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## No Habla Espanol: Are Monolingual Teachers Getting the Support They Need?

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No Habla Espanol: Are Monolingual Teachers Getting the Support They Need?

Cristina Benavides

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### **Abstract**

For this Capstone Project, the researchers investigated how monolingual teachers view the support and resources they received to teach English Language Learners (ELL) and what they thought could be done to improve their teaching effectiveness. An evidence based argument is offered that monolingual teachers were not being provided with effective support and resources. More specifically, three themes emerged from an analysis of the data obtained from interviews of monolingual teachers and administrators. Based on the emergent themes, an action was undertaken to help monolingual teachers better address the needs of ELLs. This is an important issue for monolingual teachers because the research provided options that the district could implement in order to increase their ability to successfully work with ELLs.

### No Habla Espanol: Are Monolingual Teachers Getting the Support They Need?

When I was younger, my father would tell me stories about him when he was an elementary school student. He always talked about elementary school in a negative way. When I got into college I started to piece together why he would have had such a difficult experience. So, I asked him to tell me the whole story of his difficult experiences. He said that his parents moved from Mexico to California when he was only seven years old. My father and my grandparents only spoke Spanish. They knew barely any English and were not able to speak it. My grandparents enrolled my father in public school. This was the third grade and my father had his first encounter with a language barrier as a seven year old. He walked into class and examined the room to find a seat. Naturally, he sat next to the student that looked and spoke like him. He did this because he felt comfortable sitting with someone who understood him, meaning another Mexican in the back of the class that spoke only Spanish like my father. The student he sat next to became my father's friend. They would spend their days talking to each other in Spanish, not knowing what their teacher was teaching. She had no teacher's aid, no translator and knew no Spanish herself. His third grade teacher was a young monolingual woman who taught her class in only English. She would tell the students to listen and pay attention to what she was saying. My father and his friend would not listen, but it was because they did not understand her. She was not mean to the students in any way, but she did not know what to do with English Language Learners in her class. As a result, she would ignore them. The language barrier went two ways, my father only knowing Spanish and his teacher only knowing English. The two did not know how to respond to each other because the two spoke different languages.

Today, my father would be labeled as an English Language Learner.. He had no idea what ELL meant when I asked him if he would consider himself in that category as a student. As a student he worked on his English and made sure he knew exactly how to write in English correctly. Now as an adult, other native English speakers ask my father to edit their papers because he is advanced at grammar and punctuation in English.

Growing up, my father pushed himself to get an education and succeed in school. He is now a Supervising Criminal Investigator and I am motivated by him to finish college. His story is one of the main reasons why I not only want to become an elementary teacher, but why I want

to work with English Language Learners. I was inspired by my father's story to create a capstone that would help and hopefully benefit monolingual teachers by providing them with support for English Language Learners. I know that for myself I struggle with the Spanish language even though I am Mexican. I can only imagine what it feels like to be a monolingual teacher with students that only speak Spanish and not be able to communicate with them and help them. Furthermore, I want my capstone to help identify programs that different districts have, areas of improvement, and resources for teachers. I do not want another student to feel how my father felt in his elementary class everyday, distant and not understood because of a language barrier.

### **Literature Review**

English Language Learners are attending school with only knowing their native language which is usually not English. They are having trouble keeping up with their English speaking classmates. Now a days teachers have the majority of their students speaking another language other than English in the classroom. These teachers need some guidance on what they can do to ease the transition for their English Language Learners.

Some key terms are:

ELL- English Language Learners: Students who are not able to communicate in English fluently.

ESL- English Second Language: Someone who studies the language but it is also not their first language.

#### **What is the issue?**

All students have to attend school and that goes for children of immigrant families as well. Immigrant children have to attend the same schools as English only speaking children. These ELL students had to attend schools that did not allow them to be taught in any language other than English. Proposition 227 from 1998 required ELL students to be taught in English

immersion classrooms. A new proposition, 58, was passed in 2016 which allows for languages other than English to be used in the classroom. Before this change in the education system, some other schools already had bilingual programs for their students to thrive in. These programs were only started if enough parents signed a waiver and asked if their child could be apart of it. A few hundred schools offer these programs according to EdSource (2017).

According to the Office of Bilingual Bicultural Education (1981), bilingual programs are programs designed for students to practice in their native language and transition into English. The theory behind bilingual programs is that students who do not speak English well will practice in their native language and continue learning the material in class. Alternative programs are submersion and submersion plus ESL. In a submersion program the student sits in the class with native English speakers and is taught normally. In a submersion program plus ESL, the student is placed in a classroom being taught English. The student is then pulled out and spends the rest of the day learning in their native language.

### **Why is it an issue?**

This topic is interesting because the number of immigrant families in the United States is vastly increasing yet the number of bilingual teachers is not. It is important that monolingual teachers either become bilingual and certified or be more inclusive of English Language Learners. It is important to be aware of the struggles and misconceptions monolingual teachers have with teaching ELLs.

The problem that monolingual (English) teachers face today is the lack of support and resources for teaching the growing number of English Language Learners. According to Gonzales (2016), the number of immigrants moving to the United States is rapidly increasing.

These immigrant families are coming from other countries with the majority falling into the category of English Language Learners.

Many people would say welcoming immigrant students into the educational system is a good thing, but teachers often fall victim to stereotypes whether or not they mean to. Teacher beliefs are also a contributing factor. Their beliefs impact their classroom and their pedagogy (Kelly, 2018). Developing that student-teacher relationship is the key to a successful year. Although, teacher prejudices can often lead to unsuccessful academic environments (Shim, 2017). However, teachers are not always the problem. It could also be the educators that teach the teachers.

