marked the Home Language Survey incorrectly, the participants from Greene and Honey Creek were the only ones to report never having encountered this situation.

When school administrators discover that a student’s native language was improperly marked as “English,” they talk with the parents about the need to test the students’ English language proficiency. Consistently in these discussions, parents share that at least one of the reasons they did not indicate that the child spoke a language other than English was that they did not want their child to participate in an English language acquisition program.<sup>35</sup> The principal at Jetters related,

I think one of the problems with our parents is that most of them do not speak English, and they want their children to speak English, and we want them to also, but some of them do not understand that it’s not going to happen overnight. It’s a gradual process. So I will meet with them and explain the importance of beginning in their native language and feeling very comfortable before we transition gradually. But some, a few of them have said, “I don’t care if my child fails. I want them in all English.”

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<sup>35</sup> Because parents were not interviewed for this study, it is difficult to know what fueled these concerns. However, the participants in this study shared their hypothesis about the sources of parents’ apprehension about English language acquisition programs. These ideas are discussed below.

Like the principal from Jetters, the administrator at each school makes every effort to dissuade parents from opting out of the program recommended for their children, stressing the specific benefits of the program for helping with English acquisition. “[Y]ou have this research to back you up. Then that always helps when you’re talking to parents,” the principal at Gauthier revealed. The administrator also explains that in signing the waiver, the parents are signing away their children’s right to support as they learn English. The assistant principal from Connolly clarified,

And the bottom line: the parents can choose NOT to have the kid enrolled in the program that does service this. And it’s part of the packet. And what we tell them, “When you choose not to be enrolled in the program that we think your kid belong into, what is it that you lose?” And they lose some rights.

The administrative conferences have had varying degrees of success. With some parents, the use of the word “rights” is jarring enough to make them recognize the potentially harmful effects of signing the waiver. “Sometimes when you talk to them about signing away the child’s rights, they’ll hear that word, and they won’t like it,” the principal of Gauthier shared. However, participants report that some parents maintain that they do not wish to enroll their children in English language acquisition programs. In those cases, “You can’t coerce a parent,” said the assistant principal at Henry. He continued,

You can explain to them and explain to them the benefits. And even if, I explain to them, even if they want that child in an English-speaking classroom only, and, particularly if the family is Spanish-speaking, they can always sign a waiver. But let me at least test the child and find out where he is. And then make an informed decision.

Through the conferences, administrators make every effort to ensure that parents have all the information they need before they make their final choice. Nevertheless, the facts

presented to parents do not always sufficiently convince them that their children will be best served by the English language acquisition programs recommended by the school.

### **Participants' Understanding of Parents' Decisions**

Even when presented with research showing that English language acquisition programs help students increase their English proficiency, some parents hold that their children would best be served by not receiving additional assistance in learning English. The assistant principal at Jeters explained that “if a parent says, ‘I understand that, but I still don’t want them,’ they have the right to decide if they want them waived.” While many participants expressed frustration with this situation, some offered theories on why these parents make a decision that is disadvantageous for their children.

The most commonly held belief among the respondents was that parents ignore the facts because of certain personal convictions about English language acquisition programs. According to the assistant principal at Grant,

A lot of times the parents don’t have the background, and they feel that “If my child is in an ESL program or in a dual-language program, it’s going to be slow, it’s going to be delayed, my kid’s not going to advance.”

Alternatively, the principal of Gauthier hypothesized that “parents sometimes have a mind frame that, ‘We’ll let them struggle now that they’re little. I don’t want them struggling later on.’” This view was echoed by the bilingual teacher from Kaye, who suggested,

The parents are not receptive to it because, you have to understand, the parents want their children to learn English as fast as they can. They don’t care if they’re successful in school.... They want them to learn English, period.

The district's ESL program development supervisor proposed another explanation for these parents' actions: "we have a lot of parents who will do that because they also hear a lot of what the media has to say about bilingual programs."<sup>36</sup> A previous bad experience with a program also may color parents' perspectives; the bilingual teacher from Clements shared,

Most of those [parents] are either they were educated through a traditional bilingual program [themselves] and didn't do well or they had a sibling go or a nephew or a niece or things like that. And those [parents] are the ones that don't tell the truth [about their children's native language] because they don't want to be... They don't want to have that label.

While each of these is plausible, it is difficult to determine which of these suggestions is the most accurate because parents did not participate in this study.

The hypothesis I found to be most intriguing—namely, that cultural differences explained parents' decisions—was suggested by the principal at Grey. I found her proposal to be particularly compelling because it helped to explain why the district's Vietnamese parents did not demand bilingual education for their children despite the community's large size; the other participants focused their ideas on the Hispanic population. Also, because the principal is a Vietnamese parent, the decision-making she described reflected her own choices for her children. This was a first-hand perspective that was missing from my other interviews. The idea of cultural differences does not help

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<sup>36</sup> While many smaller pushes have been made to promote negative sentiments toward bilingual education, one of the most prominent media campaigns occurred in Arizona around the 2000 election (Johnson, 2005). At the time, one of the most contentious issues on the ballot, known most commonly as Proposition 203, was the implementation of "English Only" policies in school. If passed, Proposition 203 would prohibit the use of bilingual education as a means of helping students acquire English proficiency. Led by Ron Unz and the *English for the Children* organization, the media campaign promoted the metaphor PROPOSITION 203 AS WAR. Although it is difficult to know the extent to which the media influenced voters' decisions, the goal of passing the proposition was achieved. (For an analysis of the views presented by the media regarding bilingual education, see Brooks, 1997; McQuillan & Tse, 1996.)

account for Hispanic parents who waive their children's right to bilingual education. However, it does explain at least in part why non-Hispanic parents may not insist that their children be provided with the same linguistic resources as Hispanic children—or why they accept a lack of equal educational opportunity for their children.

### **Grey: A Cultural Divide in Parents' Demands**

As I waited for my first interview to begin, I noticed that a sign near the main office was written in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. It was the first tri-lingual sign that I had seen in conducting my interviews. I was surprised by it, but at the same time I was impressed, as I felt that it showed how highly the school valued these languages and their respective cultures. It also suggested that there were a significant number of students who spoke of all three languages enrolled at the school. With this in mind, I was even more curious than usual to hear the responses that I would receive when I asked about the possibility of implementing a bilingual education program in a language other than Spanish.

When I asked the principal if she could foresee the school having another bilingual education program, she informed me,

Umm, actually, we have enough kids that we probably can have Vietnamese either dual-language or bilingual classes in certain grade level. But the challenge is that once you have a bilingual program in place, it needs to be comprehensive, and it need to be consistent. A child can't have Vietnamese instruction one year and the next year go right back into English class, you know?

It seemed that despite having the number of children the law requires to have a bilingual education program, a lack of resources prevented the school from providing students with equal educational opportunity.

While a limitation on resources did help to deter the school from implementing a Vietnamese/English bilingual education, it was not the determining factor in whether or not the school provided this linguistic resource. Despite the strain the program could put on the school's resources, the administration was willing to offer it. However, as the principal explained

[the school] did a survey, a parent survey seven years ago to the Vietnamese parents to see if they would like [the school] to establish a bilingual program for Vietnamese/English program. The vote was that no, they want their kids to be in the English class and learn English as much as possible. Versus the Hispanic families. They would like to maintain the bilingual program for their children to learn Spanish.

She felt that in the seven years since the survey had first been conducted, the responses would not have changed. As a Vietnamese parent herself, she was familiar enough with the parents of the school to know that the Vietnamese parents still would be against a Vietnamese bilingual education program, preferring that their children only be taught using ESL techniques. Her response provided insight into the important influence of parents. While under federal regulations a Vietnamese/English bilingual education program should have been implemented, parents prevented the creation of such program by expressing their disinterest in it.

The stark difference in the views of Hispanic and Vietnamese parents on bilingual education was explained by the principal of Grey in cultural terms. She shared that

[t]he tendency of the Asian parents is that they themselves would like to learn the language and would like to function with bilingual skill. And they very much would like to be part of the mainstream as quick as possible. And it's just cultural. You see that very common with the Asian parents. With the Hispanic parents.... Some of them are illiterate or never been in school before. They feel inferior when it come to having their kids learning a different language and they can't communicate with their child. Also, it's cultural that they have the strong urge of protecting the

culture.... And also, they have this sense of... How should I say it? Culture preservation. That they would like to have their children educated in their native language, which is Spanish, so that later on they can maintain the language and become... Even though American citizen, but still keep their roots.

The principal saw these cultural differences as the primary reason that Spanish/English bilingual education is so prominent in this country, while bilingual education for speakers of Asiatic languages were much rarer.

In addition to the cultural differences the principal verbalized, there was another cultural difference in parents' preference for or indifference toward bilingual education to which she merely alluded. However, the implications of this difference are just as great. Before the interview proceeded to the next topic, the principal concluded her description of cultural differences by explaining

I can speak for the Asian parents because I'm one of them, that I do want my kids to be bilingual, but in my opinion, they, my daughters can learn Vietnamese on weekend. I send them to Vietnamese school, but I want them to function and able to be part of the mainstream.

