IMPACTS OF URBAN EDUCATORS' SENSEMAKING OF
MICHIGAN'S "READ BY GRADE THREE" LAW ON
ENGLISH LEARNERS' LEARNING EXPERIENCES

By

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the policy sensemaking of urban educators on the "Read by Grade Three" (RBG3) Law and their sensemaking impacts on English Learners' (ELs') learning experiences. Applying a critical cultural policy sensemaking framework, I conducted an urban district case study to highlight educators' perceptions and behaviors in support of ELs. I conducted 18 interviews with 12 participants (district and school administrators, literacy coaches, teachers, and an EL family), observed 47 hours of interventions and instruction, and school and district meetings, and collected 25 relevant documents about RBG3 and EL district policies. Each participant shared their understanding of RBG3, their emotions about implementing the policy, their pedagogical relationship with students, and their lived experiences from assessments and interventions.

The findings of this study suggest that educators in urban contexts are critical of RBG3, which emphasizes accountability for students' reading scores by rationalizing the importance of consistent data tracking with frequent assessments and interventions. Under resource-constrained contexts with a high number of students having Individual Reading Intervention Plans, the lack of a district infrastructure system, human resources, instructional planning time, and professional development made the policy's intended goal unattainable for educators. Initial interpretation of the policy intertwined with the situated challenges evoked negative emotions such as frustration, hopelessness, insult, and a sense of unfairness. Accordingly, urban educators doubted the

retention effects in the same system. Especially regarding ELs, teachers perceived that the retention exemption for ELs is unrealistic, and the testing system constantly gives students failure messages and test anxiety. Under this high pressure for rapid English acquisition and the negative consequences of slow growth over time, although ELs' cultural diversity has been celebrated in school and district events, their linguistic diversity has not been utilized as the core of instruction. Furthermore, an enforced test-driven accountability system has ultimately devalued the culturally responsive sustaining pedagogy and limited pedagogy's function to enhance test scores.

This study implies that the RBG3 policy may exacerbate obstacles to ELs' learning through frequent diagnosis and interventions, especially in urban contexts. Policymakers and practitioners should acknowledge that although the policy intends to enhance students' fundamental reading competence for further academic success, this policy may bring unintended negative consequences to particular marginalized student subgroups like ELs. In addition, they should know the exemption for ELs cannot justify this testing environment where there are constant failure messages to ELs. Furthermore, compared to a classroom consisting of one or two dominant minority languages, it is necessary to conduct research on effective culturally responsive instruction for classroom structures that have ELs speaking more than 10 different non-dominant minority languages.

Dedicated to my parents, my husband, and my son.
Thank you for always believing in me.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I investigate district and school educators' sensemaking of the Read by Grade Three Law (RBG3) in support of English Learners (ELs) and the impacts of sensemaking on ELs' learning experiences through a district case study. There has been a lot of literature on retention policy effects, the majority of which is focused on quantitative methods that heavily relied on students' reading assessment scores. The underlying assumption of these studies was that students' learning outcomes could only be measured by their scores on standardized tests. However, while this test-driven accountability RBG3 seemed to pursue equity by reducing the score gaps between white students and students of color with the constant early diagnosis and interventions, its inherent mechanism may exacerbate obstacles to marginalized students' learning by requiring them to take tests they will inevitably fail, especially in urban contexts. In this consequence, although culturally responsive sustaining pedagogy has been developed for enhancing linguistically and culturally diverse students' learning, RBG3 created conditions that limit the use of this pedagogy fully, which further reduces ELs' opportunities to learn. Therefore, through the sensemaking of district and school educators in urban contexts, this study explored how they critically perceive this retention policy in urban contexts and how unintended consequences exacerbate ELs' learning during policy implementation.

1. Purpose of Study

As a Korean and mother of an English Learner (EL), I have always been interested in how my son developed his two languages, Korean as a primary language and English as a secondary one. One day, after becoming a kindergartener during his third year in the U.S. my son asked me, "Mommy, why does my teacher speak only English? Why can't she speak Korean? And why do I have to speak both languages?" I answered, "You were born in South Korea, so

you have learned Korean first and came here, so you need to learn English to live and learn. But your teacher was born here, and she may only need to learn English." At that moment, he might have been trying to answer the question "who am I?" That answer would be complicated by his language use.

Unfortunately, my son's primary language use has been unnecessary for four years in U.S. schools, except for the international night events that were intended to introduce different cultures and their foods, clothes, books, toys, etc. to his preschool once a year. Although the event was somewhat meaningful, with the purpose of enhancing the understanding of diversity, my son and I still felt like outsiders since all cultural items at the event were represented only in English. Rather than being truly respected for our culture, it seemed that the event was meant to show mercy to those who did not belong to mainstream America and to temporarily offer immigrant and international students like my son a sense of belonging in the name of embracing diversity.

Furthermore, I have witnessed that my son's developing English was recognized as a problem with cognitive development due to his teachers' lack of understanding of bilingual development. However, my son's fluency in Korean has proved his advanced and developed cognition. Sadly, his bilingual ability was recognized as "beginner" and he was thus labeled as an EL, which was translated as a "problem" to be remediated with interventions "as if he did not already have a language repertoire" (Seltzer & García, 2020, p. 39).

Thinking back to my son's question about teachers' language use, from his preschool to grade one, he rarely had been asked about his primary language and culture except during some brief events. This is because he was forced to only use English, as the listeners at his schools were only able to communicate in the form of repertoire in English (Seltzer & García, 2020). Therefore, he doubted whether his primary language was valuable to learn because of the

learning environment that only emphasized English fluency and proficiency in school settings throughout his early childhood, which was a critical moment for shaping his identity. Therefore, as a researcher and a mother, I am concerned that this adverse learning environment might have been exacerbated under the Michigan's Read by Grade Three (RBG3) law that forces constant diagnosis and intervention of reading for K-3 grades, sending a message that reinforces English-only ideology. And I assumed that schools in urban contexts with constrained resources might have even more difficulty implementing the policy.

Despite these concerns from a parent of an EL, RBG3 seems to have legitimate reasons for its implementation. Early reading competency has attracted extensive attention from policymakers and researchers since it affects students' later learning outcomes and high school graduation rates (Hernandez, 2011; Sparks et al., 2014). In recognition of the importance of early reading, in early 1990, the U.S.'s federal government expanded its funding for reading research institutions and projects aimed at increasing reading proficiency rates (Pearson et al., 2020). As this substantial attention toward reading competency met the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, reading policies began to emphasize more flexible local control based not only on research-informed teaching, but also on strong accountability for data-driven outcomes (Rodriguez & Rolle, 2013). In response to national demands and states' needs, third-grade retention policies have increased in popularity across the nation, and as of 2020, 37 states, including Michigan and the District of Columbia, had joined the movement. In short, Michigan's Read by Grade Three (RBG3) law is a result of an emphasis on high-stakes testing under accountability reforms that stress the importance of third-grade reading competency.

In response to the high popularity of retention policy across the nation, much research has been conducted to prove its effects in terms of academic achievement, student behaviors, high school graduation rates, and inequality issues (e.g., Livingston & Livingston, 2002; Özek, 2015;

Winters & Greene, 2012). Aligning with the results-oriented nature of policies with concrete cut-off scores, most studies of retention policy used quantitative approaches. Although most of the results have demonstrated up to five year's worth of academic gains, these gains have faded over time, and these policies have disproportionately impacted the high school dropout rate for minority students (Mariano & Martorell, 2013; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005; Schwerdt et al., 2017; Greene & Winters, 2006, 2007; Winters & Greene, 2012). The policy has been continually expanded from state to state as a result of Florida's retention policy's impact on sharply increased rankings in NAEP reading scores being considered a huge success (Weyer, 2018). Even though it is unclear whether Florida's student reading competency overall growth comes from retention itself or additional instruction (Robinson-Cimpian, 2015), it seems there are plausible political reasons why other states have followed this path. Inspired by Florida's success, Michigan has legitimated the retention policy with the expectation that overall reading competency improvement of third graders will lead to their further academic success (Kennedy et al., 2015).

Compared to the many quantitative approaches of the retention policy, only a few qualitative research studies on how retention impacts students' perceptions of their learning experiences have been conducted (Booher-Jennings, 2005, 2008; Huddleston, 2015; Huddleston & Lowe, 2014; Roderick & Engel, 2001). Although some research has shed light on struggling readers' learning strategies and emotions during interventions, there is no research conducted exclusively for ELs in a qualitative way. Therefore, in this study, I explored three possible problems related to ELs' learning experiences that RBG3 law may influence.

First, ELs may face different challenges than non-EL minorities in terms of language use in an educational system that emphasizes "standard English" as imposed by RBG3. However, the minority students who have been targeted in existing retention policy literature with qualitative

research have been heterogeneous since minority groups include students of color, low socio-economic status students, and ELs. Not distinguishing ELs from other minority students, existing literature has shown limited understanding of the particular and unique difficulties with reading that ELs may face. Therefore, how RBG3 impacts exclusively ELs needs to be investigated.

Second, while existing qualitative research utilizes reproduction theories to explain inequality of retention impacts on students and how the policy frames students' failures as their own fault (Huddleston, 2014), there is still a gap concerning the cognitive process of educators. Namely, we need to understand how and why educators' sensemaking regarding retention policy affects their behaviors, which reinforce or resist the structures that the policy implies. Therefore, investigating the sensemaking that determines educators' actions is necessary to understand how policy actors make decisions to support ELs at the individual and organizational levels.

Third, while existing policy sensemaking literature has shed light on the cognitive process of implementing agents, it still does not fully explain how the notion of power privileges particular voices over others. The sensemaking process does not always occur in equal relationships between sense-makers but rather occurs in organizational, hierarchical, and unequal power relations. Therefore, a more critical way of understanding policy sensemaking is necessary. To reveal power issues in the process of policy sensemaking, I established the critical cultural policy sensemaking framework.

2. Research Questions

In response to the three above research necessities, I conducted a district case study. The study aimed to investigate how the RBG3 law affects ELs' learning experiences. Therefore, the overarching research question was "How do policy actors in the urban context make sense of

RBG3, and how does this sensemaking affect ELs' learning experiences?" The following sub-questions led my inquiry:

1. How do policy actors in the urban context – including district leaders, school leaders, and teachers – make sense of RBG3 in support of ELs?

    a. What influences the actors' sensemaking around RBG3 for ELs?

    b. What do the actors believe RBG3 requires administrators and teachers to do for EL students, and how do they feel about these requirements?

    c. What power dynamics and tensions exist in the process of sensemaking regarding RBG3's underlying premises? How do actors perceive them?

2. How do the actors' sensemaking regarding RBG3 impact how a school provides learning experiences for ELs?

    a. What is the phenomenon of ELs' learning experience in reading instruction and interventions?

    b. In classrooms, how are ELs' first languages and cultures recognized?

    c. How does the sensemaking of teachers evolve into messages to EL students?

3. Inquiring into the Culturality & Naturality of Key Terms

The Analects of Confucius, 문질빈빈(文質彬彬) – inquiring into culturality and naturality – was introduced with the explanation that "if the background wins the decoration, it is tacky, and if the decoration wins the background, it seems empty. Only after the decorations and backgrounds are evenly harmonized are the saints" (Kim, 2012, p. 123). Cho (2012), a Korean educational anthropologist, applied this term to his qualitative research to explain how one can find the meaning of a word through the process of construction, reconstruction, and

deconstruction; throughout this process, one is constantly asking questions. Therefore, I will examine the culturality (the form of the word) and naturality (the essence of the word) of two key terms in my study: learning and sense. Although people use these words frequently, their meanings might be interpreted differently for contextual and personal reasons. Therefore, I tried to find the most appropriate meanings of these terms for my study.

3.1. Learning

What is *learning*? Learning is not just an academic outcome but rather something that embraces a whole process of interacting with new information gleaned from external words. From the cognitive development perspective, learning can be defined as constructing one's knowledge with the process from assimilation to accommodation, and it can be effective when proper scaffolding provides chances for articulation and externalization (Piaget, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). From the schooling purpose perspective, learning also points out the process of identification and socialization, letting us ponder who we are as individuals and teaching us what roles we should play as citizens with a sense of civic virtue (Labaree, 1997). In the individual education consumer perspective, learning can be a tool for improving one's social status through educational attainment (Labaree, 1997), but it also must be constantly pursued throughout our lives in order for us to "find ourselves."

Existing retention policy literature has mostly dealt with learning by asking: "How much does the policy increase the score?" Qualitative research that has focused on inequity issues caused by the retention policy has shown that learning at school under the retention policy reproduced a social structure in which minority parents and students believed the assessment was trustworthy, and therefore, believed that they (the minority students) were retained due to their

own faults (Huddleston, 2015). However, most literature did not discuss how learning as the meaning of living has changed under the policy.

Learning provides not only knowledge but also attitude, value, emotion, and relationships to the world. Students learn something at school to shape their own senses of the world and to define who they are for being themselves. Like walking in nature at one's own pace, with enough time to ponder and reflect on their learning, students can absorb something meaningful from the new information. Such knowledge accumulates on the inside and is revealed through speech, writings, or other artistic expressions, sometimes after a long wait. If school emphasizes repetition and memorization without a fundamental meaning-making process, students may not have chance to integrate new knowledge into who they are. In the notion of learning as living for being oneself, culture and language are critical. Gadamer et al. (2004) stated that culture is related to "cultivation," which is "a process of forming the self in accordance with an ideal image of human" (p. 11), meaning that culture refers to "the properly human way of developing one's natural talents and capacities" (p. 44). Language is the main vehicle for constructing, replicating, and transmitting culture (Schiffman & Ricento, 2006). To keep the importance of culture and language in mind, we need to think about the meaning of a certain culture and language enforced at school.

When RBG3 was passed in Michigan in 2016, it seemed doubtful whether the purpose of additional intervention for struggling readers would work, as the intervention is intended to facilitate bi- and multilinguals' better learning by emphasizing only English proficiency in the school setting. If learning is considered as living and being oneself, the process of intervention should be educational by embracing students' primary languages and cultures, not equipping them with certain reading strategies and skills in a certain period by enforcing English-only and

middle-class white American culture. This approach to learning -- shaped by constant external input without consideration for the role of languages and cultures and without enough time to digest new stimuli -- may exclude the basis of a child's identity. While this approach can help acquire fragmented skills, it can also be the biggest obstacle to being oneself.

Furthermore, we need to think about the possibility that when students are placed at the lowest performing group, they may develop a poor self-image with low self-esteem. This suggests, as Hakuta and Beatty (2000) write, that "the aggregate performance of language subgroups that are inappropriately tested can be seriously misunderstood, and decisions influenced by invalid test results can have a significant impact on their lives" (p. 21). Despite the rationale of providing additional intervention as support, this activity may convey to students that they have failed so that constant diagnosis and treatment in early childhood may not operate as support.

In my study, learning experience does not include only reading outcomes, which were the main consideration of quantitative retention studies, or the social reproduction tool, which was investigated in qualitative ones. Learning experiences encompass a broader scope by including students' values, attitudes, and perceptions of the world, their school, their teachers, and themselves, which are shaped gradually over time at their own pace. Therefore, through the learning environment providing frequent assessments and interventions emphasized by RBG3, I investigated how educators' notion of learning has impacted their sensemaking of the policy in support of ELs.

3.2. Sense

What is *sense*? Associated with sensory-related systems by corresponding organs, senses refer to cognitive and physical processes that respond to stimuli and offer analyzed data for perception (Wolfe et al., 2006). With the main senses of our body to see, hear, smell, touch, and taste, we feel something toward an object and decide the next action. Therefore, a sense is a basic element of almost every aspect of cognition and behavior (Wolfe et al., 2006).

When people talk about sense, they often distinguish it from interpretation and understanding, which mainly result from logical processes. As a human being, sense seems to be a close immediate response toward a certain object through not only logical processes, but also feelings, intuition, and improvisation (Maitlis et al., 2013). Sense is not fixed but transient so that it can change over time with new stimuli and information surrounding individuals (Brown, 1989; Coburn, 2001).

Sensemaking theorists have tried to distinguish sense from interpretation by emphasizing the nature of *invention* in sense, compared to the more nuanced *discovery* inherent in interpretation (Brown et al., 2015). In their empirical studies, especially policy implementation literature, scholars have interchangeably utilized sense with interpretation and understanding. Since sensemaking was introduced, it has been shaped by preexisting knowledge, worldviews, selected clues, situated contexts, and communities (Resnick, 1991; Schwenk, 1984; Weick, 1979), characteristics that are indistinguishable from interpretation.

However, for my study, I argue that using the term sense to refer to the way educators perceive RBG3 policy through their lived experiences is more worthwhile than using interpretation and understanding, which sounds close to a fixed conclusion. In addition, my research participants' senses may not be produced from only logical understanding and

interpretation of the policy. Their interpretation is not just coming from the policy document itself, which does not explicitly talk about support for ELs, so it may come from their critical sense to interpret the policy with invisible factors such as their pedagogical relationships with students, attitudes toward student frustration, and values in teaching. Their sense may not be captured in complete form (as interpretation) but may be revealed in an emotional format (such as a sense of fear, urgency, pressure, frustration, or burden).

In this study, I utilized the term sense as an ongoing transient cognitive process with a broader scope that includes logical and emotional aspects to reach a particular interpretation and understanding as the end product of sensemaking.

4. Overview of Methods

For this project, I conducted a district case study. By asking questions about participants' experiences, I investigated how district and school educators have shaped their sensemaking regarding RBG3 and how ELs have experienced their learning under the policy. To explore policy actors' sense, I conducted interviews with the district and school leaders, teachers who support ELs, literacy coaches, and EL students and parents in one urban district with a relatively high number of ELs to examine their policy sensemaking. In addition, I conducted observations of interventions and instruction to reveal how ELs learn and how teachers teach and of school meetings relevant to ELs and literacy to explore how their sensemaking is shaped in authentic situations. Furthermore, to enhance the understanding of the district's context, I collected documents related to RBG3 and EL policies.

5. Organizing the Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I have presented why I had an interest in this topic with my research positionality and how this topic has evolved into detailed research questions by responding to existing literature.

In Chapter 2, along with the detailed information on Michigan's RBG3, I review relevant literature about third-grade retention policy, effective instructions for ELs, culturally responsive sustaining pedagogy, and policy sensemaking. By exploring the gap between existing literature and current research necessity, I discuss the importance of my dissertation. Along with integrating this literature, I introduce a conceptual framework that was applied to analyze the data.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the methodology of this study. Along with the reasons for selecting a qualitative case study, I present the recruitment process, participant selection, district context, data collection, and analysis methods.

In Chapter 4, I present the key findings of my dissertation. This chapter consists of factors of sensemaking, urban educators' sensemaking of RBG3, particular sensemaking towards ELs, and ELs' learning experiences analyzed through four elements of a culturally responsive sustaining education framework.

In Chapter 5, upon a summary of the findings, I draw several implications in terms of policy sensemaking and ELs' learning under RBG3 implementation. Along with the implications for policymakers, practitioners, and EL researchers, I suggest future research topics. Finally, I share my closing thoughts by reflecting on my dissertation journey.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to organize existing literature regarding retention policy and effective instructions for ELs and to create a conceptual framework that shows critical cultural policy sensemaking. This review begins by presenting 1) Michigan's Read by Grade three law's context and the relevant retention policy literature, 2) English learners and RBG3, and 3) sensemaking studies and frameworks. These are situated in my conceptual framework to investigate the research questions.

1. RBG3 and Retention Literature

In this section, I begin with an explanation of how RBG3 was initiated and how it differs from Florida's retention policy as well as outline how implementation is expected to bring about better reading outcomes. Then, I present three different research approaches from prior studies that investigated test-based grade retention policy impacts, with the focus on methods and findings, to determine existing studies' limitations. Finally, I discuss the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on RBG3 and related anticipated challenges.

2. The Context of Michigan's RBG3

2.1. Legislation and the Implementation of RBG3

Over the last two decades, Michigan has implemented a variety of early reading policies to satisfy the demands of national, state, and local leaders. Under the NCLB Act, Michigan implemented its Reading First Program between 2002 and 2008 with $180 million of federal government funding to provide scientific, research-informed professional development on reading difficulty diagnosis, effective reading instruction and intervention, and students' growth

monitoring (Michigan Department of Education [MDE], 2017; National Reading Panel et al., 2000). Aligned with this effort, Michigan initiated several state-level reading policies (see MDE, 2011) and regional movements (see Reading Now Network [RNN], 2012) designed to achieve better outcomes by enhancing reading instruction quality to produce better student reading outcomes.

Despite these constant efforts, Michigan's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) fourth grade reading average scores between 2009 and 2013 (218 out of 500 in 2009, 219 in 2011, and 217 in 2013) were persistently lower than the national average (220 in 2009, 220 in 2011, 221 in 2013) (National Assessment Governing Board [NAGB], 2009-2013), prompting then-Governor Rick Snyder and state policymakers to initiate retention legislation in hopes of enhancing early-grade students' reading competency. Following the failure of two early drafts, House Bills 5111 and 5144, in 2013, mainly due to their focus on retention but lack of solid implementation elements to support reading (Michigan Legislature 5111, 5144, 2013), the Third Grade Reading Workshop was established to suggest the following recommendations: research-informed assessments and interventions; instructional training suited to diagnosing reading difficulties; the provision of literacy resources for home support; and an annual analysis of school reading assessment performance (Kennedy et al., 2015). Reflecting these recommendations, and including more solid literacy support, House Bill 4822, which became the RBG3 Law (Public Act 306), was finally passed in 2016.

RBG3 includes provisions for seven important elements: 1) literacy coaches, 2) professional development (PD) for teachers, 3) Individual Reading Intervention Plans (IRIPs) for students, 4) reading intervention, 5) valid and formative assessments, 6) retention, and 7) good cause exemptions (Michigan Legislation 4822, 2016). Beginning with the 2020–21 academic

year, third graders who cannot meet the cut-off score (1252) on the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) and who are not waived by good cause exemptions are to be retained in third grade for one more year (MDE, 2019c).

Many efforts by state and local bodies were devoted to the implementation of RBG3 after its passage in 2016. These included various allocations for funding aligned with the implementation of RBG3, and the MDE provided professional learning, reimbursed districts for assessment costs, and supported summer reading programs. Furthermore, the MDE provided a Read by Grade Three Guide, to help districts reach a coherent understanding of how to enact the law, and a Parent Awareness Toolkit, to educate parents about accessible digital reading materials and the good cause exemption process (MDE, 2019b).

To support professional development regarding reading instruction, the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) published a series known as *Literacy Essentials*, research-informed documents consisting of findings from peer-reviewed journals to develop coherent literacy instructions for teachers across the state (MDE, 2019a). These works contributed to producing a clear literacy instruction guideline for K–12 teachers and administrators from the school to the state level. Under this system of state and related agency support and through work with literacy coaches, teachers are supported by continuous PD and mentoring services to improve their reading instruction, continuing their efforts to provide better data-driven diagnoses, research-based interventions, and home support resources.

2.2. Test-driven Accountability System

Along with the distribution of responsibilities regarding student outcomes between the district, school, educators, and parents, and support to enhance literacy instructions, RBG3 ultimately intended to measure its effectiveness through the reading outcomes of standardized tests. This test-driven accountability system was developed through NCLB in 2002, adding federal pressure to states by requiring annual tests of students in grades 3-8 and states then required districts to report annual progress of all students' achievement to receive Title 1 funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). This tightly coupled relationship between accountability and student testing has evoked lots of controversial discussions among those who advocate accountability policies that promote equity and those who are opposed to accountability policies that they argue damage equity in terms of the prescriptive practice of teaching and the failures of working-class children of color on high-stakes tests (e.g., McNeil et al., 2000).

This system aimed to reduce achievement gaps coming from the race and class disaggregation as a vehicle for enhancing educational equity (Scheurich & Skrla, 2004), but as much research showed, there were several modest positive results on student outcomes (Dee et al., 2010), but it did not much close the gap as originally intended (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009), and there were unintended negative consequences for marginalized students (e.g., Menken, 2010). Later, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 revised and replaced NCLB to expand the roles of states by providing more flexibility with less federal government power through mandating or incentivizing states, but it still required annual testing and reporting the results publicly, which was the core of NCLB (McGuinn, 2016).

Although this test-driven accountability system placed new cost burdens on schools, the main school funding mechanism -- local property taxes -- remained unchanged. As a result,

school funding inequality has only increased in this era of increasing poverty concentration and resegregation. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018). Social segregation based on property values ultimately impacted the inequitable distribution of funds for schools, which in turn affected student outcomes through school quality. With regards to school funding, there has been nothing fundamentally changed, except for test-score-based incentives or additional funding such as Title I, although to receive increased Title I funding, already under-resourced schools are required to provide comparable services in the form of mentoring, which is often impossible when these schools already lack the necessary funding to address students' basic needs. The marginalized students' low performance caused by basic funding inequity and poverty has been dealt with through additional elements such as exemptions from tests or testing accommodations, which do not address the cause of the problem. There was a dilemma when disadvantaged students were exempted from testing, because there was a risk of being excluded from the accountability system process where the main policies and funding are focused, which could cause schools to lose even more funding. As a result, regardless of district, school, and student contexts, they must survive under a test-driven accountability system by staying in compliance. In this circumstance, teaching lower-needs students in affluent areas with more funding, without additional federal or state incentives, becomes the best option for teachers.

Therefore, seemingly inclusive RBG3 aimed to enhance reading competence with retention, interventions, and additional support for improving reading instructions may cause unintended negative consequences in areas where enough resources are unavailable.