The majority of individuals who educate teachers on teaching ELL students do not have any type of degree or certification. In a study done it was found that only 15 out of 50 educators did have some type of degree or certification in bilingual education (Roy-Campbell, 2013). Even if the teachers successfully teach pre-service teachers about ELLs, many schools lack the proper programs necessary for assisting ELLs.

### **What is being done?**

A researcher interviewed four teachers from Monterey County and concluded that only one teacher out of the four had some type of bilingual program at their school while the other three did not (Uribe, 2016). In addition, the program that was used proved to be ineffective and was terminated. The lack and ineffectiveness of programs to assist ELLs increases the disconnect between monolingual teachers and ELL students. The above issues are all contributing factors to the ongoing and rising problem of teachers not being able to successfully teach ELL students.

Over time the increasing number of ELL students in the United States will prove to be devastatingly large. The population of ELL students that are underserved has grown and will continue to grow. ELL students are bringing their language and diverse backgrounds into more schools. Students coming from diverse backgrounds can speak multiple languages and others can only speak English. Students who speak a language other than English can be shamed for not knowing how to pronounce the language correctly or if they speak with any type of inaccuracy. These students might fall into the Limited English Proficiency category which is difficult to transition out of. Not only are ELL students growing in schools but the recent rise in population has left much of the United States with an influx in these unique students (Squire, 2008). California had the highest rate of immigrant students in 2014 at 22.7% in schools (Gonzales, 2016). These students can find it difficult to succeed in school and later graduate.

Language	Percent
Spanish	81.56%
Vietnamese	2.21%
Mandarin (Putonghua)	1.87%
Arabic	1.53%
Filipino (Pilipino or Tagalog)	1.25%
Cantonese	1.21%
Korean	0.81%
Punjabi	0.77%
Russian	0.76%
Hmong	0.69%

Figure 1. Table showing California language census (California Department of Education, 2018).

According to the California Department of Education there are approximately one million ELLs in California as shown in Figure 1. Currently, bilingual educational programs work



towards helping ELL students transition from not knowing English to English proficiency. These programs are run by teachers but there is a shortage of qualified teachers who are able to test children in two different languages (Olivos & Sarmiento, 2006). Not only are there not enough qualified bilingual teacher to teach these programs but there is also a high turnover rate in underperforming schools. Usually, underperforming schools have a greater need to attract highly qualified teachers. The most important thing for students to have are their teachers and them not having a qualified teacher is an issue.

It would be beneficial to ELLs if schools provided them with a way to communicate in their own language. Supporting students and allowing them to learn in their native language helps children have a deeper understanding of the lesson in both languages. Once the student has full mastery of their native language they are able to learn about their new one, in this case English. Helping children in their native language allows for their literacy skills to develop and in turn develop into their second language. Children practicing their first language in the classroom allows students to feel appreciated. School can develop specific learning strategies and lessons for students in their native language. Having simple words in the classroom for students of a particular language to understand is a step in the right direction. A study was done with a kindergarten teacher who always uses Spanish in her lessons. She did this because she believes in supporting students learning in their native languages. A simple goal this teacher had was to have her ELLs understand her instructions (De Oliveria et al,2016). Although this kindergarten teacher used Spanish in her lessons, she still had some mistakes. This is an example of the type of work being done in classrooms.

Another example of supporting diversity in students is a teacher who is monolingual and still accepting of diversity in the classroom. This classroom is multiliterate and students are encouraged to share their language through literature. The idea is for teachers to foster a multiliteracy in their own classroom where students can learn in their first language. Teachers that are not bilingual can adopt this method of teaching in multiliteracy classrooms. Teachers would not have to be bilingual or certified to work with this method in their classroom (Schwarzer et al, 2014). This method would help teachers who for example are bilingual, but has a student that does not speak their language. By using literacy every student in the class benefits from that one student's language.

To help with the shortage of bilingual teachers some schools have children learn lessons in their native language and then change classrooms and have a teacher teach them lessons in English. This idea can help with the high demand in schools.

Proposition 58 allows classrooms to incorporate language into their curriculum. Some classrooms are succeeding in doing this and others fall short. The past bilingual programs pulled children out of the classroom and made them miss parts of the lesson during that time. Others had students speak only one language per activity. Some teachers have been incorporating small bits of language into their classroom and they see a difference in their students' education. There is still more to be worked on but these slow changes make learning a second language in the classroom all the more encouraging.

### **Method**

For this Capstone Project, the researchers investigated how monolingual teachers view the support and resources they receive to effectively teach ELL students and what they thought could be done to improve them. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research

literature, the researchers formulated an action that responded to the focus issue in a way that inspired, informed, or involved a particular audience.

### **Context**

Six schools were used as the community partners across four different school districts.

**Greys Elementary<sup>1</sup>.** Greys Elementary is located in Rose, California and is within the De La Rosa Unified School District. Greys Elementary is home to about 400 students with close to 50% being Hispanic/Latino. The students who identify as two or more races make up 16% of the student body and Caucasian students are 14% of the student body. Other ethnicities that can be found within Greys Elementary are African Americans (6%), Asians (5%), Filipinos (4%) and Pacific Islanders (2%). The main language spoken by the students classified as ELL was Spanish (14.9%). The English language Acquisition Status within Greys Elementary shows that in the 2017-2018 school year 21.1% were considered English Learner while 4.5% were considered Fluent English Proficient. Performance wise the English language arts/literacy results indicated that 39.58% of the students scored at Level 1, 26.04% were Level 2, 24.48% were Level 3 and 9.9% of the student body were considered Level 4.

