

## **Final Paper - Interview**

### **I. Demographics**

I interviewed the ELL coordinator, Heidi, from District Happy located in Proud, IL. The town of Proud has two elementary schools, a middle school, and a junior high school however it is a small district. The district Happy has a total of 42 languages spoken. Statistics in the district show that there are 242 Russians, 205 Koreans, 87 Spanish, 55 Japanese, 41 Cantonese students. There are an additional 248 students that speak other languages that are a minority in the district. Those other languages are: Greek, Indonesian, Telugu, Romanian, Serbian, Gujarati, Farsi, Portuguese, Bulgarian, French, Mandarin, Polish, Italian, Kannada, Albanian, Bosnian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Urdu, Punjabi, Arabic, Tamil, Croatian, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Hebrew, Marathi, Pilipino, German, Assyrian, Konkani, Menominee, Turkish, Latvian, Ukrainian, and Mongolian

### **II. Background knowledge on person**

Heidi became interested in ELL during her practicum in her mother's district of Hollow, IL. Hollow had a Hispanic population of 88%. After she completed her practicum, she took over for a teacher that went on maternity leave. With the district having such a significant portion of Hispanic speaking students, Heidi immediately adapted her lessons to meet the students' needs. She enjoyed working with students that had ELL needs and decided to go back to school. Heidi attended Illinois State University for an eighteen-month program to get her ELL endorsement. Heidi's decision to go back to school was reinforced when she overheard a parent of one of her students in a meeting compliment her on how terrific the son was doing.

After this position, Heidi got hired in the district in which she is currently working. When she started the job in the district of ELL, Heidi did not fully understand that she would have to implement her own curriculum, as no current curriculum had been

constructed. A principal from another elementary school in the district decided to form a leadership committee to create an ELL model within the district. Since then they have put together a binder that includes all the important ELL information. Heidi was involved in creating the binder and to this day has responsibilities updating the binder due to her new job title. She makes sure that the binder is up to date with all the ELL regulations. Inside the binder, it contains a flow chart of the TPI and TBE programs for how a child can enter each program. The binder also includes the expectations and standards for both implementing the programs and requirements for exiting students.

### **III. The role of the person**

Heidi has been the ELL coordinator for the district during the past two years. This means that she is involved in doing research to see what types of grants the district can apply for. She then has to write the grants. She is in charge of all ELL teachers which involves making sure that the teachers are implementing the curriculum correctly. Heidi has also been occupied with finding funds to get appropriate technology in the classroom for her ELL teachers. All teachers now have interactive white boards due to Heidi having extra money from one of the grants she was awarded. Since Heidi was an ELL teacher before becoming the coordinator she thought interactive white boards would benefit ELL students. She feels blessed because she has the background on how to best serve students who have different native languages other than English.

### **III. Summary of the interview**

Heidi went into great detail with me about her vision of the ELL program. She explained her vision of what an instructor should look like, how the district should fund the program, how the district should support multiculturalism, how the district should educate and support families, and her view of professional development. Here is a summary of the information Heidi shared.

According to Heidi, one of the most important factors of ELL in this district is

that there is a system in place recognizing when a child should be an ELL student. This greatly helps in getting the student the necessary help throughout their education. If a child has an orange folder or an orange piece of paper in their curriculum folder then the district knows that they are of another native language than English. The information inside the folder lets the district know what services the child is receiving and includes all the test scores. The orange piece of paper informs the district that the child does not qualify or receive services. When a family walks into the district for the first time, the process to identify their child starts immediately.

Even though there are successful programs within the district, the ELL program does have some challenges. The district follows a model called block model. Block scheduling is when an entire grade level is taught a single course at the same time. For instance all students in the same grade level will be taught language arts at 9am and math at 2:15pm. There is however some flexibility for when a teacher can teach social studies and science but that is the only time that children are allowed to be pulled out of the room for other services such as speech, ELL, social work or occupational therapy. This becomes a problem for the ELL teachers to be successful with managing time for when they can pull out students. The ELL teachers have to make sure that a child can also have other services if that child needs them. Unfortunately, there are limited times available for teachers to work with their students. That is the biggest disadvantage of the program.