2.3. A Comparison of Michigan and Florida Retention Policies

Comparing Michigan's RBG3 to Florida's retention model is useful, as Michigan drew from Florida's model, which has shown remarkable reading improvement for its students. Florida's ranking on the 2019 NAEP fourth-grade reading average scale score increased to 6th in the U.S., up from 31st in 2002 (Kennedy et al., 2015; NAGB, 2019b; Van Beek, 2013). Though both states' programs are rooted in test-based promotion, the two policies have differences in their implementation, which may lead to different effects and consequences. The similarities and differences of the policies are clarified in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Comparison of Third Grade Retention Policies in Florida and Michigan*

Element	Florida	Michigan
Year law passed	2002	2016
First academic year with retention	2002–03	2020–21
Essential components	Six components: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary & oral language	Five components: same, but without oral language
Improved literacy instruction for teachers	School-level literacy coaches	District-level literacy coaches
Support for all students		Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Tier 1
Support for struggling students prior to retention	Progress monitoring plan (PMP)	MTSS, Tiers 2 &3, Individual Reading Intervention Plan (IRIP), additional 30 minutes of daily reading instruction, Read at Home plan
Intervention for retained students	Placement with high performing teachers, success-based intervention strategies, summer reading camp, daily additional 90 min instruction	Placement with highly rated teachers in literacy instruction, summer school program

Table 1. (cont'd)

Retention cut-off score	Below the Level 2, Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)	Below 1252, Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP)
Retesting	Yes, but not uniform	No
Mid-year promotion	Yes, since 2004–05 by a retesting result	Yes, when district/school officers appeal
Second retention	Yes	No
Good cause exemptions	Six exemptions: ELs who took less than two years of English courses; disabled students in the Individualized Education Program, or who have scored higher than the 51st percentile in alternative tests; disabled students who received intensive reading interventions; students proven proficient by a portfolio or students who were retained twice before	Five exemptions: Students with an Individualized Education Program or 504 Plan; ELs who have received fewer than three years of English instruction; students receiving intensive reading intervention for more than two years; students retained one time previously; students who have been in the present school less than two years without an IRIP
Funding	Approximately $587M between 2003–2013 (10 years) (Jasper, 2016)	Approximately $192.75M from 2015–2020 (5 years) (MDE, 2018)

*Reorganized information from Greene and Winters (2007), Florida Department of Education (2009), and Public Act 306.

Michigan and Florida's retention policies have many similarities in terms of their purpose, focus, and support structures. Both aim to enhance students' early literacy competency, mainly by supporting reading instruction improvement through literacy coaches to guide teachers toward better teaching and intervention efforts with struggling readers. The PMP (Florida) and IRIP (Michigan) are used to diagnose students' reading difficulties and monitor their progress. Additionally, both states have established an ELA cut-off score or minimum level based on their state's spring summative assessment, which is used for retention decision-making. Retained students are provided summer school and additional reading interventions, and they are assigned to a highly effective teacher.

Compared to Florida's retention plan, Michigan's RBG3 called for hiring a smaller number of literacy coaches due to Michigan's relatively lower levels of funding. Florida hired literacy coaches at the school level, while Michigan did so at the district or county level, which means schools share human resources with other schools by staggering the literacy coaches' schedules. This means that these coaches are present in a given school only one or two days per week. To overcome its human resources and funding limitations, Michigan developed a virtual platform, Michigan Virtual (MV), to create a coherent literacy instruction model for training all teachers across the state (MDE, 2017). Furthermore, since one of the fundamental purposes of this law is to improve all teachers' literacy instruction, when applying the MTSS Tier 1 system, all students are expected to receive high quality literacy instruction from teachers.

Regarding exemptions, Michigan allows ELs a relatively longer period for studying English – three years compared to Florida's two years – before subjecting them to retention. Students with fewer years of English study may apply for a retention waiver. Florida also allows students to retake the proficiency exam and promote at the mid-year point, allowing s a second retention if deemed necessary. By contrast, Michigan's law does not explicitly present the possibility of retaking a proficiency test, but retention may be waived for students already retained one time between kindergarten and grade two. Likewise, although many aspects of the policies resemble one another, different funding and exemption criteria may lead to different outcomes.

2.4. Expected RBG3 Outcome

Florida's successful retention policy (Just Read, Florida!), enacted in 2002-03, provided $12 million dollars of funding to hire reading coaches to improve reading outcomes, and it has still operated with hundreds and thousands of dollars (Marsh et al., 2008). Although the first year

of retention produced 14% retained students (27,713), they disproportionately consisted of Black and Hispanic students. The overall percentage gradually decreased to 7.4% in 2011-12 (15,106), along with constantly increased reading outcomes in Florida's state exam, which seemingly affected increased outcomes in NAEP (Florida Association of School Psychologists, 2003; Helios Education Foundation, 2014). Likewise, considering the implementation elements described in the preceding section, RBG3 anticipates that the multiple modes of literacy support provided for teachers and students will enhance K–3 students' reading competence so that this growth is discernible in students' MSTEP ELA scores.

Three key elements of the RBG3 law's implementation (Michigan Legislature, House Bill 4822, Act no. 306, 2016) may contribute to better student reading competency in the following scenarios: 1) literacy coaches and professional development are provided to train teachers and improve their instruction skills for better student outcomes; 2) a systematic approach with a rigorous evaluation system, IRIP, and reading interventions will contribute to tracking individual students' reading difficulties and supporting their growth; 3) home support with a "Read at Home Plan" emphasizes greater parental engagement and involvement in literacy support, which will lead parents to take more of an interest and sense of responsibility when it comes to their children's literacy competency in early childhood. In particular, the parents of students with IRIPs will be able to access school resources and free books to support their children's needs. Given these multiple avenues of support, students are expected to show better literacy competency in the M-STEP at the end of the third-grade academic year. If a student cannot meet the cut-off score (1252), he or she will be retained in third grade for one more year and placed with a high performing teacher to ensure better instruction.

Like Florida's retention policy, which has led to positive gains in state reading outcomes (Greene & Winters, 2007), Michigan may expect that all third graders will have a better ELA

outcome on the state assessment M-STEP and that the policy will continue to have a positive impact on the state's NAEP standing. Since the RBG3 implementation, Michigan's ranking has, indeed, increased from 41st in 2015 to 32nd in 2019 for Grade 4 reading on the NAEP (NAGB, 2019a), but it is unknown whether this growth resulted solely from RBG3-related events. The following section describes the challenges of RBG3 in the COVID-19 pandemic. This can help how the pandemic has affected the law implementation and ELs.

2.5. The Challenges of RBG3 in the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Michigan's K–12 schools to close on March 16, 2020; they remained closed for the rest of the 2019–20 academic year (Executive Order No.2020-5, 2020; Executive Order No. 2020-35, 2020). This led to waiving all state assessments by the federal government, so third graders in Michigan did not take the M-STEP in May 2020 (Chambers, 2020; MDE, 2020b). For this reason, the prospect of retention was waived, and Michigan promoted all of its third graders to the fourth grade for the 2020–21 academic year. As of the Fall 2020 semester, 86% of districts in the state had decided to provide some or all in-person instruction, while the remaining districts offered their classes entirely online (Lovitz et al., 2020). Since the MDE announced that it would maintain all implementation pieces of the RBG3 law except the retention element for the 2019–20 academic year, the MDE has provided continuous virtual teacher professional development opportunities to enhance literacy instruction (MDE, 2020b).

Despite the above, the changes in learning modes brought on by the pandemic also led to challenges for some students, parents, and teachers. First, the online learning format can be difficult, especially for early grade (K–2) students, the children affected most directly by the RBG3 law. These students may find it difficult to concentrate during online learning for long

periods of time, so they may need their parents to provide additional help, especially for understanding and uploading daily tasks. By analyzing survey data from 112 parents, Garbe et al. (2020) found that parents faced challenges regarding how to balance and coordinate demands between working and helping with their children's learning. They reported parents' lack of content knowledge and noted children's low learning motivation, both of which might be barriers to remote learning. The study also found that parents from more vulnerable groups reported more concerns about the low quality of their internet access and a lack of technology accessibility.

Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate educational inequities for ELs who are receiving blended or fully online instruction. Compared to fully in-person instruction at school, online learning at home may require a higher parent involvement, especially for marginalized ELs who need help to understand, complete, and upload their assignments. Additionally, the use of English-only instruction may be a barrier not only for ELs, but also for their parents who may not be proficient in English themselves. Furthermore, fewer opportunities to interact with peers and teachers, which is critical for second language development, may hamper ELs' English development and lead to lower reading scores in the state assessment involved in the retention process (Verga & Kotz, 2013). Therefore, if ELs receive insufficient support at home, they may face more challenges related to language acquisition and task completion. The development of ELA achievement alongside insufficient chances to develop effective English skills in an online learning environment may attribute to some families' responsibilities for teaching rather than the ability to rely on teaching delivered at school.
In addition, teachers can face significant challenges when initiating online reading lessons, since most traditional reading instruction methods are not applicable in this new learning mode. Even in cases of in-person schooling, the emphasis on safety means that students must maintain social distance while at school, which may prohibit various forms of literacy instruction. Furthermore,

accessing support from literacy coaches and administrators can be challenging. With these factors in mind, one cannot reasonably expect the level of teaching effectiveness intended by the law.

In this circumstance, anticipating the less supportive nature of online learning and the great need for parents and students to take responsibility for reading outcomes, it is questionable whether or not the results of the Spring 2021 M-STEP will be reasonably seen as the result of the application of proper implementation pieces from the retention policy.

3. Retention Policy Literature

According to Huddleston's (2014) systematic review, the literature on retention policy can be categorized into two groups, teacher-initiated and test-based. Since Michigan's RBG3 adopted the test-based approach, it is important to consider how different approaches have been used in test-based retention studies. I grouped existing literature by methodology, not categorized by themes, because this enabled me to examine how research questions led to different methodological approaches. This strategy also allowed me to think critically about why a certain approach has been used prominently in retention policy studies. Extant test-based retention research has been focused mostly on Florida, Chicago, Texas, and Georgia, where cut-off scores or threshold levels were used in the following three ways to determine retention: 1) quantitative approaches, based on large-scale data, 2) qualitative approaches, using case studies, and 3) mixed method approaches.

3.1. Quantitative Approaches

A majority of previous retention research has relied heavily on quantitative approaches by focusing on students' short- and long-term academic outcomes, high school completion rates,

misbehavior histories, psychological effects, and inequities. Many quantitative methods have

been used, but most of the more recent studies (as of 2020) tended to use regression discontinuity

(RD) to find causal retention effects with the student data for those who scored right above and

below the cut-off score or threshold. As stated in the prior section on Michigan's Read by Grade

Three Law's expected outcomes, the main aim of retention policies is to increase overall

students' reading outcomes measured by high-stakes testing. Therefore, the quantitative

researchers shaped their research questions according to the interests of results-oriented

outcomes with measurable variables.

Academic outcomes. Regarding academic effects of retention policies, many studies have

shown significant positive gains for retained students, but these fade over time (Jacob & Lefgren,

2004; Mariano & Martorell, 2013; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005; Schwerdt et al., 2017; Greene &

Winters, 2006, 2007; Winters & Greene, 2012). For example, using RD to compare retained and

promoted third graders in Florida, Greene and Winters (2006) found that retained third grade

students in the first year of retention in 2002 had larger gains in reading, math, and science

scores in the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) than their socially promoted

peers, but these results faded in the second year. In the next study, Winters and Greene found the

statistically distinguishable short-term gain came from the remediation effect of retention policy

that could last up to five years (from third to seventh grade) but faded thereafter (Winters &

Greene, 2012). Although their studies have shown a significant increase in retained students,

they failed to explain the causes of this effect. It might be caused by retention itself, but also by

highly effective teachers, summer school programs, and additional interventions.

In addition, a study by Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) using a growth curve analysis in

Chicago found that retained students in third and sixth grades have shown a very small gain in

reading outcomes in Chicago's high-stakes testing in the first year, but it did not last

substantially into the second. In the same city, using regression discontinuity, Jacob and Lefgren (2004) investigated summer school programs and grade retention effects for third and sixth graders from 1993 to 1998. They found that these two factors brought significant positive impacts on student reading outcomes in the state's high-stakes test for only third graders, not sixth graders.

To sum up, in terms of academic achievement, studies tell us that the retention policy is much more effective for younger students in their reading outcomes, but it has not been proven from where this gain comes, whether it be from retention, summer school, intervention, or teacher assignment. In addition, this gain lasted from one to five years, but after that, the gain disappeared.

High School Graduation. As a long-term effect, research has shown that retention may increase high school dropout rates, which may be related to emotional adjustment and equity issues (Allensworth, 2005; Hong & Young, 2008; Jacob & Lefgren, 2009; Livingston & Livingston, 2002). For example, Allensworth (2005) used a matched-sample analysis to compare Chicago student dropout rates from 1992 to 1998 and found that test-based retention for eighth graders had an adverse effect on dropout rates, but that the adverse effect was less than in cases of teacher-initiated retention.

In the same city, using the plausibly exogenous variation method to compare dropout rates among sixth and eighth graders, Jacob and Lefgren (2009) found that while retaining sixth graders has a null effect on high school graduation rates, retaining low-performing eighth graders in secondary school has a higher dropout rate in high school. This study implies that early retention would be better than later retention in terms of negative impact on high school graduation rates.

In addition, Livingston and Livingston (2002) not only found a high dropout rate among retained students, but they also demonstrated that this harmful effect was centered mostly on African American students, as retention discouraged their motivation for advanced educational attainment. This suggests that retention might inhibit struggling minority students' motivations to pursue further education.

To sum up, although a test-based retention policy brought lower dropout rates than a teacher-initiated one, the retention policy still yielded disproportionately higher impacts on marginalized students.

Misbehavior. Several researchers investigated retained students' behavior problems, finding mixed results (Martorell & Mariano, 2018; Özek, 2015). For example, Martorell and Mariano (2018) analyzed New York City third through eighth graders' data between the 2003–04 and 2011–12 academic years and found that retained students' absences and suspensions did not increase compared to non-retained students.

In addition, Özek (2015), examining Florida's third grade data for the 2003–04 and 2009–10 academic years, found increased numbers of disciplinary incidents and suspensions among retained students. These students were mostly African American boys from low socioeconomic households. However, neither study could provide a clear explanation of why retention had positive or null effects on students' suspension and disciplinary incidents.

In summary, prior quantitative test-based retention research has shown that the short-term gains that accompany retention fade later and may even bring about higher high school dropout rates, especially among underprivileged students. Interestingly, these research results are mostly aligned with previous literature syntheses and meta-analyses about the effects of teacher-initiated retention in terms of academic outcomes and psychological effects, which have determined that

retaining students have substantial adverse academic effects over the long term (Holmes 1989; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jimerson, 2001).

3.2. Limitations of Quantitative Research

Since the retention policies symbolically highlight reading scores and retention itself, the majority of previous studies on the subject have focused on result-oriented outcomes. Therefore, they have been interested in whether or not the retention policy itself works and how long the impact lasts. Aside from those focused on academic achievement, there have been some studies related to behavior or graduation rates. This is because, on the one hand, if the retention policy effect is insufficient, it would be major evidence to overturn the policy itself. On the other hand, if the retention policy is proved effective, the research can be considered strong evidence that can serve as a major basis for maintaining and expanding the policy. This signifies that quantitative research has symbolized the main evidence in support of the retention policy, which shows a politicization of research evidence (Henig, 2009).

However, the aforementioned quantitative studies' results have been criticized due to the nature of the retention policy. The retention policy is not just made of retention itself but includes many other implementing elements to support at-risk students, such as summer school, additional instructions and interventions, and growth monitoring systems. Therefore, although some research proved significant positive academic effects, it is hard to distinguish whether they resulted from retention or other additional support. For example, while Schwerdt et al. (2017) proved significant short term positive academic gains from the retention policy, Robinson-Cimpian (2015) criticized their working papers since it was uncertain whether the increased scores came from the retention itself or additional services.

This limitation of quantitative approaches to retention policy studies tells us why the policy implementation process inquiry is necessary. If students' increased outcomes came from additional forms of support, the retention itself might no longer be necessary. Or, if the implementation process is harmful to a particular subgroup, we may need to think about the losses resulting from the retention, not just the gains. Accordingly, qualitative studies closely show the retention process and illustrate the dilemmas that students and teachers face throughout it. Instead of macroscopic approaches based on numerical data, qualitative studies mainly have utilized case study methods that have included both intensive observation of the case studies and interviews exploring the perceptions of stakeholders. This approach reveals what happens inside the black boxes that could not be shown in quantitative research, but the number of qualitative studies is still significantly small.

3.3. Qualitative Approaches

Despite the importance of investigating the implementation process of the retention policy, relatively few qualitative approaches have been applied to the topics of minority inequity, struggling students' learning, and multiple stakeholders' perceptions in regards to retention (Booher-Jennings, 2005, 2008; Huddleston, 2015; Huddleston & Lowe, 2014; Roderick & Engel, 2001). Qualitative researchers have shaped research questions that were more process-oriented by focusing on students' learning experiences, educators' perceptions, and inequity issues. This research focus has also led to methodological differences, with researchers primarily using case studies and ethnography.

Several studies have shown that retention might disproportionately impact minority students. For example, Roderick and Engel (2001) investigated students' responses to a retention policy through a qualitative study by interviewing 102 low-achieving sixth and eighth grade

African American and Latino students in Chicago's public schools during the 1999–2000 academic year. They found that, while a majority of students reported that they increased their study time inside and outside of school under pressure from the new retention policy and that they had a stronger motivation for learning, one third of these students still felt a huge barrier related to the larger learning gaps they needed to close in order not to be retained. This led them to put little effort into their schoolwork. This finding connotes that without directly addressing a prevalent issue for minority students, i.e., a lack of resources, these minority students' motivations to learn (that the policy initially facilitated) disappear in such a limited learning environment.

When it comes to students' limited learning following retention, research has demonstrated the unequal impacts of these policies on underprivileged students. Huddleston and Lowe (2014) conducted a school case study in Georgia with interviews and observations of 10 struggling students. They found that struggling students relied on a search and destroy strategy, which calls for reading fragmentally to answer questions when working to pass the retention test. This had the effect of robbing them of the chance to acquire careful reading skills. In another study, which extended its scope to include teachers, parents, and administrators, Huddleston (2015) found that school administrators who opposed retention sometimes created more accessible steps to inform parents of how to appeal for a waiver and ensure their child was promoted to the next grade. This study demonstrated how retention exemptions might be a pitfall for minority parents who have less access to relevant information on this topic. This limited access, in turn, causes students to miss the chance to apply for an exemption. This work reveals that parents have a differential impact on the exemption information based on the views and practices of their school leaders. If there are school leaders who support the retention policy and

do not want to offer waivers, then parents are much less likely to know about how this process works than those who have school leaders who support parents in the waiver process.

To sum up, in contrast to quantitative studies, which are focused on the output of retention, qualitative studies mainly investigate inequity issues related to retained minorities' experiences and perceptions by highlighting the policy and testing implementation processes. Moving away from a utilitarian perspective focused on average student outcomes, these qualitative studies often discuss how retention has negatively affected minority students' learning and address the underlying power dynamics behind retention decisions and implementations.

3.4. Mixed Method Approaches

In addition to solely quantitative and qualitative research, a few studies related to retention policy conducted mixed methods. Although the two studies reviewed here did not investigate retention policy exclusively – rather, they dealt with the retention issue as a part of the operation of high-stakes testing in Texas' accountability system – I include them here because test-based retention is initiated by the results of high-stakes testing under the purpose of accountability (Huddleston, 2014).

To investigate the adverse impacts of Texas' high-stakes testing on minority students' dropout rates, McNeil et al. (2008) analyzed a longitudinal 271,000 ninth-grade student data set of test scores, graduation, and retention rates in a high-poverty urban district between 1995 and 2002; to do so, they conducted a school case study with in-depth ethnography to investigate Latino students' school life. In the first phase of data analysis using a quantitative approach, they found that, compared to White and Asian students, African American and Latino students had higher dropout and retention rates over a seven-year period. Unlike the official report that

announced the overall student performance increase and dropout rate reduction – which was touted as a symbol of the Texas accountability policy's great achievement – an analysis of ethnic subgroups shows that certain subgroups still fell behind. Researchers found through interviews and observations that the accountability system with high-stakes testing and retention increased pressure on students of color and ELs. In these circumstances, minority students were recognized as potential liabilities, which constrained the school's ability to improve performance. The use of high-stakes testing under the accountability system led to unintended consequences that caused students to drop out of school by pressing schools with sanctions and rewards. The authors stated that with these avoidable losses, the system maintains successful outcomes with the exclusion of vulnerable student subgroups. In this process, retention has been used as a strategy to ensure a positive school rating in the accountability system.

Similarly, Heilig and Darling-Hammond (2008) analyzed longitudinal student data in K-12 schools in Texas and supplemented their findings with seven qualitative interviews with students and school staff. They found that within the retention process, the Texas accountability system excluded low-performing students by referring them to special education or exempting them as ELs. They also found that being placed in special education reduced learning opportunities for students of color, especially African American and Latino high school students. The authors used the phrase "game the system" to describe the student exclusion process from testing and schools under the accountability system utilizing high-stakes testing and retention. They also stated that even some schools underreported their dropout rates to receive incentives. Like previous research, this study revealed how the accountability system – despite its intuitive rationale of not giving up all students – led to unintended consequences for vulnerable student subgroups.

These two studies have shown how retention can be used as a strategy of the accountability system with high-stakes testing. By using not only quantitative but also qualitative approaches, these studies attempted to explain the findings of first phase quantitative analysis with qualitative methods.

3.5. Two Types of Research on Retention Policy and English Learners

In this section, among general retention literature targeted at all students, I draw from two particular studies that investigated retention effects on ELs, which is my research-specific subgroup. Michigan's RBG3 law may impact the English acquisition of culturally and linguistically diverse ELs. Although the law's exemption provision may help ELs avoid retention if they have been in the U.S. for fewer than three years, other ELs face the challenges of retention and intervention as at-risk students. Many studies have found broad negative effects of retention policies for minority students (including ELs) such as emotional trauma, heightened high school dropout rates, and exacerbated educational inequities (e.g., Hong & Young, 2008; McNeil et al., 2008; Penfield, 2010; Roderick & Engel, 2001), but few studies have investigated the effects of these laws exclusively on ELs.

The most relevant research to date on retention policies and ELs has been conducted by Figlio and Ozek (2020) and Huddleston and Lowe (2014). These studies used different quantitative and qualitative research approaches to show the impact of academic retention policies on ELs' academic achievement, psychological status, and their ability to learn to read.

Figlio and Ozek (2020) demonstrated the positive long-term effects of Florida's retention policy on ELs. By using RD, they applied a longitudinal analysis to 40,000 Floridian ELs' data gathered from 12 districts between the 2000–01 and 2011–12 academic years. They found that, compared to struggling readers who took a social promotion to the fourth grade, retained third-

grade ELs were able to succeed in more advanced classes in the upper grades. However, regarding these research results, Callahan et al. (2019) noted that policymakers and practitioners must look out for misinterpretations or overgeneralizations about the study's positive findings for ELs, since the research sample was limited only to ELs who had been in the U.S. for more than two years. In other words, Figlio and Ozek (2020) may not explain the outcomes of ELs who have been in the US less than two years. Callahan et al. (2019) were also worried that better reading instruction should be considered when explaining this success, and that people should not solely rely on cut-off score functions.

Huddleston and Lowe (2014) focused on how Georgia's retention policy shaped ELs' learning by using a one-school case study with interviews and observations. Their participants were 10 struggling readers, four of whom were ELs. They found that during interventions when preparing for the state-level assessment, these students mostly used the search and destroy strategy in which students only looked for sentences that the questions asked about. This strategy prevented the struggling readers from making use of opportunities to learn careful reading, which requires enough time to read passages fully. In turn, the students became less motivated, as they read without pleasure or confidence. As they were assigned reading materials chosen by teachers rather than being allowed to proactively select what they wanted to read, only one strategy could be developed during the intervention for passing the test, not enhancing authentic reading skills. This finding shows how retention policies shape ELs' reading learning in a negative way and rob them of chances for real learning based on their interests, as they are constantly reminded of the limited time available to them to prepare and acquire better testing skills to pass the test.

In summary, although quantitative approaches have shown positive long-term effects for ELs by helping them acquire English reading skills, qualitative studies still cast doubt about whether retention policies can support ELs' actual learning or narrow their learning experiences

by pushing them to exceed the cut-off score in the short term. The educational resource limitation and contextualized assessment reflected a certain representative culture and language, which made some researchers skeptical about the appropriateness of retention policies (Penfield, 2010). Further, since qualitative studies have not focused exclusively on ELs, it is essential to conduct a qualitative study on how ELs' language acquisition processes are changed under the retention policy pressure and how interventions for ELs are designed for their multilanguage development, compared to monolingual students, and reflect their cultural and linguistic perspectives.

3.6. The Gap for Future Research

A majority of previous retention research has focused on these policies' outcomes in quantitative ways, rather than their mechanisms, as revealed by qualitative studies. Although the research has shown the positive effects of retention related to short-term gains, the approach remains insufficiently proven concerning why and how the retention generated these outcomes. Furthermore, regarding the high dropout rates and unequal impacts on minorities, it is necessary to investigate unintended consequences of retention policies. This is important because this discernable measurement approach shapes students' perceptions of themselves as assets or liabilities based on test scores and behavior data rather than considering them as a whole person (McNeil et al., 2008).

From a utilitarian perspective of the retention policy, it is clear that prior research has mostly targeted all students, breaking them into a few specific subgroups. Therefore, it is unsurprising that there are also few minority-student-focused studies and even fewer exclusively addressing the effects of retention on ELs. Fortunately, as the EL subgroup is rapidly growing, current researchers have paid attention to the policies' impacts on ELs (Figlio & Ozek, 2020).

However, due to the adaptation of limited methodological research design, the existing literature still does not provide a comprehensive description of *how* retention has led ELs to reach certain academic outcomes. Therefore, in future research with more qualitative approaches, it is necessary to investigate the mechanism of retention implementation, its impacts on ELs' learning experiences, and other unmeasurable variables that prior quantitative approaches have overlooked.