**Stars Hollow Elementary.** Stars Hollow Elementary is a public TK-5 elementary school in Stars Hollow. It is one of four elementary schools in the district. Its goal is to teach students resilience, perseverance, kindness and good intentions, as well as the importance of academics. During the 2017-2018 school year there were 492 students enrolled at Stars Hollow Elementary. According to the Schools Accountability Report Card for Stars Hollow Elementary, the school consisted of a diverse group of students. The school was made up of students who were Hispanic or Latino (90.2%), White (4.5%), Asian (2.6%), Filipino (0.8%), Black or African-American (0.6%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (0.2%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.2%), Two or more races (0.2%), and there were 0.6% of people who choose not to share their ethnicity (Patronik, 2018). During the 2017-2018 school year, there were a variety of languages that were spoken by English language learners at Stars Hollow Elementary school. There were two students who spoke Arabic, three Filipino speaking students, one Hindi speaking student, one

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used in all people, places, and things to protect anonymity.

Mixteco speaking student, 224 Spanish speaking students, and four students who spoke a different language (Patronik, n.d.). According to Education Data Partnership, there were 238 English language learners at Stars Hollow Elementary school in 2017-2018 (Patronik, n.d.). There were also 65 students who were Fluent English proficient, meaning that they were English language learners but they passed their English acquisition test. Once they pass the test, the district labels the students as Fluent English Proficient.

**Sharks Elementary.** Sharks Elementary is one of the K-5 grade public elementary schools in the Waves school district. Waves school district can be found in Starfish County in the state of California. The unique location can be found inland of Monterey County and Silicon Valley. This small community is rapidly growing, making room for potential growth in school institutions (About Us., n.d.). According to Sharks Elementary school profile, the school serves 631 students. With so many students, a diverse group is formed. Based on the information given by California's Department of Education Sharks Elementary's student body is made up of Hispanic/Latino (62.6%), White (30.9%), Asian (1.4%), African Americans (1.1%), Pacific Islander (0.5%), Filipino (0.3%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (0.2%). Two or more races (1.3%), and there was about 1.7% that did not report their ethnicities (Education Data Partnership, n.d.). In connection to the diverse population a variety of languages come about. 95.7% of the population speaks Spanish, 2.15% Punjabi, 1.08% Urdu, and 1.08% Filipino (Education Data Partnership, n.d.). With this information, we also find that 93 out of the 631 students are considered to be English Language Learners, each scoring at different levels of proficiency. According to ELPAC test results, 21.43% of the students scored at Level 1. For Level 2 none were reported. Level 3 there was 28.57% of the students at this level. Level 4 had the highest percentage as overall scores which was 38.1%.

**Sydney Elementary.** Sydney Elementary is located in Tormund, California which is located in the Tormund City School District. The district is located inland from the Monterey Peninsula being about 20-30 minutes from the coast. The school district in which the school resides has almost 9,000 students (ED Data, 2017-18). The majority of the student population is Latino at 90%. The next highest category are white students at 5.46%. The next is Asian and

Filipino at 1.93%. The next is Pacific Islander at 0.13%. The next lowest is American Indian at 1%. And the lowest percentage is African American at 0.73% (Tormund City School District, 2015). At Sydney Elementary, there are a total of 933 students. The student body is 98.8% Latino. The next highest category is white students at 0.4%, American Indian at 0.4%, and then Asian at 0.2 percent. Additionally, about 80.3% of school are English Language Learners and 97% of the student population is socioeconomically disadvantaged (CA Dept. of Education, 2017-18). Additionally, 54% of the student population are English Learners with 34% being English-only. Also, 80% of the population are socioeconomically disadvantaged (Tormund City School District, 2015).

**Cougar Elementary.** Cougar Elementary School is located within the small agricultural region known as Cougar County. In particular, Cougar Elementary resides within Cougarville, California and is a part of the Cougar School District. Cougarville provides the comfort of a small town with its surrounding hillsides and open meadows, however, short drives both North and West allow convenient escapes to much more hustle and bustle with the city views of San Jose, California and the beautiful beaches in Monterey, California. According to the California Department of Education (2019), Cougar Elementary School serves nearly 500 students ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade with 96.3% Hispanic students, 1.6% White students, 0.4% African American students, 0.2% Asian students, 0.2% Pacific Islander students, and 0.8% of students identified as two or more races. Cougars is also considered a Title I school with 53.5% of students being English Language Learners and 72.2% receiving free or reduced lunch (California Department of Education, 2019).

**Sea Breeze Elementary.** Is located in Ocean, California in the Sea Breeze School District. The school is home to 413 students this year ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade. Sea Breeze Elementary is not a Charter school, but a public school. Sea Breeze elementary does however fall under the Title I bracket. Of the 413 students, 91.0% receive free and reduced meals. The number of English Language Learners are 64.9% of the student body (California Department of Education, 2019). Students typically speak Spanish at Sea Breeze, but there are a few that speak Arabic as well. There was one child that spoke Tongan (EdData, 2018). The

student body was made up of 85.0% Hispanic or Latino students, 6.5% White students, 3.6% had two or more race students, 1.7% African American students, 1.5% Pacific Islander students 1.0% Filipino students, 0.7% Asian students.

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

We interviewed six teachers from the Sea Breeze, De La Rosa, Stars Hollow , Tormund City, and Cougar School Districts. This group of prospective participants provided insight into different methods provided throughout the districts, as well as other resources that teachers have found on their own that they deemed relevant and/ or important to help ELLs succeed with language acquisition. This group provided knowledge on both a district and classroom level, that gave us a broader idea of the issue at hand.