When a child is ready to exit the program there are precise qualifiers based on the districts criteria which is above what the state criteria is for exiting a child. In order for a child to be considered to exit the program, they must have an overall proficient score of 4.8 and a literacy proficient score of 4.6 based on the WIDA assessments. There are 3 pieces of criteria that the district asks to be filled out to show that the child will be successful in a mainstream classroom. See the appendices A, B, and C. One of the forms that need to be filled out is the mainstreaming checklist that the general education teacher

completes based on the child's classroom work. The second criteria is a consult consideration matrix, which includes data the district has on that child's assessment scores such as WAPT, ISAT, MAP, AIMSWEB, and the report card. The child's scores should be at the district's target, which varies from grade to grade. Here are the targets for second grade AIMSWEB and MAP:

**Second Grade AIMSWEB Benchmark Targets**

R-CBM	Fall	Winter	Spring
	55	79	94

MAZE	Fall	Winter	Spring
	5	10	13

Writing	Fall	Winter	Spring
	16	22	29

Math	Fall	Winter	Spring
	10	22	22

**Second Grade MAP Target**

Reading	Fall	Winter	Spring
	177	177	188

Mathematics	Fall	Winter	Spring
	179	179	191

Heidi did not go into detail about all the scores that must be met for the WAPT and ISAT.

The district is above the state targets in all these tests. The last criterion is a form that the parents must sign off saying that it is okay for their child to exit the program. After exiting the program, students are still monitored for two years to make sure they are successful in the regular education classroom. A child can reenter the program at any time; however this doesn't usually happen unless they are transitioning to the middle school or junior high and the child struggles with such transition.

When the district hires a new ELL teacher it wants to make sure that the teacher is well versed with second language learners. Also they want the teacher to have had experience with ELL students. It is important that the teacher can make strong and positive connections with the students and their families. The teacher should also know different strategies and how to adapt the curriculum to ELL students. The district wants a

teacher who can explain second language acquisition well.

The ELL program gets funded through grants. We get money from title III, taxpayers' money, consolidated grants, IEP (immigrant education grant), TPI/TBE grants, and LIPIEPS. For each grant, the money is used is used differently. The TPI/TBE grant is \$150,000 and used to purchase materials and to pay salaries and benefits. The LIPIEPS is to pay for the teacher's salaries, summer school, and workshops for professional development. The grants that the district is awarded depend on the amount of ELL students the district has to teach.

The district wants to support ELL families by providing translators when needed. They connect and reach out to families by having ELL nights. One night might be to inform families about the summer school and fill out papers that will be needed. It is a goal to find better ways to serve parents. In the future Heidi would love to have a center for the parents to check out materials that will be useful.

To better provide professional development about ELL students the district has connected with CPELL. Through CPELL there are staff developments, parent developments, and teachers are given an opportunity to be a part of a Cohort program in which they earn a type 75 and endorsement in ELL. There is a new Language Line that can be used with families during CAS meeting. A CAS meeting is a meeting that informs the parents about any interventions the child may be receiving in school. The Language Line will have a translator that can be used through speakerphone to help both the school and the parents understand each other. The district also has an incoming "K" night to explain to the parents what is expected in kindergarten.

Heidi feels that sometimes money can be spent in other districts on coordinators that are not worthwhile because they are not educated in this area. She feels that if an ELL teacher is not doing what they should, she will keep working with them until they get to the point of being successful. Since Heidi does have a great ELL background she

was able to supply her ELL staff with technology that makes her district the leading district in the field of technology. There are teachers that are presenting at conferences about how they use technology with their students. The program leader has to know what ELL teachers should know to be able to supply and support their ELL staff.

Heidi feels that professional development is important for general education teachers. The general education teachers need to understand ELL and the process of second language acquisition. Teachers need to know how to adapt to a child who has a different native language. The last area where professional development is needed is to know cultural responsive and linguistic instruction to teach ELL students.

District Happy is working at doing everything they can to be the best at working with ELL students and parents.