4. English Learners in RBG3

The number of English Learners (ELs), one of RBG3's target student subgroups, has increased rapidly from 8% in 2000 (3.8M) to over 10% (5M) of U.S. public school students in 2016, and Michigan-based ELs account for 6.6% of the national population (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). In response to the sharp increase of ELs, policymakers and practitioners have considered how they can best serve this group (Mavrogordato & White, 2020). National reading research and assessment institutions have also begun to recognize the impact of students' cultural diversity on reading comprehension and have changed their frameworks accordingly (NAGB, 2020). Since reading is, itself, a contextualized process, scholars have begun to recognize that decontextualized assessments are inaccurate for evaluating students' reading comprehension (Pearson et al., 2020). As one of the nation's earliest reading policies, RBG3 should also pay attention to ELs' different learning paths for English acquisition compared to monolinguals.

In this section, I first address who ELs are in the U.S. Then, I examine the literature on ELs' language transition from their primary language (L1) to their second (L2), effective learning processes for reading in English, and the impacts of home language and literacy practices for language acquisition and the culturally sustaining responsive education framework. Building on this literature, I argue that RBG3 may shape ELs' learning through interventions that

do not consider cultural and linguistic diversity and how this dynamic may be exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1. ELs in the U.S.

> According to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), an EL can be defined as a person: whose native language is not English or whose use of a language other than English at home has a significant impact on their level of English language proficiency, and whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English may deny them the ability to meet challenging state academic standards, succeed in classrooms where the language of instruction is English, or participate fully in society. (ESSA, 2015, p. 393)

Based on the above federal definition, each state has developed a unified definition for ELs and, under the terms of school-based accountability, each school should identify how to support ELs (National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy [NCIIP], 2020). Even though this definition suggests that ELs' homogeneous characteristic is a deficiency in English competency, EL subgroups are heterogeneous due to racial, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, and immigration differences (NCIIP 2020; NCTE, 2008). These multiple factors impact the categorization of ELs into subgroups and may bring different reasons or needs for acquiring languages. These, in turn, may require the use of varying instructional approaches (Noguerón-Liu, 2020).

4.2. Multilingualism

While monolingualism focuses on the acquisition of one language through immersion and submersion, the theory of multilingualism posits that multilingual learners use their languages as resources to develop one another (Sirens & Van Avermaet, 2014). Research shows that ELs, who learn in well-structured bilingual programs, are likely outperform monolingual students in four to five years in reading (Ramirez, 1998). This indicates that the mother tongue

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can be an effective foundation for learning academic knowledge and skills in second languages. Along with this academic achievement, multilingualism has cultural, political, and economic benefits: it improves students' positive identity construction (Sirens & Van Avermaet, 2014), international competencies that lead to economic prosperity in globalization, and ethnocultural justice and socio-economic justice that encourage community harmony with respectful cultural expression, and reduce the arbitrary costs to minorities related to an artificial manner of assimilation (Crawford, 2006).

Along with these benefits, multilingualism has two concepts: additive multilingualism and subtractive multilingualism. While addictive multilingualism refers to the acquisition of second languages that are equally valued as their mother tongue, leading to both languages' development without losing their mother tongues, subtractive multilingualism refers to the situation when the second languages have a higher status than the mother tongue, and the first language naturally fades as the learner develops proficiency in the second languages (Lambert, 1974). This subtractive bilingualism occurs mostly for immigrant students who necessarily need to learn the host country's language without proper support for developing the first language, and naturally lose their mother tongues (Cenoz, 2013). Since it is related to language status, dominant languages with a high social status are symbolically valued more than non-dominant languages (Kramsch, 2010). Therefore, when society does not value a primary language, it naturally disappears as second language proficiency is developed (Lambert, 1974).

Because society, and often educators, do not value ELs home languages, ELs themselves may see those languages as a liability to be overcome, and seek quick assimilation into American culture so as not to remain on the margins of society (Crasword, 2006; Sleeter, 2012). If,

however, educators utilize ELs' home languages as assets, and not deficits, then multilingual students can develop their home languages alongside English, to their ultimate benefit.

4.3. English Learners' Language Acquisition

RBG3's current intervention directions for supporting ELs aim to help them acquire English proficiency in a short time to increase their academic achievement. The focus is on deficient English proficiency by assuming that ELs have the same instructional needs as monolinguals (García et al., 2018). This can be seen as a practice that frames students' diverse cultures and languages as a deficit that hampers their learning (Lee, 2006; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Valencia, 1997). Given the considerable discussion on the value of ELs' first language for proficiency and its possibility of transferring to English, it is necessary to conduct effective, research-based interventions for ELs from this asset perspective (Borrero & Bird, 2008).

Many researchers have found that first language development benefits second language acquisition (Jiménez et al., 1996; Gottardo, 2002; Gottardo et al., 2001; Gholamarin & Geva, 1999; Hammer et al., 2020; Marchman et al., 2020; Kremin et al., 2019; Relyea & Amendum, 2020). For example, Gottado (2002) investigated the relationship among oral proficiency, phonological processing, and reading skills of Spanish-English speakers' first and second languages. By testing 85 Michigan first-grade students, Gottado found that phonological processing in both languages and reading competency in the first language can be strong predictors for reading ability in the second language. This study notes that bilinguals' language development occurs within and across both languages, not as solely separated mechanisms. In addition, Relyea and Amendum (2020) utilized multilevel growth curve analysis, with the data of 312 Spanish-English speaker kindergartners, to investigate the relationship between first language reading ability and second language acquisition. They found that students with low oral

English proficiency but strong Spanish reading skills could catch up and surpass their peers later. This study suggests that one's first language reading skill can be a strong predictor for their English acquisition. Building on the findings of transfer between alphabetic languages, Gottardo et al. (2001) and Gholamarin and Geva (1999) found that, between L1 and L2, phonological skills were also transferred to non-alphabetic languages (Chinese and Hebrew).

Although these works have displayed the importance of primary language development as being beneficial for ELs' L2 (English) acquisition, schools' ineffective instruction may hamper ELs' acquisition in both languages, which in turn leads to their retention and higher dropout rates due to low academic outcomes (Bowman-Perrott et al, 2010; Rubinstein-Avila, 2003). With the above in mind, it is important to investigate what interventions ELs have received in the RBG3 implementation process. Specifically, when designing the interventions for ELs distinct from those designed for other groups (such as monolingual or special education students), it is necessary to see whether deliberate approaches consider the critical role of L1 for L2 acquisition and effective instructional strategies (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2010).

4.4. Effective Instruction with Home Languages and Cultures

When considering how to effectively teach ELs as they learn to read in a bi/multilanguage context, we must consider five phenomena: 1) understanding the use of multiple languages, 2) culturally relevant and responsive instruction, 3) assistance with assessments, 4) PD for teachers, and 5) human and material resources.

Understanding the use of multiple languages. First, it should be acknowledged that primary language development is a good predictor of ELs' second language acquisition. Palmer and Martinez (2016) argued that teachers must shift their fundamental understanding of language from monolingualism to multilingualism. They emphasized that teachers should perceive

languages not as parallel autonomous systems that operate separately, but rather as concepts that interact in natural code-switching systems in the form of hybrid language practices (García, 2009; Gumperz, 1982; Heller, 1999; Palmer & Martinez, 2016). Along with this fundamental change of perception on language, De Jong and Harper (2005) noted that teachers should know students' cultures and languages, so that they can modify their typical teaching to fit ELs. For bilingual students, translanguaging, the "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual words" (García, 2009, p. 45), could also be a way to extend the possibilities of exploring an unlimited multilinguistic repertoire dynamic by allowing students opportunities to use multiple languages with social, cultural, and linguistic elements taken from students' real lives (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Kleifgen, 2019).

Culturally relevant and responsive instruction. With a more open attitude toward using multiple languages in classrooms, students will come to see their first languages as assets, and teachers may adopt various instructional methods and strategies for teaching ELs using students' home knowledge.

Since the 1980s, researchers have been studying the connections between home-community culture and curricula in schools and how teachers can make learning culturally relevant and responsive (Au & Jordan, 1981; Cazden & Legget, 1981; Gay & Howard, 2000; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995). Although a majority of this research has focused on African American students, it is worth considering these findings and adopting them for use with ELs, whose educational needs are different from mainstream learning. Au and Jordan (1981) argued that teachers need to recognize the differences between formal and informal learning gained from inside and outside school and should then support students to have a sense of the world by providing connections between a student's experiences gained from the home-community and texts in the classroom. King (1991) also noted that encouraging teachers to

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respond to students with a critical reflection on social justice is one of the ways to bridge students' knowledge gained at home with school contexts.

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested the term "culturally relevant pedagogy," which emphasizes experiencing academic success, maintaining cultural competency, and developing critical consciousness on social order. The author claims that teachers' beliefs that their students can achieve academic excellence is essential. With this belief, teachers need to be actively involved in students' learning by integrating their culture and daily learning at school. Ladson-Billings also argues that valuing students' home and community cultures explicitly means teachers must genuinely accept students as they are. Then, students can know that they are "historically, socially, culturally, and linguistically situated" in their classroom (Fairbanks et al., 2014, p. 590).

Lee (1993, 1995, 2000) has also shown how culturally and socially acquired tools can be applied to reading comprehension tasks to develop students' interpretive reading abilities. For effective reading instruction, Lee suggested that, we need to care not only about how rich cultural practices can be integrated into classrooms, but also about how acquired skills can be connected to mainstream learning.

Over time, with further developed forms of culturally critical pedagogies, such as culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002) and culturally responsive sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), there has been an increase in awareness of the importance of responding to students' daily experiences within a more supportive and sustaining democratic environment.

Assistance with assessments. Regarding assessments, ELs, compared to other students, may need more deliberate assistance from technology. Policymakers and educators should acknowledge that ELs face two challenges: language and content (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2010). Therefore, a deliberate assessment system considering their language development and

comprehension is necessary to avoid automatically assuming that ELs are struggling students. Since the current assessment has been designed for monolingual readers, it may categorize ELs as being at-risk, so a support system, such as technological translation for vocabularies, should be provided for ELs (Hopewell & Escamilla, 2014). In addition, a translanguaging oral assessment could be another way of accurately assessing ELs' reading comprehension. If ELs know the words, they may show a high level of understanding of the reading content.

PD for teachers. To create a more culturally inclusive and respectful environment, constant professional learning is pivotal for teachers so that they may compile and draw from students' funds of knowledge, "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing" (Moll et al., 1992, p.134). Moll et al. (2005) asserted that understanding the home-based contexts of learning enables educators to know the child as a whole person, one who already has multiple stores of preexisting knowledge constructed at home, instead of considering them to be a student who has only limited knowledge constructed by teachers' instruction in the classroom. As researchers and teachers visited Latino communities, Moll et al. (2005) found that, by visiting Hispanic students' homes to learn about their home contexts, cultures, and funds of knowledge, educators can realize that their students have a depth of multicultural experiences. Likewise, teachers should have more opportunities to be exposed to compile students' home knowledge through research-based designed PDs.

Human and material resources. Finally, schools need to create more multicultural environments by hiring linguistic experts from their local communities and purchasing multicultural books. As Noguerón-Liu (2020) noted, if teachers have inadequate knowledge of ELs' cultures and first languages, the recruitment of linguistic brokers from communities can act as mediators and translators to help improve interactions among students, teachers, and parents.

Furthermore, the use of multicultural books in reading instruction may enhance the opportunities for naturally revealing ELs' cultures and languages.

To sum up, teachers can enhance ELs' learning by adapting culturally relevant instruction using their first language and funds of knowledge to bring about a more comprehensive understanding of language practices. To adopt a more equitable pedagogy, it is necessary to create not only more cooperative and warm welcoming classroom environments, but also to enter into deliberate considerations of how to use ELs' language and cultural knowledge to leverage the gap between their current and new knowledge (Au & Jordan 1981; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

A great deal of research has highlighted teachers' low levels of belief in their students' cultural knowledge value, that is, knowledge not gained from the mainstream, so teachers end up failing to encourage or even actively minimize the introduction of this knowledge in classroom discussions (Larson & Irvine, 1999). Under the accountability pressure that comes with high-stakes testing and retention policies, biased Eurocentric middle-class English and a failure to acknowledge sociocultural differences can mean that students' home-community cultures and knowledge are likely to be regarded as unimportant, with the rationale for fostering this view being rooted in the importance of students becoming competent readers (Au, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). Accordingly, ELs might experience reading difficulties due to the inappropriate situational contexts of assigned reading comprehension texts and a lack of cultural and linguistic resources (Barnitz, 1998).

4.5. ELs in Urban Districts under Test-driven Accountability System

According to Milner (2012), depending on city size, density, and the outside-of-school factors (housing, poverty, and transportation), urban schools can be categorized into three conceptual frames. While *urban intensive* and *emergent* are described as schools located in large

cities (*intensive* indicated metropolitan cities with more than one million people, *emergent* indicated less than that), *urban characteristic* refers to schools located not in cities, (instead rural or suburban) but that have similar challenges to urban intensive and emergent schools such as increasing numbers of ELs. Urban intensive schools faced more funding and resource constraints caused by population density that impacted student outcomes (Baker, 2017). The inequity of school funding structures heavily relying on property taxes increased challenges to schools having a majority of minoritized student groups, and this spending gap between urban community districts and predominantly white suburban districts can be up to twice as much on the amount per pupil spent on students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Kozol, 1991).

In this circumstance, ELs in urban and suburban areas receive different support in terms of linguistic development. While ELs in suburban areas with affluent family backgrounds receive home supports through outside school learning materials, additional first language schools, frequent home country visits by highly educated parents (Kwon, 2017), or can attend bilingual schools, ELs in urban districts mainly consist of immigrant and refugees have fewer opportunities to develop their first languages, situated in less home support, and a high level of linguistic diversity which cannot be covered by traditional dual-language programs (Warhol & Mayer, 2012). Therefore, ELs in urban areas with less private support outside of school may face challenges with the first language acquisition without proactive changes in public discussion regarding the importance of bilingualism.

In addition, ELs also confronted the challenge of the standardized tests required by the test-driven accountability system. ELs who stayed in the US less than one year only can be exempted from the test. Although early exemptions are guaranteed for ELs who have stayed in the US less than three years, after 1999, the duration has been reduced to one year for recent and

unschooled immigrants (Scheurich & Skrla, 2004). Therefore, embracing ELs into the accountability process required ELs to take all standardized tests along with seemingly considerable exemptions and accommodations. However, this still caused problems since the aligned assessments to Common Core standards have not embraced multicultural and multilinguistic aspects of students for creating test items for pursuing equitable assessments (Cummins, 2000). Although there is a movement to develop cultural embedded test items considering the social-cultural contexts of students, it is still in the planning stage (e.g., NAEP 2025 framework). Therefore, in the current frequent context-reduced standardized testing environment, ELs have endured multiple failures with negative experiences not to be excluded in the accountability system (Cummins, 2000).

4.6. Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework

In response to the necessity of different teaching approaches for student subgroups who have cultural and linguistic diversity, grounded in Ladson-Billing's studies, New York State Education Department (NYSED) created the Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) framework (NYSED, 2019). This framework aimed at providing practice guidelines for education stakeholders – policymakers, university faculty, district and school leaders, teachers, students, families, and communities – to establish cultural identities and a valued learning environment by encouraging positive academic outcomes, respecting socio-culturally marginalized student subgroups' voices, and cultivating critical thinking (NYSED, 2019). This document stated that since school is a place to meet various cultures, which are defined as the multiple elements of identity determined by race, gender, language, religion, nationality, and social economic classes, teaching should be rooted in students' lives and experiences coming

from their culture to respond to one's unique educational demands. With this asset-based pedagogy that values what students and communities contribute to schools, schools can leverage the cultural capital and indigenous knowledge that has historically marginalized students in traditional schooling.

This framework has four principles: (1) a welcoming and affirming environment (school space for all people with respect and dignity by embracing different cultures), (2) high expectations and rigorous instruction (the importance of encouragement of positive self-image with a growth mindset to empower students by providing academically rigorous instruction), (3) an inclusive curriculum and assessment (elevating marginalized student voices with learning opportunities of power and privilege), and (4) ongoing professional learning (constant learning chances for teachers to have critically conscious perspectives of instruction and assessment) (NYSED, 2019). With the mindset to recognize culture as a significant element of education, not as merely additional consideration, the framework aims to see marginalized students and families' languages and cultures as assets, not liabilities, by applying a critical pedagogy to consider students as co-designer of curriculum and instruction and as social change agents (Duncan-Andrade& Morrell, 2008; Jenkins & Healey, 2009).

I applied these four principles to this study's conceptual framework to see how my research participants enact their shaped senses in their practices. This enabled me to evaluate how educators' instructions and instances of school decision-making are rooted in each principle when they support ELs in the process of RBG3 implementation.

4.7. Anticipated Challenges for ELs under RBG3

Although ELs need deliberate instruction that considers their cultural knowledge and language as assets, they might still be oppressed by RBG3, which uses high-stakes testing based on a norm of monolingualism. If the assessment is developed for monolinguals, bilingual students are likely to be categorized or labelled as struggling readers and then assigned to receive "one size fits all" reading interventions (Hopewell & Escamilla, 2014; Skerrett, 2012). Under this circumstance, ELs may confront challenges in terms of the possibility of retention, manipulated learning, and a devaluation of their native culture and language.

First, retention due to lower test scores may disproportionately impact ELs, compared to native English speakers. For example, by using the hypothesized 2020 experiment to analyze the M-STEP ELA scores of Michigan third grade ELs in 2016, Winkel and Zhang (2019) found that most ELs would not meet the cut-off score and would, therefore, be retained. Furthermore, economically disadvantaged ELs have lower passing rates than their more affluent EL counterparts. Winkel and Zhang also acknowledged that a lack of parental resources for formally appealing for exemptions is likely to increase ELs' retention rates. Without deliberate help from administrators who see retention as harmful, as Huddleston (2015) stated, less-educated parents may not help their children effectively, even when a legal pathway to avoiding retention exists. Furthermore, the exemption period of less than three years offered to newly arriving ELs may still not be long enough to ensure English proficiency, since research has shown the term for true acquisition might really be somewhere between three and seven years (August et al., 2009; Halle et al., 2012). Therefore, the unreasonable expectation for ELs to be normalized and proficient within three years, coupled with the relatively lower level of access to exemption information for

parents of economically disadvantaged ELs, may cause unequal opportunities for promotion to the fourth grade.

Second, once categorized as struggling readers bound for retention or intervention, ELs may experience manipulated learning within an ineffective learning environment. As Duke (2019) stated, it is problematic to put all struggling readers into the same intervention, given the complexity of reasons for poor reading, such as a lack of parental support at an early age and the poor condition of students' preschool learning. Accordingly, and even worse, ELs may face different multi-layered challenges due to their diverse cultures and language backgrounds. As Huddleston and Lowe (2014) showed, many struggling readers are forced to use a limited array of strategies just to pass the test, but they do not learn a diverse and authentic array of reading skills strategies in interventions. Suppose teachers have an insufficient understanding of ELs' language proficiency and comprehension. In that case, they may not use the ELs' strengths, instead opting to focus only on how to overcome their English deficiencies.

Third, as the RBG3 law has forced ELs to make a quick transition from their first language to English, ELs may lose their chance to develop their first language and cultural knowledge. Without an awareness of the importance of these funds of knowledge they have inherited from their native culture, ELs may not have the chance to assign value to their language and culture while at school. Although the law allows exemptions for some ELs, it still emphasizes monolingualism for early preparedness in English by raising the threat of retention. This underlying message can create concerns among ELs' families and push them to stress their child's English skills earlier than they might have done otherwise (McConnochie & Figueroa, 2017; Murillo, 2012). This emphasis at both home and school on the importance of English proficiency can lead ELs to have fewer chances to develop their first languages during the

relatively limited time available to young children to develop native-level skills in both languages. A high prioritization on English practices at home and school may lead to fewer chances for ELs to display cultural knowledge, which might be less-often considered or even trivialized, and then force ELs to abandon their native culture to assimilate into the mainstream U.S. culture (Sleeter, 2012). As language is the "main vehicle for the construction, replication, and transmission of culture itself" (Schiffman & Ricento, 2006, p. 125), we may lose multiculturalism benefits in terms of ethno-cultural justice and socio-economic justice cultivated by community harmony and acceptance of diverse cultural expression (Crawford, 2006; Reiera-Gil, 2018).

Fortunately, MDE (2020a) recently provided RBG3 retention guidance for ELs, saying that ELs should not be retained due to a three-year timeframe of exemption, since it would violate the guidance of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in which ELs' meaningful access to age-appropriate learning should be guaranteed (OCR, 2015). Therefore, for ELs who have received more than three years' English instruction but do not reach the MSTEP cutoff score, they will not be automatically retained with this careful consideration caused by the conflict between the policy and civil rights. MDE also stated that LEAs need to consider the needs of bilingual students' language acquisition in terms of reliable assessments, language assistance programs, and professional learning for evidence-based instruction. However, constant assessment for diagnosis of deficiency and interventions from K-3 have been applied so it is necessary to investigate whether school level policy implementation follows these recommendations and what challenges educators and students might still face.

5. Policy Sensemaking Research and Framework

When studying how the RBG3 laws impact ELs, it is critical to investigate how educators have shaped sensemaking related to this policy to support ELs. In this section, I describe sensemaking theory and outline its key arguments to demonstrate how it has been used in the policy implementation literature with divergent perspectives. Then, I critically evaluate the limitation of existing literature, show additional theories that supplement the limits, and suggest the critical cultural policy sensemaking framework for my study.

5.1. Sensemaking

As an organizational theory, sensemaking theory was introduced by Karl Weick in 1995 and is rooted in the sociocultural constructivist perspective. This sensemaking theory originally aimed to analyze decision-making mechanisms; through this approach, organizational researchers explored humans' cognitive perspectives beyond just dealing with material or technical elements (Poran et al., 1989). By focusing on cognitive aspects, early scholars analyzed how these mental models connect the group and individual levels and lead to interpretations of competitive environments in business. Sensemaking theory was initiated to build with Weick's question: "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (Weick, 1995, p. 18).

Researchers have defined sensemaking in many ways. Some scholars highlight the placement of sensemaking, while others focus on relevant activities. For instance, Louis (1980) described sensemaking as a recurring cognitive process that occurs in response to surprise factors, when individuals consciously and unconsciously formulate anticipation and make assumptions to predict future events that are under the control of expectation. Starbuck and Milliken (1988) noted that sensemaking is the placement of stimuli in some frameworks "to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict" (p. 51). By contrast, some

scholars place a greater emphasis on activities: Sackman (1991) highlighted sensemaking as a mechanism used to attribute meaning to events and to embrace certain principles "for perceiving, interpreting, believing, and acting that are typically used in a given cultural setting" (p. 33), and Thomas et al. (1993) focused its interaction for "information seeking, meaning ascription, and action" (p. 240). Congruent with all of these meanings, Weick (1995) suggested that sensemaking could be defined "as placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning" (p. 6).

In addition, Brown et al. (2015) articulated the distinction between interpretation and sensemaking by using the notions of *discovery* and *invention*. While interpretation indicates something that waits to be discovered, sensemaking *emphasizes discovery less and focuses on invention*, as Weick (1995) noted that "people generate what they interpret" (p.13). Spillane et al. (2002) also noted the difference between sensemaking and interpretation with the former's emphasis on *active* attempts of meaning construction by integrating individuals' prior knowledge and beliefs with the new stimuli.

There are five key arguments within sensemaking theory. First, individual sensemaking is shaped by preexisting knowledge or beliefs. According to Weick (1979), humans can "construct, rearrange, single out, and demolish many objective features of their surroundings" (p. 164). They can produce what they interpret and act according to the basis of the meanings they make (Blumer, 1969; Weick, 1995). Second, in the sensemaking process, one selects some parts of information, but not all parts. Within the limitations of human rationality, people cannot consider all clues available for interpretation, thus they choose partial representations within a loosely coupled enactment process (Schwenk, 1984; Weick, 1979). Third, individuals' sensemaking is shaped and modified through their interactions with surrounding environmental contexts and

situations. Rather than being neutral, sensemaking is situated in a certain context where people can notice, interpret, and act on what they find (Resnick, 1991; Weick, 1995). Fourth, through formal and informal networks, direct and indirect imitations occur in organizational and/or cultural contexts so that individual sense is shaped similarly to others' senses by socially shared beliefs concerning strategic choices (Huff, 1982; Porac et al., 1989). Although the sensemaking of people within a group can be similar, it is still unique to each person and based on individual traits (Porac et al., 1989). Fifth, sensemaking, as constructed through the four processes described above, determines individual actions. Humans' subjective interpretations are shaped in a situated context and manifest in their behaviors as practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Weick, 1979).

Based on these key arguments, policy sensemaking can be defined as a particular framework to examine the fundamental cognitive process of manifesting actions by analyzing how a policies' implementing agents notice, select, and interpret policy messages in a particular situation by integrating an individual's preexisting knowledge and interactions with surrounding networks. This constructed sensemaking can be revealed while people are talking, thus explaining what they thought (Weick, 1995).

5.2. Policy Sensemaking Empirical Studies

Over the last 40 years, a substantial body of literature has aimed to explain a discrepancy between state and local policy implementations, which may lead to policy failure. According to Spillane et al. (2002b), this literature can be divided into four categories. First, behaviorism and rational choice theory explain that, since agents' behaviors are determined by self-interest, insufficient incentives and monitoring may lead to a lack of pressure (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). Second, unclear and ambiguous policy messages that lack

details on specific desired changes might be a cause for local agents' different understandings and behaviors (Firestone, 1989; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1974). Third, segmented policies that lack consistency among multiple elements can create competing goals, which may diminish the authority or power of the overall policy (Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). Fourth, implementing agents' unwillingness to follow the policy or sense of autonomy may produce diverse local practices (Berman, 1978; McLaughlin, 1987).