**Researchers.** The research group consisted of six different individuals in order to have a broader understanding of the resources that are being provided to monolingual teachers throughout the tri-county area.

**Rosa.** I believe that I am not the only one that can solve providing monolingual teachers with resources to help English Language, but I feel that I would be able to use my personal experiences coming from a predominantly Latinx community and being an English language learner. I remember having teachers that could not help us because they did not know the language or they themselves can not understand what I am asking or struggling with. I think that myself, as an upcoming teacher, would be able to use my previous experiences to help other current teachers and new upcoming teachers to have the appropriate tools to help English language learners. With the majority of the population changing dramatically, all teachers will encounter an ELL at some point in their careers. My experiences within the educational system has provided me with real connections that I experienced first hand being an ELL. The first couple of years in school I was in the ESL program. I feel that as a future educator it is important that I draw from these real connections that will allow me to be a more knowledgeable educator. Not only from an experience standpoint but resource wise, acknowledge that

their students come from different ethnicities and have different language repertoires within my future classroom will allow me to make better connections with my students that will also help them succeed throughout their academic experiences and overall future lives. That is why I think that it is important to learn about the resources that are already being used in classrooms to help ELL students. I am different from the targets because I am not an educator yet. In addition, I am also different because I am not a primarily English speaking teacher. Growing up my parents always made sure to imprint in us that we should not judge someone based on their race, ethnicity, social class, education. I have also worked with children for over 4 years in different communities such as those considered “middle/upper class,” as well as working with students who are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. This allows for me to have a diverse community understanding having worked with different communities.

*Alisha.* I personally find this topic meaningful because when I enter the educational field I will be going in as a monolingual teacher. I feel as though being monolingual will challenge me in many ways especially depending on the area I begin my career in and whether that community has a substantial number of ELL students. For this reason, I would like to be knowledgeable, beforehand, about the resources that are available and also ways I can help support other educators who may be monolingual as well. By teaming up with Bendy Well at Cougar Elementary School, I hope to learn about the resources and support she has found helpful to her as a monolingual teacher who works with English Language Learning students. If at the end of this research there are few resources available, I hope our group can be knowledgeable enough to help establish new ways to aide monolingual educators in their classrooms with ELL students. In the past, the only personal experiences I have with this topic is when I worked in an after school program and was given a new student who only spoke spanish. It was very difficult to build a connection with such a large language barrier, however, we used a lot of body language, as well as received help with translations from other students in order to communicate. I feel as though this experience closely aligns with the research question and, therefore, will give me motivation to find the resources and ways I could have gone

about the situation so the student had the best outcome. Currently, I am different from the “targets” because I grew up as a monolingual student who did not have to overcome language barriers within my educational process. I am different from the “influentials” because I am going to also be a monolingual educator and will have to overcome the language barriers with future ELL students.

*Selena.* This project connects to me on a very personal level due to the fact that I will become a monolingual teacher within the next couple of years and will have students in my classroom that do not speak English. Current monolingual teachers face many challenges when it comes to teaching students who are ELLs and these challenges are ones that I will soon face myself. As a future educator I would like to feel secure, supported, and prepared before entering my classroom. The students I will have, I will be responsible for their understanding of several concepts throughout the school year. There have been several times in my life where I have seen or been put into situations where I am the monolingual individual having to communicate to an ELL. You see, in my community I am more than just a resident, I am a coach and an active volunteer within the school district. There have been times where I have experienced difficulty communicating with ELLs in the community and with no support other than relying on technology to help translate my words. The lack of resources and support given to me now as a noneducator can reflect to the current monolingual teachers. Being an active volunteer in the schools has allowed me to witness a few monolingual teachers deal with an ELL; the teachers become irritated with the student but more so with the lack of resources/support they had to deal with while trying to teach that particular student. Outside of my community and in another, as a YMCA after school leader, I have also had difficulty helping my ELL students understand their homework or enrichment concepts I was trying to teach. These situations were difficult, uncomfortable, and also left me feeling unaccomplished. Aside from the “targets” and “influentials” existing with this issue, I am different because I am a monolingual Latina who hopes to become a 4th grade elementary school teacher. Being an English only speaking Latina itself has its own challenges with how society sees me. I have worked with youth groups/ youth sports in



my community and others for about 10 years. The experiences I have had working with people who struggle to support ELLs at all ages allows me to have an open perspective; being a monolingual Latina makes me eager to see how to develop skills and gain resources that will help support others.

*Megan.* This topic is personally meaningful because I am a monolingual future teacher and I have always wanted to be able to speak different languages so that I do not have a barrier with my students. I want my students to be in a safe environment where they can express themselves. So, finding out what resources or support is out there can give me an idea what may be lacking or what I change in the classroom. My experiences back up the topic because I have grown up in an area with ELLs who speak Spanish and I have wanted to speak Spanish in order to communicate and relate to them. Knowing the language would break down another barrier. I want my students to be able to come to class and have no barriers when I teach, I try to be open-minded so that I can help ELL students in my class. While some teachers try to cut out a student's home language, I believe in additive bilingualism. I want to try to encourage students to use their home language in their writing and reading. Throughout my college career I have become more aware of what my biases are because I have self-reflected and saw what I need to change. Social media has also helped me reflect on how to change my biases. I have also been a person who is open-minded and tries to understand people's points, I think I can welcome students' differences, especially students who are ELLs because I understand that English is a hard language to grasp.

