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Educators' Sensemaking and Leaders' Sensegiving of an ESL Endorsement Policy

Paulette Andrade González

Universidad Diego Portales

Chile



Rebecca Lowenhaupt

Boston College

United States

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Abstract: In the United States, most Multilingual Learners (MLs) are taught by general educators who require training to support them effectively. This qualitative case study investigates local policymaking in a small, culturally diverse Illinois district that mandated a district-wide ESL endorsement for teachers. Drawing on interviews with district and school-level educators and an analysis of policy documents, the study examines (a) the policy goals that guided the development of the endorsement requirement, (b) how leaders engaged in sensegiving to frame and communicate these goals, and (c) how educators made sense of and enacted the policy in their professional contexts. Findings showed that district leaders framed the policy as a reform focused on equity. Their professional backgrounds in bilingual education shaped how they communicated this vision. While educators generally supported these goals, they had different interpretations of the policy. Key factors influencing their sensemaking included their confidence and perceived preparedness to teach MLs. The study contributes to research on policy implementation and ML education by

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demonstrating that shared outcome goals (in this case, equity for MLs) are not sufficient to ensure coherent policy enactment when goals leading the implementation process, such as efficiency and teacher welfare, remain in tension and are not collectively negotiated.

Keywords: Multilingual Learners (MLs); educators' sensemaking; leaders' sensegiving; policy goals; policy implementation; ESL endorsement

Construcción de sentido del profesorado y comunicación de sentido de los líderes educativos sobre una política de certificación en ESL

Resumen: En Estados Unidos, la mayoría de los estudiantes multilingües (MLs, por sus siglas en inglés) son atendidos por docentes de educación general que requieren formación para brindarles un apoyo efectivo. Este estudio de caso cualitativo investiga la formulación de políticas a nivel local en un pequeño distrito escolar culturalmente diverso de Illinois que estableció como requisito distrital que el profesorado obtuviera una certificación en ESL. A partir de entrevistas con personal educativo del distrito y de las escuelas, así como del análisis de documentos de políticas educativas, el estudio examina: (a) los objetivos de política educativa que guiaron el desarrollo del requisito de certificación; (b) cómo los líderes participaron en la construcción de marcos interpretativos para presentar y comunicar dichos objetivos; y (c) cómo el profesorado interpretó e implementó la política en sus contextos profesionales. Los hallazgos muestran que los líderes del distrito enmarcaron la política como una reforma orientada a la equidad. Sus trayectorias profesionales en educación bilingüe influyeron en la manera en que comunicaron esta visión. Si bien el profesorado apoyó, en general, estos objetivos, existieron distintas interpretaciones sobre la política. Entre los factores clave que influyeron en la construcción de sentido del profesorado estuvieron su nivel de confianza y de percepción sobre su propia preparación para enseñar a estudiantes multilingües. El estudio contribuye a la investigación sobre implementación de políticas y educación de estudiantes multilingües al demostrar que compartir objetivos de resultados (en este caso, la equidad para los estudiantes multilingües) no es suficiente para garantizar una implementación coherente de la política cuando los objetivos que orientan el proceso de implementación, como la eficiencia y el bienestar docente, permanecen en tensión y no son negociados colectivamente.

Palabras clave: Estudiantes Multilingües (MLs); construcción de sentido del profesorado; orientación interpretativa de los liderazgos; objetivos de política; implementación de políticas; certificación en ESL

A construção de sentido dos educadores e a comunicação de sentido dos líderes distritais sobre uma política de certificação em ESL

Resumo: Nos Estados Unidos, a maioria dos Alunos Multilíngues (MLs, na sigla em inglês) é atendida por professores da educação geral que necessitam de formação para apoiá-los de forma eficaz. Este estudo de caso qualitativo investiga a formulação de políticas em nível local em um distrito escolar pequeno e culturalmente diverso de Illinois que estabeleceu uma certificação distrital em ESL como requisito para os professores. Com base em entrevistas com profissionais da educação do distrito e das escolas, bem como na análise de documentos de políticas educacionais, o estudo examina: (a) os objetivos da política educacional que orientaram o desenvolvimento da exigência de certificação; (b) como os líderes distritais atuaram na construção de referenciais interpretativos para apresentar e comunicar esses objetivos; e (c) como os professores compreenderam e implementaram a política em seus contextos profissionais. Os resultados mostram que os líderes do distrito enquadraram a política como uma reforma voltada para a equidade. Suas trajetórias profissionais na educação bilíngue influenciaram a forma como comunicaram essa visão. Embora os professores tenham, de modo geral, apoiado esses objetivos, houve interpretações diferentes sobre a política. Entre os principais fatores que influenciaram a construção de sentido dos educadores estiveram sua

confiança e sua percepção de preparo para ensinar alunos multilíngues. O estudo contribui para a pesquisa sobre implementação de políticas e educação de alunos multilíngues ao demonstrar que compartilhar metas de resultado (neste caso, a equidade para alunos multilíngues) não é suficiente para garantir uma implementação coerente da política quando os objetivos que orientam o processo de implementação, como eficiência e bem-estar docente, permanecem em tensão e não são negociados coletivamente.

Palavras-chave: Alunos Multilíngues (MLs); construção de sentido dos professores; comunicação de sentido dos líderes distritais; objetivos de política; implementação de políticas; certificação em ESL

Educators' Sensemaking and Leaders' Sensegiving of an ESL Endorsement Policy

Among the overall trends of increasing diversity in U.S. classrooms, one of the most notable is linguistic diversity. In the US, 23% of residents aged 5 or older reported speaking a language other than English at home (Batalova, 2026). In school, recent policy reports indicate that 10.6% of students were classified as English Learners (ELs) in 2021 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Although historically, Multilingual Learners (MLs¹) were primarily in a few key states, they are now present nationwide, even in states that have not historically served linguistically diverse students (Camarota & Zeigler, 2014). Researchers have estimated that 42% of all U.S. public school teachers have at least one ML in their class (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015).

Despite this growing diversity in classrooms, the majority of MLs receive most, if not all, of their instruction from regular classroom teachers. In part due to the design of language supports, this is also because ML enrollment has outpaced the capacity of bilingual and ESL programs in many contexts, and some states have adopted English-only policies (Hopkins et al., 2016; Queenan et al., 2024; Villegas et al., 2018). Classroom teachers, in contrast to the diversity of their students, continue to be homogeneously White (80%), English monolingual, middle class, and female (77%; Haddix, 2017; Taie & Lewis, 2022). Evidence suggests that most teachers do not feel adequately prepared to work with MLs because they have not had sufficient opportunities to develop the conceptual knowledge necessary to effectively teach those students (Lucas et al., 2018).