The language schools to which the principal referred provide an alternative setting in which students can socialize with others of the same cultural and linguistic background and gain speaking, reading, and writing proficiency in their native language. These generally are maintained by sub-groups within the Asian community. With this supplementary environment in which Asian students can study their native language, parents prefer that they concentrate on the other subjects while attending public school. In contrast, Hispanic parents tend not to have this alternative available to them, they must rely on public schools to serve the same function. The culturally-based difference in access to an alternative location for working to maintain their native language serves to

explain why Asian parents seem to have less interest in bilingual education than Hispanic parents do.

### **The Impact of Parents' Choices on Equal Educational Opportunity**

The influence of parents on schools' ability to provide students with equal educational opportunity is impossible to ignore. While schools may make every effort to provide the English language acquisition programs, parents may still refuse to allow their children to participate in these programs. Because schools cannot obligate parents to enroll students in a program that will help them learn English, students may not receive the equal educational opportunity that the school is trying to give them. By not allowing students to receive the assistance they need, parents can become a hindrance to their children's academic achievement.

While the parents who choose to waive their children's right to participate in English language acquisition program are of various linguistic backgrounds, the cultural differences between the parents of LEP students serve to explain in part the differences in parents' expectations for the schools. As discussed by the principal at Grey, most parents of LEP students value bilingualism and hope that their children will gain proficiency in both English and their native language. However, their beliefs on how and where this should be accomplished vary greatly. Thus, it seems likely that some parents whose children are given fewer options for English language acquisition programs do not see receiving different program choices as a lack of equal educational opportunity. Rather, these parents are not interested in the alternatives and view investing in such programs

for their children as an unnecessary allocation of resources as the programs would not be used.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Practical Implications: A Commitment to Equal Educational Opportunity**

Within the organizational structure of the American education system, factors outside of the schools, such as the government and parents, play an influential role in determining the methods schools may use to assist their LEP students in acquiring English. These influences often have a limiting effect on schools' ability to meet the needs of these students. Nevertheless, school administrators have an enduring commitment to providing their students with equal educational opportunity. The interviewee at Boyd Academy reflected an understanding, expressed by many participants, of the need to create a balance between the ideal and what schools are able to do.

Bilingual program, in the language of all the children that come to us, that would be the best thing. If I could have a Korean, a Vietnamese, a French, and whatever, that would be the ideal program to really have effective instruction for all of the children that come to us. That is not to say that our ESL programs are not doing a good job.

An ongoing dedication to making the best of a less than perfect situation has led school administrative teams to go beyond the guidelines set by the higher levels in the educational hierarchy. Rather, within the limited flexibility allotted, school administrators frequently are able to alter their schools' English language acquisition programs slightly so that they better meet the needs of their particular LEP population.

While the two previous chapters discuss some factors that constrain schools' ability to help all of their students learn English, this chapter highlights the perseverance

of school administrators in their commitment to providing all LEP students with equal educational opportunity. It considers two examples of this resolve as a means of exploring the practical implications of this study for schools. The first example explores the efforts made by new administrators to implement new English language acquisition programs that are better suited to meet the needs of their particular LEP population. I then discuss the dedication of school administrative teams to helping students, as demonstrated by their willingness to provide services above and beyond those required by law. Despite the conditions set by the federal and state government, as well as the school district, that seem to limit their ability to do so, schools continue their efforts to provide all LEP students with equal educational opportunity.

### **With New Administration Comes New Visions**

As discussed in Chapter 7, district, state, and federal policies heavily influence schools' ability to meet the needs of their LEP students. These regulations largely dictate the methods schools use to help students increase their English proficiency. Nonetheless, school administrators retain some flexibility in determining how these rules will be implemented within their schools. Different administrators may apply the same guidelines in very different ways with very different outcomes. Thus, if a school is consistently unable to accomplish its goals, it may be beneficial to establish a new administration that can bring a fresh perspective on how better to help students achieve.

At three of the schools involved in this study, new administrators refocused the schools on the importance of helping their LEP students learn English as a means of

providing equal educational opportunity. At Connolly, only the assistant principal was interviewed, but both he and the principal were both relatively new to the school; it was his second year and her fourth year. At both Gauthier and Pine Wood, the principals had only been at their respective schools since the beginning of the school year. The same was true for the vice principal of Pine Wood. With a fresh perspective and a background in bilingual education or ESL, the new administrators were able to increase the importance placed on the schools' English language acquisition programs.

### **Connolly<sup>37</sup>: Heading in the Right Direction**

Connolly has reached a crossroad in the development of its English language acquisition programs. The assistant principal shared,

We are currently under the developmental program. This is our fifth or sixth year with the program. And we always know [that we are] under this organization type of program because of occurrence. And the whole southeast district of the Houston Independent School District decided to go over to the developmental program. So it was a comprehensive program that involved elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. Now that the grant is over with this year, we are looking back into it and questioning whether that is our best approach or what.

The new administrative team is helping to lead the school in the direction that will be the most beneficial for the 65 percent of the student body that is LEP. Currently, in addition to the developmental bilingual education program, which transitions students out of bilingual education by fifth grade, the school offers ESL. Although it would be easiest to continue with the same programs because they are already in place, the principal and vice principal are taking an active role in ensuring that they implement the best methods for

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<sup>37</sup> See Appendix D for a more detailed description of Connolly.

their students.<sup>38</sup> The assistant principal explained, “We have visited some schools, and we are planning to attend schools with other programs that we want to look into and see what we felt it was better for.”

The administration’s dedication to helping students acquire English through the most effective methods possible extends further than just the programs themselves. The administrators make every effort to provide the resources the teachers need to implement the techniques. The assistant principal expressed this goal, saying, “One of the focuses of our school is to make sure that the basic needs are not a problem, so [the teachers] can focus on the high-order needs.” One way these needs are met is by ensuring that teachers have the physical equipment—such as books, pencils, and photocopies—they need to teach. Another is by providing teachers with the opportunity to participate in workshops that help improve their teaching capabilities.<sup>39</sup> The assistant principal shared, “The principal has devoted lots and lots of moneys to develop the teachers.... she has promoted a lot of personal growth through professional development.” While the professional development may cause teachers to be away from their classrooms during the trainings, “it’s investing in the future. And it’s a long-term solution, so it requires... You make sacrifices.” By focusing on providing the best programs for their LEP students and preparing the teachers to implement these methods, the new administrative team at

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<sup>38</sup> Because of the small number of non-Hispanic LEP students at Connolly, the district prescribes ESL as the best program for helping these students learn English. Thus, the administrative team’s efforts in the search described here do not affect these LEP students.

<sup>39</sup> The new principal is committed to having as many ESL-certified teachers as possible. The assistant principal shared, “We have ESL-certified teacher in every grade level in order to serve kids that would fall under that program... we have provided the means or resources to help them or encourage them to get certified in ESL.” In this way, the principal is able to greatly improve the quality of instruction non-Hispanic LEP students receive because LEP students receive instruction from teachers trained to implement ESL techniques properly.

Connolly is helping to ensure that the school will provide students with equal educational opportunities for year to come.

The new administrators at Connolly have demonstrated the benefits of self-assessment and the search for self-improvement; through these processes, the administration tinkers its way toward helping the school's LEP students learn English as quickly and efficiently as possible. As mentioned before, after the grant under which they had originally implemented their bilingual education program had expired, the easiest thing to do would have been to follow the path of least resistance, simply continuing with what had worked so far. Instead, the new administration is deliberating the pros and cons of its current program while considering the benefits other methods may have to offer the school's LEP students. The principal also is taking steps to ensure that the school has high quality teachers who are able to effectively implement the programs it puts into place. The new administrative team at Connolly serves as an example of the success a school can achieve through its continued dedication to improvement in the face of easy outs and obstacles.

### **Gauthier<sup>40</sup>: Fixing a Program in Shambles**

For five years before the new principal arrived at Gauthier, the school had had a two-way bilingual education program. However, the program was unsuccessful at helping the schools' Hispanic LEP students acquire English proficiency. As the principal explained,

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendix D for a more detailed description of Gauthier.

Previously this school was a dual-language, which, research will tell you that is the best, and I do agree with that. However, it was not being implemented the way that it should've been.

The inability of Gauthier's previous administration team to put research into practice led the school board to recruit the new principal to fix the situation. The principal seemed unsure about what specifically had led to the improper implementation of the program. Nevertheless, it was her top priority that the program that was in place would be changed so that the LEP students could successfully learn English, and her proactive nature helped her to meet her goals. She shared,

I was actually brought here to the school because of the need. I can't tell you what was happening. I don't really want to know. I just know that the children were not producing what they should've been producing, and it's not blame anyone. I just knew that something has to be done. These kids are not to where they need to be. And somebody has to put a halt, and we need to start going the other way. This was a really good school, I guess I can say that, five years ago. Then something happened in between, and it just started going on the spiral. So I said, "Guess what! Here, the brakes are right here. And we can't do, we can't go anywhere but up." So we've been working very hard.

As a new administrator, the principal brought with her new visions of how to ensure students' success.