In addition to the above, more recent literature has found a lack of substantial time to learn about a policy before its implementation may lead to policy implementers pursuing only minor changes to their practices (Cohen & Barnes, 1993; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999). Although the literature attempts to explain the importance of agents' cognitive changes, this research still considers agents to be implementers and followers who act as the policy intends by devoting more time to understanding and learning about policy messages. However, these agents are shaping their senses of the policy, not just from learning opportunities, but also based on their preexisting knowledge and contexts.

With this necessity in mind, the literature on early policy sensemaking has often investigated the understanding and interpretation of policy messages and has emphasized not only sufficient time for learning and enacting, but also the process of cognitive change with the agents' dilemma in a particular context (Hill, 2001; Jennings, 1996; Smith, 2000; Spillane, 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Spillane & Callahan, 2000; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999). These studies did not explicitly use the term "sensemaking," but they used similar words such as "interpret," "understand," "construct," "believe," and "response" to explain why district- or school-level workers interpret policy messages differently and, in turn, lead to different actions. For example, by observing a veteran math teacher who had to adopt a new math instruction policy within just one year, Smith (2000) found that the teacher took almost a year to fully enact

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the new policy messages dealing with several dilemmas. This caused the following outcomes in her classroom: (1) the teacher faced a personal and professional dilemma between her belief in traditional teaching methods and the advantages of the new instruction, (2) based on this awareness, she took time to shift her belief from the past to the new approach, which featured more integrated techniques, and (3) the teacher experienced difficulties with students unfamiliar with the new instruction, and she struggled to balance between traditional and new tasks to help students naturally adapt to the new protocols. During this process, the teacher's interactions with her peers also affected her beliefs and practices.

After this, Coburn and Spillane have been at the center of a significant amount of empirical studies that use sensemaking theory to explicitly examine perceptions of differently positioned agents in policy implementations. Using cognitive frameworks, their work has focused on three types of agents' sensemaking and their process in more interactive ways within their school and district contexts: teachers, principals, and district officers.

First, studies of teachers have shown how their sensemaking is shaped and why their sensemaking differs from one person to another (Coburn, 2001, 2004; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999). For example, in an in-depth case study of one elementary school case using observation data from 130.5 hours of school meetings, Coburn (2001) found teachers' sensemaking to be collectively constructed through conversations and observations with their colleagues in both formal and informal meetings. This means that they shared their understandings of new policy messages. This aligns with the notion of socially shared beliefs as one of the key arguments in Porac et al.'s (1989) original sensemaking theory. Furthermore, by comparing three different career teachers, Coburn (2004) found that teachers mediate and respond to institutional pressures differently based on their preexisting knowledge and beliefs according to four dimensions: congruence, intensity, pervasiveness, and voluntariness. This

study also considered why individuals selectively accept cues in certain contexts (Schwenk, 1984; Weick, 1979). These Coburn studies (2001, 2004) also align with Spillane and Jennings' (1997) findings that, although teachers attended the same workshops as their colleagues to learn about new policies, their interpretations of the messages were varied, even in the context of the pursuit of districts' alignment strategies. This can also explain why teachers' sensemaking has either advanced in conceptual understanding or stayed rooted in peripheral changes (Spillane & Zeuli, 1999).

Second, compared to that of teachers, principals' sensemaking has shown different aspects (Coburn, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002a). Since principals manage two directions in an organizational hierarchy, between district officers and teachers, they function as mediators and buffers. For example, by comparing three schools, Spillane et al. (2002a) explored how principals shape their senses to mediate district accountability policies. The researchers found that principals construct their senses based on professional background, school histories, and their mid-level manager role, and they ultimately become sense-makers who affect teachers' sensemaking. However, this influence is not one-way, as teachers' formal and informal networks also impact principals' sensemaking. In this way, principals face dilemmas between accountability compliance and teachers' autonomy. Building on this study, Coburn (2005) found that principals selectively create learning conditions for teachers to support better enactment. Although these studies have shown how principals, as middlemen for sensemaking, affect teachers' sensemaking, it still seems that principals are neutral managers, not proactive meaning-makers who can choose messages. These studies failed to explain why principals choose some partial policy messages rather than others and how power dynamics in hierarchies affect principals' sensemaking in these processes.

Third, Spillane studied multiple topics regarding district officers' sensemaking (Spillane, 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Spillane & Callahan, 2000) and found that, depending on how district officers look at teachers' learning, the ways they support the teachers may differ (Spillane, 2000a). For example, when district leaders perceived teachers' learning from a behaviorist perspective, their ways of supporting policies are fragmented and focused on visible and measurable behaviors. In contrast, if district officers are aware of the importance of teachers' cognitive development of learning, to bring about a deeper understanding of a policy, their way of training teachers is then designed to change teachers' cognition and motivation. In line with this study, Spillane (2000b) revealed that district officers' sensemaking patterns were either form-, function-, or piecemeal-focused (ordered here from highest to lowest level). District officers need to apply their professional teaching experiences and content knowledge of math in order to interpret the core messages of new instructional policies. Based on these findings, Spillane argued that, beyond local resistance or incompetence, district leaders' different sensemaking on policy messages might reveal local variances and be manifested in the ways school-level agents are supported.

In sum, the existing literature regarding policy sensemaking contributes to the field's understanding of why local variances in policy implementation occur based on cognitive influences. The differently positioned implementing agents shape their own senses of policy messages based on individual traits and social interactions. As these constructed and unique senses collaborate or clash with the views of other positioned agents', the dynamic can lead to varying implementation enactments between the districts, schools, and even classrooms.

5.3. Sensemaking Approach as the Basis for Research

For this research, I propose to draw upon Spillane et al. (2002)'s cognitive framework of sensemaking in the educational policy implementation process, which they established by reviewing theoretical and empirical studies of cognitive science. The framework emphasizes that the explicit behavior changes in policy implementation come from the implementing agents' fundamental cognitive schema change in the sense toward the policy, shaped in the process of accepting, rejecting, or reconstructing policy messages to suit particular local conditions (Spillane et al., 2002). The authors developed three stages of the framework: (1) individual cognition (local, individual sense-makers notice new stimuli and interpret it based on their prior beliefs, knowledge, and professional experiences), (2) situated cognition (schools and districts' organizational and historical contexts act as critical factors that shape sensemaking), and (3) the role of representations (external representations of policy texts and discourses influence sensemaking). In this framework, Spillane et al. (2002) noted the importance of positive and negative affects, which impact sense-makers' reasoning for their optimistic or pessimistic judgement (Schwarz, 1990).

One's sense at the school level is basically shaped by one's existing knowledge and experiences, which integrate the representation of policy texts and discourses delivered in a top-down way with the form of district policy documents and professional development workshops. In this process, Spillane et al. (2002) stated that without a deeper understanding of core ideas of policy, some recognize the policy's new ideas as similar to their current practices, which may be different from what the policy actually intends. This superficial or partial understanding and assimilation between new knowledge and the current instruction can be a barrier to an actual fundamental change.

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In addition to top-down delivered resources for individual sensemaking, there are social interactions within thought communities to synchronously construct meaning (Resnick, 1991). Through formal meetings such as professional learning communities and informal meetings as conversations with others, individuals see and compare each other's transient senses to bring insights and perspectives and develop their socially-mediated senses (Brown, 1989; Coburn, 2001).

To sum up, I will situate the variables suggested in Spillane and his colleagues' sensemaking framework as the basis of my conceptual framework. However, due to the uniqueness of my particular research targets, I assume the general sensemaking of RBG3 toward whole students would be different from those toward ELs. Since the sensemaking in my study requires the competency to understand unrepresented policy messages for ELs, I need additional critical notions in this basic framework.

5.4. Limitation: The Notion of Power

Although Spillane et al. (2002)'s sensemaking framework is useful, it has a limitation: it lacks a comprehensive examination of the notion of power in the process of sensemaking. Compared to early literature, more current studies have dealt with broader contexts – which might affect different types of sensemaking – but have still focused on agents as implementers complying with policy intentions by assuming that all policies lead to action in the "right" direction. However, as Weick (1995) distinguishes, sensemaking is an active constructed meaning process, not one ruled by passive interpretations. Thus, when it comes to policy messages, local agents are proactive meaning-makers who critically evaluate policy messages and their underlying assumptions via interactions with professional communities rooted in expertise and autonomy. As a teacher working for over ten years in the educational field, I had

also observed and participated in this active dynamic of reconstructing our own understanding when my school implemented new policies.

To investigate how RBG3 impacts ELs, we must examine agents' (teachers, principals, and EL families) sensemaking about the law, which requires an awareness of power dynamics in order to root out assumptions about and implications for a particular group. Compared to other instructional policies, which have been the main foci of prior literature, retention policies pose a more symbolic threat to students because they get more attention from educators and parents who seek to support reading instruction that will reduce the likelihood of retention (Ellwein & Glass, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1989). To acknowledge the power resulting from the English-only ideology embedded in the policy text and implementation process, educators and parents of ELs need better awareness of the policy's implicit nuances; they cannot simply interpret the text as it is. Furthermore, although educators acknowledge the necessity of equitable and culturally relevant instruction for ELs, those at the table when decisions are made about curricula and assessments are important for these policies' enactment (Noguerón-Liu, 2020). Therefore, a more deliberate approach to investigating power dynamics is necessary.

With the above concern in mind, this study must include a focus on power, an area that prior works on policy sensemaking have overlooked. Although sensemaking theory suggests the importance of power by stating that authoritative sensemaking is hegemonic and reproduces the forceful consent of subjects (Brown, 2004), a few prior studies have focused on this issue with a shallow description of its dynamic (e.g., Spillane et al., 2002a). As Brown (2004) noted, texts' generalized and regular storytelling encourages readers to adopt a certain framework for understanding their reality via a particular version that is hegemonically imposed by the text and which subtly masks its original intent with multiple claims for support for the text's authority.

Likewise, although the RBG3 law seems quite intuitive by appealing to a utilitarian perspective and claiming to support all third graders' further academic learning (Panfield, 2020), it may exercise the power of English-only ideology by manipulating the complexity of reading difficulties as being controllable under limited yet omnipotent fantasies of one-size-fits-all English immersed solutions to create a sense of legitimacy. Therefore, with an awareness of this power, which the text or discourses formulate as taken for granted, natural, and common sense (Clegg, 1989), there will be a process of knowing and judging what naturally forces the agents in the process to deliver the policy text in both informal and formal meetings where so much discourse takes place.

5.5. Critical Sensemaking

With the awareness of a lacking analysis of power and privilege in the original sensemaking framework, Mills, Thurlow and Mills (2010) advanced a critical sensemaking framework by applying Unger's (1987) formative contexts, Mills' and Murgatroyd's (1991) organizational rule theory, and Foucault's (1979) embedded power discursive practice. The authors pointed out that Weick's sensemaking model can be applied to a certain democratic context in which all voices are heard equally so that his model cannot capture unequal distribution of power to explain how and why some voices, languages, and experiences are heard over others and why discriminatory practices can be reinforced in organization. With this recognition of the original sensemaking theory's limitation, critical sensemaking is built by triangulating interpretivism, post-structuralism, and critical theory to provide a different framework to explain the issue of power and privilege in sensemaking.

Therefore, by adopting three different notions, critical sensemaking tries to show a connection between dominant organizational values and individual behaviors. Unger (1987)

discussed the notion of formative contexts, which refers to structures that constrain the boundaries of possibilities to imagine by privileging certain dominant assumptions and representing organizational rules. These contexts can be produced through discourses. In addition, Mills' and Murgatroyd's (1991) organizational rule theory explains how particular actions are determined by organizational rules, which may include competition and globalization. Even though individuals make a sense for determining behaviors of daily practice, organizational power still imposes on the local meaning-making and practices. Last, the notion of discursive practice in Foucault's (1979) embedded powerful discourse enables one to understand the possibility of different discourse existence depending on the time and space, which affects different senses toward the same situation. Through the notion of embedded powerful discourse, we may understand how a certain policy limits the complexity of learning with preferable and convenient ways to govern.

The limitation of existing policy sensemaking literature may come from the fact that the studies' framework was mainly rooted in Weick's sensemaking model that posited a positivist approach with epistemological certainty (Mills, Thurlow & Mills, 2010). Therefore, the policy sensemaking literature might not deeply deal with the issue of power, knowledge, and structure. Critical sensemaking framework can provide an alternative lens to understand why particular languages, practices, and experiences are recognized as meaningful over others. For example, in the process of identity construction – defining who we are and what we should do – the original model of sensemaking notes that individuals find meaningful identities by projecting identities toward their environment, which reflects back; however, critical sensemaking focuses on the possibility of particular privileged identities of organizational power to define what is a "good employee (teacher)" (Mills, Thurlow & Mills, 2010).

Therefore, in this study, I will apply a critical sensemaking framework to capture how the issues of power and privilege affect individuals' sensemaking by creating a plausible rationale with selected discourses for justifying their behaviors. Searching formative contexts, organizational rules, and embedded powerful discursive practices will lead to a rich explanation of sensemaking that can be biased, oppressed, or privileged.

To sum up, critical sensemaking theory, with its emphasis on power dynamics, provides a useful framework for analyzing agents' sensemaking of the RBG3 law to support ELs in a critical perspective with the notion of power. Using this theory, I will be able to investigate how each agent shapes their sensemaking in particular contexts at the micro levels of school and classroom, how complex power dynamics impact the process of sensemaking, and how these constructed senses manifest in their instructions and interventions as the modes of providing support for ELs.

6. Critical Cultural Policy Sensemaking Conceptual Framework

Integrating Spillane et al.'s (2002) sensemaking cognitive framework, Mills, Thurlow and Mills' (2010) critical sensemaking, and NYSED's (2018) culturally responsive sustaining education framework, I built a conceptual framework of critical cultural policy sensemaking, which will guide the direction of my data collection and analysis, as shown in Figure 1.

As shown in the gray square on the upper left side of the graphic, through the human and material resources and funding that districts provide to schools, *filtered* RBG3 policy messages have been delivered to individuals. The policy messages have gone through the sensemaking process as you can see in the blue part. The sense shaped in this process can be *enacted through* behavior in the orange part, and as a result, this action *shapes* ELs' learning experiences.
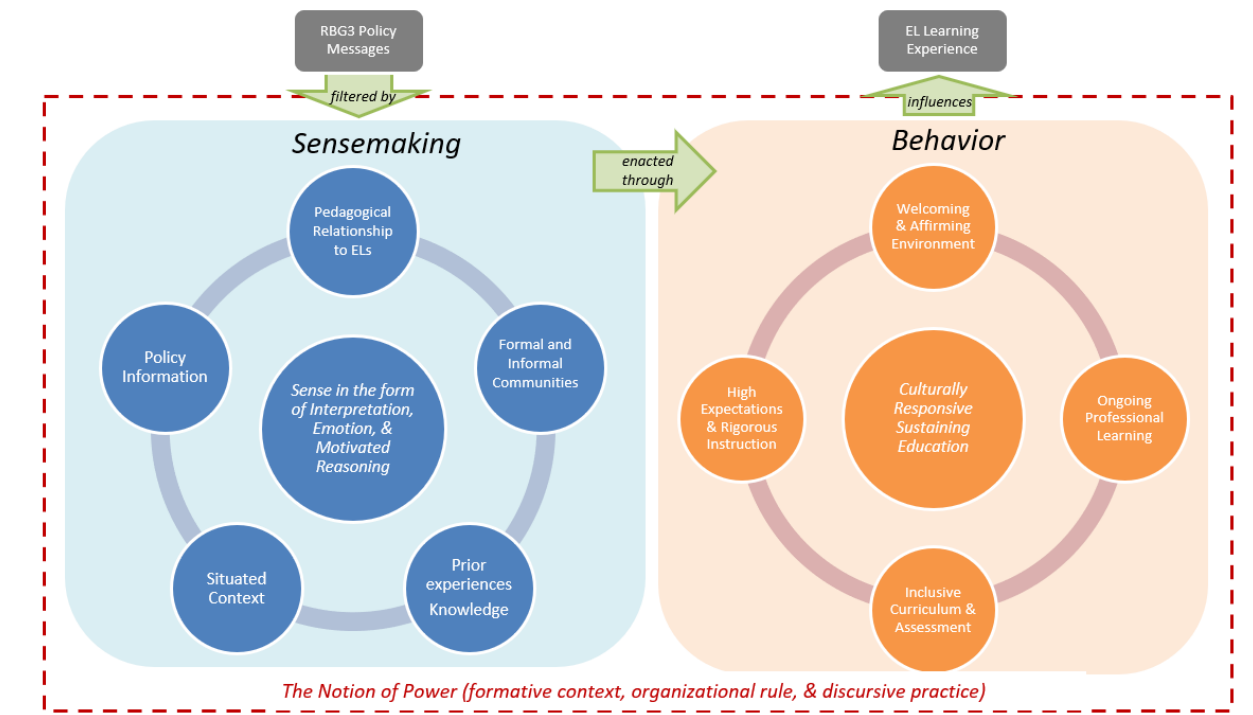
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Critical Cultural Policy Sensemaking

First, in the *sensemaking* process (as you can see in the blue part) has five internal and external factors, as shown as the outside blue circles, that affect sensemaking: (1) *pedagogical relationship to ELs* (between teachers and ELs in terms of teaching and leadership, and between parents and their EL children in terms of parenting), (2) *policy information* in the form of text and discourses, (3) *prior knowledge and experiences*, (4) *situated contexts* (historical and organizational contexts of the school building and the district), and (5) *formal* (school meetings and professional learning communities) and *informal meetings* (private conversations between colleagues). These five different factors may revise or refine sense (the middle blue circle surrounded by four factors) that is revealed in the form of interpretation, emotion, and motivated reasoning.

To create these five factors, I have added one factor of *pedagogical relationship to ELs* to the four factors of Spillane's framework that affected sensemaking. I assume that individual sensemaking departs from perceptions of the meaning of pedagogical relationships with their students and children before affecting other factors. Depending on how teachers, administrators, and parents perceive their ELs as students and children, their interpretations of the policy for supporting ELs might be different. For example, if a teacher defines an EL student as someone who needs help to overcome an English deficiency to get out of intervention programs, they may interpret the policy as it is with the deficit perspective on ELs' language and cultures. On the other hand, if a teacher perceives ELs' limited English as a natural process of learning due to dual or multiple language development and values the students' first languages and cultures, they may interpret the policy as an oppression of ELs with a linear development with normalization, which should be the same as non-ELs.

The shaped sense, which is the middle-blue circle, would be enacted through *behavior,* which will be observed in their instructions and school meetings. I analyzed the current teachers' instructional practices and the school's decision-making process by comparing what they say in interviews to what they really do in class and school meeting observations with the four orange-circled principles of the CR-S framework: *(1) welcoming and affirming environment, (2) high expectation and rigorous instruction, (3) inclusive curriculum and assessment, and (4) ongoing professional learning*. I utilized these four principles to evaluate how their behaviors are designed with a critical cultural sense. I assume that these educators' behaviors will eventually shape ELs' learning experiences.

In addition, in the entire process from new policy stimuli to ELs' learning experiences, I assume that various power dynamics, which is the red bar at the bottom of the graphic, would be

discovered between principal and teachers, between general teachers and EL teachers, and between teachers and parents. For example, in the sensemaking process, in formal and informal meetings, EL teachers may not be able to raise their voices to show the necessity for their better teaching compared to general teachers due to embedded hierarchical relationships within limited funding. Likewise, I wanted to capture how *formative contexts*, *organizational rules, and discursive practices* may facilitate or constrain individual sensemaking and behavior in the whole process.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

With the pilot study conducted in the fall of 2019, I interviewed curriculum directors, principals, and teachers in two districts to investigate and compare educators' policy sensemaking and strategies to implement RBG3. From this pilot study, I found that the low SES school educators have faced more challenges in terms of more possibly retained students, more paperwork regarding IRIPs, and less parent involvement in supporting students' literacy. While conducting this study, I found that many of the at-risk students who are under interventions came from minority student groups and many of them are ELs. Therefore, I felt the necessity to conduct a district case study to understand the district-level dynamics in the policy implementation process and their policy sensemaking in support of particular student subgroups. Especially because EL relevant policies are usually determined at the district level rather than the school level, I decided to conduct a district case study.

Therefore, in my dissertation, I conducted a qualitative case study of one district using a phenomenological approach. I collected data from interviews, observations, shadowing, documents and artifacts from December 2021 to April 2022. According to Yin (2003), case studies are the "preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). Since my study is to reveal how and why a particular policy impacts a certain student subgroup by investigating its specific process and relevant actors' sensemaking, the case study is the best avenue to answer my research questions.

Since case study approaches have varied depending on scholars, I had to choose which approach would fit my research purpose. Borrowing Yazan's (2015) perspective, a case study

approach can be categorized into three based on the views of different scholars: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. Yazan categorized Yin's epistemology as close to positivism but Stake and Merriam's ones as constructivism (but with nuances between the two). As realism artists pursue detailed description, which is close to reality, impressionists resist the fixed truth, rather constructing their impressions and projecting their subjectivity onto a phenomenon. Likewise, Yin's approach is close to a realism approach to find information, which is close to truth with empirical study methods and a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods that are built with a concrete theoretical framework and data collection charts before conducting data gathering. However, Stake's approach resembles impressionism as it pursues exclusively qualitative data with a higher flexibility of data gathering; Stake thought that when the researcher gathers data, an unforeseen research focus gradually reveals itself, and that ultimately major revision of data collection direction would be inevitable. Therefore, Stake did not determine an exact beginning point for gathering data nor detailed data collection plans, and his analysis procedure emphasized intuition and impression rather than fragmented data interpretation (Yazan, 2015).

In contrast to the different approaches of Yin and Stake, Merriam is positioned in the middle by emphasizing the necessity of concrete preparation of data collection plans and embracing flexibility to account for unpredictable parts of research (Yazan, 2015). Merriam provided more extensive and comprehensive approaches to case study data collection, especially for interviewing processes, which Yin or Stake did not provide. In addition, she provided interview types, good questions, information about starting the interview and interactions during interviews, etc. Merriam also emphasized the importance of concurrent data collection and analysis, not waiting until the data collection is complete. To allow more intensive analysis, the researcher should begin their analysis with the initial data collection before collecting more data

(Merriam, 1998). This approach allowed me to coordinate a further research direction by discovering what initial data collection plans missed. Merriam (1998) defined case study characteristics as particularistic and heuristic, which illustrates that the study focuses on a particular phenomenon, providing its rich and thick description, illuminating its readers' understanding.

While reading Yazan's (2015) analysis of three different approaches, I felt that Yin's approach is technical and practical, but it may lead to only representing obtained data, which runs the risk of ignorance of non- or less-representation. Therefore, I ultimately want to pursue Stake's approach, which allows for researchers' subjectivity and data collection flexibility. But, as an emerging scholar, this would lead to many challenges due to my developing research skills. Thus, considering research question alignment and feasibility of applying with more precise directions, choosing Merriam's approach would be the best option for my current stage.

With Merriam's approach, I integrated a phenomenological approach to create interview protocols and observation direction. Since my main research focus is to explore policy actors' sensemaking, I need to closely investigate their lived experiences that shape their senses. Phenomenology requires us to "ask the person to think of a specific instance, situation, person, or event. Then explore the whole experience to the fullest" (Van Manen, 1997, p. 67). Furthermore, I chose the phenomenological approach in proceeding with the case study because – as one of the influential perspectives in organization studies relying on linguistic structure – sensemaking is highly associated with interpretive, constructive, and phenomenological research by perceiving one's interpretation as transient, subjective, and constructive, which is revealed through retrospective activities (Brown et al., 2015; Van Manen, 2016). To do this, Van Manen (1997) stated that formulating concrete experience-near questions is critical. Therefore, although the

overall design of the research is a case study, I created deliberate interview protocols by considering a phenomenological approach to reveal the essence of the phenomena.

The study explores the overarching question: How do policy actors make sense of RBG3, and how does this sensemaking affect ELs' learning experiences? Two specified questions are as follows:

1. How do policy actors in the urban context– including district leaders, school leaders, and teachers– make sense of RBG3 in support of ELs?

    a. What influences the actors' sensemaking around RBG3 for ELs?

    b. What do the actors believe RBG3 requires administrators and teachers to do for EL students, and how do they feel about these requirements?

    c. What power dynamics and tensions exist in the process of sensemaking regarding RBG3's underlying premises? How do actors perceive them?

2. How do the actors' sensemaking regarding RBG3 impact how a school provides learning experiences for ELs?

    a. What is the phenomenon of ELs' learning experience in reading instruction and interventions?

    b. In classrooms, how are ELs' first languages and cultures recognized?

    c. How does the sensemaking of teachers evolve into messages to EL students?

2. Researcher's Positionality

As a Korean, I lived in South Korea for 33 years and worked in a public elementary school in South Korea for over ten years. As a teacher, I had opportunities to teach children how to read and write in Korean and to observe how they learn. Unlike the U.S., which consists of diverse races and ethnicities, South Korea is a homogenous society; therefore, children have shown similar paces to acquire Korean in terms of learning acquisition for one's primary language. However, with the recent influx of Chinese students to South Korea, Korean educators have also had to consider how to support students' language acquisition and learning. Since these Chinese students were likely to be labeled as struggling readers and learners in all subjects, the issue was how to support them more effectively in the Korean education system. To support their learning, schools that had many Chinese students hired Chinese and Korean bilingual speakers to facilitate interaction among teachers, students, and parents.