Considering that demographic change in the student population has largely outpaced the diversification of teacher demographics, schools must welcome new communities of students without having expertise or educational resources to support MLs (Capps et al., 2005; Lowenhaupt & Reeves, 2015; Marrow, 2011; Quiñones-Benitez, 2001). To face this reality, researchers have advocated for increased preparation of classroom teachers (non-specialist teachers) to work with linguistically diverse students (Lowenhaupt & Reeves, 2015; O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008). Research has indicated that "the most successful teachers of ELs have identifiable pedagogical and cultural skills and knowledge" (Gándara et al., 2005, p. 3). Preparing teachers to work with linguistically diverse students is an absolute necessity if we want to support the academic success of all students. This requires a shift in the approach to and mechanisms for training all teachers, not just those with a specialization in supporting MLs.

¹ In this article, we refer to students as Multilingual Learners rather than using terms like English Learners, English Language Learners, or English as a Second Language students. This terminology is intentionally chosen to highlight students' assets instead of focusing on deficits. Additionally, we acknowledge the terminology used by our participants regarding teachers and programs, such as the titles ESOL or ESL teacher and the designation of ESL programs.

In this regard, districts across the US employ a range of program models to serve MLs, with English Language Development structures varying in intensity and integration. Two of the most common models are pull-out, in which MLs receive separate English instruction outside the general classroom, and push-in, in which language specialists support students within mainstream instruction (Baeher et al., 2014; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2019). More recently, many districts have moved toward sheltered instruction models that integrate language and content learning across subject areas (Echevarría et al., 2017; Short et al., 2012). These models typically require general education teachers to develop expertise in second language acquisition and instructional scaffolding for MLs. In this context, the district in this study sought to strengthen instructional coherence by requiring every teacher to hold an ESL endorsement, reflecting a shift toward more inclusive, integrated approaches to supporting MLs.

In this paper, we examine how one highly linguistically diverse school district in Illinois responded to programmatic and demographic shifts by redesigning its EL program and implementing a series of improvements to its instructional policies, including requiring all teachers to obtain an ESL endorsement. During the design and implementation of this district policy, educators and leaders in different roles engaged in sensemaking and sensegiving to understand and integrate the changes that the new policy brought to their professional roles and responsibilities. To explore how educators with experience working with linguistically diverse students made sense of and communicated their understanding of the district's professional development initiative, we analyzed interviews with these educators and examined district documentation produced during the policy development process. Our work was guided by the following research questions: (1) How did the values and goals embedded in the district's ESL endorsement policy shape the messages communicated to educators about ML instruction? (2) How did leaders' sensegiving help frame and communicate those policy goals? (3) How did educators make sense of these messages as they implemented the policy in their professional contexts?

This paper aims to contribute to both the literature on policy implementation and ML education by examining how a shared commitment to an equity outcome did not prevent tensions when the goals embedded in policy design were experienced differently by those who designed and those who enacted the policy. For district leaders and policymakers, tracing how sensegiving and sensemaking unfolded across organizational levels offers insight into why equity-oriented reforms may produce uneven results even when various actors share the same outcome goals. For policy researchers, this case illustrates the analytical value of distinguishing between outcome goals and process goals when studying implementation. This distinction helps surface sources of tension more precisely than examining shared values alone.

Theoretical Framework

Language Policy, Planning, and Implementation

Understanding how educators make sense of district-wide endorsement policies requires situating this process within the broader field of language policy and planning. Scholars in this field have highlighted that the values and assumptions that guide policy design are not automatically shared by those responsible for policy enactment (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Johnson, 2013). Policies move through multiple layers and spaces—from formulation to interpretation to implementation—where meanings are constantly negotiated. As Malen (2006) argued, implementation is inherently political, influenced by the interests of actors, their professional beliefs, and local contexts.

In language education, this translation of values into practice is particularly critical because language policies often carry implicit ideologies about what constitutes effective instruction, equity,

and inclusion (Menken & García, 2010). District-level reforms, such as ESL endorsement requirements, communicate specific messages about what counts as expertise for serving multilingual learners (Gras & Kitson, 2021; Johnson & Thorne-Wallington, 2021). Our study explores how educators interpreted and responded to these messages as they navigated through policy stages and among policy actors, including district leaders, school leaders, and teachers.

Policy Goals

To understand the intentions behind district-level endorsement policies, we draw on Stone's (2012) framework of policy goals, which identifies equity, efficiency, welfare, liberty, and security as competing public values that guide political reasoning. In this study, we focus on the three goals most relevant to the endorsement policy. Equity refers to ensuring that MLs have equal access to educational opportunities and meaningful participation in all aspects of schooling. Welfare refers to the district's responsibility to support teachers' professional and economic well-being as they take on new instructional demands. Efficiency reflects the need to balance the expansion of teacher qualifications with the practical management of limited financial and human resources. These values are often in tension: promoting equity through additional training may challenge perceptions of efficiency or liberty for teachers (Tran, 2015).

Integrating language policy perspectives helps illuminate how these policy goals shape the messages communicated to educators. Policies that emphasize both equity and efficiency, for example, may be interpreted differently by district officials seeking systemic alignment compared to teachers who need to navigate concerns related to workload and professional identity. Thus, analyzing policy goals provides insight into the sensemaking process through which policymakers frame the purpose and significance of reforms (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Policy Implementation

Sensemaking theory provides a lens for understanding how educators construct meaning in response to new policies (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). This process is both cognitive and social: educators interpret policy messages through their beliefs, experiences, and professional interactions (Coburn, 2001, 2005). Some scholarship has expanded this perspective to include sensegiving, the active role leaders play in shaping others' interpretations to align with organizational goals (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Yamine & Lowenhaupt, 2021). In educational contexts, school and district leaders play a crucial role as sensegivers, framing reforms, creating learning opportunities, and influencing how teachers internalize and enact policy goals (Crawford, 2018; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017; Little, 2002).

In this study, we conceptualize sensemaking and sensegiving as interrelated processes. District policymakers engaged in sensegiving by articulating endorsement goals and incentives, while educators engaged in sensemaking by interpreting and adapting these goals within their contexts. Examining these processes side by side allows us to understand how policy intentions and policy interpretations interacted to shape implementation outcomes.

By integrating language policy theory, Stone's (2012) framework of policy goals, and perspectives on sensemaking and sensegiving, we conceptualize policy implementation as a dynamic process that involves negotiating values and constructing meaning among various actors. In the case presented here, language policy and planning perspectives situated the policy process within the broader context of how policies traveled across organizational layers, moving from district formulation to school-level interpretation and finally to classroom enactment. Furthermore, these perspectives lead us to consider how ideological assumptions about expertise and equity shaped what actors understood the policy to mean (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Menken & García, 2010). Stone's (2012) framework helps identify the values and intentions embedded in the district's

endorsement policy, while sensegiving and sensemaking theories allow us to understand how these values were communicated, interpreted, and enacted by various stakeholders. Ultimately, this approach highlights the interconnected relationship between policy design and educators' interpretations, offering insights into how endorsement policies can more effectively enhance capacity for serving multilingual learners.

