

**ENGLISH LEARNERS' CONCEPTIONS OF SELF IN AN INTERNATIONAL
BACCALAUREATE MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAMME: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

by

Kendra Seitz Katnik

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Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Nathaniel McClain, Ed.D.



Dissertation Committee Member: Pamela Ross McClain, Ph.D.

Dissertation Committee Member: Pamela Schwallier, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

To Aida, Diego, Lora, Mariam, Sofia, and Zahra. Thank you for entrusting me with your stories. Your confidence, bravery, tenacity, and goals give me so much hope for our future.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the experiences of English learners (ELs) participating in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IB MYP) at a suburban middle school in Southeast Michigan. The International Baccalaureate Organization recognizes several key ideas that align with established theories of second language acquisition and culturally responsive pedagogy. While in theory, ELs should thrive in IB programs, little research is available on their experiences in American IB schools, and some research has brought to light discrepancies in the stated and actual language ideologies at play in such programs. The aim of this study was to document the lived and told stories of ELs who are participating in the IB MYP to identify how the program shapes their conceptions of self and acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social needs. Findings suggest that key elements of the IB MYP, including the IB learner profile and focus on international-mindedness, contribute positively to participants' strong identity as learners, self-esteem, and developing social and ethnic identities as multilingual students. Participants strongly believe their needs are being met, particularly through the efforts of individual teachers as they implement the IB approaches to teaching that remove barriers to learning and promote conceptual understanding of content through inquiry, real-life contexts, and collaboration. Examining the findings through the lens of LangCrit reveals that the IB MYP does not appear to overcome dominant cultural ideology that perpetuates meritocracy and traditional definitions of intelligence and success.

Keywords: English learners, International Baccalaureate, culturally responsive pedagogy, conceptions of self, student identity, self-esteem, social and ethnic identity, international-mindedness

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Even the earliest advocates for public education saw public schools as a means not only to educate the nation's citizens but also to create cohesion among diverse populations and eliminate social problems such as poverty (Kober et al., 2020b). In 1848, Horace Mann coined the term "the great equalizer" in referring to his vision for the Common School Movement. We can thus infer that the public-school movement in the United States has been interested in issues of equity since its inception. Mann's vision of schools as a great equalizer continues to be relevant today.

Public schools reflect the values of the community and accordingly are inherently political (Belle, 2019; Kober et al., 2020a). Throughout American history, schools have been a "theater" for playing out cultural conflicts (Cusick, 1992). While public schools are idealistically charged with providing equitable educational opportunities for all students, public school systems exist as microcosms of the larger American society and therefore mirror, and often reproduce, social inequities that persist today. As such, educators cannot engage in school leadership without addressing the intersectionality of race, culture, class, gender, ability, sexuality, and politics. Ignoring intersectionality within schools erases the very identities present in classrooms and communities.

Safir and Dugan (2022) captured a point of view increasingly recognized by researchers and educational leaders interested in such issues of intersectionality:

For all our talk of being student centered, we have bought into a success paradigm that robs many children of their voices, marginalizes their gifts, and prioritized measurement and incremental improvement over learning and transformation. (p. 12)

How, then, do we reconstruct public education around a different set of values, approaches, and views of success? We can begin by centering the experiences of children—particularly children at the margins—and working to heal wounds of racism and oppression in schools (Safir & Dugan, 2022).

Engaging in the work of growing cultural proficiency enables educational leaders to acknowledge individual and institutional barriers that have prevented education from fulfilling its promise as a great equalizer. This work allows schools to ensure core values, respond inclusively with diverse students and communities, and guide equity-focused personal and organizational transformation (Lindsey et al., 2019).

Background

A particular persistent problem in preK-12 schools nationwide is that students from immigrant and language minority backgrounds continue to be underserved in public schools in the United States, where education policy, curriculum, and practices are designed for educating language majorities (García et al., 2012). This inequity is evident in that English learners (ELs) are often excluded from rigorous coursework because English proficiency is inappropriately conflated with academic competency (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017). School leaders can promote equity for ELs by ensuring that they are included and supported in rigorous programs designed to promote academic achievement. International Baccalaureate (IB) programs have been identified as a promising option for promoting ELs' access to and success in rigorous coursework through individualized instruction and the development of intercultural understandings (Aldana & Mayer, 2014; Callahan & Hopkins, 2017). Participation in the IB program can be a means for promoting equity for ELs if they are supported appropriately and their languages and cultures are recognized, valued, and leveraged as assets.

Problem Statement

Despite a substantial body of federal law establishing the rights of limited English proficient students to equitable educational opportunities (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; Civil Rights Act, 1964; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982; U.S. Const. amend. XIV), ELs historically and perpetually lack such opportunities compared to their native English-speaking peers for whom policy, curriculum, and educational practice are designed (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017; García et al., 2012; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; Nutta et al., 2014; McGraner & Saenz, 2009, 2015). In contrast, the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) recognizes several key ideas that align with established theories of second language acquisition and culturally responsive pedagogy, including that language learning is not a separate discipline isolated from content learning, the role of all teachers in language instruction, and the importance of activating and building prior knowledge, scaffolding meaning, extending language, and affirming identities (Cummins, 1984; Cummins et al., 2005; Krashen, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2016; Thomas & Collier, 1997). While in theory, ELs should thrive in IB programs, little research is available on the experience of ELs in American IB schools, and some research has brought to light discrepancies in the stated and actual language ideologies at play in such programs (Carder, 2006, 2008; Corcoran & Gerry, 2010; Levy, 2007; Siskin et al., 2010; Solano-Campos, 2017).

Given the IB's explicit commitment to honoring linguistic diversity, it is appropriate to investigate the actual experiences of students from immigrant and language minority backgrounds who are participating in IB programs, and how the programs acknowledge their academic, linguistic, and social needs. By better understanding ELs' identities and needs, educators can work toward more equitable systems and practices that include culturally and linguistically diverse voices and perspectives. Written policies about language ideologies are not

enough if they are not realized through the lived experiences of the students for whom they are written.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of middle school ELs participating in school-wide implementation of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IB MYP). While the IB philosophy and its published documents honor linguistic diversity and speak to making content accessible and relevant to learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (International Baccalaureate Organization [IBO], 2008, 2014, 2019), ELs are often excluded from rigorous programs like IB in American public schools (Callahan & Gandara, 2004; Callahan & Hopkins, 2017; College Board, 2014; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; Nord et al., 2011), and explicit and implicit language ideologies can be at odds (Carder, 2006, 2008; Corcoran & Gerry, 2010; Levy, 2007; Siskin et al., 2010; Solano-Campos, 2017). This study employed a narrative design which allowed for exploration of the lived experiences of this group of students as their voices, especially those of younger students in the Primary Years Programme (PYP) and Middle Years Programme (MYP), have been largely omitted from the literature.

Research Questions

This narrative study addressed gaps in the literature by documenting the personal stories of six ELs from diverse language backgrounds participating in the IB MYP in a suburban middle school with school-wide implementation of the program. The following questions were written to foster exploration of the lived experience of ELs in the MYP:

1. What do the lived and told stories of English learners reveal about how the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme contributes to their conceptions of self?

2. What beliefs do ELs hold about how the IB MYP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social backgrounds and needs?

Research Approach

This study employed a narrative methodology for in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of ELs in an IB MYP, in order to inquire into how the IB MYP shapes their conceptions of self and the beliefs they hold about how the program recognizes their unique needs. The study was bounded by one suburban middle school in Southeast Michigan with school-wide implementation of the IB MYP and was delimited to the sample of students interviewed according to the study's design. Six middle school ELs were selected using convenient and purposive sampling procedures. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews focused on life histories, details of the middle school experience, and reflection on meaning. I analyzed data through multiple coding cycles with the intent of developing a deep understanding of individual narratives before looking for common themes related to the impact of the IB program. The final round of concept coding allowed for reflection on the broader social constructs present in the narratives. Codes were organized into categories that reflected themes as they became apparent.

Although the nature of the study prevented triangulation of data, a comprehensive review of relevant literature and use of a validated interview protocol shaped and refined the data collection procedures. Coding categories were developed and refined on an ongoing basis, guided by the study's conceptual framework. Additionally, various strategies were employed to strengthen credibility of the study, including researcher journaling, search for discrepant evidence, and peer review at different stages of analysis.

Assumptions of the Study

This research was carried out with several assumptions in effect for the duration of the study. The first assumption was that the participants were truthful in their responses to interview questions as they recounted their perceptions and experiences. The second assumption was that the participants' stories would reflect their conceptions of self and emerging identities as both learners and members of the greater society. Third, I maintained that experiential data that emerge from human interactions are a decolonizing form of knowledge that have the potential to humanize, liberate, and heal (Safir & Dugan, 2022). Finally, this study assumed the position that schools are ideological sites where language can be used to perpetuate or challenge social inequality.

The Researcher

I began my career in education as an elementary school classroom teacher. In my very first class of first graders, nearly two thirds of my students spoke languages other than English in their homes. Coming out of my teacher preparation program, I did not feel prepared to meet the needs of this population of students in my classroom; yet I felt compelled to better understand those needs. Consequently, I began to seek out additional resources and training. Fast-forward to over a decade later, at the time of conducting this study, I am employed as coordinator of the English Language Development program in the school district where this study took place. Throughout my years as an educator, the more I learned about the assets my culturally and linguistically diverse students brought to my classroom, the more I became interested in amplifying the voices of the students who are too often marginalized and viewed through a deficit lens by their teachers and school leaders. Specifically serving ELs in public education has become the focus of my career as I seek to grow my own knowledge and expertise in providing

equitable opportunities for this growing population of students, as well as sharing that knowledge and expertise with other educators. Through this work, I strive to keep the voices of my students and their families at the forefront, allowing them to speak for themselves and share their experiences openly and authentically.

As an educator of ELs, I brought to the inquiry process practical experience as well as knowledge and understanding of the environmental context. I also acknowledge that the same experiences that are valuable in providing insight could also bias my judgment regarding the research design and interpretation of findings. While narrative research design allows for the researcher to be an active participant in the collection and analysis of data, I strived to strengthen the credibility of the research by making the interpretive process explicit. I did so by thoroughly describing data interpretation and reporting of results. I continually reevaluated the impressions of respondents and challenged preexisting assumptions through researcher journaling throughout the analysis process. I also employed the use of response communities to check my thinking through interpretation and reporting as field texts and final research texts were constructed.

Rationale and Significance

The experience of ELs in IB programs is related to a larger discussion of adequacy versus excellence of education. Such issues are essential for school leaders to consider in seeking transformational change. Discussion on adequacy of education often revolves around inequitable opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with disabilities within public education systems. Enrolling ELs into a rigorous IB program does not offer equity of access to high-quality programming if those students are not appropriately supported within the program. One way educational leaders can gather data on the extent to which students are benefiting from a particular program is to ask

them. The voice of students is often overlooked in educational decision-making; yet seeking to understand students' lived experiences should be at the heart of our practice as educational leaders overseeing safe and positive learning communities.

In their research on effective leadership, Kouzes and Posner (2007) identified “challenging the process” as a common practice demonstrated by exemplary leaders. By considering the impact of decision-making on the actual students in our care, particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds, school leaders can challenge the process of educational decision-making through a social justice lens. While policy is typically created to mitigate issues, it is often far removed from and lacking the voice of whom it impacts. This phenomenon was evident in Solano-Campos' (2017) study which concluded that the stated language ideology of an IB elementary school conflicted with students' actual experiences. Lack of preparation of teachers and administrators to work with ELs is a barrier to strong policy implementation that actively supports and values the assets of multilingual students. (Levy, 2007; Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999; McGraner & Saenz, 2009; Nutta et al., 2014). As such, in considering the stories and experiences of real students in the IB MYP, the results of this study allow school leaders to evaluate the actual impact of the IB program for these students, compared to its intent. This is an important piece of monitoring instructional programming to sustain educational change and overcome problems of inequity.

Definition of Terms

Common definitions of several key terms are necessary to understand this research study. These terms include English learner, culturally and linguistically diverse, and immigrant student.

English learner: The study uses the term *English learner* as defined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):

The term “English learner,” when used with respect to an individual, means an individual — (A) who is aged 3 through 21; (B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school; (C)(i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; (ii)(I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and (II) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or (iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and (D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual — (i) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards; (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society. (1965, Section 8101[20])

Students are identified as English learners through a common entrance protocol defined by the state in which the study took place.

Culturally and linguistically diverse: This general term is used to refer to individuals whose home culture and language differ from the mainstream culture and English language. Culturally and linguistically diverse students and English learners can be mutually inclusive, but all culturally and linguistically diverse students are not necessarily English learners.

Immigrant students: Title III of ESEA offers a narrow definition of *immigrant children and youth* as individuals who: “A) are aged 3 through 21; B) were not born in any State; and C) have not been attending one or more schools in any one or more States for more than 3 full academic years” (ESEA, 1965, Section 3301[6]). Typically, when referring to K-12 students in

public schools in the United States, ESEA's definition is used. More generally, the term includes all students who were born outside of the United States (first-generation immigrant students), or whose parents were born outside of the United States (second-generation immigrant students). While this distinction is not important for the purposes of this study, it is important to note that not all immigrant students are English learners, and not all English learners are immigrant students. In fact, the majority of ELs in U.S. public schools are native-born U.S. citizens (Bialik et al., 2018).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the literature regarding the International Baccalaureate (IB) in U.S. schools as it relates to English learners (ELs). Given the research questions' focus on ELs' conceptions of self, the literature review also explores how self-concept is defined and understood. Key elements of the IB that overlap with best practices for teaching ELs are identified and the influence of language ideologies on language learning is discussed. Embedded within these overarching themes is a discussion of barriers and challenges for ELs in IB programs. Furthermore, the review identifies gaps in the literature to contextualize the study's problem statement and research questions and explains the study's theoretical framework.

Background

Adolescent Conceptions of Self

Given the research questions' focus on ELs conceptions of self, it is important to understand how self-concept is defined and understood. Self-concept is a general term used in psychology to refer to how individuals think about, evaluate, or perceive their behaviors, abilities, and characteristics (Bailey, 2003; Baumeister, 1999; Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006; Epstein, 1973; Harter, 2012; Lewis, 1990; Rogers, 1959). Psychologists categorize self-concept in a variety of ways. Seymour Epstein, well-known for his integrative theory of personality, determined that self-concept includes knowing the material self, interpersonal self, and intrapersonal self (Epstein, 1973). Lewis (1990) suggested that the development of a concept of self includes the existential self and categorical self. The existential self is the most basic part of self-concept, the sense of being separate and distinct from others, while the categorical self develops when a child becomes aware they are an object in the world with properties. In early

childhood, children apply concrete categories to themselves; later, they begin to include internal traits and comparative evaluations in descriptions of themselves (Lewis, 1990). Rogers (1959) categorized self-concept into three components: self-image, self-esteem, and ideal-self.

Self-Image

Self-image includes social roles and personality traits (Kuhn, 1960). In adolescence, conceptions of self are often full of contradictions as children develop the ability to consider possibilities and reason more abstractly. Additionally, teens tend to emphasize traits like being friendly and considerate more than younger children, demonstrating an increasing concern with how others view them (Harter, 2012). This concern with the perception of others can be connected to the “interpersonal self” highlighted by Epstein (1973).

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, as defined by the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, is the degree to which the qualities and characteristics contained in a person’s self-concept are perceived to be positive (American Psychological Association, 2022). Tafarodi and Swann (2001) stated that self-esteem includes evaluating the intrinsic value and instrumental value individuals place on themselves. Intrinsic value refers to the belief that “I am a good person.” Instrumental value refers to the belief that “I can do good things.” Morse and Gergen (1970) concluded that uncertain or anxiety-inducing situations can have a rapid impact on self-esteem. As a result, self-esteem often temporarily drops when children transition from one school setting to another, such as shifting from elementary to middle school (Ryan et al., 2013). Additionally, the level of self-esteem affects performance (Coopersmith, 1967). Argyle (1973/2008) categorized four major factors influencing self-esteem: the reaction of others, comparison with others, social roles, and identification.

Ideal Self

In positive psychology, the ideal self is thought to include three parts: an image of a desired future, hope, and a sense core identity. It is the emotional driver of intentional change and intrinsic motivation (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006). If the ideal self conflicts with an individual's self-image, self-esteem is negatively impacted. A person's ideal self may not match with what actually happens in their lives, which is called incongruence. The development of congruence is dependent on unconditional positive regard and is necessary for self-actualization (Rogers, 1959).

Ethnic Identity

An additional category of self-concept pertinent to the study's research questions is ethnic identity, which refers to how people come to terms with who they are based on their ethnic or racial ancestry. The necessity of ethnic identity exploration is most apparent for those from nondominant cultures. As such, in the United States, people of European ancestry engage in less ethnic identity exploration than those of non-European ancestry (Phinney, 2006). Phinney (2006) developed a model of ethnic identity that includes three stages or statuses: (a) unexamined ethnic identity, (b) ethnic identity search, and (c) achieved ethnic identity. Adolescents and adults in the first stage, unexamined ethnic identity, have not been exposed to ethnic identity issues. They may demonstrate a preference for the dominant culture or adopt the ethnicity of their parents with little thought to the question of ethnic heritage and what it means to them individually. Those who are exploring the customs, culture, and history of their ethnic group are in the ethnic identity search stage. For some, this leads to a rejection of the customs and values of the dominant culture. Finally, those who have actively explored their culture and have a deeper appreciation and understanding of their ethnic heritage, whether or not they choose

to maintain heritage language or customs, have an achieved ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990). Umaña-Taylor (2003) found that the degree of ethnic diversity in a school impacts identity exploration and achievement; the more ethnically homogeneous the school, the less exploration occurs. The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) states that its programs promote the development of schools that encourage the creation of rich personal and cultural identities (IBO, 2019).