When I arrived in the U.S in 2018 with my son, who was four-year old, he also faced similar challenges. Although he was fluent in Korean in preschool and kindergarten, his language was not valued by most white monolingual teachers who often misunderstood his lack of English proficiency as indicative of his level of cognitive development. I distinctly remembered one episode that exemplifies this issue. One day, my son got hurt on the playground at preschool and I received a note that his teacher had written. The note consisted of a false story that she (the teacher) had been there when my son was hurt in a particular location on the playground. However, when I asked my son what had happened to him, he explained that he fell down in another place, not in the location that the teacher stated in her note. Since my son could not explain to his teacher in English what had happened to him, she might have thought he also

could not explain situations in Korean. Because of this situation, I realized that monolingual teachers might lack understanding of bi- or multi-lingual students' cognitive development.

Episodes like the one noted above began to pique my interest in ELs' learning experiences. As a mother of an EL, I knew how much energy and time were required to maintain and simultaneously develop a child's primary and secondary languages. In the Read by Grade Three law's implementation situations, ELs may feel more pressure to catch up to the level specified by the policy demands, designed by only considering white middle class monolingual students. Although the policy guarantees conditional exemption for ELs in grade three not to be retained, regular screening diagnostic tests have been implemented to identify struggling readers and selected ELs should receive interventions, which might be operated as pressure.

While my son was in kindergarten in 2020-21 when COVID-19 happened, I had a chance to observe several virtual EL classes which aimed to make up for their English deficiency. During EL classes, EL teachers provided only standard English and U.S. relevant cultural content materials, not offering any chances to talk about ELs' primary languages or cultures. As I followed the public-school curriculum, I felt that educators only focused on developing ELs' English skills at school to avoid their further stagnation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, which provided online learning, the pressure on parents like me to further educate ELs at home was exacerbated since most of the responsibility for students' learning fell to parents. Parents, in turn, had to respond to the overwhelming amount of teachers' uploaded assignments, which might have resulted from limited class time and a lack of interactive learning features in the online system.

My husband had to adjust to being a Korean-American at age 17 when he began to live in the U.S. He has always told his son (who looks just like him), "You do not make that silly face.

Then the kids will ignore you. And as an Asian, you should always be neat and study better than anyone else. Otherwise, teachers and friends ignore you." Perhaps, having lived for some time as a minority, my husband offered this advice based on empirical evidence so that his son would not suffer the same grief. Growing up in a homogeneous society, Korea, however, I never had experienced discrimination by race, so I always thought my husband's advice was non-educational. However, his advice inevitably reflected reality and it might be a strategy used to escape struggles that come from discrimination.

My "pedagogic orientation" as a parent and educator to the lifeworld is connected to my research interest because the "phenomenological hermeneutic mode" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 40) led to my intellectual curiosity of how a particular student subgroup learns and grows in a certain context and how educators can support their learning.

However, I have to acknowledge my bias, which may come from my own experiences as an insider and outsider of the U.S. Thirty-three years of living, studying, and teaching in South Korea and three years of living and studying in the U.S. have shaped my unique perspective of the U.S. education system as a parent, teacher, and researcher. First, my family belongs to the category of EL families due to our first language, but our highly educated parent status may categorize us as among high-SES EL families that can provide extra help for a child's learning at home, which may bring different educational concerns and needs than those of low-SES EL families. Therefore, I am aware that my current personal understanding of ELs might not apply to a wide range of EL families. Therefore, I need to extend my perspective as a researcher to become more engaged with EL families, understanding their circumstances from their perspectives.

Second, perhaps my point of view is due to my background of living in Korea for a long time. Because of this, I may put more value on Korean things, which may distort my perception of the American education system. For example, while South Korean schools have a Confusion influence, highly valuing the growth of one's whole person, American schools seem to place more value on raising competitive, individualistic citizens. However, my perspective can be a boon to the research because it leads me to ask questions about aspects of the U.S. system that many American scholars take for granted. Therefore, with my minority position and global perspective along with teaching experiences, I aim to illuminate the lived experiences of ELs and their educators in a certain policy context.

3. Data Collection

3.1. Research Site

I considered information-rich cases to select a district case, which is one type of purposive sampling method (Patton, 2002). Since the direction for EL policies typically is determined at the district level, and not the school level, I decided to conduct a district case study. To find a proper district that fit my study's purpose, I considered two criteria. One was where the rate of ELs population is relatively higher than Michigan's average rate, so many policies around ELs have been discussed at the district level. The other criteria was where the district might feel pressure from RBG3 due to low reading performance. In my previous retention research and the process of district recruitment, I found that districts having more disproportionately marginalized students may have their own critical sensemaking around this policy compared to homogeneous or privileged districts where the retention policy did not have much impact due to very lower numbers of struggling readers. To fulfill these two criteria, I

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chose the Blue district in an urban context where there are a high number of ELs and a low English proficiency rate for this case study.

Located in one of Michigan's 15 metropolitan cities, the Blue district is responsible for approximately 10,000 students. This district serves from grades pre-K to 12 having more than 20 elementary schools. Among them, two lower level elementary, two upper level elementary, one served K-8th, and three secondary schools had language assistance programs (sheltered or multi-tiered classrooms) mainly provided by the bilingual department with more than 30 EL teachers and 15 bilingual assistants.

Table 2. *Student Demographics for Michigan and Blue District (2021-22; in percentages approximately)* [1]

	Michigan	Blue District
African American	18	40
Latino	9	20
White	64	23
Asian/ Pacific Islander	4	5
Economically disadvantaged	52	80
English Learners	6	15

As shown in Table 2, the Blue district is racially diverse, the majority of students live in poverty, and many are English learners. According to MI School Data for 2021-22, approximately 40% are Black, 23% are White, 20% are Latinx, and 5% are Asian. Approximately eighty percent of all students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. According to the recent bilingual department's report of Blue district in January 2022, 18% are classified as bilinguals and 15% are ELs, the majority of whom are from immigrant and refugee families coming from war zones and conflict areas. Most of them are living in subsidized housing, which

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[1] https://www.mischooldata.org/ The data was derived on May 10, 2022.

indicates low social-economic status. Although the largest population of communities is Hispanic, the EL population in Blue was extremely heterogeneous, since EL students came from approximately 85 countries and speak a total of almost 65 languages other than English. The most common languages are Spanish and Swahili, but a large percentage of ELs spoke different languages than these three. In the 2021-22 academic year, over 200 ELs newly arrived, mostly coming from Middle Eastern and African countries. In addition, the 3rd graders' proficiency rate of the district in 2018-19 M-STEP ELA[2] was below 25 percent and approximately 3000 K-3 students had IRIPs in the 2021-22 academic year.

As a resettlement city, the Blue district has various support programs for ELs. According to the Home Language Survey, the district provides a screening test for new students to measure English proficiency and to identify language support necessities. Once students (K-3) are identified as ELs, the district recommends EL parents send their children to three elementary schools which operate Language Assistant Programs (LAP). In these schools, EL classrooms (sheltered or multi-tiered formats) are provided with 15 bilingual assistants (using 15 different languages) who staggered schedules for supporting ELs. However, the other thirteen elementary schools also have EL students. Parents might choose them for various reasons such as closeness to home or because they believe their children will learn best in an English-only environment. Furthermore, out of consideration for the linguistic heterogeneity of EL communities, cultural brokers support communication between classroom teachers and parents whose first language is not English. Likewise, according to the high number of ELs, various policies for ELs are systematically provided compared to other districts.

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[2] https://www.mischooldata.org/ The data was derived on May 10, 2022. The 2019-20 MSTEP was waived due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020-21 score was unavailable yet.

After receiving IRB permission, I applied to the Blue district for my research approval and received its permission on Nov 30, 2021. I collected my data from Dec 2021 to April 2022. The research design for district approval and consent forms are placed in Appendices A, B, and C.

3.2. Participant Selection & Recruitment

My 12 participants were a district administrator in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (who is in charge of the entire RBG3 process), three bilingual department administrators, two former literacy coaches, two EL teachers in one of the LAP elementary schools, a principal, a special education teacher, a reading specialist, and an EL family in a non-LAP elementary school.

In order to compare schools with LAPs to those without, I shadowed two teachers in Orange School (a LAP school, serving K-8), as well as visited Green School (a non-LAP school, serving K-3). Green School had seven ELs in total, which is far fewer than any LAP elementary schools. I asked the principal to introduce me to two teachers supporting ELs and all EL students receiving intervention as at-risk readers. After conducting one observation of intervention in the initial data collection stage, I selected four students as focal cases to observe by considering their communication skills, primary languages, and parents' willingness to participate in the research. Although I have observed four EL students, only one EL family participated in the interview.

In this recruitment process, I also wanted to include principals in LAP schools and more district administrators for my study, but they were unfortunately unavailable due to the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic and an administrator transition situation.

3.3. Methods

I collected the case study data through various methods: interviews, observations,

shadowing, documentation, and artifacts from December 2021 to April 2022. Table 3 shows the

data collection plan.

Table 3. *Data Collection*

Methods	Frequency / Time	Name[3]	Race	Gender	Position/Content
Interviews	2	Amy	White	Female	RBG3 district administrator
	2	Juan	White	Male	Bilingual department administrator
	1 joint	Linda	White	Female	Bilingual department administrator
		Mary	White	Female	Bilingual department administrator
	1	Jessica	White	Female	Former literacy coach (retired)
	1	Britney	White	Female	Former literacy coach and current reading specialist
	2	Laura	White	Female	EL teacher (G3)
	2	Susan	White	Female	EL teacher (G2)
	2	Joseph	Black	Male	Principal
	2	Lisa	White	Female	Reading specialist
	2	Nia	Black	Female	Special education teacher
	1 joint	Carlos	Latinx	Male	G3 EL family (his mother and sister)
Observation	12 hours	Interventions			Lisa and Nia's intervention small groups (6 days, 2 hours per day)
	28 hours	EL Sheltered classrooms			Laura and Susan's classroom shadowing (4 days, 7 hours per day)
	5 hours	School meetings			School PD Literacy data tracking meeting (2.5 hours), Intervention team meeting (1 hour), and IEP meeting (1.5 hour)
	2 hours	District meetings			EL steering meeting (2 days, 1 hour per day)
Document	15	RBG3 relevant documents			
	10	EL relevant documents			

Interviews. I conducted 18 in-person or virtual semi-structured interviews with 12

participants. Interview participants include a RBG3 district administrator, three bilingual

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[3] All names are pseudonyms.

department officers, two former literacy coaches, a principal, a special education teacher, a reading specialist, and an EL family. I conducted interviews twice with participants whose current position is more related to the law enactment and who allowed follow-up observations (interventions or meetings) that raised more questions for the second interview. The former literacy coaches' voices should be heard as key actors in the law, but they left the position last year due to funding issues. Therefore, I could not conduct any observations for them and had a one-time interview for each.

In addition, I recruited people who were in different positions in the Blue district to embrace the perceptions of multi-stakeholders in a district from district administrators to an EL family and to compare the similarities and differences. Especially, by including an EL family, I wanted to shed light on their perception of the law that may differ from the intentions of policymakers and educators.

Using a phenomenological approach, I created "semi-structured life world interview protocols" to gain "descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomenon" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 3). In order to understand educators' pedagogical relationships with their students, I began with how they perceive themselves and their students. As Weick (1995) stated, "Whenever I define self, I define 'it', but to define it is also to define self. Once I know who I am then I know what is out there. But the direction of causality flows just as often from the situation to a definition of self as it does the other way" (p. 20). One's sense starts with a sense of themselves and integrates with their external words.

When I conducted a pilot study with sensemaking on RBG3 in fall 2019, asking plain and direct questions about teachers, principals, and curriculum directors' understanding of RBG3, the

participants' answers were plain and general, offering a lot of information and leaving room for interpretation. But it was hard to understand why they thought in this way. I realize now that there was a disconnect between the answers and a specific time and place in experiences, which brought concrete context and details that allowed participants to remain in the pre-reflective lifeworld (Van Manen, 2016). Beyond the questions that distinguish between personal and impersonal points of view on the policy itself, I needed fundamental questions to lead to personal lived experiences for exploring worldviews and pedagogical relationships with students, which phenological perspective pursues. These include questions such as "What is teaching? What does it mean to be a teacher? What is it about your relation to these children that makes you a teacher? What does this child mean to you and what do you mean to this child? What is it about teaching that makes it possible for it to be what it is in its essence (is-ness)?" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 42). These questions can also be revised with a pedagogic grounding in school leadership and parenting and can be applied to explore principals' and parents' perceptions of Els, which might be fundamental departures from their sensemaking (Van Manen, 2016). Therefore, building on principals', teachers' and parents' perceptions of themselves and of ELs, I asked about their understandings and interpretations of RBG3. The sense of RBG3 sensemaking for a particular group (ELs) requires the capturing of more critical thoughts, embedded assumptions, and premises through policy texts. Without understanding the relationship between educators and students, it would be difficult to reveal why participants perceive the RBG3 in the support of ELs in a particular way. Therefore, as a fundamental basis, investigating participants' perceptions on ELs should be preceded by asking about pedagogy of their teaching, leadership, and parenting.

 Building on the fundamental questions of their pedagogies related to the perception of ELs and their understanding and opinions about RBG3, additional interview topics for each

participant were different: (1) district administrators were asked about their professional background, EL policies at the district level, and main current agendas and challenges, (2) the principal was asked to address school initiatives related to literacy support for ELs, district-level support for ELs, interventions and goals for ELs, (3) teachers were prompted to discuss their EL students' characteristics, instruction and interventions for ELs, and standardized tests and classroom assessments, (4) an EL and their parents were asked to share their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and learning experiences from interventions. The conceptual framework of critical cultural policy sensemaking was reflected in the interview protocols.

In the second interview, based on the analyzed individual first interview and observation data, I created more in-depth semi-structured questions to elicit their thoughts on sensemaking of RBG3 policy and EL's learning experiences. In this second-round interview, I asked participants to bring two to three photos (that they took by themselves or chose from the internet) that represent their perception of the impact of RBG3 on EL students, broadly marginalized students, or teacher work and instructional changes. These visual images enhanced the engagement with participants' own analytic process by focusing on what was the most important to them along with evoking their emotions, engaging reflective processes, and associating their lived experiences, which deepened our interviews (Coe et al., 2017). The interview protocols can be seen in Appendices D (teachers), E (district administrator), F (literacy coach), G (principal), and H (EL student and parent).

Observations. Along with interviews to explore individual sensemaking, I conducted observations and shadowing in classrooms and school and district meetings for a total of 47 hours. As Spillane et al. (2002) explained, to understand individual and collective senses, observing the current practices in participants' daily work is critical to see practice "as it

unfolded" with the use of field notes or videotapes (p. 412). By closely observing the activity itself, I compared what participants said and what they actually did. In this way, I acted "as a sensitive observer of the subtleties of everyday life'' (Van Manen, 2016, p. 29). Although I planned more observations, the COVID-19 pandemic situation (participant or participant's family health issues) delayed many observations, ultimately leading to limited chances to observe.

Since the main research question concerns the meaning of the phenomenon of EL's learning experiences under the RBG3 law, I conducted observations (six days, 12 hours) in interventions at a non-LAP school and shadowing (four days, 28 hours) in EL sheltered classrooms at one LAP school. During the observations, I took field notes and reflective memos. These classrooms were small-group intervention classes for struggling readers, including ELs, with a reading specialist and a special education teacher or were sheltered EL classrooms consisting of only EL students taught by an EL teacher for the full day. These day-to-day practices unpacked how teachers recognized ELs' languages and cultures and what they thought the right forms of support for ELs were through their instruction. This observation also revealed the pedagogical relationship between students and teachers. In addition, I probed teachers after each observation and shadowing regarding what I observed but could not clearly understand.

In addition, I attended district and school meetings on literacy topics such as EL relevant meetings (EL steering district meeting two times, one hour each), school data monitoring meetings (two-and-a-half-hour school meeting), and an at-risk student support meeting (one and a half hours). These meetings revealed collective sensemaking for decision-making processes in support of ELs. Although I have asked to observe RBG3 district meetings, due to COVID-19 situations and urgent district schedules, it was not allowed. Instead, a district administrator shared the relevant documents of the meetings.

With these observational field notes, I wrote the narrative description, which provides a full story of the lessons and district and school meetings after every observation (Jennings, 1996). The observation protocols developed with conceptual framework elements can be seen in Appendix I.

Documents and artifacts. I also collected documents from school and district websites, such as annual education report cover letters and school event announcements. During the school visits, interviews, and district meetings, I collected internally circulated documents (e.g., IRIPs round process direction, IRIP checklist, the mid-year retention survey, the retention guide for parents, and EL relevant meeting materials, etc.) which could not be accessed in websites publicly, but my participants were willing to share with me for better understanding. Furthermore, during classroom and intervention observations, I collected teachers' learning materials and took pictures of the culturally diverse learning environments. Analyzing related documents and artifacts regarding the study topics enhanced my understanding of the organizational and historical contexts of the Blue district where my participants were situated.

4. Data Analysis and Management

Following three steps of data analysis – preliminary analysis, thematic analysis, and interpretation – I used an inductive approach with the data of interview transcripts, observation field notes, and relevant documents and artifacts to search for emerging themes (Emerson et al., 2011).

All recorded interviews were transcribed via a transcription software, Temi, and reviewed by me to find and edit missing parts. For coding, I applied my critical cultural policy sensemaking framework. However, when we analyze data with only the framework established

before data collection, we may risk losing non-represented but essential data due to the limitations of the given frame that we built from assumptions based on existing literature. To prevent this risk, with a phenomenological orientation, I read each interview or observation data entry as a whole to reach a holistic, meaningful insight into the background of each story and re-read each data to identify meaning units (Galvin & Todres, 2012). The phenomenological reflection leads to insight into the essence of a phenomenon by reading each transcript as a whole, which involves the procedure of explicating the multi-layered structures of meaning (Van Manen, 2016).

Therefore, my first coding involved inductively searching for meaning units in raw data, relying on my logic and intuition. As a second coding, I applied my established framework to investigate what existing literature can say about the searched phenomenon. The comparison between the first and second coding results resulted in similarities and discrepancies that allowed me to see representative and non-representative meaning units through my framework. Since the goal of data analysis is to find emerging common themes in the written data and search language that accurately captures the themes, I used the language used by the participants as much as I could to show the essence of their lived experiences (Barritt et al., 1984).

While coding, I took analytic memos in Word and PPT formats to track the changes to my understanding of the analyzed data as a whole. This was useful because initial insight evolved as the data was collected and analyzed (Moore et al., 2012; Saldaña, 2021). This memo also provided a chance for reflection, to raise questions I can explore in further interviews and observations (Jennings, 1996). I was open to revising the pre-established framework with flexibility if it cannot adequately explain the phenomenon. After the interpretation phase, I

synthesized all the meanings of the phenomenon into a comprehensive story with essential structure (Galvin & Todres, 2012).

For the trustworthiness of data analysis, I applied Merriam's (1998) approach. I triangulated data coming from interviews, observations, and documents to enhance internal validity. These multiple resources helped me to compare, develop, and refine each finding. Additionally, I invited two professional scholars who have expertise in case studies and phenomenological analysis to discuss the analysis process. It provided me with others' perspectives on the analyzed data and helped me to find my biases or misunderstandings. To enhance external validity, I used thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); providing rich contexts for each participant's policy sense helped readers empathize with participants. To ensure reliability, I explained my researcher positionality, revealing my unique perspective as both an outsider and insider of the U.S. education system and acknowledging my pre-understanding, assumptions, and biases that might affect my interpretations of the investigated phenomenon.

Although I followed the above steps to guarantee trustworthiness, I was also aware of how to achieve phenomenological research validity. According to the nature of the stories that participants told a researcher, "A story does not assume the authoritative and omniscient narrator who tells the whole truth and nothing but the truth; the teller's perspective is assumed to be a partial one, one honestly assumes, and thus open to criticism" (Elbaz, 1991, p. 6). In addition, admitting that different researchers may interpret the same texts differently, I acknowledged that phenomenological research validity is ultimately the reader's response to the participant's experiences as described by the researcher.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

In previous sections, I outlined the study purpose, research questions, relevant literature, conceptual framework, and methodology. Through data analysis of 18 interviews, 47 hours of observation, and 25 documents, I sought the answers to the following research questions:

1. How do policy actors in the urban context– including district leaders, school leaders, and teachers– make sense of RBG3 in support of ELs?

    a. What influences the actors' sensemaking around RBG3 for ELs?

    b. What do the actors believe RBG3 requires administrators and teachers to do for EL students, and how do they feel about these requirements?

    c. What power dynamics and tensions exist in the process of sensemaking regarding RBG3's underlying premises? How do actors perceive them?

2. How do the actors' sensemaking regarding RBG3 impact how a school provides learning experiences for ELs?

    a. What is the phenomenon of ELs' learning experience in reading instruction and interventions?

    b. In classrooms, how are ELs' first languages and cultures recognized?

    c. How does the sensemaking of teachers evolve into messages to EL students?

To align with these research questions, this finding chapter consists of five sections: 1) revealed policy implementation phenomenon, 2) factors that affected educators' sensemaking, 3) policy sensemaking of urban educators & particularly sensemaking in support of Els, 4) tension around sensemaking, and 5) Els' learning experiences under the policy context.

1. Revealed Phenomenon

An explicitly revealed phenomenon was that the Blue district would not retain anybody. In the retention information letter, which explains the purpose and process of the RBG3 law and the district's stance, the Blue district announced that they were not in support of retention, due to negative effects shown in existing retention research, and they believed that having a partnership with families to support students at home and schools would be more effective. The negative effects of retention, as described in educational research (e.g., Hattie, 1999) were mentioned across all interviews. Principal Joseph said,

> It's kind of made that the modus operandi for us as a district, like we're not gonna retain our students. We don't see retention as viable and they'll often cite John Hattie's effect size of retention that has a negative effect size thing of that nature…When we do our IRIPs, especially this it's been mountains of third graders who don't meet the criteria for proficiency. We've sent notices home to a number of them. You'll know that in [Blue], we actually have changed our retention policy and it states that teachers can't retain, unless a parent has requested.

Accordingly, there were documents identifying categories for exempting most children (the year when ELs were identified, IEP category, pre-retention experience and family dynamic). Instead, the district focused on improving diagnosis and intervention. For example, K-1 is tested by AIMSweb, and second and third graders are tested by NWEA, and according to the results, teachers are required to make intervention plans for low-performing students. However, NWEA only provides composite scores, and does not show exactly which reading area students struggle with, so it is re-diagnosed using additional assessments. These standardized tests are requested three times a year. NWEA scores predict proficiency in M-STEP, which is required from second

to eighth grades. NWEA is a computer-based test consisting of four sections, each with a

question configuration that takes 45 minutes[4]. With the diagnosed area, the teacher writes IRIPs

for students who have not reached grade level. This is the process of IRIPs to provide

intervention plans along with getting signatures from parents.

      All ELs also receive IRIPs. In the Blue district, 90% of students in the entire district

receive IRIPs. IRIP students receive interventions from an interventionist for 20 to 30 minutes

daily. Where an EL class is available, students receive their intervention from their EL classroom

teacher; in cases where no class is available, students meet with an interventionist instead. ELs

additionally take another standardized test at the end of each year, measuring English proficiency

called the WIDA ACCESS test[5], which examines four areas: speaking, listening, reading, and

writing, each area taking around 40 minutes. Figure 2 shows all of the standardized tests,

assessments, and IRIPs that third grade EL students receive in a year. And in the whole process,

educators felt burnout. Why was this happening? To understand this phenomenon, I had to

understand their sensemaking process.
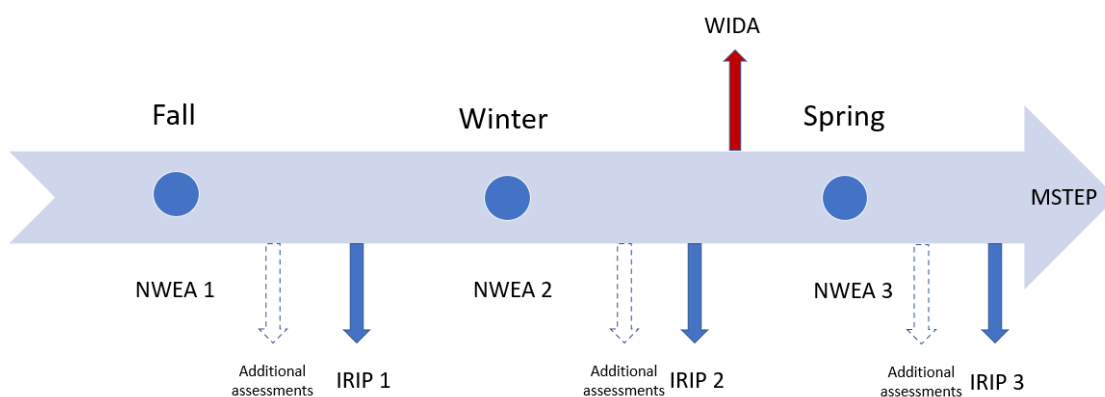
Figure 2. Standardized Tests, Diagnostic Assessments, and IRIPs for Third Grade ELs

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[4] https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/student-assessment/benchmark-assessments/nwea-map-suite

[5] https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/OEAA/WIDA-Assessments/WIDA_Michigan_Specific_TAM.pdf?rev=77961c588b1f4372a6ef754064c27480

2. Factors of Sensemaking

2.1. Policy Information and Formal and Informal Communities

Administrators receive the policy information through various channels such as documents (state RBG3 docs, IRIP, and retention letters), formal state-level administrative meetings (e.g., MDE EL advisory committee and district administrators' meetings), district department meetings (e.g., curriculum and instruction department meeting), and informal meetings (e.g., principal network and EdD program alums). Through various channels, they understood the wider range of policy components to consider what was really required of teachers. Literacy coaches, especially, whose positions were created by the law, fundamentally understand the purpose, intention, and expectations of the law and utilize their understanding to improve the district systems. In contrast, teachers did not have access to the detailed information of RBG3, and most of them encountered this law through IRIP training by district and school data tracking meetings that delivered the message "what teachers have to do." Therefore, they rarely talked about this policy itself with their colleagues. Their focus was more intensively on retention, IRIP, and intervention - which are the school-level manifestations of the policy. The focus was only on how to diagnose children and write and submit IRIPs, which were steps that had to be taken under the name of "accountability." Teachers' expertise was excluded from district-level in-depth discussions on how this policy helps teachers, enhances teaching and thereby helps children's reading, when current situational limitations were considered and additional needs assessed. Likewise, educators' sensemaking was shaped by surrounding communities and policy information through the text of policy documents or discourses. However, reconstructing the initial interpretation was most affected by educators' beliefs about

learning, shaped by prior experiences, and their pedagogical relationships with students, as well as the challenging contexts in which they were situated.