Methods

Research Design and Case Selection

This study builds on a larger, longitudinal, multi-sited study of educators that examined practices to support immigrant-origin youth in six school districts across the United States (Lowenhaupt et al., 2021). The current study used a qualitative case study design to explore sensegiving and sensemaking processes of educators and leaders regarding the implementation of a district-wide ESL endorsement policy in one of these sites, a small district in Illinois. The case study approach allowed for an analysis of how leaders and teachers interpreted and implemented policy, emphasizing the complexity of sensemaking and sensegiving processes across organizational levels.

The district was purposefully selected (Patton, 2014) because it represented an illustrative case of local policy reform aimed at enhancing equity for MLs. In May 2022, the lead author visited the district to conduct interviews with teachers and administrators regarding support for immigrant-origin students. In April 2023, both authors conducted a two-day site visit focusing on the newly launched newcomer program, which provides resources to help newcomer students and their families adjust to U.S. schools. We observed classrooms, interviewed educators, and engaged in discussions to understand the district's approach to supporting MLs and their evolving efforts to support immigrant-origin students in general and students classified as English Learners (as per the legal classification) in particular.

Following those conversations, we became interested in one aspect of the district's initiative to replace the pull-out model for MLs with a push-in model, which involved a commitment to getting all their teachers ESL-endorsed. Teachers were given a couple of years to complete coursework related to teaching ESL students and clinical experience teaching ESL to receive their endorsement. This case examines the policy process related to this requirement as reported on by various actors involved.

District Context

The study was conducted in a small school district in Illinois that had recently adopted a policy requiring all teachers to obtain ESL endorsement. At the time of the study, the district served approximately 2000 students across four schools—three elementary schools and one junior high school—with multilingual learners representing about 30% of the total student population (about double the state average). More than 60 languages were spoken in students' homes, with no single language being predominant. Only two of these languages reached the minimum number required by Illinois to provide Transitional Bilingual Education for English Learners (Illinois State Board of Education, 2025). This means that only speakers of these two languages attending schools with more than 20 students who speak those languages received literacy instruction in their home language.

Before implementing the new policy that we focus on here in the 2020s, the district offered a pull-out ESL program, which often separated MLs from their peers during instruction to receive ESL classes. The new policy aimed to integrate ML instruction into the general classroom by requiring every teacher to complete the state's ESL endorsement and shifting ESL teachers into

coaching roles supporting teachers' integrated instruction. This restructuring also involved changing ESL support staffing from two ESL resource teachers at each school to one for the entire district.

Learning Team

As part of the policy design process, district administrators established an EL Program Review Learning Team, led by the Director of EL Services and comprising educators in various roles across the four schools. In 2017, the team met during two main phases, Discover and Design, to review legal parameters, current research, and existing programs to develop a series of recommendations for the redesign of the EL program. Although the research team did not observe Learning Team meetings directly, internal documents (e.g., agendas, slide decks, and summaries) provided insight into how district leaders framed policy goals and communicated expectations to educators.

Participants

Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling to include educators who were directly involved in the creation, implementation, or interpretation of the ESL endorsement policy. We directly emailed several educators who were involved in this policy reform and included all those who agreed to participate in the study. The final sample included seven participants: district-level administrators, school principals, and teachers who worked directly with MLs or held leadership responsibilities related to the policy. Table 1 summarizes participants' roles, endorsement status, and participation in the Learning Team.

Table 1

Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Role	Were They Part of the Learning Team?
John	Superintendent	No
Angela	District Director of EL Services	Yes
Patricia	District-level administrator	No
Farah	School-level administrator	No
Katie	District EL Resource Teacher	No
Alyssa	Foreign Language Teacher	No
Sara	Foreign Language Teacher	No

Data Sources and Collection

The data included semi-structured interviews and district documents. We developed the interview protocol based on the theoretical framework from Weick (1995) and Coburn (2001) and prior research on policy sensemaking and sensegiving. It included questions about participants' roles, interpretations of the endorsement policy, and perceptions of its implementation. The protocol was reviewed by both authors, resulting in minor wording adjustments to enhance clarity and flow. Interviews were conducted from Spring to Fall 2023.

All participants were contacted via email and provided informed consent. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted between 25 and 70 minutes. They were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Five interviews were conducted in English and two in Spanish, according to interviewees' preferences (the researcher who conducted the interviews is a native Spanish speaker).

Additionally, we analyzed the working documents from six Learning Team sessions held from April to November 2017 to update the EL program, provided by the district's Director of EL Services. The first four sessions, called "Discover," focused on the legal parameters and literature surrounding EL programming. The fifth and sixth sessions were called "Design" and were aimed at producing recommendations for redesigning the EL program based on the results from the first phase. The documents included session agendas, federal and state legislation, supporting literature about ML education, and outputs from the Learning Team.

Each research question was addressed using different data sources. To examine the first research question, we analyzed district policy documents and conducted interviews with district policymakers involved in designing the ESL endorsement initiative (e.g., district administrators and program leaders). To examine the second research question, we analyzed interviews with district administrators. Finally, to examine the third research question, we drew on interview data to understand how teachers made sense of the policy.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an iterative, two-cycle coding process (Miles et al., 2014). The first phase combined deductive codes derived from the theoretical framework (e.g., policy goals, sensegiving, sensemaking) with inductive codes that emerged from the data. As a first approach to data analysis, those codes allowed us to identify the main elements of the policy creation and implementation process, as well as explore how the sensemaking and sensegiving process unfolded.

In the second phase, we generated Pattern Codes (Miles et al., 2014) to group the codes produced in the first cycle and identify themes that allowed us to answer the three research questions. In each coding phase, authors met to compare and refine code definitions. During each coding cycle, we wrote analytic memos (Miles et al., 2014) that helped us document our thinking process and drive future analytic decisions.

Finally, we created descriptive matrices to examine subthemes and identify illustrative examples and counterexamples (Miles et al., 2014). The result of this phase was the identification of two themes related to the policy goals that motivated the school district to require ESL endorsements from teachers (Research Question 1), two themes related to leaders' sensegiving (Research Question 2), and two themes related to the sensemaking process of educators in response to this policy (Research Question 3). Table 2 illustrates the procedures for these two phases of analysis.