The International Baccalaureate

The International Baccalaureate is a nonprofit foundation that works with schools, governments, and international organizations to develop programs of international education and assessment. The IB mission is to “develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect” (IBO, 2017, p. 2). Founded in 1968 and influenced by early 20th-century educationalists such as John Dewey, A.S. Neill, Jean Piaget, and Jerome Bruner, the IB claims a progressive education approach that emphasizes critical inquiry, transdisciplinary study, and active learning. The IB includes four programs of education: the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for students aged 3–12, the Middle Years Programme (MYP) for students aged 11–16, and the Diploma Programme (DP) or Career-related Programme (CP) for students aged 16–19 (IBO, n.d.-c).

There are four foundational and interrelated elements central to all IB programs which include: international-mindedness; the IB learner profile; a broad, balanced, and connected curriculum; and approaches to teaching and learning. The IB seeks to foster international-mindedness by encouraging students to reflect on their own perspective, culture, and identities, as well as those of others. The IB learner profile is a list of 10 attributes that highlight promoted dispositions such as curiosity and compassion, as well as developing knowledge and skills. The

IB learner profile states that IB learners are inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. Each IB program offers a curriculum that is broad, balanced, conceptual and connected. The programs emphasize making connections and exploring connections between academic disciplines. Each program culminates in the completion of a project that allows students to deepen and showcase their knowledge.

Finally, the IB approaches to teaching and learning are centered on a cycle of inquiry, action, and reflection and place an emphasis on student and teacher relationships (IBO, 2019).

The IBO estimates that 1.95 million students worldwide participate in its programs; as of 2022, there are over 5,500 IB World Schools authorized in 160 countries (IBO, 2022b). Nearly 2,000 of these IB World schools offering one or more of the four IB programs are in the United States (IBO, n.d.-c). While at its inception, 100% of IB schools were private schools, today more than half of IB World schools are state schools (IBO, 2017). The IB acknowledges that most students in IB schools have complex multilingual backgrounds and construct knowledge in a language that is not their mother tongue (IBO, 2008). However, English alone is the main medium of instruction in most IB schools (IBO, n.d.-d).

Schools' Obligations to English Learners

Public schools in the United States are required under federal law to ensure that students learning English can meaningfully participate in all educational programs and services they provide (Civil Rights Act, 1964; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). ELs represent nearly 10% of all K-12 public school students in the United States. This group includes over 5 million multilingual students who speak over 400 languages and dialects (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2018, 2020a, 2020b). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits state education agencies and school districts from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin. In 1974,

the Supreme Court ruled that public schools must take affirmative steps to ensure that ELs can meaningfully participate in the educational programs and services provided in order to comply with their legal obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). Furthermore, in the same year Congress amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) confirming that public schools must act to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation of students in instructional programs (Pub. L. No. 93-380, 1974). It is therefore essential that American schools offering an IB education take steps to ensure that ELs are included and supported in these programs.

IB Principles of Inclusive Education

In its document *Learning Diversity and Inclusion in IB Programmes* (IBO, 2016), the IB outlines the following principles of inclusive education:

- Education for all is considered a human right.
- Education is enhanced by the creation of affirmative, responsive environments that promote a sense of belonging, safety, self-worth and whole growth for every student.
- Every educator is an educator of all students.
- Learning is considered from a strengths-based perspective.
- Learning diversity is valued as a rich resource for building inclusive communities.
- All learners belong and experience equal opportunities to participate and engage in quality learning.
- Full potential is unlocked through connecting with, and building on, previous knowledge.
- Assessment provides all learners with opportunities to demonstrate their learning, which is rewarded and celebrated.
- Multilingualism is recognized as a fact, a right, and a resource.

- All students in the school community fully participate in an IB education and are empowered to exercise their rights and accept their responsibilities as citizens.
- All students in the school community have a voice and are listened to so that their input and insights are taken into account.
- All students in the school community develop the IB learner profile attributes and develop into inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.
- Diversity is understood to include all members of a community.
- All students experience success as a key component of learning.

These principles make clear the IB's explicit, resolute commitment to the inclusion of all learners in its programs, as well as an assets-based approach that positions diverse students as active participants and co-constructors of their educational experiences.

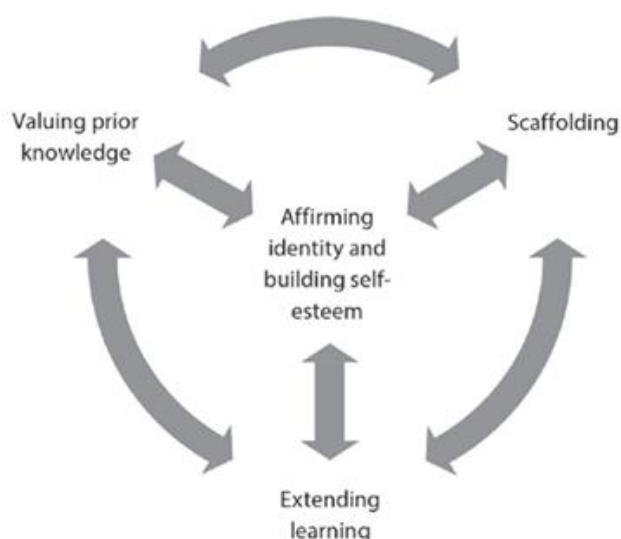
Key Elements in Both IB and EL Education

In theory, the IB perspective aligns well with what is known about best practices for educating ELs. The IB emphasizes affirming students' cultures and identities, providing a supportive yet challenging learning environment, and motivating students through authentic learning experiences. Furthermore, the IB specifically states that schools should develop a whole-school language policy to articulate conditions and practices for linguistically diverse students to be successful (IBO, 2008), demonstrating a commitment to including and supporting diverse students in its programs. Recently, the IB published a new document for its schools titled *Access and Inclusion Policy* (IBO, 2022a) that aims to establish standards and best practices in access and inclusion so that all students can fully participate in IB education. For the first time, additional language, defined as a student's first or best language not matching the language of

instruction, is established as a primary barrier to participation. The policy states that access arrangements must be accurately planned to remove or reduce barriers during teaching, learning, and assessment (IBO, 2022a). The IB identifies four principles of teaching that promote equal access to the curriculum for all learners. These four principles of affirming identity and building self-esteem through valuing prior knowledge, scaffolding, and extending learning (see Figure 1) are also principles present in theories of second language acquisition (Cummins, 1984; Cummins et al., 2005; Krashen, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2016; Thomas & Collier, 1997).

Figure 1

The Four Principles of Good Practice in the IB Learning Cycle



Note. From “What is an IB Education?” by International Baccalaureate Organization, 2019, p. 11 (<https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/about-the-ib/pdfs/what-is-an-ib-education-en.pdf>).

Culture and Identity

One of the key elements of an IB education is international-mindedness. According to the IB, the aim of all its programs is to develop internationally minded people who recognize their common humanity. IB programs provide opportunities for students to engage with local and

global issues and ideas, and reflect on their own perspective, culture, and identities, as well as those of others (IBO, 2019). High-quality instruction for ELs leverages students' home languages, cultural assets, and prior knowledge to support students in making meaning (Dressler & Kamil, 2006; Short et al., 2018; Staehr Fenner, 2014; Understanding Language, 2013).

The international-mindedness element of an IB education also aligns with culturally responsive pedagogy, described by Nieto (2016) as a mindset that respects and builds on students' backgrounds and experiences through the use of materials and specific teaching approaches. Ladson-Billings (1994) coined the term *culturally relevant teaching* to describe “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 18).

Diane Staehr Fenner (n.d.), a prominent researcher in the field of English as a Second language (ESL) teaching, made a connection between the IB philosophy and key principles for instruction for ELs. She pointed out that while the Common Core State Standards do not prescribe how to incorporate students' background experiences or home languages into instruction, ESL teachers possess considerable expertise in these areas (Staehr Fenner, n.d.). Additionally, the IB states that international-mindedness is developed through its focus on multilingualism, as all programs require students to study, or study in, more than one language (IBO, 2019).

The landmark research of Thomas and Collier (1997) showed that when schools succeed in transforming the sociocultural context of school so that language minority students experience the same type of supportive context for learning two languages as monolingual speakers do for learning in English, they create additive bilingual contexts that are associated with superior school achievement.

High Challenge, High Support

Conditions conducive to language learning are created when teachers demonstrate expectations of success for all learners (Short et al., 2018). Teaching that maintains high expectations for cognitive demand yet is highly context-embedded is the most beneficial for language learners (Cummins, 1984). Brophy's (1983) seminal work on teacher expectations found that teachers behave differently toward students for whom they have high expectations, offering feedback on assignments at a higher rate, seeking improved responses, providing more wait time, smiling more, and offering more eye contact. Subsequent research confirmed these findings revealing that when teachers have low expectations of their students, they call on them less often, ask less-challenging questions, reward them for less-rigorous responses, and give fewer and less-challenging assignments (Haycock, 2001; Marzano, 2010).

In my own experience as a teacher of ELs, I have seen these behaviors demonstrated toward students who are learning English. When pointed out, teachers have shared that they are afraid to put ELs "on the spot," and do not know how to make challenging tasks and assignments accessible. These anecdotes echo research indicating that the preservice training of grade-level and content teachers for meeting the needs of ELs is lacking (McGraner & Saenz, 2009; Nutta et al., 2014). Teacher training and support is needed to ensure that educators know and use best practices for linguistically diverse learners and avoid teaching "a form of literacy that gives learners a lasting experience of subordination" (Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999, p. 21).

Thomas and Collier's (1997) research also demonstrated that when teachers' expectations of EL students were high, their achievement was also high. Additional studies also have found that high-challenge/high-support classrooms have smaller achievement gaps (Gibbons, 2014). Teachers who create the most nurturing environments for academic growth of linguistically

diverse students share a pervasive and persistent belief that diverse students can succeed, as well as provide scaffolding to support and challenge those students (Kyburg et al., 2007).

Rigor and Challenge in the IB

Inherent in the IB curriculum is a perception of rigor and challenge (Monreal, 2016; Paris, 2003; Spahn, 2001; Sperandio, 2010). In a study investigating why schools chose to implement IB programs, Sperandio (2010) found that schools wanted to challenge students academically and socially and felt that the IB curriculum matched the high expectations of the school community. In fact, Spahn (2001) concluded that many schools were attracted to the IB because of its high academic standards, and the international aspects of an IB education were of secondary importance. Paris (2003) found that students who elected to pursue an IB diploma chose to do so because they felt it was prestigious and highly regarded, giving them a competitive advantage. While limited research could be found on the experience of ELs in IB programs, several studies reflect the ability of IB schools to provide a high-challenge, high-support environment for language minority students (Kyburg et al., 2007; Lew, 2019; Mayer, 2008; McDonald, 2014).

Expectations and Support for Linguistic Minorities in the IB

Four studies in particular, all conducted in diverse, urban high schools in the United States implementing the IB DP, provide evidence of IB schools that maintained challenging yet supportive environments for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Mayer (2008) concluded that with the appropriate scaffolds, the IB DP can benefit a wide range of students. Implementation of the IB DP was a first step in the process of raising the academic achievement of Latino and African American students. To maintain the academic rigor, however, teachers had

to implement additional academic and social support mechanisms to ensure students were able to meet the rigorous challenges of the program (Mayer, 2008).

McDonald (2014) found that while Latino immigrant students faced obstacles in their urban high school's IB program, they drew on resilience to overcome them. The students identified specific curricular experiences that influenced their success, including ESL classes, engaging with complex texts, rigorous writing assignments, and teacher support (McDonald, 2014). Kyburg et al.'s (2007) grounded theory study concluded that a pervasive and consistent belief that diverse students could succeed (high expectations) and scaffolding to support and challenge students (high support) were the two factors most integral to creating nurturing environments for academic growth for students from racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds.

Lew (2019) conducted a similar grounded theory study investigating an IB DP with a particular emphasis on supporting linguistic minority students, to find out how the program was structured to meet the specific needs of these students. Findings included flexibility in course requirements and assignment and assessment accommodations made by teachers (Lew, 2019). While the studies above show that IB schools can effectively provide the environment necessary for ELs to succeed, it is not clear the extent to which teachers and administrators across the IB are being prepared to effectively meet the needs of linguistically diverse student populations (Levy, 2007).

Motivation and Academic Identity

Motivation is an important condition for language learning as well (Krashen, 1987; Short et al., 2018). An element of Krashen's (1987) widely known and well-accepted theory of second language acquisition includes the affective filter hypothesis which posits that learners with high

motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and low levels of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language learning. As such, teachers should plan instruction that supports and enhances students' motivation (Short et al., 2018). This can be achieved through encouraging students to make connections to their own lives, creating inherently motivating learning tasks, utilizing project-based learning, and fostering student ownership (Short et al., 2018).

The IB programs also emphasize the importance of making connections and offering students authentic opportunities to connect their learning to the world around them (IBO, 2019). A key element in IB education is the IB's approaches to teaching and learning. The IB defines six approaches to teaching and five approaches to learning that guide and focus educators and students and are grounded in contemporary educational research (IBO, 2019). The approaches to learning include five categories of interrelated skills that aim to empower IB students to "become self-regulated learners who know how to ask good questions, set effective goals, pursue their aspirations and have the determination to achieve them" (IBO, 2019, p. 6). These five categories of skills span all IB programs and include thinking skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, and ethical thinking), research skills (comparing, contrasting, validating, and prioritizing information), communication skills, social skills, and self-management skills (IBO, 2019). The approaches to learning are designed to help support students' sense of agency and to encourage students to see learning as an active and dynamic process (IBO, 2019).

When linguistic minority students are supported appropriately, the IB can be a vehicle to increase motivation. Arreguin's (2015) phenomenological study of the experience of Latino students in an IB DP found that overall, students felt recognized and validated in the program, and made use of aspirational, linguistic, and familial capital to succeed. In Lew's (2019) study on multilingualism and multiculturalism in an IB DP, language minority students reported a sense of

pride and belonging through the heritage language courses offered in the IB curriculum. Furthermore, the IB helped the school overcome deficit-oriented ideologies among both staff and students: being smart became “cool,” and this change in climate raised the standard of performance for all students (Lew, 2019). This finding echoes previous conclusions that social support is a powerful motivation for successful immigrant students and ELs enrolled in advanced coursework (Baker, 2017; McDonald, 2014). Feeling successful is highly motivating, and modifications to the curriculum, instruction, and scaffolding can allow diverse students to experience a sense of success in the IB (Kyburg et al., 2007; Lew, 2019; Rambow, 2013).

The Influence of Language Ideologies on Language Learning

Despite evidence that culturally and linguistically diverse students can thrive in a rigorous program like the IB, a disconnect between explicit and implicit language ideologies in such programs can act as a barrier to these students’ success. Explicit and implicit language ideologies play an important role in the way ELs perceive themselves in school. As discussed previously, teachers exhibit different expectations, attitudes, and behaviors toward students for whom they have high expectations compared to students for whom they have low expectations (Brophy, 1983; Haycock, 2001; Marzano, 2010). Teachers’ expectations, attitudes, and behaviors toward students—particularly students of color and those from disadvantaged backgrounds—have a direct and profound impact on the way these students see themselves as learners and in turn, on their academic achievement (Boser et al., 2014; Brophy, 1983; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Spitz, 1997). Historically, ELs in the United States have been proven to be underserved in public education (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; Nutta et al., 2014; McGraner & Saenz, 2009), where the medium of instruction is typically English and a longstanding tradition of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy has prevailed (Hakuta, 2011;

Thompson, 1952). Even in schools where bilingualism is positioned as an asset, the linguistic repertoires of multilingual students can be made invisible through the interrelated processes of linguistic tokenism, linguistic subordination, and linguistic compartmentalization (Solano-Campos, 2017). Proficiency in dominant, colonial languages by English proficient speakers is valued over mother tongue bilingualism (Solano-Campos, 2017).

IB Language Policies

The IB's language policy makes an explicit commitment to supporting multilingualism and extending access to an IB education for students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (IBO, 2014). The policies for the PYP state that "the development of mother-tongue language is crucial for cognitive development, and in maintaining cultural identity" (IBO, 2009). The IB offers flexibility to PYP schools in providing language instruction to students. Language acquisition is a compulsory component of the MYP and DP; schools must provide sustained language learning in at least two languages (IBO, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). These languages are referred to as "Language A" and "Language B" in the MYP through the DP.

The Language A offered by most IB schools is English, with an implicit assumption that this is the students' best language, and Language B in many international schools is French, or increasingly Spanish (Carder, 2008). Historically, the IB did not consider options for students enrolled in programs where the primary language of learning was not their mother tongue (Carder, 2008). In fact, there is a perception that the IB language requirements perpetuate Western and English-centered epistemologies (Solano-Campos, 2017). Today, however, the IB recognizes the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the majority of the students it serves and has enacted policies to acknowledge home and heritage languages (IBO, 2008).

A “Language A2” option was added in the DP, for students with an already high level of competence in the target language (Carder, 2006). MYP still only offers Language A and Language B, however, which does not consider the diverse language background of students in international programs and U.S. schools. While Language B may be English for ELs, Language A (mother tongue) instruction must be provided as classroom instruction or private, small-group tutoring. This poses a challenge for schools in diverse areas where many first languages are represented in the student population and does not honor the bilingualism of students without academic language and literacy proficiency in their home language. Carder (2006) recommended that the IB provide clear and consistent information and guidance from early childhood on in order to enhance its reputation as an international educational body, and Solano-Campos (2017) pointed out a need to execute the IB language principles in a way that promotes additive bilingualism for all students.

The IB’s guidance on students learning in a language other than the mother tongue (IBO, 2008) uses the term “balanced bilingualism,” as an end goal of language development, though this definition is out of date with current linguistic understanding and does not fully affirm the language identities of linguistically diverse students. “Balanced bilingualism” views two languages like the wheels of a bicycle that work together equally, where the objective of learning a second language is to become fully fluent, and to have acquired two languages that do the same work and are developed to the same level. Sociolinguistics of the past have positioned language as diglossic, meaning that bilinguals use one language in certain contexts for certain purposes, and another language for different functions (Fishman, 1967). In this view, bilingualism is understood as linear, with one language being added to the first (Lambert, 1974). García et al. (2012) argued that this conceptualization of emergent bilinguals adding a second language to

their first language, native language, or mother tongue does not recognize the complex linguistic repertoires of multilingual individuals, whose language practices are intricate and cannot be easily assigned to a “first” or “second” language.