*Natalie.* I found this topic meaningful because I grew up in a predominantly Latino community where the majority of my classmates, along with myself, were English language learners. At my elementary school I remember that there were some teachers who did not speak Spanish and struggled with communicating and understanding their students. This caused some stress for the students when they were trying to learn, because their teachers were not able to understand them and help guide them. When students felt supported, they did better in school and had motivation to continue studying. Being an ELL student myself, I felt the support from my teachers which encouraged me to keep

studying. That is why I want to know what resources are available for monolingual teachers to help their ELL students. I hope to gain insight as to what resources my interviewee's school provides her with in order to support her when teaching her ELL students. What makes me different from the "target" is that I am a bilingual individual and have a bit of insight of what ELL students need because I was one. What makes me different from "influential" is that I am able to separate/accept someone's beliefs and not use them against them. I am able to set those beliefs aside from who they are in order to just view them as an individual. I think that this ability will help me teach students no matter what background they come from to be successful.

*Cristina.* This topic is personally meaningful to me because I am currently attending college to become an elementary teacher. I want to be as prepared as I can be when I enter a classroom with a variety of students. I feel like this topic will allow me to see what materials and techniques are offered to teachers now in an elementary setting. I have done service learning for the elementary school that I am going to be interviewing my teacher at and have seen first hand that ELL students have a difficult time communicating in the classroom. I feel it is important to include ELL students in the classroom. For me, being a future bilingual elementary teacher, I feel like I have an added quality because I will be able to understand ELL students if they are struggling in an area in the classroom. My group and I are qualified to take on this topic because we are all future teachers and we are all trying to bridge the gap between ELL students and teachers. I feel that I am different from "targets" because my physical appearance does not match my racial background, for that reason I do not feel like I am a target. I feel that I am different from the "influentials" because as a future teacher I have been taught to look past race, social class, education, sexual orientation and gender identity. When I have my classroom full of students I need to be able to teach them and not judge them on their appearance. I need to be able to help them succeed in school. As a result of my appearance not resembling that of most Mexicans, it has often been assumed that I do not speak Spanish or know any of the Spanish traditions. I now have a better understanding of not judging people by the way they speak, look, or act. This Capstone will allow me to

better connect with English Language Learnings in my future classroom.

### **Informants.**

**Rosa.** Meredith Shepard is a second grade teacher at Greys Elementary School in Rosa, California. During her 9 years of teaching, she has had to implement many resources and skills to help the ELLs she has had.

**Natalie.** Angela Merici is a third grade teacher at Stars Hollow Elementary school. She has been teaching for 17 years. She is also bilingual which makes working with ELL students easier.

**Selena.** Cody Dawson has been a teacher at Sharks Elementary for 12 years. He is a Caucasian man who has picked up some Spanish from his years of teaching, but not enough to where he would consider himself bilingual.

**Megan.** Heather Hopkins is a first grade teacher at Sydney Elementary. She has been teaching for 24 years. She has worked at the school she is currently at for two years. She is a Caucasian woman. Though she only speaks broken Spanish, she can understand Spanish pretty well.

**Alisha.** Bendy Well is a third grade teacher at Cougar Elementary School in Cougarville, California. During her 13 years of teaching she has had to overcome working with ELLs as a Caucasian monolingual educator.

**Cristina.** Emma Smith is a kindergarten teacher at Sea Breeze Elementary School in Ocean, California. She has been teaching for 25 years as a monolingual Caucasian teacher.

### **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

1. What kind of support and/or training is given to monolingual teachers who need to interact/teach ELLs?
2. What do you see as the problem with the support or training that is provided to monolingual teachers who need to interact/teach ELLs; or What are you concerned about when it comes to the support/training given to monolingual teachers who teach ELL student(s)?

3. What is currently being done to improve the interactions between monolingual teachers and ELLs - by whom - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?
4. What do you think can be done to provide better support for ELLs and their monolingual teachers?
5. What obstacles prevent providing more support or training to monolingual teachers teaching ELL students?
6. Besides what is already provided by your school (if there is anything), are there outside resources that you have found to be useful? Is there a personal preference or order you follow in the situation of helping monolingual teachers teaching ELL students?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to say about supporting/training monolingual teachers who have ELL students and/or the improvements that could be made to support their efforts?

### **Procedure**

Participants were interviewed. All interviews were done individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a phone interview or paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews took less than one hour, were audio-recorded (with participant consent), and took place in Ocean School District, Tormund City School District, Stars Hollow School District, and De La Rosa School District. A semi-structured interview was used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. All interviews/surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

### **Results**

For this Capstone Project, six monolingual teachers were interviewed to see what they thought could be done to improve the educational experience for English Language Learners. This is important because teachers who do not speak another language can have a hard time

communicating effectively with their students. In addition, students with language barriers, who are categorized as ELLs, are less likely to achieve academic success or have the ability to master the English language. Due to the inability of the English language learner to fully master the language, all other subject areas are affected. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time, cost, and effectiveness. Based on the evaluation of each action option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1 *Evaluation of Action Options*

	Time	Cost	Effectiveness
Professional Development Day(s)	Moderate	High	Moderate
Language Classes for Teachers (the predominant language of ELLs)	Low/Moderate	High	Moderate/High
Instructional Aide Specifically for ELLs	Low	High	High

The table above represents the three options that emerged after interviewing six monolingual teachers. After thorough consideration and extensive research on the resources that monolingual teachers would need to support English Language Learners, we found that teachers would benefit from EL focused professional development days, language classes for teachers based on the predominant language within their districts/schools, and having a bilingual instructional aide per grade level who is there to primarily focus on ELLs.