Table 2

Phases of Analysis

	Theoretical Framework	Codes	Alignment with Themes
Phase 1: Deductive coding	Policy goals	· Equity · Efficiency · Liberty · Welfare	1 and 2
	Policy actors	· District leaders · Learning Team · Teachers / ESL Resource Teacher · Students and Families	All, with an emphasis on leaders for Themes 3 and 4, and on teachers for Themes 5 and 6

	Theoretical Framework	Codes	Alignment with Themes
	Policy stages	· Policy creation · Policy implementation	All, with an emphasis on Policy Creation for Themes 1, 2, and 3, and on Policy Implementation for Themes 3 to 6
	Sensemaking process	· Roles · Sensemaking	5 and 6
	Sensegiving process	· Prior knowledge and expertise · Relationships · Sensegiving	3 and 4
Phase 2: Themes	RQ1: policy goals 1. Achieving equity for MLs was the main policy goal driving the policy process. 2. The policy was designed to balance equity and efficiency RQ2: leaders' sensegiving. 3. Leaders framed the ESL endorsement as an opportunity to align teachers with district goals. 4. District leaders drew on professional expertise and relationships to guide the collective understanding of policy goals. RQ3: teachers' sensemaking 5. Educators' sensemaking did not always align with leaders' sensegiving. 6. Teachers' sensemaking reflected both commitment to policy goals and critique of the policy's implementation.		

Our analysis provided insights into how administrators and educators experienced the policy process from design to implementation. Below, we present our findings addressing three research questions: the policy goals prioritized by the district, the processes involved in leaders' sensegiving, and educators' sensemaking of the ESL endorsement policy.

Findings

Policy Goals: Pursuing Equity and Efficiency for Multilingual Learners

In this section, we examine the first research question: How did the values and goals embedded in the district's ESL endorsement policy shape the messages communicated to educators about ML instruction? To answer this question, we analyzed interview data and working documents from the Learning Team that designed the policy. We identified two main themes that represent how different policy goals were prioritized in the ESL endorsement policy. Understanding the goals that led the school district to revise its EL program helped ground educators' sensemaking processes in the policy context.

Theme 1. Achieving Equity for MLs Was the Main Policy Goal Driving the Policy Process

Throughout interviews and documentation, concerns about equity for MLs were present as the most important goals for creating and implementing the policy. This goal was addressed both explicitly and implicitly by leaders and embedded in meetings.

During the policy creation process, the Learning Team reviewed the federal and state legal parameters surrounding EL instruction and examined the current research on the benefits of bilingualism and second language instruction. In the documents created to summarize the main takeaways of this literature review, the Learning Team concluded that it was key to “Ensure EL

students have equal opportunities to meaningfully participate in all curricular and extra-curricular activities” (S1-K. Team Work. Compiled Resonating Aspects of the Legal Parameters) and that “Good instruction is good for ELs, but specific strategies, designed for ELs, should be included” (S2-R. Team Work. Compiled Review of Exemplary Practice in ESL Instruction). In both cases, the Learning Team grounded their policy creation process in two main pillars: to secure MLs’ equitable access to instruction and school activities, just as any other student in the district, while giving them the specific language support that allows them to learn. Those principles guided the Learning Team’s sensemaking process and were built into the policy to inform how the whole district would make sense of it.

Those same goals were represented in the interviews, particularly in those with administrators. For instance, the superintendent discussed one of the reasons for moving away from a pull-out model:

And what they've done historically is they were pulling kids out of science. So, our EL students weren't getting science instruction, which was a little bit alarming. In my first year, I did a visit at the high school to their STEM lab. And I was talking to the teacher, and he said “Yeah, we get so few EL students from your district in our program.” And I kind of put two and two together; that's because we weren't providing them with a whole lot of science instruction. (John, superintendent)

As John explained, MLs were being pulled out during science instruction, which affected their knowledge and motivation to pursue STEM classes in high school. Recognizing that the previous model did not provide those students with equitable education (as evidenced by insufficient science instruction) was one of the key motivations that led the district to redesign the EL program. In the program redesign, no students were pulled out, and they stayed in their classrooms with the rest of their peers.

Regarding how the new EL program better supported MLs’ language development, the Director of EL services and leader of the Learning Team explained:

Under the old model, kids- because you have one or two, I mean, there's only X number of hours in the day. So, kids were only getting about 90 minutes at the max. In some cases, it was 60 or 45 minutes, in a 6-hour day, that was comprehensible. The rest was just wah, wah, blah, blah. And now, you've got children who are getting six hours of instruction each day, that is comprehensible, that is at their zone of proximal development, that is calibrated to their language proficiency level. So that scaffolds and accelerates their development to the next level. (Angela, Director of EL services)

According to this quote, equity was understood both as sharing the classroom with the general student population and also as having equal opportunities to learn the content. By requiring all teachers to be ESL-endorsed, the district sought to achieve its equity goal and guarantee that students received comprehensible input and instruction adapted to their language needs in every classroom.

When designing the policy, the Learning Team chose an EL instruction model that prioritized equity while also considering what was most efficient for the district. During its last session, the Learning Team created presentations with recommendations for school leaders. The goal of equity was evident in those recommendations. For instance, equity understood as equal access to the content is apparent in the statement: “Building competency of all teachers to differentiate for language proficiency levels” (S6-S. FINAL PPT 12.18.17 K-5 Faculty Mtg. Presentation), in which the ESL endorsement required was referred to as a way to reach all students in all content areas

without excluding them from mainstream classrooms. The same document also stated that “ELs are considered at the front end of any initiative,” which highlighted that their well-being was of paramount importance to the district. This point is connected to the previous finding, which shows that district leaders made equity an explicit goal when starting the policy-creation process.

Theme 2: The Policy Was Designed to Balance Equity and Efficiency

Another priority for the Learning Team was efficiency, both financially and in terms of available resources. In connection with the financial aspect, one of the process documents from the Learning Team stated that “Pull Out ESL instruction is the most expensive and least effective EL Program Model” (S5-G. Team Work. Take-Aways to Share with Colleagues). That is, the model that was being used by the district was not only modified because it was not beneficial for students, but also because of its cost. During policy creation, the Learning Team considered various program models and assessed their benefits and drawbacks. As the Learning Team leader, Angela declared that finances were one of the factors that mattered in the final decision: “For example, I knew that co-teaching would not be a recommendation that would fly. So, I explained to them why that would not be implemented, why the board would reject that, namely, because it's too expensive” (Angela, Director of EL services). Because of her experience as a consultant and her expertise in ML education, Angela knew that the program model chosen by the Learning Team would have to meet several different goals, one being its cost. As an administrator, she was aware of the financial constraints faced by school districts, and she led the Learning Team to incorporate this consideration.