Even the most recent publication from the IBO addressing access and inclusion for diverse learners defines additional language learners as those whose language ability is “below the level that is deemed linguistically competent” (IBO, 2022, p. 24), which does not acknowledge the dynamic ways in which multilinguals process and produce language. Today, linguists understand that bilinguals are not balanced. They usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Different aspects of life often require different languages (Grosjean, 2010). *Translanguaging* refers to the dynamic process whereby multilingual speakers use their languages as an integrated communication system. A translanguaging framework ensures that students’ diverse home language practices are validated, and that students are taught to leverage their entire linguistic repertoire for academic purposes (García & Hesson, 2015). A translanguaging framework that validates and leverages students’ full linguistic repertoires is not evident in the IB’s stated language policies or its curriculum.

ELs and Access to Rigorous Coursework

Implicit language ideologies that are deficit-focused impact ELs by limiting their access to rigorous coursework. In 2015, the Office for Civil Rights for the United States Department of Education and the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice published a joint “Dear Colleague” letter reminding state education agencies of their obligations to ensure ELs have equal access to high-quality education (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). The letter outlines the 10 most common civil rights issues that result in noncompliance by school districts to meet

federal obligations, one of which is ensuring ELs have equal opportunities to meaningfully participate in all curricular and extracurricular activities, including the core curriculum, graduation requirements, and specialized and advanced courses and programs. Statistics from the College Board (2014) and National High School Transcript Study (Nord et al., 2011) highlight the underrepresentation of both ELs and former ELs in advanced coursework, which is a predictor of college admission. ELs are often placed in office support or aide positions rather than the academic coursework necessary for graduation (Callahan & Gandara, 2004), and they are less likely to complete required math and science courses than their English-proficient peers (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Callahan et al., 2010).

A policy brief that summarized research on ELs' underrepresentation in advanced coursework, however, stated that IB programs represent a promising option for promoting ELs' access to and success in college preparatory coursework (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017). While the IBO does not currently track EL enrollment data (Staehr Fenner, n.d.), it has made an effort in the last decade to expand and document participation of historically marginalized students in IB authorized schools (Corcoran & Gerry, 2010; Siskin et al., 2010). However, retaining and supporting underrepresented populations can be challenging due to difficulties in providing appropriate support to teachers and expanding teacher beliefs about who the IB is "for" (Corcoran & Gerry, 2010; Siskin et al., 2010).

Gaps in the Literature

Very few studies were found related to ELs in IB programs. Several of the studies reviewed focused on linguistic minority students with diverse language backgrounds, but not necessarily students who were classified as ELs by their schools, instead including students who had exited ESL programs or came from Spanish-heritage families (Aldana & Mayer, 2014;

Arreguin, 2015; Baker, 2017; Kyburg et al., 2007; Lew, 2019; Mayer, 2008). Furthermore, the majority of the studies that explored the experiences of language minority students in IB programs took place in urban high schools with a majority of Latino students who had opted-in to IB programs (Aldana & Mayer, 2014; Arreguin, 2015; Kyburg et al., 2007; Lew, 2019; Mayer, 2008; McDonald, 2014). Missing from the literature are studies conducted in suburban settings with more diversity in the language backgrounds of linguistic minority students. In the school district where this study took place there are more than 40 first languages represented in the EL population. Furthermore, few studies could be found in the context of the MYP, and none that involved school-wide implementation.

Theoretical Framework

Dewey's (1938) theory of experience is a theoretical underpinning of all narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). It is important to consider Dewey's notion of "situation," or the place or places where events occur. By framing narrative inquiry within this view of experience, it becomes imperative to focus the inquiry not only on individuals' experience but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which that experience is shaped and expressed. This study assumed the position that schools are ideological sites where language can be used to perpetuate or challenge social inequalities, recognizing that the study took place within a linguistic field, described by Bourdieu (1991/2003) as a system of "linguistic relations of power based on the unequal distribution of linguistic capital" (p. 57). These philosophical assumptions result in a view of the classroom as a place where belief systems about language users and their linguistic practices are grounded in power dynamics of the greater society (Solano-Campos, 2017).

Accordingly, the study was designed using a critical lens. Critical theory is a social theory that focuses on structures of power and the control of individuals, groups, or society by externally imposed influences (Kim, 2016). It asserts that emancipation occurs through critique of such structures (Fay, 1987). The major purpose of critical theory is to “make problematic” what is taken for granted in culture to achieve a greater degree of social justice for those who are oppressed (McCarthy, 1991, p. 43). Critical researchers envision new possibilities by critiquing existing power structures within social systems, using theory to advocate for social action (Madison, 2011). Under this perspective, people use their insights and the work of researchers to understand and ultimately change reality (Peca, 2000). This perspective is well-aligned with the ideals of narrative research and the telling and retelling of stories as a research methodology. Okri (1997) wrote that stories either give life meaning, or negate it with meaninglessness, and that changing the stories we live by can change lives.

Critical Race Theory and LangCrit

Critical theory is grounded in a desire to understand forms of power and domination that create social inequality. There is no doubt that schools are powerful institutions where hierarchies exist. Much debate continues to be had around whom schools are “for” and how institutions marginalize populations of students they claim to serve, particularly students of color. Policy today continues to be shaped by a paradigm held by social scientists and educators in the 1960s that viewed non-White students outside of the middle class as “culturally deprived or disadvantaged” (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Consequently, critical race theory (CRT) evolved out of critical theory in the United States in the 1970s to explain racial issues that critical theorists could not appropriately address (Kim, 2016). Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998), who is credited with bringing CRT to the field of education, positions storytelling as central to CRT.

Several branches have grown out of CRT to understand the oppression of other marginalized groups. More recently, critical race and language theory, or LangCrit, has emerged as a theoretical and analytical framework in which language studies scholars look for ways in which race, racism, and racialization intersect with issues of language, belonging, and identity. Drawing on poststructuralist and sociocultural theories, critical language scholars argue that the boundaries of language are socially produced and maintained, motivated by the creation of boundaries and hierarchies; linguistically, languages intersect, mix, and dissolve into one another and are not fixed, stable entities (Crump, 2014). LangCrit theory is interested in examining how such boundaries are socially produced and maintained, how power has come to be associated with certain linguistic resources in certain spaces, how these realities shape the lived experiences of individuals, the values they attach to how they use language, and the identities that emerge as a result (Crump, 2014).

Summary and Implications

The stated ideology and policy of the International Baccalaureate aligns with much of what is known about best practices for students learning English, including an emphasis on students' culture, identity, and language backgrounds, a rigorous curriculum with high expectations and individualized support, and a commitment to fostering bilingualism (Dressler & Kamil, 2006; IBO, 2008, 2014, 2019; Short et al., 2018; Thomas & Collier, 1997; *Understanding Language*, 2013). Multiple cases explored in the literature indicate that linguistic minority students can thrive in an IB context (Aldana & Mayer, 2014; Arreguin, 2015; Baker, 2017; Kyburg et al., 2007; Lew, 2019; Mayer, 2008; McDonald, 2014). Despite this evidence, a larger body of research has shown that ELs are often excluded from specialized programs like IB (Callahan & Gandara, 2004; Callahan & Hopkins, 2017; College Board, 2014; Lhamon & Gupta,

2015; Nord et al., 2011). Furthermore, linguistic minority students can face barriers in these programs when teachers are ill-prepared to meet their needs, the implicit language ideologies of schools send a message that these students do not belong in rigorous programs, or their home and heritage languages are not valued and supported (Carder, 2006, 2008; Corcoran & Gerry, 2010; Levy, 2007; Siskin et al., 2010; Solano-Campos, 2017).

Solano-Campos' (2017) ethnographic study in a U.S. state-funded school implementing the IB PYP is of particular relevance as she found that although the school positioned bilingualism as linguistic capital, the linguistic repertoires of language minority students were made invisible. This study showed how the stated language ideology of the IB is not always the reality experienced by students. Given the IB's explicit commitment to honoring linguistic diversity, it is appropriate to investigate the actual experiences of students from language minority backgrounds who are participating in its programs. This study addressed gaps in the literature by investigating the lived experiences of a number of ELs from diverse language backgrounds participating in the IB MYP in a suburban middle school with school-wide implementation of the program. The study employed a narrative exploration of the research questions through a critical lens. Arreguin's (2015) research on the experience of Latino students in an IB DP in Chicago was of particular influence in developing research questions that addressed how ELs make meaning out of their experiences in the IB MYP and how they perceive themselves academically, linguistically, and socially in the context of the program. Findings were informed by the theories of self-concept developed by social psychologists.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Narrative inquiry positions lived and told stories as data, with experience viewed as narrative in nature. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) first used the term *narrative inquiry* in the educational research field. Narrative inquiry has become an influential research methodology in education; narrative researchers in education strive to honor teaching and learning as complex and developmental in nature, and position stories of teachers and students as key in understanding the complex nature of a classroom (Kim, 2016). It draws on Dewey's (1938) theory of experience which states that experience is a three-dimensional space of temporality, place, and sociality. Temporality, place, and sociality merge in particularly important ways for children in middle school as they begin to establish their adult identities (Marshall & Neuman, 2012). From an ontological and epistemological viewpoint, narrative inquiry is simply a way of understanding and inquiring into experience. All stories are lived, told, and inquired into within social, cultural, institutional, familial, and linguistic narratives (Clandinin et al., 2016). For this reason, a narrative design was chosen to inquire into the social, cultural, institutional, familial, and linguistic narratives that contribute to English learners' (ELs) experiences in the context of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IB MYP). The following chapter describes the research design including research questions, sampling procedures, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis, as well as addresses research ethics and quality.

Justification for Narrative Inquiry

A key component of narrative research positions the researcher as a co-creator of narratives with the participants (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin et al., 2016; Kim, 2016). Narrative

inquirers study not only the experience of others, but also their own experiences as inquirers in relation with the experiences of participants (Clandinin et al., 2016). As an EL educator myself, it was crucial to consider how my own narratives and identity became part of the landscape being studied. Narrative inquiry allows for this fluidity.

Clandinin et al. (2016) theorized that a touchstone of narrative inquiry is to identify three kinds of justification for the inquiry, including personal, practical, and social. Personally, this research is relevant to me as an educator of ELs. In my work, I see firsthand the linguistic and cultural capital that students bring to classrooms, but also how it is often made invisible by school structures and the ideologies of those in power in these institutions, including fellow educators. Considering the mission and vision of the school site itself, which aims to create a learning space for all, leads to a practical application of the research. By inquiring into the lived experiences of a subgroup of students within the school landscape, educators can better understand the ways in which they do and do not honor these students' identities and meet their unique needs. Finally, social implications of the research involve amplifying the voices of a group that has been historically marginalized in the landscape of American schools, resulting in recommendations to the IB to strengthen its commitment to providing a global education to students with complex multicultural and multilingual backgrounds.

Research Design

Clandinin et al. (2016) spoke to the paradox of designing a narrative inquiry as it is both impossible to imagine the study without the participants, and essential to imagine and plan for the study. "As we design a narrative inquiry," they wrote, "the process involves engaging in imaginative thinking about the research puzzle along with possible participants as existing in an ever-shifting life space and figuring out and describing the kind of field texts needed" (p. 24). As

such, it is important to note that the research design shifted and adapted as the study unfolded. The research design for the overall narrative inquiry involved coming alongside a few children in order to understand their experiences in the IB MYP. Data were collected through the use of in-depth interviews. Field texts and interim research texts were co-composed with participants. Narrative inquiry involves reflexive, iterative processes of moving from being in the field, to field texts, to research texts, and is not a straightforward linear process (Clandinin et al., 2016).

Research Questions

Josselson and Lieblich (2003) stated that narrative research questions should be composed not to be answered, but to call for exploration. Research questions in narrative inquiry are therefore not an end goal, but rather guiding points in the inquiry process that allow for unexpected and meaningful results to emerge (Kim, 2016). Clandinin et al. (2016) referred to “research puzzles” in narrative inquiry rather than research questions to allow for this continual reformulation of an inquiry as opposed to a defined problem with an assumed solution. As such, the following questions were written to explore the lived experience of ELs in the MYP:

1. What do the lived and told stories of English learners reveal about how the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme contributes to their conceptions of self?
2. What beliefs do ELs hold about how the IB MYP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social backgrounds and needs?

Sampling Procedures

The minimum sample size was set at six participants, according to the suggestion of Beitin (2012) that an appropriate sample size can range from six to 12 provided there is thematic redundancy after six. This is also within the previous recommendation of Kvale (1996) who suggested a sample size of 15, plus or minus 10. Participants were selected both conveniently

and purposely. The first criterion for purposive sampling was that the participants were identified as ELs according to common entrance protocol defined by the state in which the study takes place, and secondly that they attended a public middle school with school-wide implementation of the IB MYP. For convenience, one suburban middle school was selected that met the latter criterion. I am employed by the school district in which this school is situated and oversee the English Language Development program district-wide. Accordingly, steps were taken to ensure research ethics and validity of the study which are addressed throughout this chapter.

Description of the Setting

Maple Hill (pseudonym) Middle School is a suburban middle school in Southeast Michigan with school-wide implementation of the IB MYP for Grades 6–8. The school has a low-incidence EL population, with approximately 2% of the total student population meeting the ESEA (1965) definition for English learner. As such, a pseudonym was used to protect the anonymity of the research participants. ELs at Maple Hill range from early through high-intermediate proficiency in English as measured by an annual language assessment.

Approximately 10 different first languages are present in the EL population at Maple Hill Middle School, with Spanish being the most prevalent native language, followed by Arabic. The majority of ELs at the middle school have attended school in the Maple Hill district for 5 or more years.

The research site has been authorized as an IB World School for the past 7 years. Exploration of the International Baccalaureate Programme began in the 2008–2009 school year with a feasibility study, trainings, and appointment of an MYP Coordinator. Preparation continued with program implementation, ongoing professional development and trainings, and curriculum development and alignment, culminating in status as an authorized IB World School

in May of 2015. Table 1 below presents the timeline of IB implementation at Maple Hill. All students who attend Maple Hill Middle School participate in the IB MYP curriculum, and continue this program into their ninth and 10th grade years at the district's high school. Students may then elect to continue into the DP for 11th and 12th grade.

Table 1

IB Implementation Timeline Maple Hill Middle School

2008-09	Initial interest and feasibility study, trainings, appointment of MYP Coordinator
2010	Early implementation of MYP, presentations to staff and community
2011	Application for candidacy, ongoing professional development, and training
2013	Awarded Candidate School status, curriculum development and MYP/Common Core alignment
2014	IB consultant visit, preparation for authorization, creation of MYP Units of Study
2015	IB MYP authorization visit March 2015, authorized as IB World School May 2015

According to MYP criteria, students receive 50 hours of teaching in eight subject groups in each year of the program: Language Acquisition, Language and Literature, Individuals and Societies, Sciences, Mathematics, Arts, Physical and Health Education, and Design. At Maple Hill, all sixth-grade students take a Language Exploration class that includes instruction in Spanish, French, and German for their Language Acquisition requirement. For seventh and eighth grade, students can choose one of these languages to study further. Teachers at Maple Hill attend annual IB conferences for ongoing professional development, and each academic department meets regularly with the MYP Coordinator to collaboratively develop and refine IB units of study.

Subject Recruitment

Permission was obtained from the school district's superintendent to access the school building at Maple Hill Middle School for research purposes. To recruit participants for the study, I first visited Maple Hill Middle School during students' scheduled English as a Second Language (ESL) class period during the week of April 25, 2022. At this time, I introduced myself as a researcher and explained the study's intent to learn about students' experiences at Maple Hill and how the IB program shapes their beliefs about themselves and acknowledges their needs. I clearly stated that participation was optional and that there were no consequences for not participating. I also explained the study's procedures including parental permission, the interview process, and incentive, and emphasized that those who chose to participate in the study and had parent permission could opt-out of the study at any time without consequence.

Research ethics require significant attention to ways in which potential participants might feel pressured or coerced into participating in the study, particularly studies involving children. While I do not work directly with the students at Maple Hill, nor do I have any position of authority there, in order to mitigate undue influence as an adult in their school, the voluntary nature of the study and assurance that the decision to participate would have no impact on the students' educational experience was reiterated throughout recruitment materials and consent/assent forms. After my initial visit, I sent a recruitment flier (see Appendix C) home with the students to review with their parents. A cover letter to students and parents was attached from the school principal which stated support for the study, reiterated that there were no consequences for choosing not to participate, and outlined steps for students or parents to share their experiences with the school without participating in the study.

The flyer and principal letter were also sent to students' parents via email by their ESL teacher the day of the recruitment visit. Parents and students were able to express interest in participation through a return slip at the bottom of the flyer. Parents consented to being contacted for the purpose of the study on the return slip and provided their own contact information. The return slips were returned to the students' ESL teacher and stored in an envelope in a locked cabinet until I returned to the school to retrieve them to maintain subject privacy. Any slips indicating "no" were immediately destroyed. After I retrieved the returned slips, I individually called parents to confirm interest and answer any questions. At this time, interpreter services were offered for the phone call to ensure informed consent. However, all parents were comfortable conversing and receiving consent forms in English.

Seven students who met the criteria of being an EL as defined by the State of Michigan and attending a middle school with school-wide implementation of the IB MYP returned the recruitment flyer. After speaking with the students' parents, one chose not to consent to the study. As such, the remaining six participants were selected to meet the minimum sample size established. Because these six students represented a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, a second round of recruitment was determined to be unnecessary.

Consent and Assent

I visited Maple Hill Middle School again to speak with selected students during the week of May 2, 2022. At this time, I read aloud the child assent form to the students and instructed them to take it home to review with their parents. The parental consent form was also sent home with the students. After this visit, I contacted parents again via email to provide context for the consent form and provide an opportunity for parents to request the consent form read aloud and specify in which language. This step ensured informed consent regardless of the reading level or

preferred language of parents. I also called parents again with this same information. Parents of all six participants returned the signed English consent forms.