The principal was offered her new position only two days before school began, but she immediately sprang into action to remedy what she felt was an unacceptable situation. One of her first undertakings was the implementation of a new type of bilingual education program.

I came to the SDMC [Site-based Decision Making Committee]. I actually almost made that decision on my own. I presented it to the SDMC with the finding of the school's records and history.... I put together the research really quickly, and I talked to the SDMC, which in turn talked to the teachers, some of the teachers one-on-one, and we all agree that this would be the best program for the school. Dual language is the best. We

all know that. However, it was not being implemented correctly, and I couldn't wait one more day to train on dual language and make sure it was going right, so we went to developmental.

Her fresh perspectives allowed her to make the necessary changes to the school's English language acquisition program, which had been failing to provide students with equal educational opportunity.

Like the administrative team at Connolly, the principal at Gauthier recognized that an excellent English language acquisition program required more than just having the necessary framework. She also encouraged her teachers to participate in professional development. However, she dedicated the majority of her efforts to ensuring that the teachers had the physical resources they needed to help their LEP students acquire English proficiency. She explained,

I came into a school that the resources were very limited and coming from a school where we had an abundance, a lot of my questions were, "Why don't you have this?" ... So I allowed them this year, and they told me, "This is the first year we ever did this now," what we would call a "wish list," and I said, "If... Whatever. No limit. I want to know, 'If I just had this,' or 'If I just had these items, I would be the happiest teacher in the world,'" and how it would help, of course. They always know that with me it always comes with a little, "But how is that going to help in the classroom? How is this going to help the children?"

With these additional resources and a more effective program, the new principal helped to better equip Gauthier to provide its LEP students with equal educational opportunities.

The lesson to be learned from the new principal at Gauthier is the importance of thinking outside of the box. Although, as the new principal said, some research demonstrates that two-way bilingual education programs are the most effective, her determination to help Gauthier's LEP students learn English led her to set the research aside and search for a program that would fit the needs of her students. Rather than

clinging to a program that clearly was not working, she quickly pulled together the resources she felt were necessary to ensure that her students would acquire English proficiency. While it may be too soon to determine how effective the new program is, Guathier's principal demonstrates that a new way of thinking about a problem can help stop what may seem to be an inevitable downward spiral.

### **Pine Wood<sup>41</sup>: Small Enough to Matter**

At Pine Wood, only nine percent of the more than 700 students enrolled are classified as LEP. As the principal explained, "It's traditionally a campus that has had such a small population that [the needs of the school's LEP students were] just never really appropriately dealt with." As a result, the new principal and assistant principal have been working to make changes that will ensure that the school provides those few students with the equal educational opportunities offered to others, as discussed below.

Although English language acquisition programs were in place, the quality of the programs was poor. LEP students in kindergarten through second grade were all placed in a single classroom with one teacher who provided them with bilingual education. Similarly, those in third and fourth grade all received ESL instruction at the same time. Fifth grade students spent most of their day in a mainstream classroom, but joined the third and fourth graders for their ESL component. Not surprisingly, students were not achieving the level of English proficiency that would be necessary for them to succeed. The principal informed me that the program was implemented by

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix D for a more detailed description of Pine Wood.

the previous administration.... not from any, not from bad intentions or anything, just because maybe they didn't have very large numbers, and they were able to get by with what they were doing because it worked and just barely, barely, barely came in under compliance.

The problem was not simply a matter of implementation, as it had been at Gauthier. Pine Wood also lacked the necessary professional and physical resources to meet the LEP students' needs. Thus, changing the type of English language acquisition programs alone would not have been sufficient to guarantee LEP students equal educational opportunities.

Because of the historical lack of attention given to meeting the linguistic needs of LEP students, the new administrative team was still working to fully understand what needed to be changed and how to do it. As the principal explained, “[C]oming in as new administrators, we talk about what’s the right thing for students, what’s the right thing for children.” However, rather than a sweeping reform like the one at Gauthier, changes were being made that address specific problems. The assistant principal shared,

a lot of what I’m doing this year is kind of observing what’s going on and trying to make as many changes as I can that are necessary mid-course as we’re going. So I do a lot of, I talk with teachers, bilingual and ESL teachers about what’s happening instructionally and what needs to be happening instructionally.

By addressing each concern, the administrators felt that they would be better able to ensure that LEP students were being met.

Issues that have been raised include the improper identification of students who need assistance in learning English and student placement in English language acquisition programs. The assistant principal revealed, “[W]e had found when we got here that the record keeping wasn’t a strength previously, and so we’ve been addressing

that issue on a student-by-student basis.” He similarly shared that the enrollment of LEP students in the appropriate program had not been highly valued:

What has happened traditionally at this school is that parents have been encouraged to sign a waiver form. So a) they’ve been encouraged to sign a waiver, b) there’s not any ESL teachers, other ESL teachers on this campus.

By increasing the awareness among teachers and parents of the importance of helping LEP students learn English, the principal and assistant principal were slowly making progress toward ensuring that the small number of LEP students are receiving the equal educational opportunity to which they were entitled.

Looking at the obstacles faced by the new administrative team at Pine Wood as it strives to ensure that LEP students are receiving the linguistic assistance they need, the value of baby steps becomes clear. The approach the principal and assistant principal have taken on is one of addressing problems one at a time and to the extent possible given the current situation. They understand that despite the small numbers of LEP students, these students’ needs must still be met. They are working to update their records and improve the classroom settings for LEP students. They recognize that their goal of providing LEP students with equal educational opportunity cannot be achieved overnight but do not allow their frustration with the current situation to make them lose sight of their objective. The new Pine Wood administrators serve as an example of the importance of a slow but steady pace in working to improve the inequalities that exist in a school.

### **Going Beyond the Basics to Meet Students' Needs**

As discussed in the previous sections, new administrators are able to provide fresh perspectives on how to implement district, state, and federal policies. These new outlooks can help a school better meet the needs of its LEP students and provide them with equal educational opportunity. However, long-established administrators may have years of experience that allow them to realize when merely meeting legal requirements does not suffice. The principal at Chester serves as an example of the power more experienced administrators can exert when they determine that the mandated services do not sufficiently ensure that their schools' LEP students receive equal educational opportunity.

Chester Elementary has over 1,100 students and is located in HISD's west region. It is a Title I school, with 96 percent of students receiving free- or reduced-lunch. Fifty-one percent of the students are Hispanic, and three percent are Asian. The student body was 53 percent LEP in the 2004-2005 school year. Over seventeen non-English languages are spoken by the students. The English language acquisition programs offered are traditional bilingual education and English as a Second Language. The school also has an ESL Refugee Center.

Conducting my interviews in Houston less than six months after Hurricane Katrina, the refugees about whom I expected to hear were those from the natural disaster. However, much to my surprise, the refugees for whom the ESL Refugee Center was created were not from New Orleans. The coordinator informed me, "I'm not talking about Katrina [when I say refugees]. I'm talking about refugees from Africa. Most of the refugees are from Africa: Somalia and Liberia." She described how these students had

come to the school as though in an exodus, with over 200 of them arriving suddenly, “pre-literate in their language, absolutely no social skills.” These students represented an influx for which the school was not ready—the coordinator explained, “[W]e had not anticipated the problems that we had with the refugee students”—and no policies provided guidelines on how to meet the special needs of these LEP students.<sup>42</sup>

When faced preparation with the challenge of how to guarantee equal educational opportunity to this LEP population, the principal realized that English language acquisition programs alone would not be adequate. Not only did these students lack proficiency in English, the coordinator explained,

there is no motivation in these kids because they have not even seen a school in their own countries, so it’s all foreign to them. So they’ve come from war-torn regions, and so they’ve come with a lot of anger. And they lack social skills, and yet everything is so different, so the transition is very traumatic for them. They know they’ve come to a safe place. They know that there’s a lot here that this country has to offer. But they don’t know how to receive that.

Thus, to meet both the linguistic and social needs of the refugee students, the principal created an ESL Refugee Center using Title III funds.

As a supplemental resource, the ninety minutes students spend within the ESL Refugee Center are free of the demands of standardized testing and the regular curriculum. Instead, the coordinator concentrates on these students’ special needs. She shared,

[T]hese refugees, like especially the ones from Somalia, are refugees who have been born in refugee camps, who have been kind of outcast of

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<sup>42</sup> The ESL Refugee Center coordinator did not offer an explanation as to why this wave of African immigrants had come to Houston. The lack of preparation for receiving this students suggests that it may have been unexpected.

society, so they've had a rough time, so they lack social skills....  
 [F]ortunately, our principal had that vision, and she thought that this would not be any classroom teacher's cup of tea. We had to have some special support. So she decided to have this center.

The coordinator provides them with a nurturing environment; she reminds them, "Look, you don't know English, but you are not dumb. So you have brains, and your brain is so much fresher than my brain. You can learn more than I know." In doing so, she helps motivate them to learn. She begins by teaching them basic social skills and acquainting them with concepts—like sharing—and vocabulary—like "doughnuts"—with which students in third, fourth, and fifth grade are expected to already be familiar. With the flexibility the principal has granted, the coordinator felt she has been able to teach the students more effectively. She explained,

[A]s they say, "Don't teach them the way *you* want to teach them. Teach them they way they want to learn how." So I have to do that. I mean, I have to literally do that. The way they want to learn. I have to come to grips with that and say, "Okay. We'll do this."