#### **IV. Connection to course material**

Now that I have interviewed an ESL coordinator, I can say that I understand how the information I have been studying relates to the instruction that is going on in her district. I currently work in the same district as Heidi. There are so many different program designs to address the needs of ELL students and not every district is going to offer the same programs. Crawford and Krashen discuss the transitional bilingual program that uses a child's native language as temporary support and that is the model Heidi's district uses for their Russian population (2007, p. 15). Our district does not have the need for bilingual education or dual language at this time. One thing that Heidi mentioned was that if a child enters our kindergarten TPI or TBE program and if that child stays in the district, that child will most likely exit from our ELL program by the end of fourth grade. Crawford and Krashen suggest that it takes a child anywhere from 1 to 6.5 years to become oral proficient and 5 to 8 years to become academic proficient. In District Happy, students are meeting both overall and literacy proficiency test scores within the suggested time period of 5 to 8 years (2007, p. 32). Happy's students are also

showing continual successful growth after they exit.

It is important for any teacher working with students who are learning a second language to understand the process that an ELL student goes through. Heidi feels that a teacher can truly understand language acquisition then they will be a wonderful teacher for the those students. In Hurley's book, she feels that second language acquisition is important to be able to plan for effective teaching. She says, "People approach language learning using the information and abilities they already have. Using first language knowledge and skills may produce errors that resemble interference, but which are in fact evidence of a creative cognitive strategy for solving the new language puzzle" (p. 54). Hurley's concepts for language acquisition are identical to the TBE model that District Happy follows. The district wants children to make connections with their prior knowledge and build their new language skills through their foundation.

While reading Tongue Tied, the author really focused on how children who speak different languages lose their native language. While in District Happy, they are teaching the children English, but at different Parent Nights, the people that are presenting are really emphasizing how the native language should still be spoken in the home. The district is working on helping the families not lose their native languages the way so many individuals experienced in Tongue Tied. District Happy is not perfect with addressing multiculturalism, but there is an effort to educate all educators in the district to keep up with best ELL practices. When you think of how far the district has come in five years, it is extremely impressive. I personally feel that the district is on the right track in doing everything it can to help support and educate students who have a different native language than English.

I think it is great that District Happy has so much faith in their ELL staff. The ELL teachers are incorporating these routines into their daily teachings as a way to help and support families. Some of the teachers have had their students make a video, which is

a tour of the school and then the students translate it into their native language. Then this video can be used for new families that enter into the district. This is why Heidi would like to make a center to be able to check out materials like these videos.

## **V. Conclusion/Recommendations**

When Heidi informed me about what districts need to involve more ELL parents, she said, "It was to educate parents." At this time I began to brainstorm ideas to conquer this district goal for a project that needed to be done for another graduate course I am taking. Since District Happy wants to better serve the parents, my group for the other class is in the process of putting together information that will inform the parents about reading and being more involved with their child. If the district likes this we are willing to present these ideas to the families at an ELL night. Our presentation will cover the developmental appropriateness for each age group, experience of what tools should be used, resources that are generic and specific to the grade level, and decoding and comprehension strategies. The parents will also be provided with a sheet of questions that they can ask their child. We are recommending that parents do these things in their native language to be involved with their child's learning process. With this plan we will have helped our district become one step closer at meeting the parents' needs.

Another area that Heidi feels needs help, is in educating general education teachers. I know some teachers that are involved in the cohort programs, however some feel as though they still are not getting the necessary help for their students. With the right professional development and getting all the teachers on the same page, the students of District Happy will really benefit and become successful learners.

Heidi did mention that as the years go on and the districts ELL population changes, the district will be happy to adapt to those needs and possibly change the models that are being used. This to me shows that the district wants to help ELL students and not follow the "sink or swim," model.

I would recommend that the district should try a Russian dual language program since there is a high population of Russian students. The statistics show how great the program is when it works correctly. In this district there is a great support by parents and if the program was explained to them clearly, I think the parents would be willing to let

their child be in a dual language program. This program would follow the 90 -10 model in kindergarten and then decrease to 50-50 by the time the child is in the upper elementary grades. In order to have a program work, the district needs to be able to support the teachers, students, and the families to be effective.

District Happy is lucky to have Heidi because she has wonderful ELL experience. I am grateful to be apart of District Happy.