Students returned consent and assent forms to their ESL teacher, which were placed in an envelope and locked in a cabinet until I retrieved them from the research site. After consent and assent forms were received, each participant was assigned a random unique identifier using an online universally-unique identifier (UUID) generator (www.uuidgenerator.net). Participant IDs were linked to identifying information (i.e., first and last name, parent names, parent contact information) in a master key stored in the cloud on Google Drive, only accessible by the researcher. This key was stored separately from research data.

Consent and assent forms were photocopied with a hard copy sent home with students for the family's own record. The originals were stored in a locked file cabinet and will be kept for 3 years following the close of the study per university research guidelines. After 3 years have passed, the signed consent and assent forms will be shredded.

Instrumentation

The data collected in this narrative research study consisted primarily of transcripts from interviews with participants. Kvale (1996) noted that narrative inquiry should focus on quality over quantity of interviews and suggested completing three rounds of open or in-depth life story interviews. Accordingly, each participant was interviewed over a period of three rounds.

An interview protocol was developed using a slightly modified version of the interview question bank used by Arreguin (2015) in the study *Reform Through a Student Lens: The Experience of Latino/a Students in an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Chicago*. I reached out to the researcher to gain permission to modify this interview protocol due to the similarity in study design and research questions and the instrument's validation in prior research, which

resulted in research findings supported by the literature. Three in-depth interviews were structured to explore the two research questions: (a) What do the lived and told stories of ELs reveal about how the IB MYP contributes to their conceptions of self? (b) What beliefs do ELs hold about how the IB MYP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social backgrounds and needs? The in-depth interview sessions were structured as follows:

- Interview 1: Focused Life History,
- Interview 2: Details of the Experience, and
- Interview 3: Reflection on the Meaning.

Table 2 depicts sample interview questions from each interview session. (Appendix B provides the full interview question bank.)

Table 2

Sample Interview Questions

Interview Focus	Sample Questions
Focused Life History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about your family and the neighborhood where you grew up. • Talk to me about your language experience. What was the first language you remember speaking? What does that mean for school? • What does it mean to you to be multilingual?
Details of the Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe your experience at Maple Hill Middle School. • Can you describe the IB Learner Profile? • Describe a class that is particularly hard. • Describe a class that you really enjoy. • Do you feel supported? Why or why not?
Reflection on the Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it take to be successful at Maple Hill Middle School? Do you believe you have been successful?

- Do you believe the IB program at Maple Hill Middle School is working?
- Have you ever felt that you needed something different at school because your needs were different?

The interview protocol was used to guide interviews with participants. In narrative inquiry, the interviewer's role is to listen with attentive care and ask necessary questions to further inspire the telling of stories. To avoid interviews that do not yield much data, researchers should help participants think narratively (Kim, 2016). Interviews 1 and 2 fit Kim's (2016) criteria for the first of two distinct phases of interviewing, the narration phase in which the interview restricts interventions to the minimum. Interview 3 fulfilled the conversation phase composed of semi-structured, in-depth questioning to clarify what was presented in the narration. In this conversation phase, the researcher is an active co-constructor rather than a passive collector of data (Kim, 2016). Each of the three interviews took place with approximately 1 week in between, to allow for the researcher and participants to process the interview without sacrificing memory of the experience.

Research journaling is also an important aspect of narrative research, as narrative inquirers study not only the experiences of the participants but also their own experience in relation with the experiences of participants (Clandinin et al., 2016). It is necessary to first engage in "autobiographical narrative inquiries" as the study is designed and carried out to place attention on our own roles within the storied landscapes being studied (Clandinin et al., 2016). "Our narrative beginnings reflect not only our autobiographical traces in relation to the phenomena under study but also how we are positioned in relation to the landscape" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 59). As such, I kept a research journal throughout the study, beginning with a description of my own personal narrative—which brought me to study the phenomenon—and

continuing with reflections on how my own lived and told stories shifted as a result of the research.

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving consent and assent forms, parents were contacted via phone call or email to schedule three 1-hour virtual interviews using the Zoom platform between May 9, 2022 and June 17, 2022, with at least 1 week between each interview. Parents were required to be in the room in which the children accessed Zoom for the interviews according to the University of Michigan Research Code of Conduct which states that study team members are not permitted to have interactions with minors that cannot be witnessed by an adult third party. Zoom invitations were sent via email with a link and password for each interview session.

Each interview took place via Zoom, outside of the school day as scheduled. To join the Zoom, a unique link was provided with a passcode. After the participant joined the Zoom meeting, the session was locked to protect confidentiality. Participants were renamed in Zoom with their unique identifier so that recordings would not include the child's name. Assent forms were reviewed again with students and confirmed, after which I began recording the Zoom session (audio only). Audio recording was optional, but all students and parents assented/consented to being recorded. Before any interview questions were asked, students were reminded that they could choose to end the interview at any time or could choose not to answer any questions. Parents were also reminded that they may also terminate the interview at any time.

It is important to note that narrative inquiries in the educational field engage in relational narrative inquiries, with an emphasis on co-researcher relationships, in which the storyteller and story listener are in dynamic relationships that promote growth and learning for both (Kim,

2016). Thus, care was taken to develop positive rapport and authentic relationships with the research participants. I began the interviews by asking students about their day or weekend and remembered details about their lives in between sessions to follow up on. For example, one child was working on an art project at home, and she shared her progress with me throughout our interview sessions. I also regularly complimented students on their ability to express their thoughts and opinions and shared ongoing gratitude for their participation.

Data Analysis

Within one week of each interview, the Zoom audio transcripts were edited for accuracy and to remove identifying information including specific names and locations. After transcription was complete, the original audio files were deleted permanently so that only de-identified data remained. Interview transcripts were stored securely in the cloud on Google Drive and will be kept for 3 years following the close of the study, after which they will be permanently deleted.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggested three analytical tools for narrative inquiry, including broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying. Broadening includes looking for a broader context of the stories told and creating a general description of the participants and the social and cultural environments in which the research takes place as informed by their stories and the literature review. Burrowing focuses on more specific details of data by asking questions about why and how the happenings influenced the lived experiences of participants. Storying and restorying brings the significance of the lived experience to the fore, while acknowledging and emphasizing that the research text only speaks for the “now”; there are always gaps where stories are intentionally or unintentionally not told (Clandinin et al., 2016). These three analytical tools were used throughout the data analysis to provide insight into the research questions centered around the meaning ELs make of their experience in the IB MYP in relation to their conceptions

of self and their beliefs about how the program acknowledges their identities and meets their individual needs.

During transcription, margin notes were added using an open coding technique with any initial patterns or themes noticed, as well as notes about any information gleaned from non-verbal cues such as vocal tone. The process of restorying began as interim research texts were developed from the research journal and interviews. These texts were loosely written in the narrative style of *Bildungsroman* through the creation of a story arc containing the themes of:

- loss,
- journey,
- conflict and growth, and
- maturity.

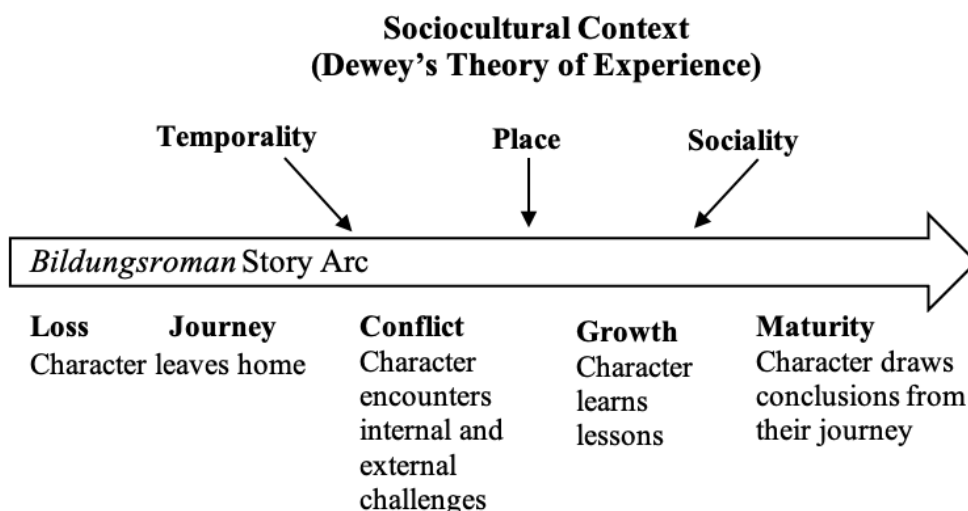
Bildungsroman focuses on an individual's personal growth and identity development. This focus on growth and identity was intended to ensure that the interim research texts were an outgrowth of the research questions which center on identity. *Bildungsroman* addresses both inner development and the complexity and conflicts of human development (Kim, 2016). A *Bildungsroman* is written "for the sake of the journey, and not for the sake of the happy ending toward which that journey points" (Swales, 1978, p. 34). This style of narrative is appropriate for narrative inquiry, which places an emphasis on the fact that there will never be a *final story*, but rather, "each story of experience opens into new stories to be levied and told, always with the possibility of retelling and reliving" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 32).

Emergent interim research texts were shared with participants in each interview and further constructed in collaboration with participants to ensure fidelity to their told stories. After mapping the participants' stories into the story arc of *Bildungsroman*, I continued re-storying by

considering how those story arcs reflected the three-dimensional inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place of the participants' experience as well as the social, cultural, and institutional narratives that shaped the way they were expressed (Dewey, 1938). Figure 2 presents a visual representation of how each data set was initially interpreted to develop restoried participant narratives.

Figure 2

Restoried Narratives



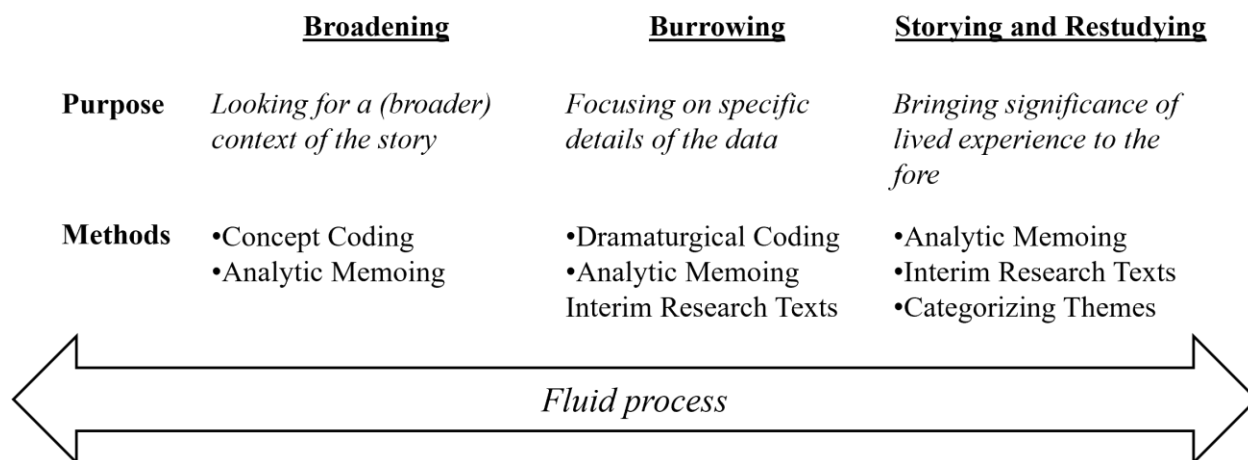
Most methodologists agree that coding schemes must be customized to the specific context of a study (Saldaña, 2016). As such, multiple coding methods were employed with each coding cycle leading to a richer perspective of the data sets throughout the steps of broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying. First, descriptive coding was employed to achieve a categorized index of the data's contents. This type of coding is essential groundwork for further analysis and interpretation (Saldaña, 2016). For example, all data coded with "language" were extracted from the main body and reassembled for a categorized narrative portrait of participants' experiences with language for further analysis.

Next, dramaturgical coding was used to explore intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions. This type of coding draws attention to the qualities, perspectives, and drives of participants (Saldaña, 2016). It allowed me to inquire deeper into the objectives, obstacles, strategies, attitudes, emotions, and motivations present in the individual narratives before considering patterns across narratives.

Concept coding was applied to larger stanzas of data to move toward more abstract concepts. Because the study was grounded in critical theory, I found concept coding particularly valuable because it allows for reflection on broader social constructs (Saldaña, 2016). Figure 3 displays the analytical tools used during the coding process.

Figure 3

Analytical Tools



Codes were placed into logical categories that reflected themes as they became apparent. Data interpretation took place simultaneously within coding and categorizing as well as after.

Categories and codes were studied to determine overarching themes that provide insight into the research questions; these themes are outlined in the Findings chapter.

Research Ethics and Quality

Several ethical considerations were made in undertaking this study. In recruiting children and youth as research subjects, there is already a concern with the vulnerability of the population due to their age. Moreover, ELs have a history of marginalization in U.S. schools and thus are, in a sense, twice vulnerable. A starting point was approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Michigan – Flint, followed by institutional approval from the school district chosen for the study.

In using the school institution as the recruitment site for participants, it was important to work within the rules and regulations of conducting research in this setting, as well as ensuring the research purpose aligned with district and school priorities to show the benefit to the children involved. Through every phase of the research, careful attention was made to the children's psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. Relational ethics are at the heart of narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). The telling of stories is deeply personal, and respect must be shown for the dignity and welfare of the participants and their communities.

Because narrative inquiry allows researchers to invite the participants to become coresearchers, co-constructors, co-narrators, and co-storytellers, it is more difficult to abide by the traditional research tenets of distance and objectivity (Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) highlighted how the researcher can take stock of their actions based on their role in the research process by taking “two steps back” through reflexivity. The first step back is the reflection of objective observation, and the next step back is reflecting on that reflection. The use of a research journal throughout the research process assisted in making this reflexivity visible. An additional ethical concern is fidelity to the told stories of participants, which is addressed in the co-construction of texts in collaboration with participants.

Furthermore, it is crucial to act with integrity throughout the narrative inquiry process by utilizing general qualitative strategies to establish trustworthiness (Kim, 2016). Some researchers have argued that assessing validity is not a useful practice in qualitative research as this concept is based on realist or positivist assumptions, making it inappropriate for naturalistic forms of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rolfe, 2006). Others, however, have posited that rejecting realism for relativism as a basis for evaluating research devalues the rigor of qualitative research (Maxwell, 1992; Porter, 2007). Despite these opposing schools of thought, we must first assess the likeliness that a claim is true before using it to inform practice; whether we use the term credibility, compellingness, or trustworthiness, validity remains an important aspect of conducting qualitative research in any paradigm (Meraz et al., 2019).

Threats to validity particularly present in narrative research include differences in people's experienced meaning and the stories they tell about that meaning, as well as the connections between storied texts and interpretation of the texts (Polkinghorne, 2007). An effort has been made to resolve or clarify the quality dilemma of qualitative research by making the interpretive process more explicit (Bailey, 1996). This study attempted to make the interpretive process explicit through researcher journaling and by thoroughly describing data interpretation in the reporting of results. Additionally, throughout the entire data collection and analysis process, response communities were engaged as a means of strengthening the validity of data.

Clandinin et al. (2016) positioned response communities as another "touchstone" of narrative inquiry and defined them as individuals who come alongside narrative researchers to read and respond to field texts. These individuals help keep the researcher "awake" to who they and the participants are and are becoming throughout the research process. Response communities are made up of one or more people who come to the work with different

experiences but are interested in the researchers' and participants' experiences (Clandinin et al., 2016).

Chapter Summary

The preceding chapter explains and justifies the study's narrative research design to explore the identified research questions. The focus of the study was the exploration of the strengths, challenges, needs, and identities of English learners as they experience participating in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme in a suburban middle school. The study was carried out using qualitative research techniques including researcher journaling and interviews. Data were analyzed using the methods described in the chapter, and ethical principles were considered and addressed to protect the rights of the study's participants.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the strengths, challenges, needs and identities of English learners (ELs) through the stories they tell about their experiences in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IB MYP). Considering ELs separately allows for the consideration of strengths and challenges unique to this growing population of students. This study begins to fill a gap in the literature by investigating the stories students tell of their experiences and the meaning they make from those experiences, thus bringing student voice to the academic discussion around ELs and IB. Through in-depth interviews, data were collected and analyzed to explore the following research questions:

1. What do the lived and told stories of English learners reveal about how the International Baccalaureate Middle Year Programme contributes to their conceptions of self?
2. What beliefs do ELs hold about how the IB MYP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social backgrounds and needs?

The following chapter first provides an overview of participants and their backgrounds. Second, thematic findings revealed by analysis of the data are shared and organized by research questions.

Description of Setting and Participants

The sample included six ELs attending Maple Hill Middle School (pseudonym), a public, suburban middle school in Southeast Michigan with school-wide implementation of the IB MYP for Grades 6–8. Maple Hill Middle School has a low-incidence EL population, with approximately 2% of the total student population meeting the ESEA (1965) definition of English learner. The school is identified with a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of the research

participants. The research site has been an IB World School since 2014. Teachers collaboratively develop IB units of study and regularly attend IB trainings. Table 1 conveys demographic information for each participant. The country of origin refers to the country in which the child was born, or in which they spent their early childhood. English proficiency is reported as measured by the WIDA ACCESS language proficiency assessment (WIDA, 2022). Levels span from 1 to 6 and are described as *entering*, *beginning*, *developing*, *expanding*, *bridging*, and *reaching* (WIDA, 2022). In the state of Michigan, ELs are reclassified as former ELs when they achieve an overall score of 4.8 (within the Expanding descriptor) on the annual assessment (Michigan Department of Education, 2021). To maintain confidentiality, participants are identified by pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Grade	Age	Country of Origin	Home Language(s)	English Proficiency	Years in U.S.
Aida	Female	8	14	Senegal	Wolof/French	Expanding	8
Diego	Male	6	13	Venezuela	Spanish	Beginning	<1
Lora	Female	8	14	Iraq/ Lebanon	Chaldean, Arabic	Developing	10
Mariam	Female	8	14	Iraq	Chaldean, Arabic	Developing	9
Sofia	Female	7	13	Mexico	Spanish	Expanding	1
Zahra	Female	6	12	Yemen	Arabic	Expanding	12

The following profiles include additional information to understand participants' background as shared in the interviews. These descriptions are intended to be a snapshot of the life journeys that brought them to the time and place to participate in this study in order to give

context to the themes drawn from their lived and told stories. They are not intended to capture the full story of the children's lives, or the depth and complexity of the meaning drawn from their experiences. In narrative inquiry, it is important to allow each storyteller to speak for themselves (Kim, 2016). Accordingly, direct quotations are used abundantly to outline the research findings in order to amplify participants' voices.