While the coordinator's philosophy has allowed her successfully to help the refugee students learn, she would not be able to follow it if she were constricted by district, state, and federal policies. However, the vision of the principal for a center that provided services beyond those mandated for LEP students has allowed the ESL Refugee Center coordinator to give the refugee students access to equal educational opportunity. Thus, the principal at Chester demonstrates that dedication to helping students acquire English proficiency and achieve academically allows the boundaries set by external forces to be stretched to meet students' needs.

### **Empowered by a Commitment to Students**

The previous two chapters may have painted a somewhat bleak picture of schools' ability to provide students with equal educational opportunity. However, the discussion in this chapter of the four schools is intended to reaffirm the power school administrators do have to help ensure that the LEP students at their school are receiving the assistance they need as they acquire English proficiency. From each school described here, there is an important lesson that can be learned.

When a school consistently gets positive results, it is easy to be satisfied with merely maintaining the status quo. However, the new principal and assistant principal at Connolly demonstrate that self-improvement is always possible. Despite the school's previous success in helping students learn English, the administration continues to search actively for the program that best meets LEP students' needs. The principal also has made a concerted effort to increase even more the already high number of ESL certified teachers; this would provide LEP students who are not in a bilingual education program access to a teacher who is trained to use methods that will help meet the students' needs. By practicing constant self-improvement, a school can become even better at meeting the needs of its LEP students.

For schools that are doing less well at helping LEP students learn English, the decisive actions taken by the new principal at Gauthier show that it is important to have the courage to admit that a program is not working and start anew. Rather than finding a panacea that would allow the two-way bilingual education program to continue, she chose to implement a new method of English instruction. Armed with research and a

willingness to think outside the box, the principal instituted developmental bilingual education. Although this technique is believed by some to be less effective at helping LEP students acquire English proficiency, the program met the needs of the school's particular LEP population. This suggests that schools that find themselves unable to meet their LEP students' needs should consider alternatives as these may prove to be more successful.

Like the principal from Gauthier, the new administrative team at Pine Wood felt that the program structure that was in place when they arrived was not effectively helping LEP students learn English. However, they took a much slower-paced approach. Rather than completely discarding what was in place, the principal and assistant principal at Pine Wood are addressing the each of the problems of the existing structure separately. By identifying and dealing with issues one at a time, they are able to get a better grasp on the task at hand and ensure that each obstacle is given the attention it requires and is handled thoroughly. By taking baby steps, schools will gradually increase their ability to meet the needs of their LEP students.

When faced with a sudden influx of refugee students, the principal of Chester took quick action to ensure that these students had the resources they required to succeed academically. Rather than ignoring the special needs that no guidelines required her to meet, the principal created an ESL Refugee Center that would help students develop the skills—social and linguistic—that are necessary for academic achievement. Her commitment to helping these students learn English drove her to go beyond what was legally required. Although district, state, and federal policies tend to determine how schools meet the needs of LEP students, the boundaries these regulations provide can be

stretched to make a school better able to help its LEP students acquire English proficiency.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Policy Implications**

If schools are to uphold the ideals laid out in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act with regard to their diverse LEP populations, policy changes must be made at every level of government. These policy changes should address the concerns discussed in the three previous chapters, highlighted in Figure 6-2, that influence schools' ability to focus on achieving their goal of providing LEP students with equal educational opportunity. By relieving stressors on the system and keeping in mind both parents demands and schools' responsibility, the federal and state governments, in collaboration with the school district, will help both schools and students to become more successful.

This chapter considers the policy implications of this study. I begin by proposing changes to school district policy that will help to better equip schools to handle the pressures they face as they strive to provide equal educational opportunity for LEP students. I then broaden my focus to changes in Texas state policy that would further enable schools to achieve this goal by providing them with a necessary, additional resource. The third section considers the bigger picture, looking at changes at the federal level that would ease the pressures faced by schools. I conclude with a brief discussion of the contributions of this study to the field.

### **District Implications**

If Duke and Canady (1991) are right, changes in policy within the district are the most direct means of creating equal educational opportunities for LEP students. This level of policy-making is better suited for addressing the cultural needs of and differences among individuals than the state or federal government. By working closely with parents, as suggested below, the school district can alleviate some of the potential tension created by contending cultural influences.

The importance of the role of the parents in ultimately deciding in which English language acquisition program their children will participate already has been discussed, as has the effect of culture on these decisions. However, parents' choice alone does not absolve schools from their responsibility to provide students with equal educational opportunity. The district cannot assume that parents of non-Spanish speaking LEP students will opt out of bilingual education for one of many reasons. Instead, the district must actively investigate how interested parents are in such programs and why they decide to enroll or not enroll their children in certain English language acquisition programs. By surveying parents every couple of years, the district can gauge the level of appeal a bilingual education program would have for parents from different language backgrounds. It also would provide parents with the opportunity to express any concerns that they may have regarding their students' English acquisition or voice satisfaction with the progress made. It is crucial to learn how parents from different backgrounds think about these programs and what these parents see as the relative advantages and disadvantages of each method. With the survey as a starting point, the district can begin a

conversation with parents about how to ensure that students are learning English using the most effective techniques. In this way, rather than acting in conflict, schools and parents could work together to provide equal educational opportunity for LEP students.

If through this dialogue a particular language minority group expressed considerable interest in a bilingual education program, the district should contemplate perhaps combining schools or re-drawing zoning lines; this would be particularly helpful in areas where there are enclaves of immigrants with the same language background. Students then could be reassigned to increase the number of students who speak a single language. This redistribution of students would both give schools the minimum number of students necessary to meet the minimum quota for providing bilingual education and allow resources to be reallocated to make this program feasible. Schools could more easily provide equal educational opportunity as a result of this reduced strain on resources.

### **State Implications**

While respondents implied that the state's influence was felt mostly in the specific test they gave students and textbooks used in the classroom, this study's greatest implications for state policy deal with teacher certification. This would address a limitation in the resources of the school district. The personnel from the school district explained that one of the greatest obstacles to implementing bilingual education in other languages is the dearth of programs that provided this type of certification. Instead, "the Vietnamese bilingual teachers just have ESL certification" and are able to speak the

students' native language." However, an ESL degree combined with fluency in a particular language is not equivalent to a degree in bilingual education. If the state offered bilingual education training programs for other languages within state universities, teachers could become certified rather than simply having to make do with a piecemeal solution. The district and schools would be better equipped to implement bilingual education programs for non-Spanish LEP students without having to worry about complying with No Child Left Behind's requirement that they hire highly qualified teachers.

### **Federal Implications**

In discussing the role played by the federal government in determining the extent to which schools were able to meet the needs of their LEP students, respondents repeatedly mentioned No Child Left Behind. They pointed to the Act's negative effects on the capacity of schools to meet these students' multiple and multidimensional needs. The dual obligation placed on schools to both help students achieve fluency in English and learn the material that would be tested puts a strain on one of the school's most limited resource—time—and limits teachers' ability to focus on either goal. Greater accommodations, such as those suggested below, must be made for LEP students under No Child Left Behind if these students are to achieve and to be able to compete with non-LEP students. In other words, to provide all LEP students with equal educational opportunity, the federal government must recognize that acquiring the language is a slow process that requires time and allowances.

The current NCLB legislation does provide some accommodations for LEP students, such as allowing them to be exempt from taking the tests in English for two years. However, these do not suffice for several reasons. First, bilingual and ESL teachers are still required to teach their students the material in addition to the language in the same amount of time as mainstream teachers have for the subject matter alone. Second, although schools may excuse students from taking the exams, these exemptions are only permitted for the first three school years that the student has attended school. Teachers are therefore often put into a position where they must choose to teach either the language or the subject material well, allowing the other to slip. By granting schools the right to exempt LEP students for a longer period of time, this pressure would be relieved, at least in part. Rather than setting a time limit, allowing students to wait to take the standardized tests until they have been able to achieve English proficiency will both garner more accurate results on the exams and allow the students to learn the material and the language. The stigma of exemptions would be removed, and schools would be free to use this flexibility to better meet the needs of all LEP students. However, it is plausible that schools and districts could try to take advantage of the system by claiming that their low achieving LEP students never learned English to avoid having to test these students. To prevent such abuses, schools would be required to use a test such as the TELPAS demonstrate that LEP students were making progress in acquiring English proficiency. In this way, teachers would be allowed to concentrate their efforts on helping students learn the language without having as much pressure to teach the material.