One aspect of efficiency considered in the policy creation process was the availability of resources, specifically teachers' previous qualifications. As the Director of EL services recounted, the district administrators realized that they had teachers who already had an ESL endorsement, which could make the transition to an ESL endorsement requirement smoother. In her words:

So, I got an idea to look in personnel records, to see if we had people that were employed in the district already, who had their ESL endorsement, but were not using it were placed as classroom teachers, but weren't called upon to use their ESL endorsement. [...] So then, when I looked at how many people we actually had in the district with the ESL endorsement, that's when I started thinking that we might be able to move in the direction of having all of our teachers meet their goal of obtaining an ESL endorsement. And when I saw that that was possible, that's when I started thinking about how we might kind of leverage that expertise to a different program model. (Angela, Director of EL services)

In terms of decision-making, having a group of teachers who were already ESL-endorsed certainly made requiring it for everyone much easier. There were teachers available to start working with the groups of mostly MLs promptly, and the district would only have to reimburse the cost of obtaining the endorsement for a smaller number of educators.

While equity was the primary policy goal in redesigning the EL program, district leaders were also required to consider efficiency in their decisions. Achieving equity while considering practical aspects was an essential element of policy creation that, for this school district, seemed to point in a similar direction. Moreover, equity goals for MLs were supported by efficiency considerations that made large-scale implementation feasible.

Leaders' Sensegiving: Framing and Communicating Policy Goals

In this section, we examine the second research question: How did leaders' sensegiving help frame and communicate those policy goals? To answer this question, we analyzed interviews with

district administrators, focusing on how they described their efforts to shape educators' understanding of the ESL endorsement requirement. We identified two main themes that illustrate how leaders' professional backgrounds, relationships, and communication strategies influenced how the policy's goals were conveyed and interpreted across the district.

Theme 3: Leaders Framed the ESL Endorsement as an Opportunity to Align Teachers with District Goals

During the policy creation process, administrators considered the impact that requiring an ESL endorsement would have on teachers. They knew that teachers would have to see the benefits of this new policy if the new EL program design was to be successful. For this reason, the administration framed the new district policy in a way that could convince teachers of its benefits. On this subject, the superintendent explained:

Yeah, so I kind of use the word manipulated, right? I kind of manipulated that a little bit. So, there wasn't really a requirement. There is an incentive. One, you'll get paid more money, and it'll get paid for. The other part of that incentive, which you could look at either way, is that there's additional job security as sort of an incentive. If you didn't get it, and we needed to reduce the number of teachers, you might lose your job. So, you know, there's sort of the threat. Part of that, I guess, is that you could potentially lose a job. But we tried to give people, you know, we gave them tons of advance notice, we gave them the places they could sign up for courses. (John, superintendent)

In this quote, the superintendent described how he framed the ESL endorsement requirement for teachers as an incentive, rather than a requirement, to guide their sensemaking process in a positive direction. In their sensegiving, the district aimed to reach two additional policy goals: welfare and security for teachers. First, district leaders communicated the new requirement as aiming to improve teachers' welfare, as obtaining an additional endorsement would increase their salaries. Administrators knew that the change would impact teachers' workload, so it was essential to ensure that the additional work would result in a higher income to convince teachers. Secondly, the district presented obtaining an ESL endorsement as an incentive for job security. If teachers received the endorsement, they would be protected from being fired in the event of needing to reduce staff.

The superintendent was aware that this second point could be interpreted as both an incentive and a threat. Thus, the district made efforts to ensure that teachers would not experience all the negative impacts of this new policy. In a way, the superintendent was trying to predict the different ways in which teachers could make sense of the policy, depending on how it was framed, and found a way to guide teachers' sensemaking in favor of a positive interpretation, which was the intended outcome of this policy.

District leaders framed the ESL endorsement requirement as an opportunity rather than a mandate, using incentives and positive messaging to guide teachers' understanding of the policy's goals. The superintendent explained that they strategically emphasized the salary benefits and professional growth opportunities associated with the policy, while minimizing the focus on its mandatory aspects. This approach to communication aimed to align teachers' understanding with the district's priorities of equity and support for Multilingual Learners.

Theme 4. District Leaders Drew on Professional Expertise and Relationships to Guide the Collective Understanding of Policy Goals

In this study, leaders' sensegiving was not limited to the explicit framing described in Theme 3. The professional backgrounds and relationships of district leaders also shaped how they

communicated the policy's goals and steered the understanding of educators involved in its design. This theme examines how those processes unfolded during policy creation and what implications they had for implementation.

The superintendent's background as a bilingual educator informed his awareness of inequities in the existing EL program and motivated him to pursue a policy change. As he described: "My master's was in bilingual instruction and curriculum and instruction. So, I was kind of aware or painfully aware that that program model did not feel like it was really serving children very well" (John, superintendent). His expertise gave him the credibility to raise these concerns with the board and to advocate for a new direction, framing the problem in terms of equity and access for MLs.

When the superintendent recognized the need to redesign the EL program, he drew on his professional network to bring in someone who could lead the process. He recounted:

So I went to the board, you know, to talk to them about my concerns about how we were serving or not serving our EL children very well. And they agreed to let me create a halftime EL director position. So, I posted that and found Angela again, we have known each other. I took an EL assessment class with her at the very beginning of my career almost 30 years ago. She signed on for the halftime position. The following year, I was able to convince the board to make it a full-time position. And we immediately launched a Learning Team to look at program models and program design. (John, superintendent)

By hiring Angela, a scholar with extensive experience in ESL endorsement coursework, the superintendent ensured that the person leading the Learning Team shared his equity-oriented understanding of the problem. Angela, in turn, played an active role in shaping what the Learning Team came to understand as valid and appropriate instruction for MLs. She described her role in this way:

Well, I led the Learning Team. And of course, I selected many of the resources that were reviewed, and we watched videos while we were eating dinner; we called it dinner theater. But I also, you know, told the members of the team, hey, if you have something that you want me to include in this, you know, giant binder of things, we're taking a look at, you know, just shoot it my way. But for the most part, you know, I kind of established the parameters for the Learning Team. And, you know, I did steer the committee's understanding and thinking about certain things. (Angela, Director of EL services)

As the Learning Team leader, Angela was aware of her influence on the collective sensemaking that occurred within the group. By selecting readings, curating resources, and organizing site visits, she guided the perspectives considered in the design of the new EL program, thereby acting as a sensegiver within the policy creation process. This collaboration between the superintendent and the Director of EL services served as a key mechanism for sensegiving, allowing both leaders to integrate their expertise, authority, and communication to link the district's policy goals with everyday instructional practices.

By using sensegiving strategies, specifically framing the policy through incentives and leveraging professional credibility, district leaders successfully translated abstract policy values into shared commitments. They communicated the ESL endorsement requirement as an issue of equity and highlighted its benefits for teachers. As a result, leaders influenced how educators throughout the district understood and responded to the policy's goals.