Aida

Aida was born in the United States but spent her childhood in Senegal where she lived with her mother's family from ages 1–6. Wolof is her first language. Aida remembers her early years in Senegal fondly and speaks of the community she had with her aunts, uncles, and cousins. Aida started school in Senegal at age 4 where she attended kindergarten and first grade. School in Senegal was conducted in French. She moved back to the United States with her mother at the age of 6 and started school again. Aida recounts:

When I came here in 2014, I had started school, a school very close to my house. I didn't learn English prior to going to that school... I did two grades in Africa and they said that they couldn't put me in third grade, because I was too young and I didn't speak English. So I had went back to first [*sic*]... So my first day of school I was sitting by myself. Every kid was like looking at me and when they tried to talk to me, I just nod my head and smile [*sic*]. Because it was really the only thing I could do. I didn't understand like a word that was coming out of their mouth... So I started learning English when I went there. And my reading and my writing and my speaking all got better as I like progressed in school.

Aida describes the transition to middle school as a difficult one. Afraid of being bullied, which she had experienced in third grade, she describes "putting up a wall" and acting "mean" toward

others. In time, however, she decided the way she was acting in middle school was not the way she wanted to be, and in eighth grade, made a commitment to change:

But then when I started eighth grade, I started to look back on myself and what type of person I was. Then I realized that I don't want to be that type of person anymore. So I decided to change my act a little and I feel like I've been better.

Aida typically spends time in the evenings and on the weekends with her mom, who she sees as a support in her life. She also describes making friends in middle school that she “probably might have for the rest of [her] life.” Aida conveys a sense of maturity in knowing who she is and taking on challenges. While she does not know what the future will hold for her, Aida feels ready, and confident that the middle school experience will help her reach her goals, whatever she chooses them to be.

Diego

Diego's story as told in his interviews is centered around being a newcomer to the United States. Born and raised in Venezuela, he and his mother joined his grandmother in Michigan and he entered school in the middle of sixth grade, approximately 5 months before participating in this research study. He is in the early stages of English language development, though he confidently uses his existing linguistic repertoire to communicate. The majority of Diego's family has emigrated from Venezuela due to economic and political concerns:

The life is good but the economy of the country is so bad. And the people no have money for buy food [*sic*]... the people is very good in Venezuela [*sic*], but the government and the economy no help to the country [*sic*].

Diego identifies the most significant challenges of this transition as not understanding enough English and not having friends when he first arrived. Speaking of these difficulties, he states:

The first one is leave to my country [*sic*] and second one is leave all my life in Venezuela and start new one life here in the United States [*sic*]. I'm not speaking English [*sic*] and this is difficult to me because I did the first day here, and I no can speak English [*sic*] with other kids or other students. I feel bad in that day [*sic*], in this day I feel bad for no speak English [*sic*] but right now, I speak good English and I have friends and all these things.

Diego is confident in his ability to grow and face obstacles. Drawing on persistence and resilience, he recounts using strategies like listening carefully, asking for help, practicing, and speaking with others to overcome challenges. While Diego describes his transition to a new country, school, and language as difficult, at the same time he is grateful to be in the United States and has a positive attitude about his life and the future:

My life change when I come to [city], when I come to America, to stay in America, my life change. Is start again [*sic*], other life. Is different [*sic*], the life of Venezuela to here, but maybe this change of life is in the first days hard, but after the time [*sic*] I see change for good. I am very happy for this change.

Diego feels accepted and supported in his new school and is eager to share his background and culture with his teachers and peers.

Lora

Lora's family identifies as Chaldean, a religious and ethnic group indigenous to Iraq, practicing Eastern-rite Catholicism. Since 2003, more than three fourths of Iraq's Christian population have fled Iraq due to religious persecution. Southeast Michigan, where this study takes place, has the world's largest population of Chaldean households outside of Iraq (Chaldean Community Foundation, n.d.). Lora was born in Baghdad, though her family moved to Lebanon

sometime in her early years. Her native language and the primary language used in her home is Chaldean, also known as Syriac, though she also speaks Arabic (Lora calls it Iraqi), with her grandparents and English with her siblings and cousins.

Lora begins her story when she came to the United States around the age of 4 (“Tell me about your family and where you grew up.” “So, first when I came here...”). She first began learning English upon entering kindergarten. A recurring theme in Lora’s story of her school experience is of not understanding, being slow to learn, and needing more time. This seems to be a belief she has about herself resulting from not being “from here,” even though she has no memories of Iraq or Lebanon: “I guess like people who are from here would understand things better.” At the same time, Lora draws on resilience and perseverance to overcome academic challenges. She wants to succeed, and sees herself as fairly successful, with success being perceived as achieving good grades. While she views her multilingualism as an asset, she often moves between positive and negative perceptions in describing it: “I feel like it helps me understand more people because you know, of different languages. And yeah, like, I guess it’s okay. It’s pretty difficult.”

Lora attended what she refers to as a “culture school” for early elementary, where she reports learning most of her language. “Our culture was there too,” she notes (perhaps in contrast to her school now), and a lot of people who could help her and her cousins. Lora’s family is tight-knit and her cousins and siblings are present through the stories she tells of home and free time. Lora speaks of those who have helped her along the way, namely her teachers, who she feels are very supportive when she asks questions, which she does often. Lora likes middle school and feels that being open-minded is “what the school is mostly about.”

Mariam

Mariam and Lora are first cousins and their stories intertwine in many ways. Also born in Iraq, Mariam's immediate family arrived in the United States a little after Lora's. She describes moving in with Lora's family because her dad "didn't have any money." Mariam has some sensory memories of Iraq, describing "all the cars and all the noises," bird sounds, and food. Mariam recounts learning Arabic and Chaldean simultaneously; both are used regularly in her home. Like her cousin, she first learned English when she entered elementary school, which she remembers as challenging:

It was difficult, because when I went to school I didn't know anything, I just saw kids, they would just like stare at me. And then, every time I had to, like, say something or I needed something, a translator had to come and then tell the teacher.

Though she describes learning English as difficult at first, she feels her multilingual identity no longer impacts her school because she "understands now." She does not feel she needs anything different from her school or teachers.

Mariam has an incredibly positive self-image, using words like "powerful" and "amazing" to describe herself. She confidently proclaims that she does her best, and she has bright hopes for her future. Mariam strongly identifies as a helper. She thinks it's "amazing" to be multilingual because she can help others who may be new to English, and she gets to help her parents every day with things like paying the bills. At the same time, she sometimes feels "judged" for speaking another language by other students, who might assume she does not know English. In the future, she wants to be a midwife to help pregnant women.

Mariam says that she is always connected with her culture, and equates culture to her family relationships, which are strong. She and Lora live next door to each other, with their

grandmother within walking distance as well. She spends most of her time outside of school with family. At school, Mariam enjoys hands-on classes like science and design. Mariam relies on perseverance, her positive sense of self, and a support system that includes her teachers and parents to confront obstacles and achieve success. “I think it’s really important to show my parents and my own self that I can do it and that I don’t give up on myself so easily,” she states.

Sofia

Like Diego, Sofia is a newcomer to the United States and her current year in seventh grade is her first time in U.S. schools. She was born in Mexico and lived there through age 9 with her mother, father, and older brother. Sofia’s native language is Spanish, although in Mexico she attended bilingual schools where she learned some English. After Sofia’s parents divorced, her mother moved to the United States and Sofia moved in with her father and then her grandparents for several years while she waited for her papers to join her mother in Michigan. During that time, however, she traveled often to visit her mother. It was at this time that Sofia felt she needed to learn English more seriously in order to be able to communicate effectively. Currently, she is also beginning to learn German because her stepfather is from Germany and she would like to be able to communicate with his extended family. She describes being bilingual in her American school in the following way:

Well, sometimes it’s a challenge because I have an accent. I don’t hear my accent but people do. And sometimes I have to say things more than one time. It’s not annoying, but it’s difficult. I have to speak very clearly. And it’s not like something I’m used to. And I speak really fast. So I have to do it slow when I talk in English, I have to do it slow, clearly, and loud so people can understand me. But other than that it’s like, fun, like,

people see me and hear me talking in Spanish. And they're like "whoa, how?" [*laughs*]
So, it's fun.

Sofia likes middle school. She values connection and has meaningful relationships with family, teachers, and friends. She seems to have a strong identity both as a Spanish-speaker and as a self-described artist. While she sees herself as different from her peers at school ("I have an accent, and I'm from other country [*sic*], and I think differently"), she has many friends with whom she feels accepted. She is motivated by her personal interests such as art and writing, relationships, as well as goals and worries about the future.

Zahra

Zahra's parents are from Yemen; her mother's ethnic and cultural heritage includes Egyptian as well. They moved to the United States before Zahra was born; Zahra is a native-born American. Zahra views herself as both American and Middle Eastern. She has visited both Egypt and Yemen, and her family often spends time in a local city, home to the largest Arab American community in the United States, where she states she feels connected to her culture. "There's like a lot of Arabic and Arabic associated things over there," Zahra explains. Before beginning school in kindergarten, Zahra only spoke Arabic at home. She recalls:

The first language I was speaking is Arabic. I did not know any English and it was kind of difficult for me to learn English at first because I kind of grew up with everybody speaking Arabic to me and I didn't really understand English words... A lot of times like I didn't understand stuff. I couldn't do like what other kids were doing because I didn't really understand it... A lot of teachers were nice to me and I finally understood English a lot better so I could be able to do a lot of things more differently than I did in kindergarten.

Today, Zahra's family uses English and Arabic equally at home. Though learning English was challenging for her at first, she no longer sees it as a challenge.

Zahra focuses on finding herself in her stories about middle school. She discusses how middle school "changes you," citing exploring her own personality and style. Zahra seems to be more acculturated into a peer/friend group in middle school than some of the other participants, as she talks about playing sports, and hanging out with friends, though she states she spends most of her free time with her family.

Findings

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: What do the lived and told stories of ELs reveal about how the IB MYP contributes to their conceptions of self? Social psychologist Carl Rogers (1959) posited that self-concept has three components: the view one has of oneself (self-image), how much value one places on oneself (self-esteem or self-worth), and what one wishes they were really like (ideal-self). Findings revealed that aspects of the IB contributed to participants' self-image and self-esteem in particular. Students did not know much about IB when asked directly, indicating that they had heard of IB but could not explain or define what it meant for their school. However, the language of IB was often embedded in their stories about themselves and about school, reflecting the values conveyed in the IB learner. The students' stories suggested that the IB MYP contributes to a strong learner identity, positive self-esteem, and to developing social and ethnic identities as multilingual students.

Emergent Theme 1: Learner Identity

IB programs emphasize developing students who are lifelong learners (IBO, 2019). The findings revealed that in the context of school, all six participants possessed a strong learner

identity. Participants viewed school as a place for learning and their role there as one of a learner above all else. While they recognized other roles they play as middle school students, including social and familial roles, the primary focus of their stories about school was learning. In fact, the words *learn*, *learned*, and *learning* appeared 113 times in the interview transcripts. The students discussed the content, quality, and quantity of learning.

The participants viewed themselves as good students and were confident in their ability to succeed through perseverance. Mariam used the word “powerful” to describe herself as a student, demonstrating a growth mindset and sense of agency over her learning experience that was echoed by the others. Lora’s statement about what the school is “all about” captures this theme well: “I’ve learned that, basically, it’s all about asking questions. And for us, it’s not like for anyone else. Because it’s like our future.” This idea that asking questions is essential to their roles as learners recurred throughout the participants’ stories. Sofia discussed how her experiences in middle school taught her to ask questions freely in the following exchange:

K. Katnik: What do you think you’ve learned about yourself through middle school that will help you in high school?

Sofia: Probably that it’s okay to ask questions. That’ll probably help me a lot if I don’t get something and I need to ask then I’ll just raise my hand. Because before I was like, kind of scared because I thought, “Oh my god, this is a really dumb question. People are gonna make fun of me.” But now I’m like, “I don’t care if it’s a dumb question. I just don’t get this so I’m gonna ask.”

The goal of the IB learner profile is to place the students at the center of their education (IBO, 2019). The impact of the IB learner profile was especially evident in the collected research data. In describing themselves as learners, participants used words from the IB learner profile to

describe their traits, demonstrating that they see themselves as open-minded, thinkers, risk-takers and inquirers, with agency over their learning. This finding aligns with previous research concluding that the IB can be a vehicle to increase motivation for linguistic minority students (Arreguin, 2015; Lew, 2019). Increased motivation is particularly impactful for ELs, for whom motivation is a key component for successful language learning (Krashen, 1987; Short et al., 2018).

Emergent Theme 2: Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, defined as the degree to which self-concept is perceived to be positive (American Psychological Association, 2022), can be rapidly impacted in uncertain or anxiety-inducing situations (Morse & Gergen, 1970). As such, self-esteem tends to temporarily drop for students transitioning from elementary to middle school (Ryan et al., 2013). This did not seem to be the case for the study's participants, who demonstrated positive self-esteem in the context of their middle school experience. Even those who had recently experienced a significant transition of moving to a new country demonstrated high levels of self-esteem in the collected data.

The participants viewed themselves as successful students, answering affirmatively when asked if they believe they have been successful in middle school. Lending to this sense of success was a pervasive belief that they are capable of overcoming challenges. All six participants discussed their ability to overcome challenges with effort and hard work. This belief was evident in the ways the students described what it takes to be successful at their school:

- Aida: “[Being successful] takes a lot of hard work, a lot of time. You have to make sure that you’re in the right mindset to be able to succeed.”
- Diego: “Learn new words, and listen to the teachers and respect other students and other teachers. Learn and study with other kids, speak with other kids. In the classes, learn new

things and listen to the teacher carefully. And after when have the test [*sic*], if you will listen all the teachers and all the classes [*sic*], you can make a good test.”

- Lora: “So basically, you just like practice more with something you don’t understand for you to... become better at it in the future... if you really want to do something then like focus more on it and put like your whole mind to it.”
- Mariam: “I’ve been successful because I just focus on my assignments and like all my classes, because I think it’s really important to show my parents and my own self that I can do it and that I don’t give up on myself so easily.”
- Sofia: “It takes a lot of effort and patience because, depends on what type of successful you’re talking about, let’s say academic, you need time, patience and a lot of effort so you can understand things and therefore do good on tests or quizzes or whatever.”
- Zahra: “You really just need to be like, open to learn new things and like participate and like learn new stuff.”

These descriptions of success echo the IB learner profile which states, “We are resourceful and resilient in the face of challenges and change” (IBO, 2019, p. 4).

High levels of self-esteem were also evident in the ways that participants discussed their multilingualism. All six participants revealed a positive view of their multilingualism, even as some told stories of their multilingualism not being valued by their teachers or peers. Self-esteem includes evaluating one’s intrinsic value and instrumental value (Tafarodi & Swann Jr., 2001). While participants were able to see the instrumental value of speaking more than one language, their stories did not reveal that they placed intrinsic value on their multilingualism or cultural backgrounds. All six participants cited helping other students who may be new to the country or learning English as a benefit of their multilingualism and a way their multilingual identity can

benefit their school. Aida captured the confidence conveyed by most of the participants regarding her multilingualism in the following reflection:

Well, it makes me feel like I'm, how do I say this, I feel, sometimes I feel better than everyone else [*smiling*]. Cuz like, I know three languages and it makes me you know, it makes you feel like wow, there's some people who only know one language and I know three and that's really cool.

While Lora was less certain in her confidence, she described an ability to understand and communicate with more people that was present throughout the participant interviews:

I think [being multilingual] means that there are like many more languages that are out there. And they're not just our languages. And I feel like it helps me understand more people because you know, of different languages. And, yeah, like, I guess it's okay. It's pretty difficult. Like sometimes I get the words mixed up with other languages. Like I don't understand that much Chaldean and Iraqi. So I sometimes add English words in there as well.

Emergent Theme 3: Social and Ethnic Identity

Argyle (1973/2008) categorized four major contributing factors to self-esteem: the reaction of others, comparison with others, social roles, and identification. Each of these categories was evident in the ways students talked about themselves and their relationships at school. They shared a need to fit in and feel accepted, and for the most part they did feel accepted by others. Although the participants first saw themselves as learners at school, they also expressed social identities through their stories. In speaking of peer relationships, participants used language from the IB learner profile including open-minded and caring. All of the participants believed they made good friends in middle school and felt accepted by others.

However, they viewed themselves as different from their peers due to their multilingual backgrounds, regardless of how long they had been attending American schools.

For all children, middle school can be a time of increasing concern with how one is viewed by others (Harter, 2012). This was true for the ELs in this study and amplified by the fact that they viewed themselves as “different” from their peers. Sofia discussed fitting in as a “problem”:

Because I realized that that is a really big problem in here that people are like, “Okay, so I am going to try to fit in here. And I'm going to change like completely myself [*sic*] and how I like to dress or something.” So I guess just like be yourself and don't- it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks.

Aida explained how the pressure to fit in can be amplified for those not from the dominant culture:

Because a child might struggle fitting into the American society and their lifestyle and not you know, being able to, like be like every other person and you know, lose their self as like themselves and become more of the person they see fit for that school sometimes. I feel that way sometimes.