To ensure equal educational opportunity among the LEP population, it may be helpful to revisit the *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) decision. The Lau Remedies determined that

schools with more than twenty LEP students at a single grade level were required to provide these students with native language instruction. Clearly, schools do have limited resources and this number reflects the average class-size. Nonetheless, it may be possible to accommodate the needs of fifteen students as efficiently as those of twenty students. Similarly, the advantage of being able to provide students with alternate English language acquisition program choices may lend credence to the idea of combining students from two grade levels. By decreasing the minimum number of students required for schools to be obligated to provide native language instruction and increasing the number of grade levels across which these students can be found, the linguistic needs of more students will be met.

### **The Contributions of This Study**

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act gives schools the responsibility of providing equal educational opportunity for all students. However, it does not provide guidance as to what this term means, let alone how schools are to achieve this goal. Thus, schools are left with a lofty task and little direction.

In the landmark *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), the Supreme Court determined that one of the prerequisite conditions for equal educational opportunity is the provision of a means through which LEP students can acquire English proficiency. The inability to understand what is being taught prevents students from receiving a meaningful education. As Judge Shirley Hufstедler of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals stated in her dissenting opinion when the case passed through her court, “Indeed, these children are more isolated from

equal educational opportunity than were those physically segregated blacks in *Brown*; these children cannot communicate at all with their classmates or their teachers” (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1973, p. 806). To provide equal educational opportunity, schools must offer students a means of learning English.

There are several methods available to schools through which they can help LEP students acquire English proficiency. While theories on second language acquisition do not necessarily suggest that one program has more merit than another, they do imply that no technique is inherently better suited for one group of language minority students than another. With this in mind, one would expect schools to identify the English language acquisition program they felt could most successfully assist their LEP students to learn English.

However, as seen in the data from HISD, schools are not searching for the single most effective method and providing it to all of their LEP students. Instead, they have selected the best technique and applied that to helping Hispanic students learn English while only offering other LEP students a program the schools recognize is less successful. The non-Hispanic students do manage to acquire English, so one could argue that the necessary condition for equal educational opportunity has been met. However, because schools provide some students with the best possible conditions for learning and only mediocre conditions for others, students are not given the same chance of receiving equal educational opportunity.

In speaking with teachers, instructional coordinators, principals, and vice principals, it quickly becomes obvious that the lack of equal educational opportunity is not a result of a lack of caring. Rather, as discussed in Chapter 9, the schools’ faculty and

staff make every effort, and at times even go beyond legal requirements, to provide students with the closest semblance to equal educational opportunity possible.

Nevertheless, their dedication to ensuring this right for LEP students is not enough.

The inability to provide equal educational opportunity is an effect of schools' position within the educational societal sector. As the focal organizations, their actions are determined in large part by the other organizations on which they rely. Despite teachers' and administrators' best efforts, their capacity to give students equal educational opportunity is limited to what the external factors will allow.

Because of the great impact of these outside forces—namely, policy makers and parents—on schools' ability to meet their LEP students' needs, it is necessary to change the way these factors influence schools if advancements are to be made toward providing equal educational opportunity. It is crucial that policy makers understand that some of the regulations they put into place with the intention of helping students learn may actually stand in the way of their academic success by preventing schools from providing them with equal educational opportunity. Parents must become more involved in helping to create the policies, at least at the district level, so that the guidelines reflect and take into account the cultural differences that are present within the student body. With these changes, an environment will be created in the district, in the state, and at the national level in which schools will be able to provide equal educational opportunity to students from different language backgrounds.

### **Areas for Future Research**

As noted in Chapter 5, the research presented in this dissertation is narrow in scope. It concentrates on a single school district and looks at how that district has addressed a growing issue. However, the need to help an increasingly diverse linguistic minority learn English is not limited to a single city. With the continued influx of immigrants, school districts across the country soon will have to contend with this problem, if they do not already.

The school district on which this research focuses is rather large and has had large immigrant populations for much of its history. As the seventh largest district in the country, it is possible that some of the issues mentioned in the previous chapter are specific to districts with over 200,000 students. The decisions reflected here are the results of years of struggling to determine how to address the needs of a diverse student body. While the district stresses that it is still evolving, its size and precedents may be pushing it in a particular direction.

The next step would be to conduct a study using similar methodology in a city that is much smaller in size and has only recently begun to feel the effects of its changing demographics. This would allow me to observe the decisions made by the school district and individual schools as they struggle to adjust to the changing demographics and new pressures. Of particular interest would be the point at which the schools and district determine that the LEP population has reached a critical mass and the challenges posed by the growing diversity must be addressed. The present study would provide a source of

comparison for the new research, making it possible to look at the similarities and differences in the choices made in the two cities.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Request for Permission to Conduct Research**

#### **Differences in Access to Linguistic Resources for Students from Various Backgrounds**

Marcela Movit  
Ph.D. Candidate  
The Pennsylvania State University  
300 Rackley Bldg.  
University Park, PA 16802  
(814) 777-4543

#### **Purpose of Research**

The proposed research project is for a doctoral dissertation.

#### **Theoretical Basis of Study**

Although studies on the access of Hispanic students and Asian students to school linguistic resources exist, research *comparing* the level of access for these groups of students does not. A comparative study of this sort would provide invaluable information for both the school district that is being studied and the field of education as a whole on the extent to which the linguistic needs of all students are being met by the existing educational system. This study aims to fill the current gap in the understanding of the student background-school language program-student access triangle

Through this research I propose to compare the Hispanic and Asian student experience by examining the relationship between student socio-linguistic background, school language acquisition program structure, and student access to school linguistic

resources. These three factors have been found in previous research to be the greatest determinants of the ability of non-native English speakers to integrate into mainstream classrooms (Cummins 2000; Krashen 2001; and Leung, 2003), student socio-linguistic background and school language acquisition program structure determine student access to school linguistic resources. Key student background characteristics for this study will include family socioeconomic status, parental educational attainment, family income; family country of origin; and student English language proficiency prior to entering the school's language acquisition program. The operationalization of the concepts of school acquisition program structure will be based on Houston Independent School District's (HISD) policy for serving students with limited English proficiency (LEP) through bilingual education programs when possible, with an understanding that some schools must offer an English as a Second Language (ESL) program as an alternative because the critical shortage of bilingual certified teachers.

### **Type of Research**

This proposed mixed-method study includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. Statistical analyses of sociolinguistic diversity within each elementary school, as well as analyses of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, will comprise the quantitative portion. This component will provide a clear picture of the current trends in linguistic diversity within individual schools and will enable the selection of a representative sample of schools for the study. Key informant interviews with HISD personnel will comprise the qualitative portion, providing first hand knowledge about

how schools in HISD provide access to the linguistic resources to the students from various backgrounds that comprise their student.

### **Contribution of Study to Research in Education**

As the country's population becomes increasingly diverse, so do schools' student bodies. The number of students who have a language other than English as their first language grows by the day. This study will provide insight into the way that schools are addressing the challenges posed by their increasingly linguistically diverse student bodies as schools strive to help all students achieve English proficiency. Central findings will be the extent to which schools implement a "one size fits all" approach or differentiate for the linguistic diversity of their student body.

### **Sampling Design and Rationale**

In order to determine which schools will be included, the study will involve a statistical analysis of the degree of diversity within the student body of each of the 187 elementary schools within HISD by means of a four-cell typology. Using data already existing in district records on the ethnicities of the student body, the study will determine quintile groups according to the percent of LEP students in each school and then select out the schools in the upper and lower quintiles, labeling these as large LEP population schools and small LEP population schools, respectively. The schools will be grouped further by the amount of diversity within their LEP populations: depending on the percentage of the school's LEP population represented by the largest minority group, schools will be divided into quintiles; those in the upper, most diverse quintile will have the smallest percentage of the LEP population represented by a single minority group,

while the lowest, least diverse quintile will have the largest percentage of the LEP population represented by a single minority group. This will yield four categories: large LEP population with high diversity, large LEP population with low diversity, small LEP population with high diversity, and small LEP population with low diversity. Five schools will be selected randomly from each category to be included in the study, resulting in a total of 20 elementary schools. This sampling method will provide a look at schools along the entire spectrum of diversity.

### **Reasons for Conducting the Study in HISD and Relevance to HISD**

The Houston Area Survey ([www.houstonareasurvey.org](http://www.houstonareasurvey.org)), a study conducted by Dr. Stephen Klineberg of Rice University to systematically monitor trends in attitudes and demographics in Houston, has noted a dramatic increase in the city's diversity. Furthermore, according to Klineberg, "[Houston] is at the forefront of the new diversity that is reconstructing the social and political landscape of urban America" (Houston Area Survey 2002). This unique position makes Houston the ideal location for any study that aims to determine what measures we must take to adequately address our country's changing demographics.

The changes in the city's general population are reflected in HISD's student body. As the number of immigrants increases, so does the number of students whose native language is not English. The growing linguistic diversity in the city reflected in the many languages seen on billboards represents a growing challenge for HISD; namely, teaching children with very diverse linguistic backgrounds English as a means of achieving in school. While other cities and school districts have faced similar problems, HISD's size

has forced it to deal with more linguistic diversity than most, yet it is not so large that different sections of the district opt to act independently.