All three options will be evaluated based on time, cost, and effectiveness. The amount of time taken for each of the options will be at the discretion of each district's academic calendar. Additionally, the cost of all options will need to be based on the specific school's budget. Lastly, effectiveness will be based on the participation that is given from all teachers and can help determine which action will be the most successful.

### **Professional Development Days**

After extensive review of our interviewees' responses, we noticed that English Learner professional development days for teachers would be an appropriate option for schools to consider when looking for new ways to support both English Language Learners and monolingual teachers. Our interviewees Heather Hopkins and Angela Merici (personal communication, November 2019) both shared how they wanted to learn different strategies to teach their ELLs. According to Molle (2013), "In the past decade, U.S. schools have become increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse and there is no indication that this trend will change in the near future" (p. 206). Therefore, providing professional development days in order to prepare teachers to work with students of all linguistic abilities is beneficial for the teachers and English learning students. When evaluating this option it is important for school personnel to take into consideration the time that will be required for this, the cost of the personal development, and the effectiveness of the development day.

When evaluating the action option based on time we found that it was a moderate aspect on Table 1. That is due in part to busy school days and not having enough time to have more training. Teachers get a lot of training in a short amount of time (E. Smith, personal communication, November 2019). There is simply not enough time in the school day or academic year to provide multiple professional development days focused on helping teachers learn how to teach their English Language Learners effectively.

Cost was the next criteria examined when evaluating our options. Most teachers will do whatever they can to improve their student outcomes, but the perennial shortage of money for programs, and the time to properly implement them are always going to be an impediment to success (C. Dawson, personal communication, November 2019). Districts are given a budget and

often times there is not enough money to do multiple professional development days because they are very costly, and therefore, do not happen often.

After looking at the time and cost of professional development days, we also looked into the effectiveness of the professional development days. Although very costly and moderately time consuming professional development seems to be moderately effective, as many of the interviewees stated, teachers were open to attending professional development days to learn more. According to Karabenick and Clemens Noda (2004), the need for teachers to acquire more knowledge related to the use of the home language and its effect on school achievement in academic content areas is very important and with a professional development day this could be accomplished. Hiring well-qualified teachers with a diverse background who have a skill set that can provide essential strategies to help our ELLs succeed in the classroom and beyond would be ideal. However, that may not always be an option, therefore, providing professional development days for teachers can be a great alternative for schools to consider.

### **Language Classes for Teachers (predominant language of ELLs)**

In order to have strong relationships between monolingual teachers and English Language Learners, there should be some common ground between the two parties. One way to establish a good relationship is by sharing a common language with one another. Emma Smith, who has been a teacher for 25 years, highlighted that, “Having basic communication skills in the ELLs home language can be very helpful” (personal communication, November 2019). With that being said, one option that can be taken into consideration for monolingual teachers is the use of language classes, in the predominant language of their students, for teachers who work with English Language Learners.

One aspect of this option that should be taken into consideration is the amount of time that the option may take in order for all teachers to access and complete the language classes. Heather Hopkins (personal communication, November 2019), who has been teaching for 24 years, mentioned how she was required by her school district to take High Intensity Language Trainings, also known as HILT, before being able to work in a classroom. Through this program, individuals are given the opportunity to take a weeklong immersion day camp throughout the summer. This program would be a reasonable option and ranked as low to moderate, in terms of

time, since it is 30 hours over the course of five days (San Joaquin County Office of Education, 2017). Since the program is also taken over the summer, the number of teachers that are able to attend a program like HILT is raised significantly seeing that most teachers have summers off. As a result, this option can be completed by many teachers in a reasonable amount of time. As noted above, the program is only a week long and, therefore, is not strenuous on a teacher's schedule outside of the classroom environment. However, this option can also be considered moderate because not everyone will be able to absorb the information as quickly as others and may have to repeat, or take additional, programs in order to fully master the language.

Another criteria that language classes can be evaluated by is the cost of the class or program the teachers would be taking. Emma Smith (personal communication, November 2019) noted that teachers should be allowed to have the language classes paid for since it is specific training for teachers in order to work with diverse student populations. With the approval by the district, this option could be considered high since there would need to be significant amounts of funding provided for all monolingual teachers to complete the classes or programs. Similarly, if the district is not willing to pay for these programs and classes for their teachers, it would still be a large financial responsibility for the teachers to complete on their own. Regardless of the type of class that is provided for teachers, such as Rosetta Stone or online classes, the cost can be a great deal for districts and teachers alike.

The last criteria that language classes can be evaluated by is the effectiveness that would be seen through the program or classes teachers complete. All six monolingual teachers that were interviewed shared that they would like to see some kind of language class be provided to them in order to be able to confidently work with English Language Learners. Meredith Shepherd, a teacher of nine years, stated, "Honestly, I feel like the best thing for me to do would be to enroll in Spanish courses through a university" (personal communication, November 2019). This option can be considered moderate to highly effective because the classes would be directly related to learning the foreign language. However, the effectiveness does depend on the individual teacher's willingness to put in the effort to learn the language. If a teacher is pushing for language classes to be provided, then s/he is hopefully willing to put in the effort that comes with learning a new language. These teachers know that bilingualism will help them form a



deeper relationship with the English Language Learners they work with by being able to help the students' academic successes.