She elaborated: “You lose yourself sometimes when you're in like an establishment where most people are the same and you're like the odd one out.”

The students’ descriptions of themselves socially were often contradictory, which aligns with Harter’s (2012) assessment of conceptions of self in adolescence. Participants described feeling “judged” for being different, wanting to fit in, and how many children “change themselves” to fit in in middle school. At the same time, they described feeling confident, not worried about what other people think, and accepted by others.

Connected to participants' social identities were patterns of developing ethnic identity related to language and culture. Phinney (2006) observed that minority populations are more likely to engage in ethnic identity exploration. Key elements of an IB education, including international-mindedness and the IB learner profile in particular, seemed to foster at least a surface level of identity exploration for the study's participants. All of the participants were proud of their multilingualism, and several expressed a concern regarding losing their home languages. Sofia discussed the complexity of this experience with good humor:

I feel kind of sad because I'm like, "Oh, I forgot how to say this word" because I will be like talking in Spanish and I forget the word. And I don't want to like take the rest of the day thinking about it like how do you say it? So I just say it in English when I know in English [*sic*]. And then I will be talking in English and I forget how to say a word in English but I know it in Spanish so I try to say it in English, so people can understand me or just like explain the words so they can guess it. And it's weird because like in English I forget it and I say it in Spanish but in Spanish I forget it and I say it in English. So it's confusing and sad at the same time because I don't want to forget Spanish because I think it's a really beautiful language. But it also is also kind of funny like, bro I just like spent one year here and I already forgetting Spanish [*sic*].

Several participants discussed how they view the IB learner profile differently due to their cultural backgrounds. Sofia articulated how the concept of open-mindedness can mean different things to different people. Sofia believes that some people see open-mindedness as listening to others' ideas, but not changing your own mind. She views open-mindedness as listening to others' ideas and using their ideas to "add something" to her own, which she attributes to her culture. Zahra also discussed the learner profile in terms of her culture, when she

explained that “[in] my culture, we’re mostly not risk takers... so probably when I learned more about the IB I started taking more risk [*sic*].”

Each of the students spoke of their home cultures as something separate from school. Diego spoke of a desire to share about his culture with others at school. Zahra discussed "bringing your culture with you" and "mixing your culture." Sofia spoke of the dichotomy between her life in Mexico and her life here in the United States. Lora and Mariam described always feeling connected to their culture, but only cited examples from home such as music, food, and religion. Aida used the words "balancing worlds" when talking about her American life and Senegalese heritage. These findings suggest that participants’ social and ethnic identities were less grounded than their learner identities and general self-esteem.

Research Question 2

Research question two asked: What beliefs do ELs hold about how the IB MYP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social backgrounds and needs? Without a doubt, students believed they were supported by their school. When asked directly if they felt their needs were met, all participants answered affirmatively and with confidence. Students were better able to articulate ways in which their academic and social needs were met in their middle school. Most students believe they no longer have linguistic needs and know English. They spoke of needing more help when they were younger until they were able to understand more English. However, linguistic and academic needs are difficult to separate when the language of instruction is also the target language for multilingual students. Prominent themes related to participants’ beliefs about how their academic, linguistic, and social needs are acknowledged included teacher impact and the international-mindedness component of the IB program.

Emergent Theme 4: Teacher Impact

Teachers who create the most nurturing environments for academic growth of linguistically diverse students share a pervasive belief that diverse students can succeed, as well as provide scaffolding to support and challenge those students (Kyburg et al., 2007). In terms of feeling supported, a resounding theme from participants was the impact of their teachers. The students believed strongly that they were supported both academically and personally by their teachers, which seemed to be the most prominent way their needs were met. Several microthemes related to the IB program emerged in the way the students talked about their teachers, including ways in which teachers challenge and support students academically, the learning activities teachers provide, and social and emotional support.

Academic Challenge and Support. Previous literature confirms that highly challenging, yet highly supportive educational environments are necessary for the success of ELs in particular (Cummins, 1984; Gibbons, 2014; Short et al., 2018). As previously discussed, participants possessed strong identities as learners in the context of the IB, claiming agency over their learning. Lending to this conception of self was a belief that they were both challenged and supported by their teachers. Participants revealed this belief in the way they spoke of overcoming academic difficulties with teacher support. They identified specific teacher-initiated support including providing more time to complete work and linguistic support for multilingual students, particularly newcomers. Student-initiated support included the ways in which teachers responded to questions with in-depth explanations of content. The IB approaches to teaching underpin teaching in all IB programs. One approach states that teaching is “designed to remove barriers to learning” (IBO, 2019, p. 6). Participant responses made evident that teachers at Maple Hill embodied this approach. Three out of five students identified extra time as a way their academic needs were met by teachers. One teacher provides study guides in advance to certain students in the class, including multilingual learners. This was seen as a helpful accommodation

to feel confident in demonstrating content knowledge on exams. Additionally, Aida captured her belief that teachers are willing to spend extra time with students to meet rigorous expectations:

The teachers, even though they have like 25 or 30 kids in their class, if you need extra time, they will be able to help you learn and understand and be able to make sure that you know this because they want you to succeed like every other kid in that class.

This sentiment regarding teachers' desire to help students succeed was echoed by the other participants as well. Additionally, Aida's statement captures her belief that she is different from "every other kid in that class" and may have different needs.

Diego and Sofia are both newcomers to the United States, in their first year in U.S. schools, and completely immersed in the English language for the first time. Diego's English proficiency is at an earlier stage than Sofia, but both students spoke more candidly about language than the other participants. Specifically, Diego talked extensively about how translation was a helpful tool for him to feel successful. Teachers provide this accommodation by allowing Diego to work with Spanish-speaking peers who can help translate for him, teachers who are fluent in Spanish themselves, or through the use of Google Translate. Both Diego and Sofia brought up the Spanish teacher at the school by name as someone who supports them using their home language. Diego saw this as an academic support, while Sofia felt more social and emotional support from this teacher. In fact, Sofia is not in any classes with the Spanish teacher but visits her during the day to talk:

I have no idea how we got to meet but sometimes I will go to her class in my lunchtime [*sic*], and we will just talk in Spanish and it's really nice... It's just great to talk to somebody else besides my family.

Several participants also discussed ESL class as a way they were challenged. Because the more proficient participants are confident in their English language abilities, they felt conflicted about taking this class, expressing that they didn't really think they needed it, but also recognizing that it helped them advance their language skills in reading, writing, and vocabulary. Aida stated that her native-English speaking peers claim she "uses big words," which she attributes to her ESL class.

Participants' belief that they can and should ask questions when necessary is important to their agency over learning. The way teachers respond to their questions is particularly important for the students to feel that their needs are being met. Providing more in-depth explanations and elaborating on content concepts is a way in which participants feel supported. The teachers' willingness to provide in-depth explanations to students who may need further clarification reflects teaching that is focused on conceptual understanding, another of the IB's approaches to teaching (IBO, 2019). Important to the participants was a sense that teachers would not get "mad" or frustrated when they asked questions. They firmly believed their questions would be answered even if the concepts had already been explained.

Learning Activities. Another way in which teacher impact is significant to students is through the learning activities they design. IB teaching is based on inquiry, uses real-life contexts and examples, and focuses on effective teamwork and collaboration (IBO, 2019). According to participants, effective teachers "make it interesting" and "explain things in a fun way." They teach concepts in-depth until all students understand. All six participants spoke enthusiastically of hands-on activities in their classes. The following quotation from Aida captures a point of view conveyed throughout the interviews regarding hands-on activities and teacher support:

If I was doing problems all the time, I don't think I'd be able to be passing [math] class but I'm passing the class with flying colors. So I feel the way that my teacher teaches, and how she like, makes sure everyone's comfortable in her class and knows what's happening before she moves on to a different subject makes me feel like I'm okay and I can you know, learn like other people.

Active learning is a prominent aspect of the IB programs, and it was evident that engaging learning activities were appreciated by participants and helped them to learn content concepts more effectively. Three out of five participants specifically cited their Design class, a requirement of the MYP curriculum, as a favorite. Across all classes, participants discussed experiments, projects, use of video, and sketching or drawing as ways they felt engaged and confident in learning.

Additionally, learning activities that involve group and peer work helped students feel successful. Working in groups or partnerships is helpful both academically and socially for this group of ELs. Because they spend the majority of their time with family outside of school, time in the classroom can be the only opportunity to socialize and build friendships. Working with peers in class is helpful in building understanding as well, as Zahra shared in the statement below:

It's like, fun to work with partners or your friends and like think about things... because like if I don't get something they'd probably understand more than I do and help me learn better.

Social and Emotional Support. Teachers had a significant impact on how participants felt their needs were acknowledged through social and emotional support. Participants characterized impactful teachers as caring, nice, understanding, and helpful. Zahra stated:

I feel really supported because there's lots of teachers and other people to help me... you can email or call or anything to any of the teachers or counselors. Anything you need. You can just like call the school.

This firm belief that the school staff would be there to support students with “anything you need” recurred throughout participants’ stories. Several participants stated that although they had never spoken with a teacher or counselor about personal issues, knowing that they were available helped them to feel supported.

Emergent Theme 5: International-Mindedness

As previously discussed, the ELs in this study revealed that they perceive themselves as different from their peers due to their immigrant origins. A key component of an IB education is international-mindedness. The IBO states that its programs provide opportunities for students to engage with local and global issues, and reflect on their own perspective, culture, and identities, as well as those of others (IBO, 2019). Some students reflected on how this component of an IB education is evident in their school through the way they are accepted by their peers. Sofia described how she feels the IB program is meeting its mission in terms of developing caring young people because of the way she is included by peers at school:

I think that the compassionate part, the understanding that other people with their difference [*sic*] can also be right, I think that is 100% working. Because for example, I'm different from people here. I have an accent and I'm from other country [*sic*], and I think differently, but people are always trying to include me into activities or something and they're really nice about it.

Diego experienced this sense of inclusion as well. He has never felt discriminated against for his culture or language and feels the IB program is working very well to promote intercultural

understanding and respect. Zahra expressed that students from different backgrounds can share experiences with other students and they are “really open to learn more about it.” Mariam talked about feeling welcome.

Several participants discussed how the IB allows for exploration of complex social issues. Sofia stated:

Here they're more open-minded and they care more and they also like, for example, they have SAGA [Sexuality and Gender Alliance] club in here. And that is something that I never talked about in my other school because they think we don't talk about either religion, or LGBTQ things 'cause they think that that's personal or something and so they don't like to talk about it so they don't get in trouble. Here that's basically you just talk about it all the time [*sic*].

Aida echoed this sentiment:

I'm able at [Maple Hill] to be a student who can like have conversations and not be excluded from those conversations... if it's like on a big topic, like you know, a topic that usually you don't talk about in schools, you can talk about it there and no one's gonna, no one's gonna be like, “Wait, you shouldn't talk about that, you're young. You don't have to worry about that.” So being able to do that at [Maple Hill] is a really good opportunity.

K. Katnik: Could you give an example of one of those big topics that you feel comfortable discussing at [Maple Hill]?

Aida: Um, well, most of them are about race and equality. And I'm able to talk about that at [Maple Hill] without being labeled as trying to make everything about race or trying to make anything like racist or stuff like that.

Some participants felt that intercultural understanding could be strengthened in their school. Lora and Mariam told stories of feeling judged by other students for speaking another language, and Aida shared that she believed the school could do more to promote international-mindedness. She would like to have more opportunities for students to talk about where they come from and how they live. These criticisms from students emphasize how explicit and implicit language ideologies can conflict in the lived experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Solano-Campos, 2017).

Chapter Summary

The preceding chapter communicates the findings of the research study which explored how the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme contributes to English learners' conceptions of self and what these students believe about how the program acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social needs. Six ELs attending Maple Hill Middle School (pseudonym), a public, suburban middle school in Southeast Michigan with school-wide implementation of the IB MYP for Grades 6–8 shared stories about their lives and school experiences through in-depth interviews. Participants represented a variety of demographic backgrounds including home language, country of origin, number of years in the United States, and current English proficiency. Findings suggest that the IB MYP contributes to the participants' strong identity as learners and positive self-esteem. Additionally, the IB appears to contribute less directly to developing social and ethnic identities of multilingual students, as they view themselves as both different and accepted. Participants strongly believe that they are supported by their school and that their needs are met, particularly by the efforts of individual teachers as well as the international-mindedness aspect of the IB. Some participants feel that intercultural understanding could be improved at their school.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

A substantial body of research documents the historical lack of equitable educational opportunities for English learners (ELs) (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017; García et al., 2012; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; McGraner & Saenz, 2009; Nutta et al., 2014). As school leaders become increasingly concerned with growing cultural proficiency, it is both important and necessary to reflect critically on the programs and resources provided to ELs that intend to promote equity and social justice for this growing population of students. Federal law has long established the rights of language minority students to equitable educational opportunities (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; Civil Rights Act, 1964; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982; U.S. Const. amend. XIV). Yet prior research has illuminated a disconnect between implicit and explicit language ideologies in programs that serve these students, impacting outcomes (Carder, 2006, 2008; Corcoran & Gerry, 2010; Levy, 2007; Siskin et al., 2010; Solano-Campos, 2017). The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) claims to provide rigorous programs of study whose tenets parallel those of culturally responsive pedagogy for linguistically diverse students. However, little research is available on the experience of ELs in American International Baccalaureate (IB) schools. This study sought to investigate the lived experiences of ELs in one such program in order to identify how the program contributes to their conceptions of self and acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social identities and needs.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to inquire into the lived and told stories of ELs in one IB MYP in order to better understand their academic, social, and linguistic identities and needs in the context of the program. The IB philosophy acknowledges the cultural and linguistic diversity that students bring to every classroom, and its published documents establish a mission of accessibility and inclusivity (IBO, 2008, 2014, 2019). Notwithstanding this stated commitment, substantial evidence points to the longstanding marginalization of ELs in U.S. schools (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017; García et al., 2012; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; McGraner & Saenz, 2009; Nutta et al., 2014). As such, it is important to investigate the lived experiences of this group of students and inquire into the impact of the program compared to its intent. By better understanding ELs' identities and needs, we can work toward more equitable systems and practices that include culturally and linguistically diverse voices and perspectives. This narrative research study sought to address the lack of student voice in the literature by documenting the personal stories of six ELs from diverse backgrounds participating in the IB MYP in a suburban middle school with school-wide implementation of the program. Their lived experiences were explored through the following research questions:

1. What do the lived and told stories of English learners reveal about how the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme contributes to their conceptions of self?
2. What beliefs do ELs hold about how the IB MYP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social backgrounds and needs?

Review of Methodology

Narrative inquiry draws from psychologist Jerome Bruner's (1986) philosophy that there are two modes of thought: the traditional logical, and the narrative. The narrative mode is

responsible for making meaning of an experience. Thus, by engaging in narrative as a method, we can characterize the phenomena of human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Narrative inquiry in education strives to honor teaching and learning as complex and developmental in nature; it positions stories of teachers and students as key in understanding the complex nature of a classroom (Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry was chosen as the methodological approach for this study in order to allow for an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of ELs in one IB MYP, as shared through the telling of stories.

The study employed the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews for data collection. Six middle school ELs attending Maple Hill Middle School (pseudonym) were selected using convenient and purposive sampling procedures to participate in the narrative inquiry. Maple Hill Middle School is an authorized International Baccalaureate World School with school-wide implementation of the MYP in suburban Southeast Michigan. Participants represented a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Each participant was interviewed over a period of three rounds.

Data analysis included multiple coding cycles using a combination of descriptive, dramaturgical, and concept coding in order to deeply inquire into the objectives, obstacles, strategies, attitudes, emotions, and motivations present in each participant's story before considering patterns across narratives. The final round of concept coding allowed for reflection on the broader social constructs present in the narratives, related to the temporal, social, and spatial inquiry space described in Dewey's (1938) theory of experience. These coding cycles took place within the fluid process of analyzing data through the narrative analytical tools of broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Codes were placed into logical categories that reflected themes as they became apparent. Data interpretation

took place simultaneously within coding and categorizing as well as after. Categories and codes were studied to determine overarching themes that provide insight into the research questions.

Major Findings

Five major themes were identified from the participants' stories reflecting on experiences in the IB MYP at Maple Hill Middle School. Themes from the data were defined as follows: learner identity, self-esteem, social and ethnic identity, teacher impact, and international-mindedness. In response to the research question, *What do the lived and told stories of ELs reveal about how the IB MYP contributes to their conceptions of self?*, data were analyzed and interpreted with Carl Rogers' (1959) definition of self-concept in mind. Rogers posited that self-concept includes self-image, self-esteem, and ideal-self. Findings reveal that specific aspects of the IB MYP, particularly the IB learner profile and focus on international-mindedness, contribute to participants' self-image as learners and positive self-esteem. Additionally, the IB appears to contribute less directly to developing social and ethnic identities of multilingual students, as they view themselves as both different from and accepted by their peers and teachers. Key elements of an IB education, including international-mindedness and the IB learner profile in particular, seem to foster at least a surface level of identity exploration for the study's participants.

Regarding the second research question, *What beliefs do ELs hold about how the IB MYP at their school acknowledges their academic, linguistic, and social backgrounds and needs?*, findings suggest that participants strongly believe they are supported by their school and that their needs are met. Most notably, participants expressed this belief through stories of the impact of individual teachers as they challenge and support students academically, present engaging learning activities, and provide social and emotional support. These microthemes demonstrate

that the IB's approaches to teaching (IBO, 2019), are evident to the students and influential to their feelings of support. In addition, the international-mindedness aspect of an IB education influences students' beliefs about the ways in which they are supported and accepted. However, some students felt that intercultural understanding could be improved at their school.