Studies exist on both the access of Hispanic students to linguistic resources and the access of Asian students to linguistic resources, but a comparative study of the level of access for these groups of students has yet to be done. This study will supply this information for HISD's "Multilingual Programs" department, providing the department with insight into how schools are implementing the programs and what difficulties they may be facing. It will demonstrate how schools are handling issues of increasing linguistic diversity among their student bodies.

Interviews will be conducted with the coordinators of the schools' English acquisition programs since they have first hand knowledge about how schools in HISD handle the linguistic diversity represented by their student bodies. Their knowledge of what challenges arise on a daily basis will add a human dimension to the statistics. The insight they can provide on how schools must adapt to the country's changing demographics in order to meet the linguistic needs of all students is invaluable to my research.

The researcher has a personal interest in understanding these issues, having grown up in a bilingual environment similar to that which many LEP students continue to experience. Growing up in Houston, attending Rice University as an undergraduate, and receiving a Masters degree in bilingual education from the University of Houston give the research a connection to and first hand knowledge of the Houston area and HISD schools that will greatly benefit the research. This research will allow the researcher to

make a contribution to HISD educational programming that will allow her to give back to the community.

### **Methodological Procedure**

The research will conduct statistical analyses of the diversity of each of the 187 elementary schools in the district to classify the schools according to the four-cell typology of student diversity. The process for doing this is described in detail above in “Sampling Procedure.” 20 elementary schools will be selected to participate in the study.

At each of the 20 schools, the person who is in charge of the school’s language acquisition program (bilingual education, ESL, etc.) will be asked to participate in an interview. If a school does not have such a program, the principal will be contacted. (In the case that a school does not wish to be included in the study, the next school on the list will be asked to participate.) If he or she agrees to participate, he or she will be mailed a consent form, which will include information regarding the types of questions that will be asked and the confidentiality that will be maintained, along with a self-addressed stamped envelop. The interview will be scheduled for a time that is convenient for both the interviewee and the researcher when the consent form is returned. It may be conducted over the telephone if necessary.

The format of the interview will be open-ended questions. This will allow the researcher to obtain the necessary information and give the interviewee the opportunity to add anything that may not be addressed directly. To the extent made possible within the limitation of the confidentiality agreement, the researcher will gladly add to the list of questions anything that the “Multilingual Programs” department, or any other

department, of HISD feels would be crucial for their department to do their job more efficiently or effectively. Each interview is expected to last less than an hour.

The information provided in the interview session will be completely confidential. No real names, addresses or personal identification will be used in the research that may reveal the identity of the individual being interviewed or the school district. The interviewees' participation is absolutely voluntary, and they have the option to withdraw from taking part in the study at any time. They may also decline to answer any question. If they do agree to participate in this study, the researcher will be the only person conducting the interview. Each interview will be tape recorded and later transcribed to ensure that all the interviewee's views are recorded accurately. Upon completion of the research, the researcher will provide a summary of findings to the school district and any interviewee who is interested in the results. The tapes of the 20 interviews will be destroyed within 6 months of the submission of the final report.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The raw data already existing in district records will be analyzed using the process detailed above in the section entitled "Sampling Procedure." Interviews will be transcribed and entered into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program that is designed to track and highlight coding schemes on multi-member ethnographic studies. By systematically comparing and contrasting interviews, the researcher will develop conceptual themes that best address the study's research questions. Preliminary coding will begin with "base" codes and "analytical" codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Preliminary base codes will reflect the research questions and be initially driven by

previous research on student access to school linguistic resources based on school language acquisition program structure. The coding structure will include identifying: how different language acquisition programs increase LEP students' English fluency, what trends exist in the language acquisition programs school districts choose to implement, which programs are more accessible to certain groups of LEP students than others, and what forces drive school districts to select one language acquisition program over another. Drawing on a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), analytic codes will be revised and reviewed to capture important themes that arise out of the data from interviews.

The analysis will draw on these coding concepts to inform the researcher's understanding of what differences exist in the level of access of linguistic resources for Hispanic students and for Asian students, why these differences may exist, what schools have done so far to increase equality in the level of access, and what steps schools may need to take in the future as the diversity within their student bodies continues to grow.

### **Target Date for Submission of Final Report to HISD**

December 2006

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol**

My name is Marcela Movit, and I'm a Ph.D. student at Penn State University. I really appreciate your taking the time to meet with me today.

This interview is going to be part of my study for my dissertation. What I'm really interested in is how schools help students who speak different languages learn English.

The reason that I wanted to talk to you in particular is that in your position, you have insight into how your school is dealing with the changing demographics of the student body in order to meet the linguistic needs of all students, which is invaluable to my research.

First, tell me a little bit about yourself.

1. Can you tell me a little about your role with regard to the English language acquisition program?
  - How long have you been here?
  - Where were you before this?

Now I want to know a little bit about the structure of the program—how it's set up.

2. When did your school first develop the bilingual/ESL program? What was the historical context? What did the student body look like at that time?

- How was it decided that a program should be implemented?
  - How was it decided which type of program should be implemented?
  - Who played a role in making these decisions?
3. How has the population in your school changed since you have been here, particularly in terms of LEP students?
- How has the school adapted to these changes (specifically in terms of resource allocation)?
  - How has your job changed to reflect these changes?
  - Has the bilingual/ESL program changed over the years?
  - How have decisions to make changes been made?
  - Who had the most influence on these decisions? Is this person/group of people still the most influential?
  - Did the community played a role in helping to make these changes? What type of influence does the community have on these programs today?

We've talked a little bit about the history of the program. Let's talk more about the actual structure of the program.

4. Do you have a single program for all your LEP students?
- What resources does this program make available (classrooms, teachers, teaching assistants, subject materials, etc.)?
  - Where do you get the funding for the program?

- How is the budget decided? Do you have a say? Is it presented to you? Do you have to give an end-of-the-year report?
  - How quickly do you generally try to mainstream your LEP students?
  - How do you decide on your curriculum?
  - What is the school's philosophy regarding helping students learn English? Is it written down anywhere?
  - At what point could you see the school implementing a non-English bilingual program?
5. To what extent do you feel that what you do and how you do it is determined by federal legislation (like NCLB), state policy, and district policy?
- Relative to the school as a whole, where is the program situated?
  - Tell me a little bit about the organizational structure of the program..
  - Which other teachers are part of the program? What roles do they play?
  - Do you have a feel for how important a priority it is?
  - Do you feel that you get the support that you need from the superintendent or the district?
  - Do you get support from the community? Is it equal from all parts of the community?

Let's move on to the students.

6. How do you identify LEP students?
  - How do you test students' level of English proficiency?
  - Describe the process that a new student who speaks only Spanish must go through as they enroll in the school.
  - Does their level of proficiency play a role in the steps they must go through?
  - What would the process look like for a student who speaks only Vietnamese?
  - What would the process look like for a student who speaks only Tagalog?
  - Have you ever had a student who slipped through the cracks? (If this has never happened: how would you handle it if it did?)
  - What are the issues that keep coming up as you deal with students and try to figure out their level of proficiency and where they fit in?
  - What is something unique that has happened over the past year?
  - People have been talking about the growing number of immigrants who are coming to Houston. Have you seen this reflected in your school?
  - How did the evacuation of New Orleans due to Katrina affect your school and program?

Let's look at the teachers:

7. What kind of preparation is there for new teachers to get them ready to teach the LEP students in their classrooms?

- Are there special classes they have to take?
- Is there any professional training or workshops for teachers that are new to your program?
- How do teachers react to these requirements or to having to teach LEP students in general?

Before we wrap up, I'd like you to evaluate your program.

8. How successful do you think your program is in helping *every* LEP student learn English?
  - What are the programs' strengths?
  - What are the programs' weaknesses?

Okay. That's about all the questions I have for you.

9. Is there anything else that you feel would be crucial to my understanding of your English language acquisition program?

If you were to write a newspaper article on how schools help students that speak very different languages learn English, what would the headline be?