Educators' Sensemaking: Interpreting and Enacting the Policy

This section addresses the third research question: How did educators understand the messages while implementing the policy in their professional contexts? As district leaders participated in sensegiving, educators interpreted and acted upon those messages within their own instructional settings. Their sensemaking process was shaped by their prior experiences, professional roles, and their perceptions of how the policy aligned with their values and working conditions.

Theme 5. Educators' Sensemaking did not Always Align with Leaders' Sensegiving

As we described, the district aspired to communicate the ESL endorsement requirement to teachers as an incentive to get endorsed, rather than an imposition from the district. Teachers were given a few years to obtain their endorsements, and they received reimbursement after completing the necessary coursework. The district framed the issue as providing teachers with options, as reflected in the superintendent's words:

We made it so that they wouldn't be financially impacted by having to take the courses, so we tried to do everything we could so that people wouldn't pay the negative consequence of losing their jobs. If they did, that was really their choice.
(John, superintendent)

The idea that teachers had a choice in getting the ESL endorsement was not interpreted the same way by all teachers. As the recipients of this new policy, teachers made sense of it according to their personal understanding of the policy and its impact on their everyday work. For instance, a teacher who had already been endorsed had a positive perspective on how the district dealt with this new policy. She said “Yo nunca lo sentí forzado, pero ya yo lo tenía” [I never felt it was forced, but I already had it] (Alyssa, foreign language teacher). Alyssa saw the ESL endorsement requirement as encouraged, not forced. However, she knew that her view was personal and not necessarily shared by all her colleagues.

As a foreign language teacher, Alyssa understood the importance of having knowledge about the language acquisition process, which may have influenced her positive sensemaking of the requirement to obtain ESL endorsement. In the interview, she said: “yo pienso también que al tenerlo te ayuda a ser mejor maestro, independientemente si estás dándole clase a los estudiantes como segundo idioma o a la población general” [I also think that having it helps you be a better teacher, regardless of whether you are teaching second language students or the general population.] (Alyssa, foreign language teacher). Alyssa made sense of the policy by considering what was best for MLs, which may also be rooted in her personal experience of speaking English as a second language. In the interview, she remembered the cultural differences she faced when she first arrived in the continental US: “Yo sé lo que se siente; yo no quiero que ellos se sientan así” [I know how it feels; I don't want them to feel that way] (Alyssa, foreign language teacher).

Not all teachers shared this positive sensemaking of the ESL endorsement requirement, though, and some interpreted it as a threat. For instance, Sara, a foreign language teacher, stated:

Yo pienso que es como que hasta fue una pequeña amenaza de que si no lo conseguías tal vez no tendrías trabajo también. Entonces, pues la gente que quiere mantener su trabajo, me imagino que se empezaron a tomar las clases [I think it's like it was even a little threat that if you didn't get it maybe you wouldn't have a job, too. So, well, people who want to keep their jobs, I imagine that they started taking the classes]. (Sara, foreign language teacher)

Sara, in contrast to Alyssa, interpreted the policy as an imposition and a limitation on teachers' liberty. If teachers who did not get the endorsement were in danger of being fired, then getting it was not an incentive, but an obligation. Sara made sense of the policy from the perspective of the practical constraints that getting or not getting the endorsement would bring to teachers. Although teachers could choose not to get endorsed and move to another school district, that may not have been easy or practical for them, limiting their freedom to decide whether to get the endorsement. Teachers like Sara valued options and felt that the new policy limited theirs. A similar perspective was shared by Katie, an ESL resource teacher, who worked supporting newly endorsed teachers. When asked about possible improvements to the EL policy, she shared:

To be more, more teacher voice. I know, when that committee was formed to, you know, redesign the ESL program, many people on that committee felt like they weren't given a voice, I guess, that it was already pre-chosen, predetermined. And administrators were just kind of pushing them to make that decision when that's not the decision that they wanted to make. (Katie, ESL resource teacher)

Because Katie worked with teachers who had recently experienced the realities of being an ESL teacher, she had the opportunity to hear many different opinions on the matter. From this quote, it is apparent that some teachers felt that there needed to be more participation of teachers in the policy creation process, who could advocate for their professional needs.

Although the district considered that salary increases and the promise of job security would be sufficient incentives for teachers to adopt the ESL requirement, teachers interpreted the policy in different ways. Some participants viewed the requirement as an opportunity for professional growth and improved instruction for MLs, while others perceived it as an externally imposed mandate that limited their autonomy. Given the diverse perceptions teachers have about the policy, it may be that opportunities for collaborative interpretation were limited, which might have led to challenges in fostering a comprehensive understanding among educators. For example, not all teachers had clarity on the roles that educators in different positions played in the Learning Team, which appeared to shape their interpretations of the policy. However, our data does not provide enough insight into the extent of collective sensemaking among the educators to assert that this was the case.

Theme 6. Teachers' Sensemaking Reflected both Commitment to Policy Goals and Critique of the Policy's Implementation

As previously described, teachers felt their voices were not sufficiently heard during the policy creation process. In connection with the policy implementation, teachers' sensemaking processes were marked by a contrast between valuing the positive aspects of being ESL endorsed for them and their students, versus focusing on the challenges they faced with this new policy.

On the one hand, teachers felt committed to the policy goals of providing equitable education to MLs. Their sensemaking process was focused on the understanding that students in the district need linguistic support throughout the school day and being ESL-endorsed allowed them to be the best teachers for those students. Alyssa, who shared her opinion and what she had heard from her colleagues, exemplified this view:

Y sinceramente, no he escuchado compañeros, por lo menos yo no he escuchado compañeros quejarse o decir... Porque yo creo que entendemos de que uno tiene que estar pendiente y saber a la población, la audiencia de uno que uno tiene. Y aquí los estudiantes de EL, tenemos muchos y aunque estudiantes que han salido del programa, pero continúan siendo ELs y también necesitan todavía estas estrategias, aunque ya hayan salido del programa. [And honestly, I have not heard colleagues, at least I have not heard colleagues complain or say... Because I think that we

understand that one has to be aware of and know the population, the audience that one has. And here, EL students, we have many students who have exited the program, but they continue to be ELs and they also still need these strategies, even though they have already exited the program]. (Alyssa, foreign language teacher)

As Alyssa explained, she and some of her colleagues understood the relevance of being endorsed because having the ESL endorsement allowed them to utilize strategies to provide accessible instruction for all students, even those who are no longer classified as ELs. For teachers, connecting with their student population is necessary, and they were willing to go through the endorsement process for this goal.