Discussion of Findings

According to previous literature, participation in the IB program can be a means for promoting equity for culturally and linguistically diverse students if they are supported appropriately and their languages and cultures are recognized, valued, and leveraged as assets (Aldana & Mayer, 2014; Arreguin, 2015; Baker, 2017; Kyburg et al., 2007; Lew, 2019; Mayer, 2008; McDonald, 2014). This study revealed that ELs at Maple Hill Middle School believe they are appropriately supported to reach academic equity at their school, and that the program has a positive influence on their developing concepts of self. While some research has brought to light discrepancies in the stated and actual language ideologies at play in IB programs (Carder, 2006, 2008; Corcoran & Gerry, 2010; Levy, 2007; Siskin et al., 2010; Solano-Campos, 2017), the interview data did not reveal this to be explicitly true for ELs at Maple Hill in terms of the expectations and support provided by their teachers, and the ways in which they felt accepted and valued by peers. At the same time, dominant cultural views of intelligence and success did seem to influence participants' conceptions of self. Though not directly perpetuated by the IB, the MYP was not an effective catalyst for challenging or overcoming these ideologies.

An element of Krashen's (1987) widely known and well-accepted theory of second language acquisition includes the affective filter hypothesis which posits that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and low levels of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language learning. These qualities were evident in the stories participants told

of their experiences at Maple Hill and appear to be directly influenced by aspects of the IB program specifically, including the IB approaches to teaching, international-mindedness, and the IB learner profile. I am struck by the notion put forth by Clandinin et al. (2016) that the way stories are told and remembered shape the experience itself. The IB learner profile appears to have equipped participants to tell their stories in a way that positions them as the “heroes” of their educational stories; they are active participants in their school experience as inquirers, risk-takers, thinkers, and so forth. These words represent identities that the students seem to have internalized in a way that shapes the stories they tell, and thus shapes their educational experience as a whole.

Although the IB seeks to develop recognition of a deep interconnectedness to others (IBO, 2019), this aspect of the IB education did not seem to overcome participants’ view of themselves as different and their home cultures as separate from the dominant culture at school to reach “achieved ethnic identity” as described by Phinney (2006). One possible explanation is that the degree of ethnic diversity in a school impacts identity exploration and achievement (Umaña-Taylor, 2003), and as a whole, Maple Hill’s student body reflects minimal ethnic and linguistic diversity. In the context of their multilingualism, participants were able to see the instrumental value of speaking more than one language. I wished they saw the intrinsic value of their language and culture and agreed with the students who shared that intercultural understanding could be strengthened in their school by fostering more opportunities for all students to explore and share their cultural and ethnic identities.

Findings Related to LangCrit

LangCrit is shaped by critical race theory and critical language studies and acknowledges that categories of language and race are socially constructed. While these constructs may be

viewed as problematic, they are a significant force in shaping identities. LangCrit emphasizes how language practices are positioned within broader social and historical contexts and captures a full spectrum of identity possibilities including imposed, assumed, and negotiated identities (Crump, 2014).

An imposed identity is one assigned; it is not negotiable in a particular time and place (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). For example, the label of “English learner” is imposed upon students based on mandatory assessments regardless of how the students view themselves linguistically. This identity cannot be contested. The majority of students in this study, for example, did not see themselves as ELs, but rather described learning English as something that had already been achieved. Despite this self-concept, they were placed in ESL classes as a result of the imposed identity. Students felt conflicted about taking ESL class, expressing that they did not think they needed it but also describing academic benefits.

Assumed identities are not negotiated. Many individuals are comfortable with these identities and are not interested in contesting them (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). In this study, participants assumed the identity of “different” from their peers due to their immigrant-origin backgrounds. Another assumed identity was students’ learner identity. In particular, the International Baccalaureate Programme seemed to have the most influence over how these learner identities were shaped. Even though the students were unable to define IB or answer specific questions about the IB program at their school, it was apparent that aspects of the MYP influenced their perceptions and beliefs. Participants related strongly to the IB learner profile and had internalized these traits. When Lora said, “I’ve learned that basically, it’s all about asking questions. And for us, it’s not like for anyone else. Because it’s like our future,” she captured the

participants' belief that school is a place for learning and that students possess agency over their learning experience.

Negotiable identity options can, and are, contested and resisted by particular individuals and groups. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) identified negotiated identity options in the areas of ethnicity and nationality, race, class and social status, (able)bodiedness, sexuality, religious affiliation, and linguistic competence. The research findings suggested that students were beginning to negotiate certain identities as they matured throughout middle school. This was evident in the way several students talked about how they “see the IB learner profile differently” because of cultural influences. They were also negotiating identities when they saw their multilingualism as an asset, despite a history of marginalization for linguistic minorities in U.S. schools where policy, curriculum, and educational practice are designed for the language majority (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017; García et al., 2012; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; McGraner & Saenz, 2009; Nutta et al., 2014).

At the same time, participants expressed ways in which they had adopted the ideology of the dominant culture, which is also reflected in the values and policies of the IB programs. For example, the IBO emphasizes its “internationally recognized university-entrance qualification” (IBO, 2019, p. 1). Though the participants have not yet entered high school let alone post-high school education, they all expressed a belief that the clear path for them was college and traditional careers. While participants valued their multilingualism for its instrumental value in helping them to communicate and get ahead in these future careers, they did not assign intrinsic value to their language or culture, and seemed to recognize English as the language of power necessary to meet their future goals. Furthermore, students defined success in terms of

achievements like getting good grades, passing tests, and being ready for high school, and did not appear to consider alternative views of personal success.

Examining data through the lens of LangCrit adds another finding to this dissertation. Although participants largely expressed a positive experience in the IB MYP and evidence pointed to its influence on positive identities and feelings of support, the IB program at Maple Hill Middle School is not a catalyst for overcoming implicit and explicit messages received by students that perpetuate meritocracy and traditional definitions of intelligence and success. This conclusion was also drawn by Arreguin (2015) in her study on Latinx students in an IB DP. She stated,

Students are adopting a view of power that does not necessarily reflect their cultural background and funds of knowledge. The responses of the students in this study indicate that IB as it is currently applied does not consistently challenge dominant ideology, but instead reinforces it in many ways. (Arreguin, 2015, p. 93)

LangCrit examines how power is clustered around certain linguistic resources in certain spaces and how this shapes what values are attached to language and what identities are possible as a result (Crump, 2014). The responses of students in this study indicate that their identities are shaped in terms of viewing English as the language of power and success, and that their cultures and languages are something they largely leave at home when attending Maple Hill Middle School.

Limitations of the Study

In planning for this research study, steps were taken to ensure validity of the data collected, though some limitations are present in the study's design. Polkinghorne (2007) identified two threats to validity particularly present in narrative research, including

discrepancies in participants' experienced meaning and the stories they tell about that meaning, and connections between storied texts and interpretation of those texts. Furthermore, while truthfulness was assumed in the data collection, a key limitation is the inability to measure honesty or truthfulness in participant responses.

As a teacher in a school district in which the study took place, I was viewed by students as an authority. This perspective creates a limitation related to forthrightness of responses, as students could be influenced by what they think the researcher may like to hear. Adding to this limitation is the fact that ELs have a history of marginalization in U.S. schools and may be less than eager to share stories of such marginalization due to the emotional impact. My role in the research setting may also present a limitation regarding my subjectivity to the data.

In order to mitigate the effect of these limitations to the greatest extent possible, anonymity of the participants was carefully protected, and interim research texts were co-constructed in collaboration with participants. I continually reevaluated impressions of respondents and challenged my preexisting assumptions through researcher journaling and partnered with response communities to read and respond to field texts. Furthermore, I attempted to make the interpretive process explicit by thoroughly describing data interpretation in the reporting of results.

The most significant limitation is the number of participants. The study was confined to six participants; generalizations of the findings are limited. The study took place in a specific setting with a specific group of participants. While recruiting six participants was sufficient for the purpose of the research, it is a small sample size. This limitation is balanced by providing a "thick description" (Merriam, 2009) with as much detail as possible without compromising confidentiality. Narrative inquiry values quality and depth over quantity and breadth of results.

Participant perceptions may not align with perceptions of others in their school or other schools. However, naturalistic generalizations (Melrose, 2009) are a possibility. Naturalistic generalizations allow readers to engage with data to find descriptions that resonate with their own personal experiences. In doing so, they can apply research findings to personal contexts. Unlike objective scientific generalization, naturalistic generalization generates possibilities for transferring knowledge from subjective accounts more privately (Melrose, 2009). As readers engage with this study, they may find connections with their own work and professional settings.

Reflections on Validity

Qualitative researchers are often tasked with justifying the inherent value of their research in ways that are not required of our peers conducting quantitative studies. This challenge is influenced by a longstanding history of Positivist epistemology that has dominated scientific achievement since it emerged in the early nineteenth century with the assumption that empirical science is the only source of positive knowledge about the world (Schön, 1983). Positivism continues to dominate academia. The No Child Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 called explicitly for the use of “scientific research” in education which has influenced decades of research since (Kim, 2016).

French postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1979/1984) noted, “Knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: Who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?” (p. 9). For Lyotard, the question of knowledge is entangled with the question of power; those in power determine the grand narrative of humanity. In undertaking this research, I positioned myself as a critical theorist, interested in the voices that have been left out of the grand narrative. Though there is merit to measurable and quantifiable data, I join a growing number of qualitative researchers interested in what lived experiences can

reveal about educational policy and practice. While this study could have been expanded into a larger case study examining other sources of data such as teacher perceptions and quantifiable achievement data, I felt strongly that this would interfere with the philosophy and theoretical framework of the study which seeks to challenge power structures and explore how they shape the lived experiences of individuals and their identities. By framing the research questions around the experiences of the students themselves, I sought to lift their voices in a way that validated their experiences as valid and meaningful forms of data on their own, without having to further substantiate that validity with additional perspectives from more traditionally acclaimed sources. Engaging in narrative inquiry gives the time and space for participants to tell their stories so that they too gain the authority and validity that the research story has long held (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Conclusions

This study reveals important data about English learners, who told stories of their experiences in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme. Participants had positive experiences in the IB MYP, demonstrating strong learner identities and high levels of self-esteem. Social and ethnic identities were impacted by the IB MYP to a lesser degree. Students felt supported mainly by the impact of individual teachers through challenge and support, learning activities, and social and emotional support. Students also felt the intercultural understanding and awareness aspect of the IB was working at their school, though it could be improved through more diversity and opportunities to share diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The positive experiences of the ELs in this study reveal that the program can be a vehicle for promoting equity and inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse students in middle school.

Recommendations

The findings from this study lead to several recommendations for classrooms, schools, and the IBO. The study's findings may be beneficial in decision-making for schools considering implementing an IB program. School leaders and practitioners might consider implementing IB programs in their own professional settings. However, while IB was a vehicle for strong learner identity, positive self-esteem, and exploration of cultural and ethnic identities for the ELs in this study, an IB program is not necessary to implement the elements present in the school that led to the research findings.

Specifically, findings suggest that to promote a sense of agency over learning, motivation, and strong learner identity and self-esteem for ELs, schools should develop common language to describe students as learners and communicate these attributes across the curriculum. This recommendation stems from the finding that the IB learner profile contributed to participants' conceptions of self. Even though participants were not able to clearly articulate the meaning of being an IB school, the language of the IB learner profile, in particular, was evident in the stories they told of their experiences. While the IB learner profile was an influential tool for placing students at the center of their education and developing a strong learner identity, schools that do not implement IB programs can develop and promote a learner profile of their own as a tool for positively impacting student identity and self-esteem.

An additional school-level recommendation can be drawn from the participants' beliefs about the level of social and emotional support available at their school. The students firmly believed that school staff were available to support them with "anything" at any time. This belief appeared to be influenced by specific messaging from the school as well as the relationships students built with individual teachers. Students knew about the resources available through their

school and felt confident that they were accessible, even if they had not used them. Schools should establish clear messaging to students about resources for social and emotional support and make sure students from all backgrounds understand how to access them. For the students in this study, this knowledge was important to their sense of belonging and support.

Another recommendation related to belonging is to provide students with ample opportunities to share about their diverse backgrounds and experiences, and to discuss complex social issues. Participants expressed a desire to discuss issues related to culture, race, and sexuality freely. For the most part, they believed an openness to discuss these topics in their classrooms led to acceptance and inclusion. At the same time, students in this study identified intercultural understanding as one area that could be strengthened at Maple Hill Middle School. As children from immigrant backgrounds, the participants felt they were different from their peers, and did not always feel accepted by peers. Aida provided a concrete recommendation when she suggested the school should provide children more opportunities to share about their backgrounds and cultures.

ELs in this study shared specific ways that their academic, linguistic, and social needs are met in their school. These findings lead to concrete recommendations that teachers can implement at the classroom level to potentially increase feelings of support for ELs. Participants named specific strategies such as providing study guides in advance, extra time for assignments, and using translation tools as particularly impactful. Additionally, they identified the importance of believing they could ask questions freely and be met with enthusiastic explanations from their teachers. As such, it is recommended that teachers explicitly coach students in how to ask for help in their classrooms, praise students for asking questions, and warmly provide additional

instruction when students ask. These qualities led to students feeling supported and unafraid to express their needs.

Additional classroom-level recommendations can be drawn from participants' descriptions of learning activities that they self-identified as contributing toward positive educational experiences. The students appreciated hands-on activities such as experiments, projects, sketching or drawing, and felt these types of activities, paired with in-depth exploration of content, helped them to learn content concepts more effectively. Teachers looking to increase engagement and confidence in their classrooms might consider increasing opportunities for hands-on learning and collaboration.

The study proved to be beneficial in examining the impact of the IB MYP at Maple Hill Middle School, specifically for students identified as ELs. As such, other schools implementing the IB MYP may want to replicate parts of the study as part of a program evaluation tool. Student stories are powerful sources of data when considering the impact of programs. School systems, buildings, and individual teachers might consider collecting narrative data from their students to inquire into how they define their experiences and their beliefs about how their needs are (or are not) being met and what they think is important.

Finally, several recommendations are directed to the IBO. When viewed through the lens of LangCrit theory, this study's findings revealed the IB program at Maple Hill Middle School did not overcome dominant ideologies and even reinforced certain implicit messages received by students that perpetuate meritocracy and traditional definitions of intelligence and success. Students in the study recognized English as the language of power and success and viewed their home languages and cultures as something separate from their identities at school. In contrast, The IBO's published documents demonstrate a firm commitment to inclusive practices across all

of its programs. As such, I recommend that the IBO (a) adopt a translanguaging pedagogy, (b) track EL enrollment and outcomes, and (c) provide teacher training specific to meeting the needs of multilingual students.

A translanguaging pedagogy promotes flexible and inclusive language use. Students are encouraged to produce output in a language other than that of the input. Benefits include metalinguistic awareness and the creation of affective bonds among teachers and students. Even monolingual teachers can support translanguaging by acknowledging students as linguistic experts and incorporating their linguistic and cultural knowledge and expertise (García & Hesson, 2015). Moving away from balanced bilingualism as an end goal for students and toward a translanguaging pedagogy would allow ELs to see the intrinsic value of their multilingualism and challenge English-centered ideologies. Tracking EL enrollment and outcomes in IB programs would allow the IB to gather data to evaluate their commitment to expanding participation of historically marginalized students, as well as provide evidence to future IB World Schools that its programs can be a promising option for promoting ELs' access to and success in rigorous programs of study. Finally, providing teacher training specific to meeting the needs of multilingual students would further position the IB as a provider of high-quality professional development for its teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

To develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which the IB MYP contributes to students' conceptions of self, this study could be replicated with a sample that is not delimited to students identified as ELs. Additionally, the study could be replicated with students participating in PYP, DP, and/or CP programs. Further study could be conducted from the perspective of

educators to explore the ways in which they perceive ELs in IB programs and acknowledge their identities and needs.

To explore the topic of ELs in IB programs more thoroughly, future studies may be carried out to analyze and understand their experiences compared to those of their native-English speaking peers. This perspective would allow for a more in-depth understanding of the ways in which IB programs are perceived and experienced by students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. While this study focused on the narratives participants told of their experiences, research focused on EL achievement in IB programs may also be warranted.

Qualitative studies are preferred to obtain rich, exploratory data, but the sample size is limited. To learn more about this topic in its entirety, it would be beneficial to conduct further studies using a quantitative or mixed methods approach. Having a larger sample size, especially in multiple locations throughout the United States and perhaps globally, could reveal a wider range of experiences and provide more insight into what can be done to support culturally and linguistically diverse students in rigorous academic programs.

Concluding Remarks

Growing cultural proficiency in schools enables educators to ensure core values, respond inclusively with diverse students, and guide equity-focused organizational transformation (Lindsey et al., 2019). This study suggests that the International Baccalaureate is a useful tool for realizing cultural proficiency at Maple Hill Middle School. Core values of student-centered learning, inclusivity, student voice, and a strengths-based perspective are demonstrated through international-mindedness, IB approaches to teaching, and the IB learner profile. Teachers respond inclusively to diverse students by providing challenging learning activities while at the same time implementing supportive structures that respond to academic, linguistic, as well as

social and emotional needs. Students possess a sense of agency over their learning experience and view themselves as successful. In contrast to an abundance of established research revealing a history of exclusion from educational opportunity for English learners (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017; García et al., 2012; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; McGraner & Saenz, 2009; Nutta et al., 2014), the IB MYP at Maple Hill Middle School proves to be a vehicle for promoting cultural proficiency and educational equity.

In conclusion, I return once more to the words of Safir and Dugan (2022) who eloquently captured the potential of choosing a “pedagogy of voice” that can transform classrooms, cultures, and policies: “Such a pedagogy says, ‘I see you. I believe in you. You are safe to grow and thrive here. I want to hear your voice’” (p. 99). This study centers the experience of ELs in order to amplify their voices and learn from their stories. In doing so, my hope is that this work will contribute to a more assets-focused view of their strengths, gifts, and contributions to school communities. In the face of monumental life changes and challenges, these children demonstrate confidence, resilience, and perseverance. Educators have much to learn from the stories they tell, if only we choose to listen. In doing so, we can begin to transform our systems to allow all students to bring their full selves to classrooms where they can safely grow and thrive.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Interview Question Bank

Interview ONE: Focused Life Histories

1. Tell me about your family and the neighborhood where you grew up.
2. What do you do outside of school? Who do you spend time with in the evenings and on the weekends?
3. Talk to me about your language experience. What was the first language you remember speaking? What does that mean for school?
4. What elementary school did you attend? Tell me about some of your experiences in elementary school?
5. How would you describe yourself as a student?
8. What does it mean to you to be multilingual?
9. Can you give me some examples of when you're connected with your culture?
10. How has your multilingual identity impacted your life? Your schooling?