2.2. Beliefs About Learning Shaped by Prior Experiences and Pedagogical Relationships

Most teachers in my study believed that the purpose of teaching is to help students maintain "the love of learning." Teachers who have taught in the Blue district longer knew not only about their students but also their siblings and families as well. As they got closer to families, teachers came to understand more about each child. Knowing one child's family history enabled them to see the child as a whole. Teachers tried to understand the child's difficulties around learning more and wanted to help them advance at their own pace. EL teacher Susan said,

> A lot of my students are refugees, so they're kind of just grateful to be here and I feel like I'm helping more than education. I'm giving, I'm helping them find socks and shoes and coats and backpacks and food…I think all teachers have that mission, but it's so fulfilling. and also these students in general are very eager to learn. They love to be here. They don't like missing school. They don't even like the weekend when I say, okay, have a good weekend. They said, can I go to school tomorrow?... And it's hard to turn it off for this population, I think a lot about, do they have food at home? I think part of the reason they wanna come to school so much is they don't have enough food at home. Or how do I get them a winter coat? What happened to the winter coat? So it's hard to turn that off. When I leave here, I am worrying about them.

Teachers who supported refugee ELs helped their daily lives beyond teaching English and wanted to celebrate each step that they achieved. Teachers did not want to minimize their

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success. Especially toward ELs, teachers knew they had to be patient, talk slowly, build trust, and notice shyness at the beginning of English acquisition. Special education teacher Nia said,

> I'm trying to understand, so just being patient and telling them it's okay. Ten times I'm letting them know it's okay if they don't understand and trying to help them use pictures and things to tell what they're trying, what they want me to know. And it becomes well. And then we build a deeper bond. Basically they learn to trust me. And they often come to me quiet and not talkative, 'cause they're worried about if they're saying something wrong or if somebody has said something to them before that has teased them, then they kinda come very shy at points. And the ones who are more vocal, are more comfortable in their home language, or primary language they oftentimes will teach. And I love when they try to teach me words.

While building relationships with students, teachers wanted to give them motivation to learn. Susan, an EL teacher also mentioned,

> I just want them to keep their love of learning if they have it, or if they don't, I wanna instill that in them. and just keep their curiosity going. Maintain their curiosity 'cause they're seven or eight years old. They have that curiosity. Keep it going for as long as possible or forever. I just want them to always know they can just ask questions and explore.

Along with maintaining learning motivation, teachers also talked about students needing to get praise for each step. Nia, a Special Education Teacher, said,

> I want them to one be able to hold a conversation with their peers. I want them to share information that they learned with them in school, with their parents, then I also want them to feel like they are doing the hard work that is necessary for them for school to

build relationships, but also to focus on their own personal growth. I want them to feel

like they're making steps and progress, win themselves of learning, so oftentimes what I

see is sometimes my kids, we are focusing on one thing, when they make a connection

and like, oh, we talked about this and I'm like, yes. That is the same thing…So I also try

not to pressure them to feel like, I don't wanna minimize their success. So each step gets

praise, no matter what, if you remember from one day and at the end of the week, if you

remember the word apple and you're able to point to apple, I'm gonna celebrate that at the

end of the week. Again, like that one celebration is not enough because I want you to see

that you matter and your growth matters. And if you're able to remember that then you're

able to continue to take steps toward being able to read and being able to write and

communicate.

As she said, her teaching is geared to encourage students' motivation to learn continuously and

acknowledge individual's growth. She didn't want to minimize their success even though it

seemed very small and insufficient for the required grade standard. However, compared to

teachers' beliefs about learning, administrators' perspectives were different. Juan, the bilingual

department administrator, who had once been an English Learner himself, emphasized the

graduation of high school and college degrees for ELs' future by acquiring reading and writing

proficiency.

We wanna get 'em to a level that they can be proficient enough to be able to succeed after

they get out of high school. So we don't just want to graduate kids. And then they have a

high school diploma and they did not achieve the skills in the English language that was

necessary for them to be able to pursue the college degree. Not everybody has to go to

college, but we want our kids to at least be able to have a high level of reading and

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writing proficiency. Without writing skills it is very difficult to succeed: English

Learners, native speakers, whatever language you might speak or might not speak. If you

cannot write, you're gonna struggle as you move forward after high school.

He perceived learning as a tool of social mobility for students' success. He understood students'

difficulties related to language barriers and language acquisition is a journey on a long path.

Nonetheless, he strongly believed that ELs should overcome the limitations to acquire English

proficiency to enter mainstream classes required for their further academic achievement and

future jobs. Likewise, these two perspectives (learning as a social mobility tool versus learning

as a personal intellectual and emotional growth) co-existed.

2.3. Situated Challenging Contexts

Although all factors described above impacted their sensemaking, the district's situated

contexts affected urban educators' sensemaking process the most. Based on delivered policy

information, teachers and administrators reviewed the infrastructure for the policy enactment and

set the expectation of what they could achieve through the policy. However, the Blue district

perceived they have more challenging contexts than enabling contexts, which might inhibit the

policy's effect, even threatening their situation or making it worse. In what types of challenging

contexts are they situated? The following quote from a former literacy coach, Britney, illustrated

the overall difficulties that the Blue district faced. She said,

We don't have planning time. You have like that added layer of like, okay, so like you're

already teaching in a more struggling district. So the kids come to school with more

emotional needs than the [Red] district. Right. And so a lot more of the teacher's time and

energy is spent on, you know, socio emotional stuff. And then academic, but it's broad.

So then by the time you get the social emotional, the regular classroom management and

teaching of just the whole class, by the time you get down to like working in small groups

or one on one intentionally. If there was buy-in and it was done well and the meaning of

why we're doing it and it wasn't like 'cause most people, when they think of third grade

reading law, IRIPs don't come to mind. It's hell my kid's gonna be retained. Well, we're

not gonna really retain, so this is stupid and why are we even doing it? It's a waste of

time. Um, but if people were really given the knowledge of why and, and tie it into like,

okay, great, well, we have these IRIPs, we're supposed to be working with this kid

because they're struggling with reading, but you still haven't told me how to do it. You

haven't shown me how to do a small group. You haven't shown me what, you haven't

given me a resource.

As Britney describes, the Blue district teachers have less planning time, their students have more

emotional needs, teachers must provide interventions, and they struggle with curriculum issues.

The following sections show each challenging context in detail.

1) *Dysfunctional Infrastructure*

The Blue district has no systemic data hub. An RBG3 district administrator, Amy, said

"Data hub? No, we have nothing. Now we're moving in that direction." Although the law

requiring it was passed in 2016, for four years, the district had been unable to create a centralized

data-sharing website or database.. Therefore, as an administrator overseeing the IRIPs and

student data tracking, Amy could not use data to monitor student growth, evaluate teachers'

interventions, or plan professional development for teachers. In addition, as Britney said above,

Amy pointed out the ineffectiveness of the reading curriculum, which had been used for 22 years in the district. An RBG3 district administrator, Amy, said,

> We don't even have any clue for IRIPs before. I mean, we just sent 'em and they did it at the school level. I don't know if they're in their CAS. I don't know if they were completed. I don't know if they were uploaded. I don't know anything.

The non-systematic district level infrastructure created a huge struggle to build consistency district-wide. The district administrator acknowledged this problem and tried to solve the issue.

2) *Teacher Shortage Eliminates Instructional Planning Time*

The Blue district has over 100 open teacher positions. This teacher shortage led most special teachers (music, art, physical education) to become classroom teachers. Accordingly, without special classes, teachers only have around 40 minutes at lunchtime for a break, which is not enough for instructional planning. Furthermore, all elementary librarians also became classroom teachers, which meant all elementary school libraries have no librarians who support student access to books and other media materials.

A huge teacher shortage forced teachers without general education licenses to become classroom teachers who provide Tier 1 teaching, which requires high quality teaching in all subjects as the basis for all student learning. These less experienced teachers should be supported by collaboration with other teachers at least. However, teachers who worked all day long did not have enough time to interact with colleagues informally. For planning instruction, teachers had to spend their personal time after school, which was especially challenging for teachers who were raising young children at home. EL teacher Susan said,

But I just don't know how they [teachers] do it. It's so much work at home. My husband, he's just trying to stick up for me, but he's like, you shouldn't be doing so much work at home. Plus two, I have a two-year-old and a five year old. I got to see them for one hour yesterday. My first day back they went to their grandparents' house. They were so tired. My daughter fell asleep on the way home. She didn't wake up until this morning. She slept; I didn't see her. I didn't talk to her. So I'm not doing work at home, but I can't imagine. I don't want to. You don't get paid for it. It's not okay. But I can't imagine how they're teaching without doing so much homework, it's impossible. You're just leaving kids behind. You're not helping the kids who are above grade level. You're not helping the kids who are below. I don't know. Yeah. As you can see, we don't have any planning time.

This imbalance between teachers' lives and work led teachers to choose routinized independent work for students. This routine seemed to take away the opportunity to try new activities to encourage dynamic interactions, which is critical to learn language acquisition or customized types of activities to suit children's levels. It also caused teachers to burn out quickly.

I have just one more thing. It has really that necessity for time has paved away from my students being more autonomous, more independent and even more self-sufficient because I'm working on the next thing for them, or I'm grading their tests from the previous day so they can see how they're working on their own. And even there's a little seven-year-old teacher leading the class while I'm here watching, but they kind of are independent in that way. And then for the center, we do daily five reading, writing five, the five facets of literacy. That's when I can pull small groups to read with or do some other planning that I need to do…Routine is a key.

A routinized daily schedule brought more control for teachers but limited their ability to provide more in-depth lessons, which would make students explore interesting reading passages, facilitate students' motivation, and raise questions through interactions with peers, which may lead to deeper actual learning.

3) *Lack of Funding for Instructional Improvement*

In December 2021, all four district literacy coaches (one full coach and three part-time coaches), who had worked for the past three to four years, left. This is because the funding that was used to support literacy coaches, one of the most important components of the RBG3, had disappeared. They either retired, became classroom teachers, or became part-time reading specialists. Teachers have had more coaching needs since in-person teaching resumed from online teaching caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but there are no more coaches to help teachers. A former literacy coach, Jessica, said,

> So it's the third grade reading law wasn't really anything new, I suppose the one thing that came out from the third grade reading law were the instructional coaches, that piece where, where it provided funding. And we've had some, we just have some fantastic instructional coaches in our district and we had a grant and it was a really nice grant. And I'm guessing each building had an instructional coach placed in their buildings. Some buildings that had a large population had two or three instructional coaches in their buildings. I know the high schools did so, and that was probably for about three years, three to four years. And then the grant ran out. And so now we find ourselves in this predicament and the district is still supportive and wants to have instructional coaches in the district. But with our teaching shortage just created such a huge problem in all areas.

And so I understand the district having to pull those instructional coaches and place them

into the classrooms.

In addition to simply coaching, they have also played a role in organizing and providing literacy-

related PDs that are necessary for all teachers. As they disappear, no one in the district can

professionally provide PDs for reading. Without training in different diagnostic assessments and

interventions, teachers have been unable to serve the high number of students who need

interventions. An RBG3 district administrator, Amy, said,

My expectation is that teachers are reflective of their teaching and build their confidence

in. They don't even have training in the different diagnostic assessments. So let's say the

screener in reading for NWEA, it just gives you a composite score. It doesn't give you

phonics, fluency, like the different parts of reading. What are they supposed to do? So

they've gotta give some deeper diagnostics. If I could get them there, this is how you do a

phonics screener. This is how you do phonemic awareness screener and then be

comfortable with choosing the intervention that goes with it. And understand that you are

responsible for that child's growth period. Despite every barrier from home and that this

office will be checking. That will be three years ahead of time, then what we are now.

In the absence of sufficient reading-related PDs from districts, teachers received only six PDs a

year provided by the ISD. In addition, the number of interventions has been decreasing as many

interventionists have to return to the classroom to fill the absences left by the teacher shortage.

4) *High Number of IRIP Students and Paperwork*

According to the interview conducted in April 2022 with Amy, a district administrator,

the number of third graders who would be retained according to the winter NWEA test was about

350 in the Blue district. In addition, 3000 K-3 students have IRIPs, which means 80-90% of

students in a classroom have IRIPs. Although the Blue district has a high number of students

who need interventions, many interventionists became classroom teachers due to a huge teacher

shortage, so sufficient intervention is not available. At Green school, all math interventionists

became classroom teachers and one of two full time reading interventionists became a part time

one. In addition, reading specialists spent three months of the school year supporting NWEA test

coordination, which means these testing periods reduced their intervention time. Reading

Specialist Lisa said,

> I can't take my kids every day, because in fall, it was like a month off of testing of
>
> instruction. And then in the winter, same thing, kind of like a month, three to four weeks,
>
> and then we're gonna in the spring again. So that's like three months out of my year plus
>
> this week of WIDA…Yeah. It's like 10 weeks almost. Maybe even more, could be 12 to
>
> 13 weeks that I am not doing intensive, you know, intervention with these kids.

Three months in the academic year (fall to spring semester), one-third of possible intervention

time annually disappeared due to testing coordinating. While many children needed more

intervention, there was a lack of human resources to support them, and even standardized tests

reduced the intervention time.

5) *Low Attendance and Emotional Needs*

Urban students have a relatively lower attendance rate relative to other districts due to

various family circumstances and district transportation. Through school visits, I easily found

decorations and video clips that promote the importance of attendance since the low attendance

relates to learning loss. There were also many issues in low-income families, in the case of ELs

who were coming from war zones as traumatized refugees, so they were often in situations where they had to be addressed first. Linda, a bilingual department administrator, said,

> One is to make sure that we have the social emotional learning component identified to make sure these kids are okay. That's just one area. If we don't have the mental health support for many of these kids that come with trauma, until we work on that, it's very difficult for them to have open space in their minds to become learners.

Since psychological stability must be a prerequisite for children to learn, providing adequate resources to meet these social and emotional needs was recognized as a big challenge throughout this district.

6) *Low Parental Involvement*

Parent support, one of the critical elements of the RBG3, is difficult to expect from this urban context. Since parents had to work for a living to support their homes, children whose parents have two or three jobs found might rarely see their parents at home. Some parents were truck drivers or worked at nail art shops even over the weekend. It was difficult for parents to care for and support children's reading carefully because they had to work for a long time with two to three jobs or participate in classes to obtain a high school diploma to prepare for the job market. Even highly educated EL parents had to begin from the bottom of the career ladder in the US, so they spent relatively less time with their children compared to non-ELs' parents. EL teacher Susan said,

> These kids don't have books at home. They don't have parents at home. Parents are working at night. So that is a huge part of growing your reading level. Is reading at home with your family. That's not happening here…Of course there are parents that read with

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their kids, but for the majority in this district parents are working. They're working two

jobs, three jobs.

Because many EL parents who are refugees and immigrants in the district were in the process of

learning English as well, they could not provide proper support to help students' learning. Due to

the economic and language barriers that many parents faced, schools became, for many students,

the most important resource that students accessed to learn academically in their lives.

7) *Learning Loss Caused By COVID-19*

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, my participants reported 18 months of academic, social,

and behavioral learning loss, since many students had not attended online learning and the

remote learning environment didn't provide enough social interactions like in-person learning.

During the pandemic, above all, parental support was necessary at home for younger children in

K-3. However, without enough parental support, students did not show up during the online

teaching period. As a result, many lost their learning, although this is a critical period for lower

grade students to establish fundamental literacy skills. Reading Specialist Lisa said,

> The kids who didn't come remotely, there are a lot of students that are behind in terms of
>
> what they should have learned last year, the kids who are in second grade now only have
>
> had a half a year of kindergarten. In school then first grade was remote and then they
>
> moved on to second grade so most of them. So those second graders are the last second
>
> graders that are behind. And then there's quite a bit of third graders that are behind too,
>
> you know, if they did not come remotely, it really is showing up as they've missed a lot
>
> of learning.

Likewise, accumulated learning loss during the pandemic in early grades became a barrier for learning the next grade level component for students.

2.4. Summary

The revealed phenomenon was that the Blue district was explicitly against the retention of RBG3. But educators still had to write up IRIPs and provide interventions along with data tracking. While policy information and communities might have shaped educators' initial policy sensemaking in response to the law, their beliefs about learning, their pedagogical relationship with students, and, above all, the challenges of their situated contexts, affected their sensemaking the most. Then, how did educators in urban contexts shape sensemaking of RBG3? The next section will explain it in detail.

3. Policy Sensemaking of RBG3 behind the Revealed Phenomenon

All participants in urban contexts revealed their policy sensemaking in the form of interpretation as the policy intends initially. However, as their initial interpretations intertwined with challenging contexts, their sensemaking evolved into motivated reasoning and evoked negative emotions. In this circumstance, they reconstructed the interpretation of RBG3, which connected with revealed actions in the phenomenon. This process is described below in Figure 3.
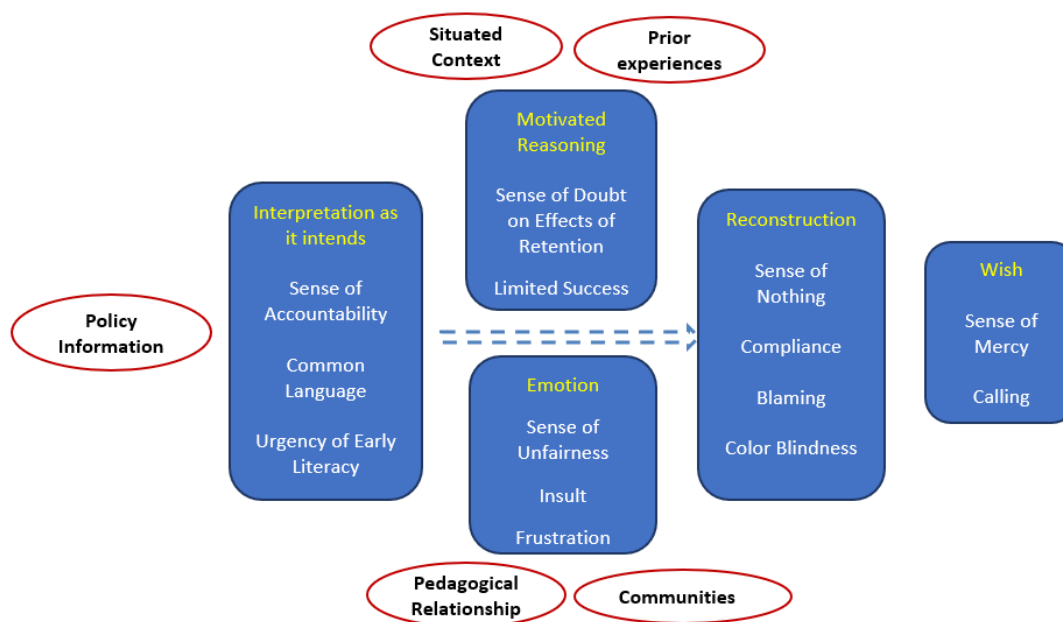
Figure 3. The process of RBG3 policy sensemaking of educators in the Blue district

3.1. Interpretation of the Law's intent, As Shaped by Policy Information

3.1.1. Sense of Accountability, Common Language, and Urgency of Early Literacy

Most participants understood the intention of RBG3. The third grade reading law emphasizes the importance of third-grade reading competency and requires instructional changes, assessments, and interventions. Due to this law, all participants reported a sense of urgency in early literacy with more accountability. While implementing this law, they said it was helpful to have a common language in terms of diagnostic assessments, interventions, and curriculum for discussing how to improve students' early reading competency. For example, Principal Joseph said,

> I think this law probably falls into broader categories of kind of how our system has
>
> moved to greater accountability…Since No Child Left Behind, we had really high-stakes
>
> measures and high-stakes accountability. And I think this law is part and parcel, I think,

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on the one end of laws of this type, I think there's a really cool opportunity to shift our

focus to measurements. How are we thinking critically about outcomes? I think that's

probably helpful in some ways. I think it's helpful to have a common language around

progress monitoring and intervention and reading…It requires teachers to have

conversations with parents and stakeholders and actually use their assessment data. One

of the things we're looking at in [Blue] is we've had a number of assessments used in our

school district. And the focus has been on the extent to which it impacted the teacher's

evaluation scores rather than on this is meaningful data to identify which students have

the greatest need.

Compared to the past, when students' scores were recognized as one of the factors for teacher

evaluation, the RBG3 law allowed educators to see student scores to discuss students' needs and

teachers' instructional change through IRIP works.

3.2. Motivated Reasoning Shaped by Situated Contexts and Prior Experiences

However, considering their contextual challenges, all of the participants thought retention

was unrealistic in their "broken" system so that "it would not be rooted" in their district as it

intends. Accordingly, they had doubts about the retention effects in the broken system without

enough support from the state. They ultimately felt "unfair" by comparing themselves to

suburban districts with relatively high SES and high-performing schools.

3.2.1.   *Sense of Doubt of Retention Effect in a "Broken" System*

Most participants believed that their system was broken and unable to provide

appropriate intervention and support for retained students. Since 90% of third-grade students are

assumed to be retained according to the 2021-22 winter NWEA scores, educators have cast

doubt on the possibility of retention for most third graders. EL teacher Susan shared her concern

when she first heard about this law. She said,

> When I first heard it, I was like, oh, they're gonna have to hire so many third-grade
>
> teachers. There's gonna be so many teachers in third grade. How is that sustainable in our
>
> district? Every single kid would get held back.

An RBG3 district administrator, Amy, was also concerned that, "so giving them another year of

a broken system where I can't even guarantee you'll have a certified teacher in front of you. It is

horrifying." Likewise, educators in the Blue district had a great fear initially since they assumed

that most third graders would be retained. Accordingly, more third grader teachers will be

necessary but the Blue district has faced a great number of teacher shortages.

> And even if they can provide more teachers for retention, they still doubted the retention

effect in their same system which proved that it was not working properly for third graders to

reach the third grade reading proficiency grade level. Principal Joseph said, "If a set of

conditions led you not to be able to learn by grade three, then why would being retained in those

same set of conditions?" In addition, a former literacy coach, Britney, said,

> If you're just retaining a child and the next year with them it's business as usual with the
>
> same instruction that they've been getting and the same curriculum, the same type of
>
> teaching, you can't expect to see any difference.

They believed that having one more year in a broken system will not make any difference for

students. If teachers have a manageable number of students, they might expect a positive effect

on retention. However, in the urban context, where most third-grade students are expected to

become retained, the dominant perception across participants is that it is practically impossible to

realize rather than expect an effect on retention. This seemingly unmanageable task under the lack of resources made doubt that the policy would be successfully implemented and eventually made educators reject retention, as part of policy messages (Coburn, 2001).

3.2.2. *Sense of Limited Success: "Our Success Can't be Easily Quantified"*

As RBG3 law has put more emphasis on the significant role of standardized tests for diagnosis, intervention, and even retention, educators in urban contexts have been more worried about the definition of student success. Assessment results should be aligned with intervention in IRIPs, meaning teachers have more responsibilities for students' growth. While the NWEA assessment shows students' growth at least in a given normalized grade level, the MSTEP assessment does not provide any individual growth. Rather, it captures where students are at a given point in time. Although students in the Blue district will receive the retention letter from the state, and eventually be exempted from the retention by district decision, the district is not free from the pressure from the state mandating improvement of students' achievement in a norm-referenced, grade-level test-score-oriented learning environment. Principal Joseph said,

> When we use NWEA, we use it for its growth capacity. It's ability to measure students' growth. If I'm in the first percentile, but I jump up to the 20th percentile, I am rewarded and applauded as a teacher. However, my students still won't make it to proficiency on the state assessment. And that's what I saw. My students came in where they were, and they dramatically jumped up. That was to be lauded and celebrated. However, when they took that state assessment, that state standardized assessment, it did not have the ability to capture that as in primary basis was, did you meet this standardized metric? And in the same way, if we do some great work at the Green school, we will see an increase in

growth at our school on MAP. However, our state assessment may not capture that,

which then we'll trigger a retention notice.

Although urban educators put more effort into addressing multilayered student difficulty issues,

such as coming from poverty and family problems, there was no measurement of how these

students grow socially and emotionally from learning at the school. Encouraging students under

challenging environments not to stop learning may not be easier than helping affluent students to

increase 10 points of reading scores. Principal Joseph also said, "What I often say is that our

successes can't be easily quantified by some of the simple measures and I believe that

nonetheless, there's still some work to be done." In an educational environment that celebrates

only visible quantifying measurement results, my participants were worried about the limited

definition of student success and growth.

3.3. Emotions shaped by pedagogical relationships and communities

The doubts about retention effects in a broken system and limited success brought

negative emotions to urban educators, such as unfairness, insult, and frustration.