### **Instructional Aide Specifically for ELLs**

The interviewees expressed a need for instructional aides specifically for ELLs. Some schools have an instructional aide, but the instructional aide may not work a lot with them because they have to help other children in different classrooms. Therefore, teachers have to try to help ELLs as best as they can even though some students may sometimes need more one-on-one help. The teacher Megan interviewed had a large number of ELLs in her class. But the school only provides one aide to work with the students for 20 minutes every day. The aide comes and helps the lower performing students with their math skills in the morning (J. Gabber, personal communication, November 2019). As the research was conducted there was sufficient evidence found that there was a need for an English as a Second Language (ESL) aide within the classroom (J. Gabber, personal communication, November 2019). Having an ESL aide to provide additional assistance for the cognitive development of the English learner would contribute greatly to their language acquisition. Not only would the student be getting additional resources to work on language acquisition it would also provide the teacher with a different approach on how to better facilitate learning for the student. In addition, according to Ferlazzo (2017), "Depending on the race of the ESL aide, they may be able to provide relevance in the materials such as local content or issues, as a result contributing to the use of the child's native language to further their cognitive development" (p. 1) While having an ESL designated aide per grade level would benefit English Language Learners, the cost would be one to consider.

After analyzing the evaluation of the action options, the time aspect of the table indicates that having aides within the classroom would be low on the spectrum. In fact, having ESL/ELL aides in the classroom would not take away any time from the teacher, but instead would help the teacher with the children who are not performing well in English Language Arts. If the aides can help with that then the teacher does not have to worry about the student.

The next aspect that we need to examine is how much money it would cost to hire an instructional aide or multiple aides within the school. The salary of an aide is different within some school districts. The cost would be high because they have to pay them salary plus benefits.

We recommend multiple aides per school in order to help the students as much as they can. According to GlassDoor (2017), the average cost of an ESL instructional aide is \$31,000 per year. On top of that many districts give aides benefits, like medical and dental, so the cost would be high for the school.

Effectiveness would be the final aspect that would need to be considered when pushing to have an instructional aide within the classroom. Based on the interviewees' responses, as shown in Table 1, they would be considerably higher on the action option based on our criteria. As mentioned by Heather Hopkins, "The only obstacle there is not having enough people to help in the classroom. Having an extra set of hands would help a lot in the classroom with ELLs" (personal communication, November 2019). Therefore, bringing up the need to have an instructional aide that could focus on supporting the learning of those working on language acquisition is highly needed. Furthermore, having instructional aides to focus on the English learner would make the effectiveness of the action option high.

### **Conclusion**

This section will justify the action we recommend to improve the resources monolingual teachers receive in order to work with English Language Learners. We will also discuss some of the concessions, limitations, and possible negative outcomes of our recommendation.

**Recommendation.** Of all the three action options that became apparent from interviewing the monolingual teachers, we strongly recommend that school districts increase the number of professional development days in order to provide additional resources and strategies to monolingual teachers who work with English Language Learners. We are confident that this will work because it is something that the majority of the teachers stated would help them be more successful in their classrooms.

**Concessions.** The two other options, language classes and having an instructional aide, are also good options because they both help the teacher in the classroom with ELLs. The language classes specifically help the teachers' knowledge of the language so they can better communicate with the students. However, if the school does not offer those language classes aides can be helpful in the classroom. Having multiple aides can benefit the teacher in terms of time management because an aide can help students who are falling behind in certain content

areas then give them the support they need. In addition, teachers can use more of their time helping the other students or many other things they have to do around the classroom. Therefore, providing aides or opportunities to take language classes supports ELLs in the classroom.

**Limitations.** The professional development option also comes with a few limitations. One of the biggest limitations with this option is having access to the funds that would support this. When organizing a professional development day it is important for administration to consider the cost of paying all teachers and staff members involved with the event, as well as the supplies, location, and the trainer/guest speaker that will be in attendance. Another limitation would be finding resources specifically aimed towards teaching monolingual teachers how to teach the different levels of ELLs. The topic at hand deals specifically with monolingual teachers and this could limit what type of professional development workshops can be implemented. Along with budgeting and establishing appropriate workshops for these developmental days, finding the time in the school year can be a constraint. Within the 365 days of the year, 180 of those days are spent in a typical public school. During those 180 days, one school year, teachers are not only teaching but have to participate in other school activities, achieve state standards/exams, complete parent teacher conferences, make lesson plans, attend meetings, and so much more. In order to gain insight and knowledge from a professional development day teachers may have to step away from their normal teacher duties and add on a workshop. Although this option comes with limitations, professional development days could highly impact both teachers and students, as well as the academic outcomes for the entire school.

**Potential negative outcomes.** Professional development days may cause teachers to spend less time with their students and or their own family. Due in part to professional development days being planned before school is back in session but, in some cases there are some professional development days conducted during the school year. If teachers begin to miss class time to attend the professional development days, their students will begin to feel a disconnect from their teachers and can eventually lead to behavior issues. Teachers and staff may also be overworked which leaves teachers drained and without energy to teach. In addition, the financial aspect of how these programs will be funded should be something to consider.

Although schools are state funded, in recent years there have been budget cuts that have impacted the access to resources that administration can provide to their staff.

**Conclusion.** Despite the limitations stated, we strongly recommend that school districts implement or increase the number of professional development days which would provide different strategies, prepwork, language training, and professional development workshops in order for monolingual teachers to support their ELLs. Hiring qualified teachers to teach ELLs is ideal, but can sometimes be unattainable. Providing monolingual teachers with professional development days would allow them to have the basic skills they need to teach ELLs. Another option would be requiring teachers to take language classes to allow them to have a common understanding of the language. This can also allow for teachers to connect with their students on a deeper conceptual level. However, the time it would take for teachers to master the language and the cost of putting the teachers through the language classes led us away from this option. In addition, having an instructional aide in the classroom can be beneficial for the students that need extra support, but requires substantial financial resources. This is an unrealistic option as most school districts would not have the funding to allocate instructional aides to classrooms. Overall, teachers receiving training on how to teach ELLs is the best option because it allows the teachers to learn new skills and support their students in their own classrooms. This option allows for multiple teachers to gain the needed skills at once, cutting back on time while still maintaining effectiveness.