## Appendix C

### Bilingual/ESL Compliance Items for TEC 29 & Chapter 89

14 Sections	Description
89.1201	Policy
a	Every district/school must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) identify LEPs based on state criteria</li> <li>b) provide required Bil. Ed. or ESL program as integral parts of the regular program</li> <li>c) seek certified teachers for Bil/ESL programs</li> <li>d) assess achievement of TEKS to ensure accountability</li> </ul>
89.1205	Required Bilingual or ESL Programs
a-b-c	Bil. Ed. is offered in PK-5/6 in the district's major languages (>20 LEP students) ...can offer Bil. Ed. beyond elem. grades.
d-e	ESL is offered in PK-12 for all LEPs in the district's non-major languages (<20 LEP students)
g	School submits a "Request for Exception from Bil. Ed." w/appropriate documentation (if applicable)
h	School submits a "Request for Waiver of ESL Certification" w/appropriate documentation (if applicable)
89.1210	Program Content and Design
<i>BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM</i>	
a	Instruction, pacing, and materials are modified to ensure full opportunity to master TEKS.
a	LPAC designates student's level of proficiency
b-c	Spanish and English are used as languages of instruction
b-c	Instruction is at the student's level of linguistic and academic proficiency
b-c	State-adopted English/Spanish texts and supplementary materials are used
b-c	Program addresses affective, linguistic, and cognitive needs
<i>ESL PROGRAM</i>	
d	Amount of instruction is commensurate w/student's level of English proficiency and academic achievement
d	LPAC designates student's level of English proficiency and academic achievement
d	In PK-5/6, amount of ESL may vary from R/LA block (minimum) to all subjects thru ESL.  In 6-12, amount of ESL may vary from 1 period of ESL (minimum ESL R/LA) to all subjects thru ESL.
e	ESL strategies or native language are provided in any course/elective (except ancillary subjects such as art, music, and PE) required for promotion/graduation
f	LEP students are mixed w/English-spknng. peers for ancillary subjects such as

	art, music, and PE....equal participation in extra-curricular activities
g	The required program is provided to all LEP students w/parent permission until he/she meets exit criteria or graduates from HS.
89.1215	Home Language Survey (HLS)
a	Every enrolled student has a completed HLS in LEP folder
b-c	HLS is administered in English/Spanish/other language & includes 2 key questions....may include additional information
d	HLS is used to identify home language & trigger testing for identification
89.1220	LPAC
a-e	District has policy on establishment and training of LPAC
b-c-d	LPAC has required members
g	LPAC conducts required activities upon student's initial enrollment
g	LPAC conducts required activities at the end of each school year
h-i	LPAC determines appropriate Spring assessments
j-k	LPAC notifies parent of placement and obtains permission
l	LPAC monitors progress of exited students for 2 years
m	LEP folders contain required documentation
89.1225	Testing and Classification of Students
a-1	Students in PK-1 whose HLS indicates another language on initial home language survey are tested w/IPT
a-2	Students in 2-12 whose HLS indicates another language on initial home language survey are tested w/IPT & CAT
b	Students whose home language is Spanish must also be administered a Spanish IPT
c	Informal assessment is given to speakers of other languages in their home language, when applicable.
d	Tests used for identification are on state-approved list
e	Tests used for identification are given w/i 4 weeks of initial enrollment
f	Correct criteria is used for identification as LEP
g	Students are identified and placed w/i 4 weeks of initial enrollment
h-i-j	Correct criteria is used for reclassifying as non-LEP and exiting from program
i	Student may not be exited from Bil. Ed. or ESL in PK-1.
89.1230	Eligible Students with Disabilities
a	Assessment procedures are in place for differentiating between language proficiency & handicapping conditions
b	Professional LPAC member serves on ARD
89.1233	Participation of Non-LEP Students (Procedure in place for enrolling non-LEPs in Bil. Ed.)
89.1235	Facilities (Bil. & ESL classes located in regular public schools, and not in separate facilities)
89.1240	Parental Authority and Responsibility
a	LEP student's participating in Bil. Ed. or ESL program have parent approval ...approval is valid throughout continued participation in program or until student exits or graduates or parent requests change.
b	School notifies parent of student's reclassification as non-LEP and program exit.
c	Parent may appeal to commissioner of education if the district/school fails to comply with the law/rules.
89.1245	Staffing and Staff Development

a	Reasonable steps to assign appropriately certified teachers to program
b	School submits Request for Exceptions/Waivers when applicable
c-d	Bil. Ed. or ESL teachers may receive supplemental salary and may participate in district-supported certification programs
e-f	Districts/schools that request exceptions/waivers use at least 10% of state allotment for teacher training...can collaborate w/local colleges
89.1250	Required Summer School Program
1	Purpose of S.S.
a	Eligible students are given opportunity to participate in SS program
b	S.S. Program instruction focuses on lang. dev. and essential skills
c	S.S. Program addresses affective, linguistic, and cognitive needs
2	Establishment & Eligibility of Program
a-b	Program is offered to eligible students entering K or 1 <sup>st</sup> in Fall.
c	Participating students are identified as LEP thru use of IPT test
3	Operation of Program
3a	Enrollment is optional/voluntary
3b	Program is at least 120 hrs of instruction
3c	Pupil/Teacher ratio does not exceed 18:1
3d	District is not required to transport
3e	Teachers are certified/endorsed in B/E
3f	Summary of student progress is sent to parents at end of SS, and copy to Fall teacher
3h	SS program does not substitute for B program required during the school year
4	Funding and Records for Program
4a	District /school uses state & local funds for program purposes... federal funds used to supplement program
4b	District /school maintains records of eligibility, attendance, and progress of students
89.1260	Monitoring of Programs and Enforcing Law and Commissioner's Rules
a-b	TEA monitors program implementation at least every 3 years using data reported through various reports and PEIMS.
89.1265	Program Evaluation
a	District conducts periodic assessment/diagnosis in the languages of instruction to determine program impact and student outcomes.
b	District conducts annual evaluation that reflects academic progress of LEP students in either language, growth in English, number of exited students, and number/frequency of teachers/aides trained.
c	District/school reports to parents the progress of their child in English and their home language as a result of participation in the program
d	Each year, school staff develops, reviews, and revises their SIP for purpose of improving LEP student performance.

## **Appendix D**

### **Description of the Schools**

#### **Large LEP Population with High Diversity**

##### **Chester**

Chester Elementary has over 1,100 students and is located in HISD's west region. It is a Title I school, with 96 percent of students receiving free- or reduced-lunch. 51 percent of the students are Hispanic, and three percent are Asian. The student body was 53 percent LEP in the 2004-2005 school year. Over seventeen non-English languages are spoken by the students. The English language acquisition programs offered are traditional bilingual education and English as a Second Language. The school also has an ESL Refugee Center. 38 percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while 14 percent are in ESL. 36 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual/ESL programs. The ESL Refugee Center coordinator, Title I coordinator, and bilingual/ESL instructional coordinator were interviewed at Chester.

##### **Grey**

The student body at Grey Elementary consists of almost 800 students. 70 percent of them are Hispanic, and twenty percent are Asian. 57 percent were LEP in 2004-2005 school year, and eighteen non-English languages spoken by students. The English language acquisition programs Grey Elementary offers are traditional bilingual education and English as a Second Language. 38 percent of students participate in the bilingual

program, while sixteen percent are in ESL. 51 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. 90 percent of students in this Title I school located in the West region receive free- or reduced-lunch. Both the principal and the instructional coordinator were interviewed.

### **Oster**

Almost 1,100 students attend Oster Elementary. About 64 percent of those students were classified as LEP in 2004-2005 school year. 74 percent of the students are Hispanic and another twelve percent are Asian. Nineteen non-English languages are spoken by Oster students. Like Chester, it is in the west region of the district and is a Title I school, with 92 percent of students receiving free- or reduced-lunch. The English language acquisition programs offered are traditional bilingual education and English as a Second Language. 56 percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while 7 percent are in ESL. 56 percent of teachers are in the bilingual or ESL programs. The principal participated in the study.

### **Pleasant Pointe**

There are over 1,100 students enrolled at Pleasant Pointe Elementary, a Title I school located in the southeast region of HISD. Of these students, 96 percent receive free- or reduced-lunch, and 62 percent were identified as LEP in the 2004-2005 school year. 76 percent of the student body is Hispanic, while 21 percent are Asian. There are four non-English languages spoken by these students. The school offers developmental bilingual education and English as a Second Language. 47 percent of the student body participates in the bilingual program, and twelve percent is in ESL. 50 percent of the

teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. The school's Title III coordinator was interviewed.

### **Large LEP Population with Low Diversity**

#### **Boxer**

Over 700 students attend Boxer Elementary. The Title I school is in the east region of the district, and 97 percent of students receive free- or reduced-lunch. Two non-English languages are spoken by the student body, which is 97 percent Hispanic and less than one percent Asian. For the 2004-2005 school year, 62 percent of students were identified as LEP. The school offers three English language acquisition programs offered to help students learn English: traditional bilingual education, developmental bilingual education, and English as a Second Language. 56 percent of the school's students participate in one of the bilingual program, while one percent is in ESL. 51 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL programs. Unfortunately, in the end, no one was interviewed from this school.

#### **Connolly**

Connolly Elementary has over 800 students. It is located in HISD's southeast region. It is a Title I school, and 97 percent of the students are eligible for free- or reduced-lunch. 96 percent of the student body is Hispanic, and two percent is Asian. 65 percent of the students were classified as LEP in 2004-2005 school year. Two non-English languages are spoken by the school's LEP population. The English language

acquisition programs offered to help these students are developmental bilingual education and English as a Second Language. 59 percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while three percent are in ESL. 48 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. The assistant principal was interviewed.

### **Gauthier**

Over 600 students attend Gauthier Elementary school in HISD's north central region. It is a Title I school, and 98 percent of students are eligible for free- or reduced-lunch. 95 percent of the student body is Hispanic, and less than one percent is Asian. Three non-English languages are spoken by students. The English language acquisition programs offered to meet the needs of the 62 percent of the student body that is LEP are developmental bilingual education, two-way bilingual education, and English as a Second Language. 60 percent of students participate in one of the bilingual program, while one percent is in ESL. 50 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. The principal of Gauthier was interviewed.