3.3.1. *Sense of "Unfairness"*

Participants in this study often reported feeling that the RBG3 policy enactment in a less

supportive environment was unfair as they perceived the goals presented by this policy as

unrealistic in given contexts. This unfair feeling was revealed in terms of lack of support from

the state, comparison with other districts' resources, student academic growth in an urban

context, and comparison with other EL districts despite different EL characteristics. First,

participants could not understand why the state requires better reading outcomes without proper support to obtain the goal. Reading Interventionist Lisa expanded on this confusion by saying,

> They [state] are not listening to us, they are not giving us what we need in order to get them [students] up there… It's complicated and it's pushed down from the state… because it's like they made the law. Rather than like us saying, if they're not at this level, it's not good and what can we do about it? We need more reading interventions. The state has pushed down this law, but they haven't provided more support.

Second, participants often expressed the practice of comparing student performance across different contexts of other districts located in the same county as unfair. More specifically, they lamented comparisons between struggling school districts with districts that have relatively high SES families, high performing ELs, and more human and material resources. A formal literacy coach, Britney, who shifted her position from a literacy coach to a part-time reading specialist due to a funding cut for literacy coaches in December 2021, and her three colleagues in the same position left as well, reported a high demand for training teacher literacy coaches after reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. She explained,

> Because then you had teachers coming back from a pandemic in school and I've had five or six teachers saying, why can't you coach me anymore? I need someone to help me with writing. I need someone to help me learn how to teach spelling. I need someone to, you know, and it's like, they want to learn. And, and so then you build that and you get them going and then it's like, oh, just kidding. We're done for a year. You know? And, and if anything, this is the year that teachers need the most support because it's the first year back in person from the pandemic. And so teachers feel the most overwhelmed and the least supported.

Britney confessed feelings of sadness from the fact that she could no longer support teachers'

teaching as a coach and started to talk about the district which has maintained literacy coaches

after school reopening during the pandemic? She said, "They [another district] have more

resources and less need, and we have more need and less resources."

Third, participants also expressed a lack of recognition students' personal educational

growth in the RBG3 law as another unfair element in the policy. Principal Joseph said,

> If the state's standardized assessment is targeting students to be at this place however
>
> we've had a disproportionate amount of marginalized students coming into the building
>
> with lower beginning scores, they can essentially do much more learning than their white
>
> peers. I didn't mean to throw race in there, but they can do much more than peers in other
>
> social economic statuses who came into the building with more assets. But still, be
>
> retained or suggested for retention.

Although the students here might learn more than other districts' students when considering the

different departure point of learning preparation, their growth will not be celebrated in the state

standardized tests. This implies that they are still not achieving enough to reach the grade level

standards. Rather than celebrating their personal growth, the law suggests retention.

Last, some participants complained about the practice of comparing achievement levels

of ELs among districts with a high number of ELs. Although ELs are a heterogenous group due

to multilayered characteristics such as the number of language usage, social emotional status,

SES, pre-schooling experiences, and immigrant status, they are often exposed to the linear

comparison of one another according to the number of ELs in a district. A bilingual department

Specialist, Mary, mentioned,

It's not really a fair comparison because we have an enormous population of English

language learners that are coming from, we as districts, we have similar housing

insecurity and food insecurity and all those disruptions, but we then also have the added

layer of English language learners.

Under the RBG3 pressures that emphasized the importance of standardized tests, educators in

urban contexts felt more unfair with this linear comparison between districts with a similar

number of ELs. Compared to high-performing districts, which have a relatively manageable

small number of struggling readers, these low-performing districts may have more challenges in

which they need to provide a greater number of interventions for a high number of

underperforming students (Ballou & Springer, 2008).

3.3.2. Sense of Insult: "Not Doing Enough"

Teachers are second only to parents in knowing students well. Teachers spend a

considerable amount of time each day with students, so teachers can know the exact level of

children through observing them in various class activities and tasks. Even without standardized

tests, teachers can evaluate students according to their own assessments by encouraging growth,

believing in competence, and persevering to give children time to grow. However, this score-

oriented accountability system did not place any trust in teachers. The fundamental implication is

these tests will supervise teachers' instructional quality, which may need to be corrected. An EL

teacher Laura said, "So I feel so bad because it's like you have these laws that make teachers feel

like they're not doing enough."

Even if a teacher's teaching at a school with already prepared children, where it is much

easier for students to succeed on tests, high scores on tests will be recognized as a result of good

teaching. In schools with generally good academic performance, these tests may still bring pressure, but they may also work as a tool of relief, confirming teacher practices are good enough. In contrast, in schools with poor academic performance, the test results work as a tool of insult as well as pressure. Teachers in urban contexts have to receive the implication that the low performing students' scores prove that their teaching is always wrong and needs to be fixed, and they may receive no recognition for their teaching efforts in their difficult working environment. And this results in turning a blind eye to policy messages. Special education teacher Nia said,

> It causes more harm in a sense that not only the students, but the teacher feel like we are not successful…You internalize that you are not able to communicate and teach and that your practice is not well, and those negative feelings can affect you as a teacher.

These discouraging messages from the standardized tests that required seemingly unattainable goals forced teachers to follow their professional expertise to do what was best for their students and push students to learn English as quickly as possible. An EL teacher Laura said,

> It's discouraging to see these mandates. And I think for me personally, I just roll my eyes. Whatever. I know what I'm doing, I know I'm making a difference. I know these kids are growing. But the flip side is it's hard. I have to have a target. I have to have a goal for my students. And this goal will never be attained.

Although students take an adjustable computer-based test like NWEA, the foundation is based on norm-referenced grade standards. How did teachers feel when they saw that the results have always been in the lowest percentile? Teachers, who see, understand, and gradually raise things up to students' levels and teach according to each student's learning path, not the normalized standard, said they knew that this assessment didn't really tell their students' skills, but it was

very painful every time they saw testing moments and the results. That despondency when teachers' commitment is unrecognized triggers the sense of insult.

3.3.3. Sense of "Frustration" and "Helplessness"

My participants felt frustration and helplessness in an environment emphasizing normalized academic success. Teachers said it was terrible to tell a very small child, who has a lot of potentials to grow, where they are compared to the national norm. So teachers said they never talked about the standardized test results to parents at conferences. EL teacher Laura said,

> Can you imagine me telling here's your score right here? Okay. I'm gonna tell this little child that she is at the first level in the entire United States. She's at the first below the mean she's below the mean, okay, this little child speaks Swahili at home. She is well developed. She's an excellent child. She's responsible. She's speaking two languages. She's raising her family. Then I have to say that she's well below the national norm, I have to give this to her parents.

And looking at the children who were having a hard time during the test, the teachers reported that they felt helpless, saying they had nothing to say but to do their best. Special education teacher Nia said, "The difficult part is that as a teacher, I can only say, keep trying, do your best." Teachers who witnessed students' anxiety expressed their helplessness. Is this a worthwhile experience for children to endure?

3.4. Reconstructed interpretation connected with revealed actions

The motivated reasoning (sense of doubt of retention effect and limited success) and negative emotions (sense of unfairness, insult, and frustration) made sense makers reconstruct

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interpretations of RBG3 (sense of nothing, compliance, blaming, and color blindness with deficit thinking) that eventually connected with their revealed actions.

3.4.1. **S**ense of "Nothing" like "Tumbleweed"

When the RBG3 was passed in 2016, all my participants felt deep fear since they knew that most of their third-grade students would be retained. But recently, they have made a district consensus that no one will be retained without parents' permission, and they will exempt students as much as they can. Accordingly, they perceive the law ultimately changes nothing. Amy, an RBG3 district administrator, said,

> It's ultimately up to the district. So it's like, the state is mandating an IRIP, but they don't
>
> have to see it. And then it's mandating a good cause exemption which can cover
>
> everybody. So it's a bunch of like circles and busy work. It's not fixing anything.

Likewise, Principal Joseph also described his perception about retention with the photo of tumbleweed as shown in Figure 4, by saying, "As far as the teeth of the policy, I don't really think it [retention] has an effect. It's like a tumbleweed moving through town and moving out of town." Instead, he stated,

> Theory of practice behind monitoring students' proficiency, that's been really formative
>
> for me… And so when we have our weekly intervention meetings, that's kind of the lens,
>
> like this big conversation about progress monitoring.

Therefore, urban educators perceive these mandated tasks from RBG3 such as retention and IRIPs have changed nothing. Instead, they selectively accepted the importance of progress monitoring as necessary.

Figure 4. The photo of a Tumbleweed Principal Joseph Brought to the Second Interview

3.4.2. Sense of "Compliance"

With the compounding challenges of teachers' situated contexts hampering the policy enactment mechanism, educators perceived writing IRIPs as compliance. My participants reported the biggest difference between before and after the law implementation was writing IRIPs to have a communication with parents about intervention and track students' growth. However, since a teacher had to manage IRIPs for 90% of students in their classroom three times a year, they just filled out IRIPs to submit to the district. A former literacy coach, Britney, said, "A lot of teachers think of it as a way, something they just have to tick off their lists and get done and turn in, and then it's never revisited after they turn it in." Without appropriate support to develop interventions and instructions through PDs and coaching, teachers naturally saw this paperwork as one of the many tasks they have to do to stay in compliance, without shifting the

fundamental mindset that utilizes IRIPs as a tool to communicate with parents to provide solid

support from home and school. The RBG3 district administrator, Amy, said,

> So, because the IRIPs came out of the third-grade reading law, our teachers view them as
>
> compliance. Of course, they do not view them as a tool to partner with parents and move
>
> the needle. That's our job. Like our office has to shift that mindset so hard.

Without a fundamental mindset change toward positive expectations for IRIPs, with attainable

goals given proper support for instructional improvement, the IRIPs also became another

paperwork task from which teachers did not expect any instructional change. This result of

compliance was also found in an interview with the El family. The mother of third-grade EL

Carlos could not remember the contents of the IRIP she received, only sent it after signing it, and

did not recognize the law itself. Therefore, even if the district sends a document explaining the

law, it tells us that it is difficult to be understood without enough communication between

teachers and parents in the classroom. Likewise, teachers' perception of the law with the sense of

compliance also affected how parents value the elements of the law.

3.4.3. Sense of "Blaming"

Obviously, my participants were aware of the intentions of the law. Above all, they

wanted to provide better teaching through this law with the aim of helping students to read

better. However, many contextual obstacles have solidified the fact that it is hard to have the

expectation that children will eventually have grade-level reading skills by the third grade.

Teachers felt that policymakers had come to an unrealistic conclusion. This frustration

eventually led to educators criticizing each other. Administrators criticized the poor quality of

teaching, and teachers criticized the lack of support from the district and low involvement of

parents. And the Blue district historically retained students in kindergarten for a long time and they already had a culture of early retention. An RBG3 district administrator, Amy, said,

> The [retention] research is clear. It doesn't work and it damages them social-emotionally, but we are a culture in this district of liking retention. Because then it means that it's not my fault. Oh, it's the parent's fault because the attendance is terrible, and they don't read with them at home and they don't come to conferences and they don't... they might be working four part-time jobs. They can't come of course. Or they've got six kids in different buildings and it's all they can do, so we still blame parents a hundred percent. We've gotten away with it forever.

According to her interview, 35% of kindergarten students in the last fifteen years have been retained. Under this context, retention has been utilized to blame students' low performance on parents. And she also pointed out the low quality of instructions of teachers.

> Let me think of the major things. They're [teachers] only intervening twice a week or their intervention doesn't match the diagnostics that they need. They're just not growing.

At this point, whether it is the children's fault, the parents' fault, the teacher's fault, or the district's fault, the cause is constantly tossed back and forth and argued over. But is this really a problem that can be solved by criticizing each other? If you look closely, everyone was doing their best. The administrators were trying to create a district-level data hub and find the right curriculum for this district through an equity lens. Teachers were encouraging and teaching children every day without any instructional preparation time. Parents were raising their children while working two or three jobs and just beginning to learn English themselves. The principal tried to encourage teachers to systematically monitor and support children by establishing a school-level data tracking system to regularly share information acquired through the

intervention team with teachers. In the context of a policy that requires fast results rather than acknowledging individuals' best, an atmosphere of criticizing someone is created. The policy messages brought frustration, leading to multi-stakeholders' deficit perspectives.

3.4.4. *Sense of "Color Blindness" with Deficit Thinking*

Furthermore, as score-oriented growth has become important in this frequent testing environment, the educators were pressured to become "colorblind," treating all students the same regardless of their diverse backgrounds and needs. It was intended to exclude numerous factors such as students' racial and cultural knowledge related to student learning and only talk about learning itself: high and low scores, to be exact. When teachers began talking about learning as a score, they started to see low-performing children, leaving out the numerous assets that a child brings to that community, and beneath that, teachers developed a sense of blame for the community that their students belong to, which implicitly leads to deficit thinking. Principal Joseph said,

> We have a number of teachers kind of committed to color blind ideology. This idea that
> students' race doesn't matter, the particularities of their culture don't matter, but what
> should matter is just, are they learning?... We've got a number of teachers with some
> deficit lenses and so they've worked with kind of generations of poor black families and
> will say things like, how come they can't do this? Are they always doing this? Why do
> they always do this? So we've got kind of those two kinds of cross currents: color blind
> ideologies that don't recognize the particular assets within communities of color and their
> kind of cultures that lends itself to over celebrating white dominant culture. Cause that's
> what it equals, if we're color blind, then we're saying everybody should be white or white

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normed on the flip side of that, we've got communities of color whose deficits are made

too. They're brought up too often, we essentialize all that's wrong in those communities.

And it's just done in subtle ways. And so this is particularly white teachers that will kind

of do this color blinding stuff. And this is part, most likely teachers of color that will do

this deficit kind of painting of everything. So you got those two cross currents that come

together within the school. So what my job as a principal is the trade-off of the deficit

coding into the high expectation piece.

Ironically, the Blue district has celebrated the diverse cultures of different communities

throughout reading month activities related to different communities (Black, Latinx, refugee and

immigrant, etc.), international nights and holiday events. However, students' home culture was

not integrated into core instruction. Students' cultures were valued outside of classroom learning,

but were not considered assets for learning, which resulted from context-free testing items and

curriculum.

3.5. Wish

This reconstructed sensemaking (sense of nothing, compliance, blaming, and

colorblindness) made urban district educators wish the mercy from the state on their decision and

rely on a sense of calling to keep doing their best even in challenging contexts.

3.5.1. Sense of "Mercy"

The Blue district decided they would not retain anybody, and they hoped for mercy from

the state on the decision. Amy, the RBG3 district administrator, said has shown her anxiety about

the possibility of this district's decision being accepted by the state by saying,

Is the state prepared for 90% of their third graders staying another year in a teacher

shortage? I can't answer. It's like we're at the mercy of the state. We know the research

says it's not good to retain them. That's not going to retain them except for special

circumstances. And that it takes four times longer to intervene with a third grader than it

does with a kindergartner.

Although the Blue district determined they will exempt students as much as they can, they wish

their decision, to focus on better interventions and data tracking rather than retaining students,

would be accepted by the state.

3.5.2. *Sense of "Calling"*

Because of the numerous contexts in an urban district that created additional challenges

to implementing the policy, the Blue district and those like it required more support from the

state. The teacher shortage led to no instructional planning time, low teaching quality, and

teacher burnout in the district. Although many social emotional issues needed to be addressed,

the immense pressure created by the testing-oriented accountability system exacerbated the

situation. In a reality that cannot be relied on for any resources in complex and difficult

situations, the only thing urban educators can fall back on is their sense that teaching is their

calling. Amy, the RBG3 district administrator, said,

This is connected to culture and climate because teachers leave because they do not feel

supported. And when we lost the REAP grant, we lost all instructional coaches and

support. And so we have a long history of thinking that we are failing because we don't

have enough interventionists and that a teacher should be able to hand a child to an

interventionist and fix them and then give them back when they're ready for grade level

content. And that's simply not our reality. So every teacher has to now become prepared

for like a three-to-four-year span of abilities. And, and we were there before, but now it's

brought light to it. And so rightly though our teachers are exhausted and burned out and I

mean to truly differentiate plans, it would take it. It takes your life. It has to be a calling.

Despite the frustrating educational context, my participants had a strong mission to keep going

through enduring difficulties to support their students, even in the situation where there was no

proper acknowledgment for their endless efforts. In chaotic and unfulfilling situations, teachers

tried to have a self-controlled mindset, as EL teacher Laura said:

It is hard to let go at the end of the day. It's hard to let go. Because teaching is never

done. That's the negative part. It's hard to let go. Sometimes you just need a Bloody Mary

to let go, and then you forget. Okay. I did my best. And just gonna relax, a glass of wine

at night or something. But I think I love teaching and so yes, you'll need that.

3.6. Particular Sensemaking toward ELs

While the above section was about how educators in an urban context engaged in

sensemaking regarding RBG3, this section is about educators' sensemaking in support of a

particular EL student population. After the recent MDE announcement (MDE, 2020a) regarding

EL's civil rights, which guarantees access to age-appropriate mainstream classes, it became

difficult to retain ELs with the reason of language barrier. However, regardless of the exemption

policy, in a learning context that emphasizes continued assessment to measure English

proficiency and immediate interventions, ELs have received a message that requires quick

English acquisition. EL teachers were worried about current students losing their primary

language as they learned English, hoping that they could practice at home to at least maintain

bilingualism. Furthermore, rather than one or two same languages among ELs, this district has more than 10 different languages in a classroom. Accordingly, students heavily relied on their common language, English, and teachers also provided English-only instruction. The bilingual assistants came to the classroom for 90 minutes per day, but it was not for co-teaching with teachers, but for assisting with basic levels of students' learning such as how to pronounce and write the alphabet and simple words and sentences. Once these students advanced to the next level of English proficiency, their exposure to English only increased. Therefore, while their international cultural knowledge was valued in their school's cultural events such as international nights or international holidays recognition events, I rarely saw this knowledge valued in EL teachers' instruction. In these circumstances, this section explains how educators in the Blue district make RBG3 policy sensemaking toward ELs.

3.6.1. *Sense of Unrealistic Exemption for Multilayered ELs*

Regarding retention exemption for ELs stated in the law, all EL teachers and bilingual department officers said that it is an unrealistic expectation that their EL students, mostly refugees and immigrants in the district, catch up to their grade level within three years. An EL teacher Laura said,

> I think it's an unrealistic assumption. Research shows us that it takes five to seven years to master a new language. We're assuming these children are coming to America with home support that has pencils and computers and that they have the means to learn. For example, I have probably six to eight cultures here. One of the cultures when they came a couple of years ago, had never been in school…It was in chaos. They were from refugee camps. The kids were running around my classroom. I was like, what do I do? I had to

teach them how to sit. I had to teach them how to hold a pencil. And I'm not making this

up. And I had to teach them how to listen, how to walk in a line. So that was one culture.

Then another culture they've been here for a while, they understand they were in

preschool. So, they spoke only Hmong in their home until kindergarten. So now they're

learning English. So by the end of third grade, you can tell the kids in here who are ready

to take that [M-STEP]. I think that should be the teacher's discretion. I think it should be

based upon how many years the student has been in a school setting in the United States.

Likewise, many ELs in an urban context, especially with refugee status, may have limited or

interrupted education experiences before coming to the US. As a result, teachers who support

refugee ELs cannot immediately initiate teaching them content. Before teaching subjects,

teachers have to educate them on how to sit, hold a pencil, and stay in the classroom.

Furthermore, along with educating parents to understand the U.S. educational system, teachers

need to care about their basic needs, such as food and clothing, before language acquisition and

academic subjects. When ELs are physically, emotionally, and economically ready to learn

something, teachers can initiate their teaching. Therefore, teaching refugee ELs may require

multiple additional tasks than teaching ELs who have already had schooling experiences and

have been exposed to English for immigration preparation. This finding is aligned with ELs'

language development research, which says various factors such as family SES, time spent

exposed to English, and disability status impact EL's proficiency (Halle, Hair, Wadner,

McNamara & Chien, 2012). Furthermore, much research has revealed that reaching English

academic proficiency would take four to ten years, compared to oral English proficiency, which

can be developed for three to five years (Cummins, 2000; Hakuta and Beatty., 2000).

Furthermore, teachers have to provide more clues for enhancing the understanding of certain vocabulary that students have never experienced in their languages and cultures. A former literacy coach, Britney, who had many years of teaching ELs, reported,

> They didn't have any idea what a farm was. They didn't know what chickens and pigs were, they hadn't had that experience. They didn't have any frame of mind to, so it's thinking that was a big, my first-year teaching kind of like an aha moment. So there's more that goes into it than just knowing how to read the words. It's like they have to have some vocabulary and context around the story that they're gonna read if they're really gonna connect and make meaning of it. 'Cause the ultimate purpose of reading is to make meaning of what you're reading. So I think that a student's culture and background knowledge needs to kind of align with whatever books they're reading and that is a challenge.

While some vocabulary words are easily recognized for non-ELs, teachers cannot take for granted that ELs who have grown up in different cultures will share a common understanding with their non-EL peers. Therefore, teachers must always consider whether EL students know what each vocabulary word means and have previous experiences related to the word to understand what they read. Due to these differences of background knowledge, EL teachers should modify mainstream curriculum activities to provide adequate comprehensible input, which requires extensive instructional planning time that the urban district could not provide.

While shadowing in EL teachers' classrooms, I noticed the wide range of English proficiency within each classroom. In the third-grade EL sheltered classroom, four out of 26 students reached grade-level proficiency due to educated parents and older siblings' English support. In contrast, more than half of students could not read or write a sentence properly, and

five new students from Afghanistan recently could not say a word. Likewise, in the situation to meet newly arrived ELs in the mid-year, EL teachers were required to have a wider range of instructional differentiations than general classroom teachers. Therefore, depending on whether they were born in the US or not, whether their home language is English, a different primary language, or both or multiple languages, and whether they had previous schooling experiences in their home countries, students have shown a wide range of pre-K to grade-three English proficiency levels. Table 4 below shows the factors that impact ELs' English proficiency development, which were found from existing research and my study.

Table 4. *Factors Impacting ELs' Communicative and Academic Proficiency Development*

Factors form existing research	Factors from my study
· Race · Ethnicity · Immigrant status · SES · Home language(s) and proficiency · Formal schooling · Trauma from war zone or family dynamics · Disabilities	· Parents' language usage for English exposure · Older siblings' English proficiency to help · Primary language stance (desirable or undesirable/ one, bi, or multiple) · English stance: English as a complete second language, or English as one of multiple languages · Classmates who have the same primary languages to help for translation of instruction · Cultural background knowledge to understand learning materials (commonality between the US and home countries)

Therefore, since ELs are a heterogeneous group, the exemption category cannot be stated as a one-size-fits-all. It is not reasonable to expect that every EL will be able to reach grade level within three years. As stated below by bilingual department officer Mary, a case-by-case approach needs to be considered in support of Els:

But I think sometimes, just in practice, that tends [the difficult distinction between language barriers and disabilities] to happen, like those get discovered in layers and that's kind of part of our wraparound services and having representation from all of these different communities within our bilingual assistant staff can be really beneficial because it's not black and white. A lot of these things are very layered and there's kind of nuance to them. There are communities where things like mental health are not discussed at all and where it's very taboo. And so thinking through how to approach questioning families and, so those are things, and they're not necessarily things that we have a clear and precise procedure on, because in many cases they have to be taken at a case-by-case basis.

As she stated, in addition to the necessity of a case-by-case approach to help EL communities to settle in a community, educators also had to acknowledge specific family history and layered factors that impact ELs' English proficiency development, in order to provide an individual supportive approach. Therefore, my participants perceived that the exemption of RBG3 for ELs ignored the multilayered ELs' characteristics.

3.6.2. *Sense of Discouragement from Continued Failure Messages*

Although EL teachers knew that their students ultimately would not be retained, they confronted failure messages constantly in their daily lives in their classrooms. This was because all ELs except those who had less than one year in the U.S. had to take all standardized tests like non-ELs. The big gap between standardized tests and current EL students' levels caused a big dilemma. While they have slowly grown in English proficiency, these frequent tests brought the failure messages to ELs, saying, "you are still not enough." EL teacher Susan said,

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I think it undermines me as a teacher because I'm here on the front lines. I see what works and doesn't work. I'm doing my own assessments already as are all these teachers. We have to do separate assessments to guide our teaching and to see where these kids really are. So the test it's so much pressure to get good scores and to move their scores up. And when you're looking at the test, you can see how the results aren't really gonna show what's really inside. Anyone can see that as any common sense. But so then it's like a waste of time and a waste of stress and I don't wanna put the pressure that I have to get their scores up. I don't wanna put that on these students because it's setting them up for failure. It's setting them up to say like, oh, here's where you're supposed to be. You're in second grade. You're supposed to be here. And then when they score way down here, how depressing is that? They'll just, I'm gonna lose them. They're gonna shut down. So I don't really even give it much intent even to the students. I don't say that to them, cuz I want them to still love learning and I want them to have confidence.

Although EL teachers created their own assessments to fit into their EL students' levels, the mandated district assessments made them stop using the alternative assessments. Furthermore, according to civil rights (MDE, 2020a), these ELs in sheltered classrooms have to be exposed to a certain mainstream curriculum the district required at the grade level. While I observed the usage of the curriculum, teachers tried to use the topic or story of the materials, but it was too much higher than the students' levels, so they had to create additional worksheets that fit current ELs' needs. Between the state and district demands and EL students' needs, teachers juggled how to support ELs.

3.6.3. *Sense of Anxiety from Tests*

These frequent failure messages from the tests discouraged students' motivation and invoked test anxiety with low self-esteem. Teachers described how students expressed their anxiety during testing. Below is a field note while observing the WIDA ACCESS testing of ELs at Green elementary school on April 7th, 2022.

Carlos (EL, third-grader) is sitting at one of the school library tables. The other four ELs are sitting separately at the tables. Reading Specialist Lisa is teaching them how to practice with three sample questions and start the actual test. There are some problems logging in and connecting to the headphones. It took the teacher 10 minutes to solve the problems.