However, teachers were also critical of how this policy was implemented in certain aspects, particularly regarding the requirement to become ESL teachers immediately after receiving their endorsement. As Sara depicted: “Yo apenas, aunque haya tomado las clases, es diferente tomar una clase y luego que te metan y tú con zero experience poder, unless you are an ESL teacher” [I just, even though I have taken the classes, it is different to take a class and then they put you in and you have zero experience, unless you are an ESL teacher] (Sara, foreign language teachers). Sara represented those who were worried about having to teach MLs only equipped with what they had learned in theory in their ESL endorsement classes. According to Sara, they were not opposed to teaching MLs; they simply did not feel prepared to apply the strategies they learned without a period of guided practice. Feeling a lack of support from the district may have influenced teachers’ sensemaking toward a more critical stance on the ESL endorsement requirement. However, according to Katie, some teachers’ sensemaking processes continued to evolve as they put their endorsements into practice:

Now you're thrown in there. But it's also good because I've seen a lot of when they are thrown in, I know, it's hard for them. But I've seen them change their attitude and their mindset about working with English language learners. Like, it's hard, and it's, but I think they see that English language instruction is not just like teaching them vocabulary words; there are so many different things that can encompass the instruction. So, I mean, it's hard, but it's kind of throw them into, this is the reality of it. (Katie, ESL resource teacher)

Katie, whose work as an ESL resource teacher involved supporting teachers during their initial teaching period using their ESL endorsement, understood the feelings of insecurity and uncertainty that teachers often experienced. At the same time, she was also present to witness the rewarding moment when teachers saw their hard work pay off, ultimately becoming better educators for Multilingual Learners.

Teachers needed support as they took on new professional responsibilities, making the role of staff who assist newly endorsed teachers crucial. In the district, Katie was assigned this position after serving as one of the three ESL specialists. About her work with teachers, she described:

A lot of times, like how to help their newcomer in the classroom. Teachers also seek out a lot of help with, you know, tailoring their instruction, their current curriculum for their English language learners in their class. Also, just, you know, like any strategies that I have, any quick tools anything to just really help them because a lot of teachers have just received their, their endorsements. (Katie, ESL resource teacher)

As a teacher, Katie supported her colleagues who recently received their ESL endorsements. She met with them individually, according to their needs, to see what they needed to become more

confident teaching MLs. However, Katie's role also included helping newcomer families and screening newcomer students. Additionally, Katie was the only ESL resource teacher in the district, which made her workload too large to meet everyone's needs. She shared her perspective on the issue:

If they really wanted the teachers to feel- the ones that got their endorsements to feel like they're supported, I feel like they would have had an ESL specialist at each school. You know, like, it jumped from two ESL resource teachers at every school down to one, to me, this year, and then well, there hasn't been that much support provided. And I feel like that. I mean, that's where, and that's what I've been asking for all year. And the Director of EL services has also been an advocate for me and, you know, the superintendent, and having more staff but that hasn't really been heard. (Katie, ESL resource teacher)

Katie based her criticism of the implementation of this policy on the need for more support for teachers who recently got their endorsements. She recognized that having only one person in her role was insufficient and that both she and her fellow teachers required guidance. According to her, district leaders were aware of these needs, but they had not yet been able to hire an additional ESL resource teacher to share the responsibilities with her.

In implementing the district's ESL endorsement requirement, the teachers interviewed for this study were primarily motivated by their commitment to serving all students, especially in a linguistically diverse environment. However, challenges such as limited support personnel also contributed to some concerns regarding the policy. Teachers, as key implementers, are understandably sensitive to how such changes may impact their ability to carry out their responsibilities with confidence. Some of them expressed a desire for enhanced collaboration and dialogue with administrators regarding the policy, as fostering an open conversation could help ensure that their insights are acknowledged and valued.

Across the three sets of findings, a consistent pattern emerges: district leaders worked to communicate a clear equity-oriented vision, while educators interpreted that vision through the lens of their own professional roles and working conditions. Where those interpretations aligned, implementation moved forward. However, where they diverged, particularly around teacher welfare and the practical demands of endorsement, tensions emerged. These findings suggest that the policy process in this district was not a matter of simple compliance, but of meaning-making at every level, from the Learning Team to the individual classroom.

Discussion

This study focused on policy reform and sensemaking in a small school district in Illinois that implemented a district-wide ESL endorsement requirement. By analyzing interviews with educators in various roles related to working with MLs and documents used during the policy creation process, we investigated the policy goals (Stone, 2012) that led the district to create and implement the ESL endorsement requirement, as well as the processes of sensegiving and sensemaking (Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995) employed by district leaders and teachers, respectively. The findings showed that the district's ESL endorsement policy was not implemented through linear compliance but through an interpretive process in which leaders and educators constructed meaning around shared yet differently understood goals. The following section discusses these findings in relation to existing literature and considers their implications for policy and practice.

When analyzing the policy process, it is vital to understand the policy goals that lead to the initiation of policymaking. From Stone's (2012) perspective, policy problems stem from the

discrepancy between policy goals and reality and are addressed by seeking solutions to these issues. In this case, district leaders became aware that, by pulling out MLs for ESL instruction, students were losing valuable content instruction and opportunities to share with their peers. This reality conflicted with the district's goal of equity, which motivated leaders to revise the EL program. The district prioritized equity for MLs because its leaders had significant knowledge and expertise in ML education. This background helped them better understand these students' needs and recognize the challenges they face. Additionally, district leaders were aware of the overarching policy goal of efficiency, which influenced the design of their policies. While this emphasis on efficiency sometimes posed challenges, the leaders made concerted efforts to balance efficiency with their equity goals.

A key finding of this study is that all actors (policy documents, district leaders, and teachers) shared the same outcome goal: equity for MLs. Yet tensions still emerged, not because actors disagreed about what the policy sought to achieve, but because they held different understandings of how Stone's (2012) implementation-level goals, particularly efficiency and teacher welfare, should be balanced in practice. This distinction is important. Leaders framed the endorsement requirement as an incentive tied to salary increases and job security, intending to align teachers' sensemaking with the district's priorities. However, some teachers experienced this framing as a mandate that limited their professional autonomy. As Allen and Penuel (2015) and Marshall et al. (2021) note, teachers consider their multiple professional demands when making sense of new policy, and for some educators, the additional obligations weighed more heavily than the district's messages about the policy's benefits. Although those creating the policy intended to leverage an incentive, those impacted by it experienced it as a mandate.

District leaders attempted to make policymaking more collaborative by forming a Learning Team that included educators in different roles, acknowledging that sensemaking is inherently social and negotiated (Coburn, 2005). However, the degree of collaboration perceived by teachers who were not part of the Learning Team varied. Some educators felt that district leaders had already determined key aspects of the reform and that the Director of EL Services exerted significant influence over the process. Although the Learning Team was intended as a space for shared interpretation, teachers outside of it lacked clarity on how it worked, which shaped their interpretations of the policy. This is consistent with Coburn's (2005) and Ganon-Shilon and Schechter's (2017) arguments that leaders play a role in helping teachers navigate differing perspectives, which, in this case, was only partially fulfilled.