Interview TWO: The Details of the Experience

1. What is the IB program?
2. Describe your experience in IB at _____ Middle School.
3. Can you describe the IB Learner Profile?
4. What effect has your experience at _____ MS had on your life?
5. What have you learned from IB?

6. What activities and lessons have you enjoyed?
7. How much time do you spend on classwork or homework?
8. Do you ever feel pressure or stress as a result of being a student at _____ MS?
9. Describe a class that is particularly hard.
10. Describe a class you really enjoy.
11. What supports, if any, do the teachers and/or school offer you in the classroom and outside?
12. Do you feel supported? Why or why not?
13. Do you feel that your individual needs are met? Why or why not?
14. Do you believe there is room for flexibility in the curriculum? Do you believe that the school accommodates students with different cultural backgrounds or learning styles?
15. As a multilingual student, what do you have to offer your school? Do you believe that this is acknowledged?
16. IB requires that students study a language. What language did you pick and why? What level are you in and is it appropriate for you?
17. How are the language needs of multilingual students met in your language class and all your other classes?

Interview THREE: Reflection on the Meaning

1. What sacrifices, if any, do you have to make to be a student at _____?
2. What benefits do you believe you will have as a result of participating in IB?
3. Where do you see your life going and how does your school experience fit into that?
4. What role, if any, does IB play in helping students reach their goals?
5. How prepared do you feel to go on to high school?

6. What advice would you give a middle school student coming to _____?
7. What does it take to be successful at _____ MS? Do you believe you have been successful?
8. What support systems and coping mechanisms do students rely on in order to succeed at _____ MS? Students, teachers, parents, coaches, etc.
9. Do you believe that the IB program at _____ MS is working? Provide examples.
10. Have you ever felt that you needed something different at school because your needs were different?
11. What role has your multilingual identity played as you've participated in the IB program?

Adapted from:

Arreguin, S. F. (2015) Reform through a student lens: The experience of Latino/a students in an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Chicago. *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global*. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.umflint.edu/docview/1699088907?pq-origsite=summon&accountid=14584>

APPENDIX B

Research Participant Recruitment Flyer

Study ID: HUM00212511 IRB: Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Date Approved: 5/3/2022

Research Study

English Learners Conceptions of Self in an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme



You are invited to participate in a research study on English Learners in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme. Participation in this study is completely optional.

The purpose of the study is to learn about your experiences at ██████ Middle School to identify how the IB program shapes your beliefs about yourself and acknowledges your needs.

Who can participate:

Students taking English Language Development classes at ██████ Middle School

What you will do:

You will be interviewed 3 times on Zoom by Mrs. Katnik. Each interview will take approximately 1 hour. You will answer questions about your background and your experience at ██████. You can opt-out any time.

Benefits:

You will be able to share your personal story and help your school better understand your background and needs.

Incentive:

If you choose to complete the interviews, you will receive a \$25 gift card.

If you are interested, please return the slip below to ██████ by 4/29/22

Name: _____

Student Section

I am interested in participating in Mrs. Katnik's study:

yes no I would like more information (circle one)

Parent Section

I support my child's decision indicated above.

Parent signature x _____

- Mrs. Katnik can contact me at _____ (email) or _____ (phone) to provide more information.

APPENDIX C

Parent Consent Form

Study ID: HUM00212511 IRB: Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Date Approved: 5/3/2022



Parental Permission

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN CONSENT TO BE PART OF A RESEARCH STUDY

1. KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS AND THIS STUDY

Study title: English Learners Conceptions of Self in an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme

Principal Investigator: Kendra Katnik, ELD Coordinator, [REDACTED] & Ed.D. Candidate at University of Michigan-Flint

Faculty Advisors: Dr. Pamela Ross McClain, PhD., Associate Professor of Education and Director of Educational Leadership Programs at University of Michigan-Flint; Dr. Nathaniel McClain, Ed.D., Assistant Professor of Education at University of Michigan-Flint

Your child is invited to take part in a research study. This form contains information that will help you decide whether you want them to join the study.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to agree to your child's participation and you can stop them at any time. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to agree to your child's participation in this research project.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to learn about English Learners' experiences at [REDACTED] Middle School to identify how the IB program shapes their beliefs about themselves and acknowledges their academic, language, and social needs.

3. WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

3.1 Who can take part in this study? Students at [REDACTED] Middle School who are identified as English Learners based on Michigan's English Learner Entrance and Exit Protocol

4. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY PARTICIPATION

4.1 What will happen to your child in this study?

- Students will be participate in three individual interviews with Kendra Katnik, ELD Coordinator for [REDACTED] Schools, who is the researcher conducting this study.
- Interviews will take place via Zoom, outside of school hours, with a parent or guardian present.
- The interviews will focus on students' life history, the details of their experiences as a student at [REDACTED] Middle School, and the meaning they make from those experiences. Example questions:
 - Talk to me about your language experience. What was the first language you remember speaking? What does that mean for school?
 - What does it mean to you to be multilingual?

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- Do you ever feel pressure or stress as a result of being a student at Royal Oak Middle School?
- Do you feel supported? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt that you needed something different at school because your needs were different?
- Students may be asked to share artifacts such as photographs or schoolwork to help tell their stories.
- Interview responses will be developed into narratives (stories) describing students' experiences. The stories will be included in Mrs. Katnik's dissertation, but students will not be personally identified in the paper.

4.2 How much of my child's time will be needed to take part in this study?

Up to 3 hours total. Each interview will take approximately 60 minutes and they will be scheduled with at least one week in-between.

5. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY RISKS AND BENEFITS

5.1 What risks will my child face by taking part in the study? What will the researchers do to protect my child against these risks?

No more than minimal risk is associated with this study. The telling of stories is deeply personal. The study's subjects are vulnerable as children and also as English learners, who have a history of marginalization in U.S. schools. Talking about ways their needs may not have been met by their school program could potentially be emotionally painful.

The researchers will try to minimize these risks by paying careful attention to participants' psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. If at any time a subject appears distressed, the interview will be terminated. As appropriate, and with parent permission, the researcher may refer subjects for whom the study may evoke difficult emotions to school mental health support staff.

Your child does not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer.

Because this study collects information about your child, the primary risk of this research is a loss of confidentiality. See Section 8 of this document for more information on how the study team will protect your child's confidentiality and privacy.

5.2 How could my child benefit if my child takes part in this study? How could others benefit?

Your child might benefit from being in the study by expressing their personal experiences and deriving meaning from them. By reflecting on and expressing how their school program acknowledges their academic, language, and social backgrounds and needs, your child will potentially strengthen their sense of self and be better equipped to articulate those backgrounds and needs in a way that validates their experiences and allows them to self-advocate.

School leaders may use the study's results to make changes to the program that directly benefits your child by better addressing their identities and needs.

6. ENDING THE STUDY

6.1 If I want my child to stop participating in the study, what should I do?

Your child is free to leave the study at any time. If your child leaves the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you or your child. If you decide to have your child leave the study before it is finished, please tell one of the persons listed in Section 9, "Contact Information". If you choose to tell the researchers why your child is leaving the study, your reasons may be kept as part of the study record. The researchers will keep the information collected about your child for the research unless you ask us to delete it from our records. If the researchers have already used your information in a research analysis it will not be possible to remove your information.

We may also decide to end your child's participation study if they appear distressed due to participation.

7. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

7.1 Will my child or I be paid or given anything for my child taking part in this study? Your child will receive a \$25 MasterCard gift card for their participation in the study. If your child withdraws from the research before the end of the study, they will receive a \$10 gift card.

8. PROTECTING AND SHARING RESEARCH INFORMATION

8.1 How will the researchers protect my child's information? Your child's name and personal information will not be stored with their interview responses. If consent is given for audio recording, your child's interviews will be recorded in the Zoom platform (audio only with audio transcript). These audio files will be stored securely in a password-protected computer folder until the audio transcript of the discussion has been verified and edited to remove personal information such as your child's name or family members' names. As soon as this process is complete, the recordings will be deleted. If consent is not given for audio recording, the researcher will take notes during the interview. When reporting findings, pseudonyms will be used to protect your child's identity and privacy. Study data will be kept for three years following the close of the study, after which it will be permanently deleted.

8.2 Who will have access to my child's research records?

There are reasons why information about your child may be used or seen by the researchers or others during or after this study. Examples include:

- University, government officials, study sponsors or funders, auditors, and/or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may need the information to make sure that the study is done in a safe and proper manner.
- Federal or State law may require the study team to give information to government agencies. For example, if we learn of abuse, neglect, or endangerment of any vulnerable person to prevent harm to your child or others.

8.3 What will happen to the information collected in this study?

We will keep the information we collect about your child during the research for study record-keeping. Your child's name and other information that can directly identify your child will be stored securely and separately from the research information we collected

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from your child. Interview transcripts and notes will be kept for three years following the close of the study, and then deleted. This consent form and your child's assent form will be stored in a locked file cabinet for three years following the close of the study. After three years have passed, the signed consent and assent forms will be shredded.

The results of this study could be published in an article or presentation, but will not include any information that would let others know who your child is without your permission.

8.4 Will my child's information be used for future research or shared with others?

We may use or share your child's research information for future research studies unless you ask us to delete it from our records. If we share your child's information with other researchers it will be de-identified, which means that it will not contain your child's name or other information that can directly identify your child. This research may be similar to this study or completely different. We will not ask for your additional parental permission for these studies.

9. CONTACT INFORMATION

Who can I contact about this study?

Please contact the researchers listed below to:

- Obtain more information about the study
- Ask a question about the study procedures
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem (you may also need to tell your child's regular doctors)
- Leave the study before it is finished
- Express a concern about the study

Principal Investigator: Kendra Katnik

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: 248-549-4968 x4655

Faculty Advisor: Pamela Ross McClain

Email: rosspam@umich.edu

Phone: 810-762-3260

Faculty Advisor: Nathaniel McClain

Email: namclai@umich.edu

Phone: 810-762-3260

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

University of Michigan

Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS)

Study ID: HUM00212511 IRB: Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Date Approved: 5/3/2022

2800 Plymouth Road
 Building 520, Room 1169 Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800
 Telephone: 734-936-0933 or toll free (866) 936-0933
 Fax: 734-936-1852
 E-mail: irbhsbs@umich.edu

You can also contact the University of Michigan Compliance Hotline at 1-866-990-0111.

10. YOUR CONSENT

Parental Permission

By signing this document, you are agreeing to your child's participation in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. A photocopy of the signed form will be sent home from school with your child for your records. The researchers will also keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree for my child to take part in this study.

 Print Participant Name (Child)

 Print Parent Name

 Signature

 Date

11. OPTIONAL CONSENT

Consent to use audio recordings for purposes of this research.

This study involves audio recordings. If you do not agree to your child being audio recorded, your child can still take part in the study.

_____ Yes, I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ No, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

Print Parent Name: _____

Parent Signature: _____

Date of Signature (mm/dd/yy): _____

APPENDIX D

Child Assent Form

Study ID: HUM00212511 IRB: Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Date Approved: 5/3/2022

Assent to Participate in a Research Study (12-14 year olds)
“English Learners Conceptions of Self in an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme”

Principal Investigator: Kendra Katnik, ELD Coordinator, [REDACTED] & Ed.D.
 Candidate at University of Michigan-Flint

Overview and purpose

We are asking you to be part of a research study that plans to learn about English Learners experiences at [REDACTED] Middle School to identify how the IB program shapes their beliefs about themselves and acknowledges their needs. We contacted your family because you attend [REDACTED] Middle School and participate in the English Language Development Program. We plan to ask 6 children between the ages of 11 and 14 to participate in our research.

Description of your involvement

If you agree to be part of this study and at least one of your parents gives permission, you will participate in 3 interviews via Zoom. Each interview will take about 60 minutes. We would like to record the audio (sound) part of the interview to make sure that our conversation is recorded accurately, but you can still be part of the study if you don't want to be audiotaped.

Voluntary nature of the study

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if your parents say you can talk to us, you do not have to do so. Even if you say yes, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may also choose to not answer a question for any reason.

Ending Participation

You can end participation in the study at any time if you no longer wish to participate. Your parent can also decide they do not want you to participate anymore. We may choose to end your participation if it seems like participating in the study is distressing you.

Benefits

You may benefit from expressing your personal experiences and making meaning from them. By reflection on and sharing how your school acknowledges your academic, language, and social backgrounds and needs, you will potentially strengthen your sense of self and be better able to share your background and needs in a way that helps you. Also, the results of this study might be used by school leaders to make changes that benefit you by better addressing your identity and needs.

Risks and discomforts

Answering questions about your personal experiences may be uncomfortable. You can choose not to answer a question, or you may stop at any time. Just tell the interviewer you want to stop. Another risk is breaking your privacy. The “confidentiality” section below tells how we plan to keep your information private.

Compensation

You will be paid \$25 for participating. You will receive a Mastercard gift card that can be used anywhere that accepts credit cards. If you decide to quit before the interview is over, you will receive a \$10 gift card.

Study ID: HUM00212511 IRB: Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Date Approved: 5/3/2022

Confidentiality

We plan to publish the results of this study but will not include any information that would identify you or your family members. To keep your information safe, the audiotape of your interview will be stored in a password-protected computer folder until a written word-for-word copy of the discussion has been created. We will edit this word-for-word copy to remove information that identifies you like your name or your family members' names.

There are some reasons why people other than the researchers may need to see information you provided as part of the study. This includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly, including the University of Michigan. Also, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we may report that information to the appropriate agencies.

We may use or share your research information for future research studies. If we share your information with other researchers it will be de-identified, which means that it will not contain your name or other information that can directly identify you.

Contact information

If you have questions about this research:

Contact Mrs. Katnik at [REDACTED]

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

University of Michigan
 Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS)
 2800 Plymouth Road
 Building 520, Room 1169 Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800
 Telephone: 734-936-0933 or toll free (866) 936-0933
 Fax: 734-936-1852
 E-mail: irbhsbs@umich.edu

You can also contact the University of Michigan Compliance Hotline at 1-866-990-0111

Assent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. We will give you a copy of this document and will keep a copy in our study records. Be sure that we have answered your questions about the study and you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in this study.

 Signature

 Date

 Printed Name

I agree to have my interview audiotaped.

 Signature

 Date

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval Letter



Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS) • 2800 Plymouth Rd., Building 520, Room 1170, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800 • phone (734) 936-0933
 • fax (734) 998-9171 • irbhsbs@umich.edu

To: Kendra Katnik

From:

Riann Palmieri-Smith

Thad Polk

Cc:

Nathaniel

McClain

Kendra

Katnik

Pamela

Ross McClain

Subject: Initial Study Approval for [HUM00212511]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:

Study Title: English Learners' Conceptions of Self in an International Baccalaureate Programme

Full Study Title (if applicable): English Learners' Conceptions of Self in an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme: A Narrative Inquiry

Study eResearch ID: HUM00212511

Date of this Notification from IRB: 5/3/2022

Review: Expedited

Initial IRB Approval Date: 5/3/2022

UM Federalwide Assurance (FWA): FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the [UM HRPP Webpage](#))

OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000246

Approved Risk Level(s):

Name	Risk Level
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HUM00212511	No more than minimal risk
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Continuing Review Required: No

NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL AND CONDITIONS:

The IRB HSBS has reviewed and approved the study referenced above. The IRB determined that the proposed research conforms with applicable guidelines, State and federal regulations, and the University of Michigan's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). You must conduct this study in accordance with the description and information provided in the approved application and associated documents.

The research meets the following regulatory criteria for expedited research:

[HHS Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior](#)

[HHS Category 6: Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.](#)

RENEWAL/TERMINATION:

The IRB has determined, consistent with 45 CFR 46.109(f), that annual continuing review is no longer required for this research.

You will receive an annual message reminding you of your responsibilities to manage this research application.

Submit a Termination Report once you only hold or are analyzing deidentified data, or the research has ended.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR INVESTIGATORS

APPROVED STUDY DOCUMENTS:

You must use any date-stamped versions of recruitment materials and informed consent documents available in the eResearch workspace (referenced above). Date-stamped materials are available in the "Currently Approved Documents" section on the "Documents" tab.

AMENDMENTS:

All proposed changes to the study (e.g., personnel, procedures, or documents), must be approved in advance by the IRB through the amendment process, except as necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to research subjects. Should the latter occur, you must notify the IRB Office as soon as possible.

AEs/ORIOs:

You must inform the IRB of adverse events (AEs) and other reportable information and occurrences (ORIOs) according to your IRB's required reporting timetable ([IRBMED](#) and [IRB-HSBS/Flint/Dearborn](#)).

UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS INVOLVING RISKS TO SUBJECTS OR OTHERS (UPIRSOs or UaPs) :

Investigators must inform the IRB promptly of any potential Unanticipated Problems (UaPs or UPIRSOs) that come to the attention of the study team. Unanticipated Problems meet **all of the following criteria:**

1. **Unexpected** (in terms of nature, severity, frequency);
2. **Related or possibly related to participation in the research;** and
3. Suggests that the research places subjects or others at a **greater risk of harm** than was previously known or recognized.

See [U-M HRPP Operations Manual Part 12.III.B.1.a](#).

SUBMITTING VIA eRESEARCH:

You can access the online forms for continuing review, amendments, and AEs/ORIOs in the eResearch workspace for this approved study (referenced above).

MORE INFORMATION:

You can find additional information about UM's Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) in the Operations Manual and other documents available at: <http://research-compliance.umich.edu/human-subjects>.



Riann Palmieri-Smith
Co-chair, IRB HSBS



Thad Polk
Co-chair, IRB HSBS