### **Action Documentation and Critical Reflection**

English language learners are the fastest-growing population within the state of California (Hopkinson, 2017). Due to this growth, teachers are tasked with helping them learn English as their second language. This may be overwhelming, especially for monolingual teachers, because they may not know the best way to support their students. After assessing our options, we decided to create an Instagram page in order to help monolingual teachers with ELLs. We chose to name the Instagram page *StrategicallyTeachingELLs*. We decided to use Instagram as our platform in providing resources for monolingual teachers because a lot of people, including teachers, use this as a tool in navigating their classrooms. In addition,

Instagram has a large teacher community that commonly shares ideas with one another. In researching ideas we came across a book that specifically gives teachers different scaffolds to help ELLs. According to *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning* book by Pauline Gibbons, it gives different strategies for teaching English Language Learners in mainstream classrooms. Some strategies from the Gibbons book include using a student's native language to introduce a topic or key concept Another strategy is using pictures, diagrams, and graphic outlines in order to illustrate complex ideas. Another strategy that can be utilized is simply slowing down the conversation for ELLs. Allowing a little more time for the learner to respond can help them think out the question or problem. (2015,pg. 25, 40-41). In addition, we looked at various tools that teachers had access to in a multitude of subject areas but found that professional development opportunities are available statewide.

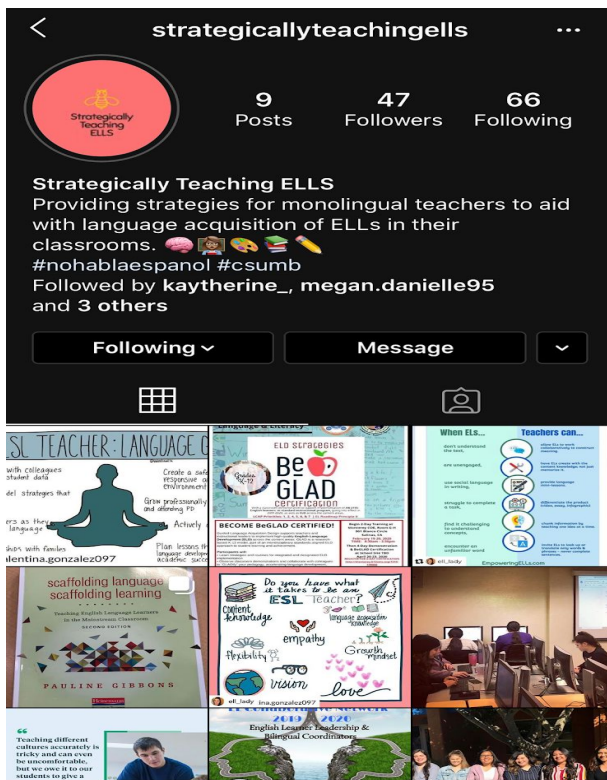


Figure 2. A screenshot of our Instagram page that we created to better inform teachers on how to support ELLs.

In order to accomplish creating a social media platform, there were several components we had to consider. The most important consideration was identifying a name that represented what our goal was; to provide strategies for monolingual teachers, as well as bringing awareness to ongoing professional development days. After several deliberations, we decided to continue with the name *StrategicallyTeachingELLs* because we felt that it represented the purpose of the page the best. One alteration that we decided to make was a name change. We found that there was no substantial interest in our page due to it being named *BridgingGaps*, since no one knew what our goal was. Changing the name to *StrategicallyTeachingELLs* helped by getting other pages similar to ours, or with the same goals, to follow us. In our first post we found that our reach was not significant with just a caption. As a result, decided to incorporate hashtags such as #nohablaespanol, #teachingells, and #monolingualteachers. As we reflected on how to have the biggest impact on our communities we decided to primarily focus on the community closest to us, which was Monterey County. By doing so, we were able to determine professional development days focused on English language learners within the tri-county area.

Our Instagram page, @strategicallyteachingells, is still in its beginning stages and has not made a huge impact on the public to measure the outcomes just yet. We posted an introduction about ourselves, another post that gave information about an EL Collaborative Network event, and a supporting quote. On our first post we had two different comments, which was great. One was from another user who is a science teacher and looks forward to seeing what else we have to share. What was a great surprise for us was to see how supporting our friends, fellow peers, and other teacher/education instagram users were so quick to follow us and show their support. It is with high hopes that our numbers in followers grow, with growth comes more outreach opportunities will arise this social media platform.

### **Synthesis and Integration**

For me I feel like this I had no idea how difficult it was for a monolingual teacher to connect with their students. I was interested in this topic because I wanted to see what is already being done to help bridge the gap between teacher and student and what else could be done. After completing this course work I feel as though I am quite the expert in innovative ways that

not just monolingual teachers but any teacher can implement in their classroom. This new method of using the student's home language in their learning was an amazing idea to me.

The next steps I need to take would be to continue on my path to becoming a teacher but also keep an open mind about different languages. I now know how important language is and how every student learns differently. As a teacher I would need to constantly be coming up with new ideas to include and influence my students. I feel like this project has enlightened me and inspired me to always push for English Language Learner inclusivity.

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