These findings also reflect a broader pattern documented in language policy and planning research: that the values embedded in policy design are not automatically carried forward as policies travel from formulation to interpretation to enactment (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Johnson, 2013). In this district, an equity-oriented understanding of ML instruction was clear to leaders whose professional backgrounds were deeply rooted in bilingual education, but that same framing was not equally accessible to teachers navigating the day-to-day demands of implementation. This is consistent with Menken and García's (2010) argument that educators at every level actively interpret and reshape policy meaning within their own contexts. In this case, the divergence between leaders' sensegiving and teachers' sensemaking was not simply a matter of miscommunication; it also reflected the ideological assumptions about expertise and equity that the policy carried, and that were understood differently across organizational levels.

Prior research on ESL certification provides additional context for understanding these tensions. Johnson and Thorne-Wallington (2021) note that the meaning and rigor of ML/EL certification vary across states, reflecting differing conceptions of teacher preparedness. Some states have adopted more rigorous certification requirements, which have been linked to stronger outcomes for MLs (Iran, 2015), while a national trend toward less demanding pathways has raised concerns about the adequacy of teacher preparation (Gras & Kitson, 2021). In this context, the

district's decision to require a full ESL endorsement for all teachers represents a locally driven effort to enhance equity. However, as the findings illustrate, the success of such efforts depends not only on the rigor of the requirement but also on the extent to which the implementation process attends to teachers' needs and provides them the support they need to be successful.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for both district leaders and policymakers designing equity-oriented reforms, and for researchers studying policy goals and implementation. For district leaders and policymakers, the central lesson is that a shared commitment to an equity outcome is not sufficient to ensure coherent policy enactment. When the goals that guide a policy's implementation and the costs to teachers are not explicitly discussed with educators, it creates tension that undermines the alignment leaders aim to achieve.

In this district, teachers who perceived the endorsement requirement as a mandate rather than an incentive were not necessarily opposed to the policy's equity goals; rather, they were responding to how those goals were being pursued and what was being asked of them in the process. This suggests that policymakers should attend as carefully to process goals as to outcome goals when designing and communicating reform. Furthermore, creating genuine opportunities for teacher voice during policy design, instead of waiting until implementation, may help surface these tensions earlier.

The findings also highlight the role of structural decisions in sensegiving. As the case of the ESL resource teacher reduction illustrated, the messages that leaders send through staffing and support decisions can contradict the messages they send through explicit communication. School districts should therefore treat decisions about resources and personnel as integral parts of the policy, rather than separate administrative matters, since these choices shape how teachers understand what the district truly values.

For policy researchers, this study supports the usefulness of distinguishing between outcome goals and process goals when analyzing policy implementation. As this case illustrates, tensions in policy implementation can arise not from disagreement about outcome goals but from conflict over the means and conditions by which those goals are pursued, suggesting that researchers benefit from being explicit about which type of goal they are examining. Applying Stone's (2012) framework with this distinction in mind may help future studies identify the sources of implementation tensions more precisely.

Limitations and Future Research

While offering insights into district policy reform and educators' sensemaking, this study has some limitations that are important to keep in mind when interpreting the findings. One of them is the number and role of educators interviewed. Although an effort was made to invite educators with different roles to participate in the study, those who accepted the invitation reflected most, but not all, positions. It would have been beneficial to have interviewed more teachers, especially those who were part of the Learning Team and others who had recently gotten their ESL endorsement, to have a more comprehensive view of teachers' sensemaking processes. A follow-up study could illuminate those aspects and describe how educators' sensemaking has evolved as policy implementation has unfolded.

Our interpretation was also limited by the sources of data utilized. The analysis was based on interviews and documents, rather than direct observations of Learning Team meetings. Since the data collection occurred after the policy creation process was completed, it was not possible to capture how collective sensemaking developed in real time. As a result, our interpretations of

collaboration and communication within the Learning Team rely on participants' retrospective accounts and written materials. Observational data from policy development spaces could have provided a fuller picture of the interactional processes through which shared meanings and values were negotiated.

Furthermore, having access to educators at different stages of the policy process would have been beneficial for understanding how their sensemaking unfolded. It is possible that educators' views on the ESL endorsement requirement changed from the creation phase to after its implementation. Although we were able to analyze documents produced during the policy creation phase, it is possible that participants' retrospective views of the process led to different understandings about the initial goal-setting stage of the process. Future studies may follow the process more closely, from the start, to document sensemaking as it occurs individually and/or collectively.

Another limitation of this study is that, as with any case study of the policy process, it takes place within a specific context and time frame. Future research could explore similar initiatives in other school districts to determine whether the themes identified in this study are consistent or vary in different cases. Analyzing other districts that have implemented ESL endorsement requirements could provide deeper insights into the factors that contribute to a successful policy process.

Conclusion

In this paper, we studied one school district's policy process that required all teachers to hold an ESL endorsement to better serve its ML population. The district was guided by the policy goal of equity for MLs and considered teachers' job security and economic welfare when designing the policy. Even though there was a common commitment to achieving equity as an outcome, tensions arose during the implementation process. This was because a joint commitment to equity was not enough to guarantee that the policy was carried out coherently. The differences in how the goals of the policy were experienced by those who designed it and those who implemented it led to discordances in its enactment.

Some teachers viewed what was framed as an incentive as a mandate, while others felt insufficiently supported when putting their endorsements into practice; both factors significantly affected their sensemaking. This study contributes to the literature on policy implementation and ML education by illustrating that shared outcome goals are not sufficient to ensure coherent policy enactment when the goals governing implementation remain in tension or are not collectively negotiated. While the findings suggest that communication, teacher voice, and consistent support are important conditions for successful reform, further research is needed to understand how these processes unfold across districts and at different stages of policy implementation.

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About the Authors

Paulette Andrade González

Universidad Diego Portales

paulette.andrade@mail.udp.cl

ORCID 0000-0003-4075-3202

Paulette Andrade González is an adjunct professor and researcher at Universidad Diego Portales. Currently, she coordinates the team that designs professional development courses for teachers as part of Chile's Plan Nacional de Escritura and Plan Nacional de Mediación Lectora. Her research is centered on preparing teachers to work in contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Rebecca Lowenhaupt

Boston College

lowenhre@bc.edu

ORCID 0000-0001-9100-1145

Rebecca Lowenhaupt is a professor of educational leadership in the Lynch School of Education and Human Development at Boston College. Her research investigates educational reform in the context of immigration with a focus on school and district leadership practices.

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