### **Honey Creek**

Over 500 students are enrolled at Honey Creek Elementary, which is located in HISD's southwest region. 64 percent of the student body is Hispanic, and one percent is Asian. The students speak eight non-English languages. The English language acquisition programs offered at the school are developmental bilingual education and English as a Second Language. 57 percent of students were LEP in 2004-2005. 49 percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while eight percent are in ESL. 40 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. It is a Title I school, where 98 percent of

students receive free- or reduced-lunch. The instructional coordinator participated in this research.

### **Kaye**

Kaye Elementary has almost 1,000 students, 86 percent of whom are Hispanic and two percent of whom are Asian. Three non-English languages are spoken by the student body of this Title I school located in the school district's south region. 93 percent of students receive free- or reduced-lunch, and 62 percent were identified as LEP during the 2004-2005 school year. The school offers these students developmental bilingual education and English as a Second Language to help them increase their English language proficiency. 57 percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while one percent is in ESL. 58 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. One of the school's bilingual education teachers was interviewed for this study.

### **Small LEP Population with High Diversity.**

### **Clements**

Clements Elementary has just under 600 students enrolled. Of these, 24 percent are Hispanic and eighteen percent are Asian. To help the sixteen percent of the student body that is LEP acquire the English language, the school offers two-way bilingual education and English as a Second Language. Seven percent of students participate in the bilingual program, and eight percent are in ESL. 29 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. Fifteen non-English languages are spoken by the student

population. Located in HISD's central region, Clements is not a Title I school, but it has an extended day and literary development magnet program. The bilingual education teacher who is in charge of recruitment for the two-way bilingual education program was interviewed.

### **Easton**

Over 300 students attend Easton Elementary, located in the school district's east region. Of those students, five percent are Hispanic, and two percent are Asian. Three non-English languages are spoken by the student body. 3 percent of the student population was classified as LEP for the 2004-2005 school year. Because of the low enrollment of language minority students, the only English language acquisition program offered is English as a Second Language. Three percent of students participate in the program. HISD reports that none of the school's teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. Easton is a Title I school—84 percent of students are eligible for free- or reduced-lunch—and has a vanguard magnet program. The Title III coordinator, who is also the lead ESL teacher, participated in the study.

### **Grant**

Over 700 students attend Grant Elementary, which can be found in the west central region of the district. It does not qualify as a Title I school, and only 32 percent of the students get free- or reduced-lunch. The school has a vanguard magnet program. 27 percent of the student body is Hispanic, and nine percent is Asian. The school was seventeen percent LEP in 2004-2005, with 22 non-English languages spoken by the student body. The English language acquisition programs offered by the school to meet

these students' needs are two-way bilingual education and English as a Second Language. Eleven percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while five percent are in ESL. Additionally, 33 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. The assistant principal was interviewed for this study.

### **Henry**

Roughly 800 students attend Henry Elementary, which is located in HISD's southwest region. 21 percent of the student body is Hispanic, and one percent is Asian. For the 2004-2005 school year, thirteen percent of the student population was classified as LEP. The students speak ten non-English languages. The English language acquisition programs offered are traditional bilingual education and English as a Second Language. Eight percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while four percent are in ESL. Twenty percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. Henry is a Title I school, and 95 percent of students receive free- or reduced-lunch. One of the assistant principals, who is also the chairman of the LPAC committee, participated in this research.

### **Song**

Located in the west central region of HISD, Song Elementary has almost 600 students. It is not a Title I school, and only four percent of the students get free- or reduced-lunch. The school has an academy magnet program and offers English as a Second Language to help its students achieve English language proficiency. While only five percent of the school was identified as LEP during the 2004-2005 school year, twenty non-English languages are spoken by the student body. The school is seventeen

percent Hispanic and fourteen percent Asian. Five percent of students participate in the ESL program. Fifteen percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. Song's Title III coordinator was interviewed.

### **Small LEP Population with Low Diversity**

#### **Pine Wood**

Pine Wood Elementary has over 700 students. Located in the northwest region, this Title I school has a vanguard magnet program and offers traditional bilingual education and English as a Second Language to help their students acquire the English language. 40 percent of the students receive free- or reduced-lunch, and nine percent were identified as LEP in 2004-2005. Four percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while two percent are in ESL. An insignificant percent of teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. 39 percent of the student population is Hispanic, while one percent is Asian. Three non-English languages are spoken by the student body. The principal, assistant principal, and bilingual/ESL clerk were interviewed for this research.

### **Medium LEP Population with Medium Diversity**

#### **Boyd Academy**

Over 1,100 students are enrolled at Boyd Academy. It is part of an alternative administrative region within the school district and has a technology and Spanish magnet program. It is also a Title I school, with 66 percent of students receiving free- or

reduced-lunch. The English language acquisition programs offered for the fifteen percent of the student population that was LEP during the 2004-2005 school year were traditional bilingual education and English as a Second Language. Three percent of the school's students participate in the ESL program, but HISD does not provide information on the percentage of students in the bilingual education program. Twelve percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. 52 percent of the student body is Hispanic, and seven percent is Asian. Six non-English languages are spoken by students from The Boyd Academy. The Bilingual/ESL instructional supervisor for the Roy feeder pattern was interviewed about the school.

### **Greene**

Greene Elementary has over 500 students on its campus in the district's southwest region. It is a Title I school, and 69 percent are eligible for free- or reduced-lunch. The school has a math, science and technology magnet program. 29 percent of them were LEP in the 2004-2005 school year. The English language acquisition programs offered to these students are traditional bilingual education and English as a Second Language. Seventeen percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while ten percent are in ESL. 34 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. 41 percent of students are Hispanic, and seven percent are Asian. Ten non-English languages are spoken. A bilingual education teacher was interviewed.

### **Jetters**

Almost 600 students are enrolled at Jetters Elementary. The Title I school, where 97 percent of students are eligible for free- or reduced-lunch is located in the southwest

region of HISD. The school has a math, science and technology magnet program. 60 percent of the student body is Hispanic, and one percent is Asian. Thirteen non-English languages are spoken by the students. 52 percent of the student population was classified as LEP during the 2004-2005 school year. To help these students increase their English language proficiency, the school offers developmental bilingual education and English as a Second Language. 44 percent of students participate in the bilingual program, while six percent are in ESL. 35 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. Jeters' assistant principal was interviewed in this study.

### **Yale**

Over 600 students attend Yale Elementary, which is located in HISD's northwest region. 80 percent of the student body is Hispanic and 1 percent is Asian. The English language acquisition programs offered are traditional bilingual education and English as a Second Language. The school also has a math, science and technology magnet program. LEP students comprised 33 percent of the school population during the 2004-2005 school year, and 28 percent of students participate in the bilingual program, with another two percent taking part in ESL. 32 percent of the teachers are in the bilingual or ESL program. Students speak seven non-English languages. Yale is a Title I school, and 82 percent of students receive free- or reduced-lunch. A bilingual education teacher participated in the study.

## VITA

### Marcela A. K. Movit

#### Education

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**The Pennsylvania State University**, University Park, PA (August 2003 to May 2007)

Ph.D. in Educational Theory and Policy with a minor in Comparative and International Education

**University of Houston**, Houston, TX (June 2002 to May 2003)

M.Ed. in Bilingual Education

**Rice University**, Houston, TX (August 1999 to May 2002)

B.A. in Sociology and Spanish (with a specialization in translation)

#### Publications and Presentations

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Mitra, D., Frick, W. & Movit, M. (Under review). "Brain drain in the rust belt: Can communities reinvent themselves in the globalized economy?" *Education Policy*.

Movit, M., Sanders, F., & Mitra, D. (2007, April) "Expanding the Definition of Education Quality: Achieving Positive Youth Development through Student Voice Initiatives." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Movit, M. (2007, February) "Differences in access to linguistic resources for students from various backgrounds." Paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Bilingual Education, San Jose, California.

Movit, M. & Deil-Amen, R. (2006). "English Language Acquisition Models." In Soto, L. D. *The Praeger Handbook of Latino Education in the U.S.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Movit, M. & Deil-Amen, R. (2006). "English Only." In Soto, L. D. *The Praeger Handbook of Latino Education in the U.S.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Movit, M. (2006). "English Plus." In Soto, L. D. *The Praeger Handbook of Latino Education in the U.S.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Mitra, D., Frick, W. & Movit, M. (2005, April). "Brain drain in the rust belt: Can communities reinvent themselves in the globalized economy?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada.

#### Awards and Scholarships

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- Alumni Society Research Initiation Grant for \$600, Penn State, 2006
- Burdett E. Larson Graduate Fellowship, Penn State, 2006
- Conrad Frank, Jr., Graduate Fellowship in the College of Education, Penn State, 2005
- Bunton-Waller Graduate Assistantship, Penn State, 2003 to 2005
- Education Policy Studies Travel Grant Awards
- Research Assistantship, Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy (2005-2007)
- Research Assistantship in the Educational Theory and Policy Program, Penn State (2004-2007)
- Teaching Assistantship in the Educational Theory and Policy Program, Penn State (2003-2004)