Students are starting a real test after clicking on the answers to three example questions. During the reading test, which takes nearly 40 minutes, Carlos carefully reads the passages of the first two questions and marks the answers. Then he started looking around to see how the other friends took the test. And he found that peers except for a girl, who had intermediate-level reading skills, randomly clicked on the answer and clicked on the next button without reading the passages. They seem they can no longer be able to comprehend the reading passages.

Likewise, three other boys are looking around. They seem to want to compare how others handle the test. And they are relieved that they are not the only ones taking the test so quickly. Their reading test is finished in 10 minutes. The boys sit for the rest of the 30 minutes with a very bored look on their faces until the girl finishes her test.

Reading and speaking tests determine the level of the writing test. Although only one girl was fully focused on the reading test, interestingly, the two boys who solved the problem within

10 minutes are assigned to a higher level of writing with that girl. Ms. Lisa and I are very surprised by the result.

In the writing test, three students sit around a semicircular table and sit with Ms. Lisa facing them. She explains how to write answers in three sections. The students are listening attentively.

All of the writing questions, which ask students to describe each picture in order, require much higher writing ability than the students' current levels. Only the girl began to focus on writing the correct answer. The other two boys raise their hands to ask what to write, Ms. Lisa explains how to write their answers in easier words. But she can't tell the answer, so Ms. Lisa repeats her instructions to think carefully and focus on the test.

Students have the right vocabulary to describe these pictures in speaking. Sadly, however, they do not know how to spell correctly. Carlos begins to list the words he knows, and another boy begins to copy the questions. When Carlos writes one sentence, he often checks Ms. Lisa's face.

Carlos: I do not know anything.

Ms. Lisa: Look at the picture. What are they doing?

Carlos: Do I need to write two "e"s?

Ms. Lisa: I cannot tell you. But what is the next word? Think and write. Make sure you need a space.

Carlos: (erasing every answer sadly)

Ms. Lisa: Oh, no. You do not have to erase them. You need to say it out loud, it is okay to then write it. Good job, keep going.

He is trying to show how he is doing his best to Ms. Lisa. Then Ms. Lisa shows him a warm and gentle smile, both sad and comforting. And even though Carlos has nothing to write, he is writing anything by pressing the pencil harder until the end of the test time. His face is a mixture of embarrassment, eagerness, and shame.

This moment made me doubt whether assessments captured students' actual growth, showing that they provoked negative emotions in students and teachers. The time taking assessments is also a part of learning. Students can have confidence when they face activities, assignments, and questions that fit into their level or a little bit higher level where they feel comfortable but challenged as in their zone of proximal development as Vygotsky (1978) emphasized. However, in this test, students were feeling shamed by confronting questions requiring knowledge beyond their current competencies. They didn't try to solve it. Rather, they started to read and write seriously, but after discovering that they couldn't, they started to give up and compare the test speed between themselves and others. And they wanted to show that they were doing their best by often checking the teacher's facial expressions. It was sad to see them trying to write anything they knew. If I were that child's mother, I would have wanted to bring him out of there, saying that he did not have to take this test.

Ms. Lisa, who coordinated the test, reported that "it was really frustrating." Ms. Lisa and I agreed that this WIDA ACCESS test would be very difficult for even non-ELs. Although the students were growing, the cut point to exit the label of "English Learner" through the WIDA ACCESS test seemed very difficult to reach. These discouraging experiences may cause ELs to have low academic self-confidence (de la Torre et al., 2019). Special education teacher Nia also described the moment when students took the NWEA test. She explained,

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I feel like this is how students feel with the tough questions. And they're like, we can't at the moment when they're asking like, hey, can you tell me what this is? And nope, keep trying, like, we're cutting off their questions. And so sometimes that causes more anxiety because we can't answer it. So when we can't respond to the question, I feel like they feel like we're stopping them, and they can't process the information. So when the tough question is asked on the screen, and they turn around and hey, can you come to help me? We're like, nope.

Students frequently asked her how to answer the questions, but she felt sad that she could not answer them. Disappointed students gave up the test. Nia tried to relax them. She said,

Breathe, take away the screen, explaining that it represents what I've taught you and what I need to teach you… And allow them to detach for a minute from the test because the test doesn't represent them. I also say it represents what I've taught you and what I need to teach you. So you show what you've learned. Then the test will tell me what I need to go back to and either reteach or teach in the future. And I think that's important also for teachers to highlight like the test does not always say you did this or you are not strong in this category. It's a reflection of me and where I need to get you to. And if I take away that piece, then it helps to decrease their stress, anxiety, worry of the task. It doesn't always work, but that is what I attempt to do. Push it back on me so that they can finish the test.

Teachers reported two types of students who have shown test anxiety. One group kept looking around to see how others answer the questions quickly, reporting stomach aches or dizziness to go to the bathroom, dropping a pencil frequently, twisting the body, hitting heads, and shaking legs. The other group detached emotionally from the test and just clicked the next button without

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reading, even though reading passages could be adjusted to their levels. An EL teacher, Laura, reported that even in the classrooms, when they utilized reading applications, although the readable reading passage was provided, many students just skipped since they assumed they could not read the passage due to their standardized testing experiences.

To provide a better assessment that fits into ELs' current levels and captures their growth accurately, EL teachers contrived alternative assessments that embraced the wide range of ELs' proficiency levels. However, due to district demand to use only given assessments, teachers could no longer utilize their own assessments. EL teacher Susan said, "Necessity is the mother of invention. But we can't use that anymore for our evaluation. The district says you can only use DRA and NWEA. I think. I don't know if we can even still choose." EL teachers struggled between district demand and student needs.

Early graders in K-3 are physically and emotionally young and pure. This period is critical to developing the joy of learning and confidence with small successful experiences. However, many ELs learned to fear and lack confidence through the tests and were not provided with enough time to grow. With unachievable goals, ELs may internalize the test result as their fault by blaming themselves through interpreting the frequent failure messages (Booher-Jennings, 2008).

3.7. Power Dynamics and Tensions in the Process of Sensemaking

In addition to five factors (policy information, formal and informal communities, situated contexts, prior experiences and knowledge, and pedagogical relationship with students) that affected the process of policy sensemaking, formative contexts and organizational rules subtly impacted it. The tensions caused by these factors made the context of ELs in urban contexts

more difficult to mediate and educators seemed to feel more frustrated when participants thought they could not control these factors.

First, formative context refers to structures that limit the bounds of imaginable possibilities by empowering predominant beliefs and determining organizational rules (Unger, 1987). This study found the government's political stance toward immigrants and refugees and the different notion of ELs and bilinguals as formative context which affects the process of sensemaking. Second, organizational rules refer to organizational power that affects individual decision making to act (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). Although individual educators make sensemaking connected to particular actions aligned with their teaching philosophy and students' learning, organizational rules still determine whether their actions are acceptable. This study found approved standardized tests and assessments by district and EL achievement comparison without considering EL's multiple layers limit individual sensemaking.

3.7.1.   *Government Political Stance toward Immigrants and Refugees*

The district EL policies required flexibility due to the federal government's political stance toward immigrants and refugees. This government policy impacts the EL population of newcomers; accordingly, it results in adjusting different structures of classrooms, human resources, and curriculums. While the Obama administration "opened the flood gates" to immigrants and refugees, the Trump administration "closed [the] door" for the last four years. Therefore, in 2017, the Blue district was "inundated with tons of language learners" from central Africa, speaking Swahili and Bantu. However, as the government stance changed, for the last four years, since there were no more newcomers, the Blue district "pivoted to having programs that were focused on taking students", thereby focusing on "building proficiency and expanding

their skills." Bilingual department officer, Mary, explained how this political stance impacted their district EL policies and structures.

> But now with the new administration [Biden], gates have started to open we've started. I mean, and so we're having to pivot, we're suddenly seeing a lot of brand-new language learners. And so our classrooms are once again, getting students who are needing to learn hello and needing to learn the alphabet and needing, and so, and that's where now we're having to pivot back, we're going back to creating spaces where students can do the introduction to English, but we haven't needed that for the last four years. So that's another side of our programming is that we do actually have to maintain a level of flexibility and modularity to kind of move and change and shift because our populations move and change and shift according to powers beyond us as a district. And so that's another side of our programs.

In this 2021-22 academic year, over 200 students newly arrived in the Blue district, requiring more basic level English programs and human resources. Likewise, depending on different political stands from the federal government, the composition of ELs characteristics and English proficiency development have changed, so that the district has to be open to fluctuating government policies to "tweak" their services to make sure it fits the ELs that they have in the district.

3.7.2. The Different Notions of Bilinguals as ELs and as non-ELs

The notion of EL was recognized as a category that needs to be exited by quick English acquisition measured by WIDA ACCESS, another standardized test that does not capture students' growth accurately. This notion of bilinguals as ELs was distinguished from the notion

of bilinguals as non-ELs who had two languages but meet English proficiency grade levels so that they were no longer identified as ELs. Accordingly, bilingual students as non-ELs were viewed by the education system through asset-based perspectives since they could utilize both primary and second languages fluently, even though their primary language might not be fluent since there was no test measuring their first language proficiency. In contrast, although bilinguals as ELs might have a high level of primary language proficiency and low English proficiency, their bilingualism was viewed as a deficit rather than an asset.

This distinction eventually distinguished students from the asset and deficit perspectives on the premise of English proficiency. Apart from the primary language proficiency, the notion of bilinguals and ELs as English levels were distinguished. Therefore, biliteracy was encouraged, but it was not based on equality between English and another language, but rather on the higher status of English as the desired language.

3.7.3. *Approved Standardized Tests and Assessments by District*

Approved standardized tests and assessments by the district did not match with the current ELs in the Blue district to track their actual academic growth consistently. Therefore, EL teachers created alternative assessments which fit their EL students. However, the rules under RBG3 requiring teachers to utilize only assessments approved by the district prohibited the usage of teachers' self-created assessments. Except for WIDA ACCESS, a non-adjustable computer-based test conducted annually for determining the possibility of exit from EL category, there was no particular assessment for ELs. Therefore, all assessments approved by the Blue district designed for diagnosing and tracking non-ELs academic level and growth, were inappropriate for ELs who have a wide range of English proficiency levels. The assessments EL teachers created

to understand proficiency of all levels from pre-K to third grade could not be utilized since they were not approved by the district. Teachers, who knew the best about students and what they have provided through teaching, could not make and use assessment tools.

3.7.4. *Linear Comparison without Understanding of ELs as Multilayered*

Another blind spot of the accountability systems was an inappropriate linear comparison between districts having a high number of ELs. The bilingual department officer Mary explained why it was inaccurate to compare the districts that have an EL population with one size fits all measurements and why districts chose different approaches for supporting ELs:

We as an inner-city school and as a public school tend to see a different EL population than some of the suburban schools, kind of surrounding us. The biggest difference being where our ELs are coming from as like what brought them to the US. So we see a lot in [Yellow and Red] districts, we see the children of immigrants who are working. And so it's often upper, like the socioeconomic classes are a lot higher. It'll be the children of professors or children of doctors and lawyers, people who have come to the US to start businesses who have immigrated. And then the [Blue] city is a resettlement city, which means that we take a certain quota of refugee families every year. Our ELs are a lot of refugee families. And so they're coming. So that's where a lot of our languages come from too. We won't see languages. I mean, we do actually have some very small groups of all kinds of different languages, but primarily our languages will be things like Arabic because we're seeing kids coming out of places like Syria and Iraq, because of the conflicts in those areas, we see a lot of Swahili because of the conflict in central Africa. We see a lot of Burmese because of the conflict in, so our families are coming from war

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zones and conflict areas and, so that's where the trauma side also comes. And then these

are also lower socioeconomic families. These are families who are coming into

subsidized housing. They are living in apartments and many times housing is a problem.

Food is a problem. There's a lot of scarcity. So there's a lot more to consider around

supporting these families beyond just teaching them English. They need a lot more than

just language support. I think sometimes when we've seen families that are coming over

and the parent is a doctoral student at near University, that's a very different set of

circumstances for their fifth-grade child who may not speak English, but has never

known food insecurity has never had housing insecurity has been in school uninterrupted

up until this point of arriving here in the US. So they're just transitioning into a different

language and it's kind of that one key piece, as opposed to all of these other variables that

we will often see.

Refugees were not able to know where they arrive before landing a city in a country. Therefore,

they did not have prerequisite knowledge about the resettlement place's language, cultures,

climate, and systems, which means most had to learn from the basic level once they settled in the

city. This circumstance refugee ELs faced would be different from ELs of families who chose to

immigrate to the US with jobs of a higher status and prepared English before coming to the US.

Mary continuously explained that,

While with the refugee resettlement system, they don't choose where they go, they have

to leave where they were because it was not safe to be there anymore. But when they are

resettled, they don't get to choose. It's not like somebody opens a catalog and goes, which

country would you like to move to? They literally just are kind of filling gaps. And so

when you leave Afghanistan as a refugee, you could end up in the United States, you

could end up in England, you could end up in Germany, you could end up in Australia,

you could end up in Brazil and you don't necessarily know sometimes until like you get

on a plane. Some of our families are finding out as they're boarding the plane where the

plane is landing. So that's the level of, of kind of forethought and knowledge that they're

getting before they get to come here. So that's why they're touching. They have no idea.

And then even if they do know that they're coming to America, they won't necessarily

know if they're going to Texas or Michigan and that's a hugely different climate.

Therefore, supporting refugee ELs did not mean providing only English support. It meant going

beyond teaching English. The district needed to educate their parents about US educational

systems and laws from the basic level of understanding, which often clashed with their

traditional community knowledge such as a gender inequality perspective on education. Special

Population Coordinator Linda said,

They provide that cultural context also when talking to us on the academic side and

within the school, they're the ones that come back to us and go, this is gonna be a difficult

conversation to have with this family because of the following cultural parameters and

barriers that we face. And I mean, some very simple examples can be, we've encountered

many cultures where the disparity of expectation for education differs drastically between

girls and boys. There's a gender bias. And so we've learned historically. And now we

move kind of through that where we know we have to sometimes have a conversation

with a family explaining why their daughter actually does have to go to school by law.

They have no problem understanding that their son's going to school. Like their son is

going to school. It's perfectly acceptable. Like that's what boys do, but always go to

school, but girls stay home. Girls do housework, girls raise the younger siblings and, and

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we have to kind of go in now, we've been primed, we've been taught. We know that we

now have to go in and have these conversations with families that say, okay, we

understand how it works in your community, we get that. You have these distinct roles.

We understand that. But here in the US, there are laws that require children, under a

certain age, to be educated in school. And that you have to prove that these children are

being educated. Or there are some severe repercussions. And we don't want those

repercussions to come down on the family. So then we have to kind of step in, and it's

not, when I say we that's where it's, it's the cultural brokers, it's the bilingual assistants

who are stepping in and having these conversations.

In this circumstance, where the Blue district must provide multiple supports to EL communities

beyond language help, it is unfair to compare the achievement of ELs among the districts and

evaluate the effectiveness of the district EL policies only by how many EL students there are.

Nevertheless, in a retention culture that emphasizes continuous academic achievement, districts

with many ELs were still compared and evaluated as scores with other districts with similar EL

numbers, excluding their multilayered efforts coming from the different EL and community

characteristics.

3.8. Particular Phenomenon around IRIPs

Considering the Blue district multi-stakeholders' sensemaking and power dynamic in

their policy sensemaking process, it would be worth seeing closely the perceptions of each multi-

stakeholder regarding IRIPs as a particular phenomenon of the RBG3.

Policymakers expected that IRIPs would be the communication tools between teachers

and parents to support students' reading competency with more accountability. However, due to

various challenging contexts that led urban educators to see the contents of the law as unattainable tasks, administrators recognized IRIPs as compliance that should be submitted to the state although the state would not monitor each IRIP completion. Therefore, principals announced the due dates of IRIP submission three times a year to teachers according to the district's request. Teachers were overwhelmed by the high number of IRIP students who need more diagnostic assessments and interventions, so they have shown micro compliance by completing them without valuing their original intention. Parents could not clearly recognize what the IRIP document was for but signed as the school requested. In this circumstance, struggling ELs suffered the test anxiety and pressure of rapid English acquisition under the notion of accountability.

Likewise, the perceptions of IRIPs depending on multi-stakeholders have shown how the policy could not be enacted as it intends but led to unintended consequences.

3.9. Summary

To sum up, the policy sensemaking of urban educators in support of ELs was affected by policy information, communities, situated contexts, prior experiences, and pedagogical relationships with students. When the initial, intended policy interpretation (sense of accountability, common language, and urgency of early literacy) met situated challenging contexts (lack of district-level data hub, teacher shortage, funding for coaching and PDs, low parental involvement, and social-emotional issues), educators' policy interpretation changed to motivated reasoning to have doubts on retention effect in the broken system and a sense of limited success. These senses led to negative emotions (unfairness, insult, and frustration) and eventually reconstructed the policy message (compliance, blaming, and color blindness with

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deficit thinking). As the Blue district is determined not to retain anybody in third grade, but to focus on the theory of practices (intervention and data monitoring), they have to hope for mercy from the state for their decisions and depend on teachers' sense of calling to maintain their practices despite difficult situations.

The district retention informational letter defended the district's decision not to retain students by showing that retention is not effective and should not be done, but there was great fear in investigated sensemaking. Because participants recognized that, in their system, there were so many obstacles that hampered them from reaching the required standards, and their children were growing up in resource constraint contexts and numerous standardized tests that constantly remind them that their efforts are not enough, the initial interpretation of the policy became an "unattainable task." Maybe they're defending themselves "by not retaining anybody" because they have known for a long time that it's meaningless to retain most students for another year in what Amy, the RBG3 district administrator, said referred to as a "broken system."

At the same time, this was related to educators' notions of students' learning coming from pedagogical relationships with students. Educators believed that the purpose of teaching is to help students continue to love learning and have confidence. Therefore, each stage of one's growth should be celebrated. However, within this policy context, implementing numerous tests conveyed a message of failure to children and triggered test anxiety. This was because children face enormous fear in the large gap between their current learning stage and the test level. Wouldn't any educator who watched and teached them to be opposed to a system in which there were insufficient supports to meet students' needs and most children were unlikely to show significant growth? Teachers were opposed to retention itself, where there was no "hope" that it could be better.

In this circumstance, I argue that, for policymakers to reasonably expect that they'll see the intended outcome, it is necessary to investigate whether the policy contains hidden prerequisites that have to be fulfilled before the policy can be effectively implemented. What the policy sensemaking of the urban educators with situated contextual challenges revealed is that, paradoxically, the law needs a kind of "cushion" to be implemented properly. Juan, the bilingual department administrator, said,

You need more of a "cushion" to be able to support your child's education in the area like [Blue], I think the comparison, it's not just EL, it's the social economic status of a community like [Red] versus [Blue]. We have children in [Red] that are not ELs and middle class, higher upper-class students that don't have the barriers that children in [Blue] have. So the difficulties and the barriers of ELs in [Red] are the same barriers of a regular traditional kid in [Red], which are much less than what a regular or EL kid in [Blue] would have. The ability to have an economic situation where the parents don't have to worry about having two or three jobs just to survive does not have that. A lot of our families and parents, they love to help their children, but sometimes they cannot do the time that they have to work and work and work, and they don't have time for that. And places like [Red], if you move into [Red] because you live in an economic level, that you have more of a cushion to be able to support your child's education. In the area like [Blue], if your car breaks down and you cannot go to work, your whole family and stability can run out, just because your one mistake or issue you can be in big trouble. If you're in [Red] and your car breaks down, you take it to the shop and they get it fixed. And your kids don't miss school, and you don't miss work, or you work from home.

> Parents don't work from home in [Blue]. Many of them have to do the services and be in
>
> play. So that's just an example.

According to policy sensemaking revealed across the Blue district's multi-stakeholders, I found several hidden prerequisites the RBG3 required as cushions before implementing the law as shown in Figure 5. These multilayered fundamental preparations would allow educators to expect the policy's intended positive outcomes.
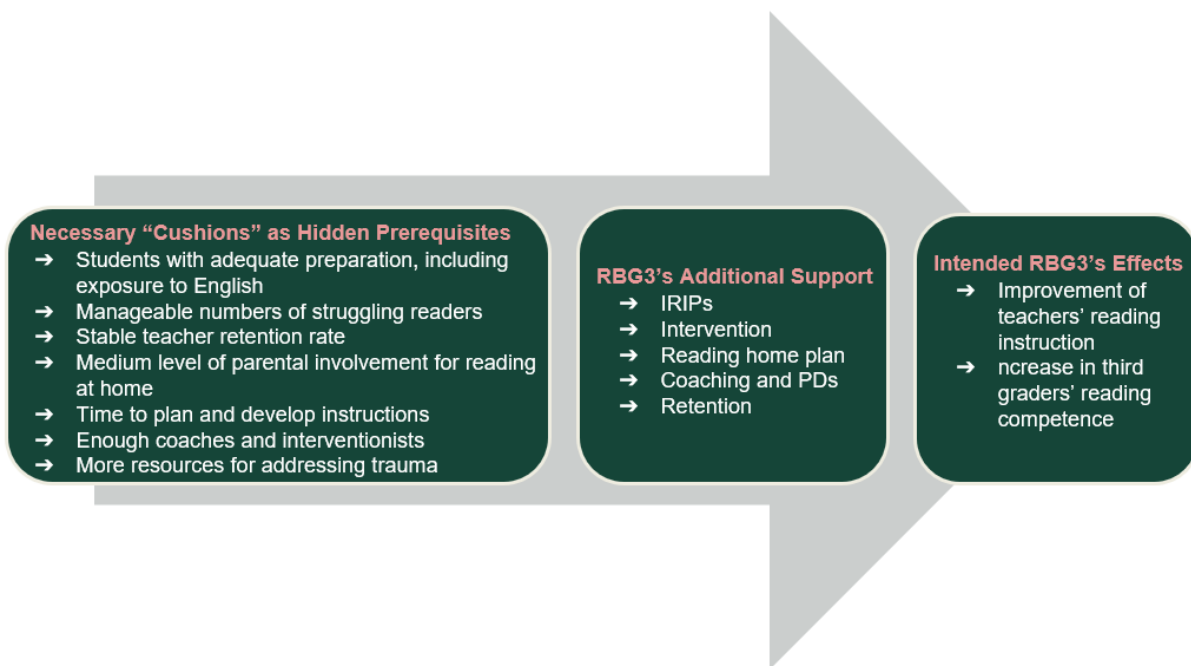

Figure 5. Hidden Prerequisites for RBG3 Implementation

4. Policy sensemaking impacts on ELs' learning experiences

Urban educators' sensemaking of RBG3 impacted how a school provides learning experiences for ELs. This section consists of five subsections: 1) LAP and non-LAP school context, 2) welcoming and affirmative environment, 2) limited professional learning, 3)

fragmented instruction, curriculum, and assessment, 4) ways to value ELs' primary languages

and cultures, and 5) policy messages to ELs in urban contexts.

4.1. LAP and Non-LAP School Contexts

The Blue district had over 1000 ELs who spoke 65 languages (the most spoken languages

are Arabic and Spanish) and were from approximately 85 countries. I visited a LAP and a non-

LAP school to compare the different support for ELs.

The Orange school was a LAP school that had approximately K-8 900 students. The

magnet school, which received additional funding due to its "international" theme, and teachers

from the school that used to support ELs in the form of multi-tiered intervention crossed over

and operated sheltered ESL classrooms (one class per grade) with about 25 ELs. There was one

sheltered classroom and two general classes in each grade, so if ELs met a grade level minimum

for English proficiency, they could move to the general classrooms. Most of the 200 Afghan

Refugees who arrived recently were assigned to the Orange school's sheltered classrooms. ELs in

kindergarten and first grade took Aimsweb three times throughout the year, and the second and

third grades took the NWEA three times. ELs in all grades must take a WIDA ACCESS test

annually. There were 15 bilingual assistants in the district, with staggered schedules who helped

EL students with basic English for 90 minutes a day. Once students mastered basic English, they

were instructed by EL classroom teachers. Most students in the Orange school were refugees.

Figure 6. Hello in different languages on the wall at Orange School

When I walked into the Orange school, I saw the "International" theme represented in a variety of ways, such as a big world map, 2022 Winter Olympic Medals, and hello in different languages (see Figure 6). On one wall, there were the United Nations' ten goals, attached side by side. As it was a school operated by grant, the facilities were great: there was a swimming pool inside, the size of the classrooms was very large, and various learning materials filled the walls of the classroom. In the classroom, decorations symbolized the motherlands of various children, and the children's diversity was also represented through clothes. A Bilingual assistant came in. She was an Arab in a hijab. She said that although she taught basic English, showing the hijab she wore was more meaningful because children of her culture felt comfortable in the hijab. Children's appearances were as unique as their different languages. While ELs were not visible at the Green School, here they are very noticeable. Two or three people spoke in their native languages because they spoke the same language in a class, but they mainly used English as a common language for interaction. For students who had just arrived from Afghanistan, teachers

paired them with a same language peer with advanced English proficiency to translate teachers' instruction as a little translator.

Students' English levels varied widely. From a child who has just arrived and couldn't say a word, only yes or no, or was just starting to pronounce and write the alphabet, to children who could elaborate opinion-writing assignments. For this reason, the third grade EL teacher always said that she was worried about what level to match when giving instructions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she found that self-directed learning using technology allowed her to differentiate instruction that matched with students' English proficiency levels. Through online verified programs, children were screened for their skills, and through 44 apps, children themselves improved their English skills on their individualized path. Therefore, most of them learned English themselves through this online app, except for writing classes in the morning (for which the teacher provided different topics every day) and learning centers (activities consisting of 10 options for partnered work). I have been skeptical about the effectiveness of this third-grade sheltered class structure, but I understood its effectiveness after observing the class of the mainstream second-grade teacher as she gave direct instructions. No matter how differentiated the level of instruction was, in the end, activities containing adequate instruction to be accessible to children of all language proficiencies were not possible. More than half of all children did not understand. It soon led to a loss of learning motivation and a decrease in concentration, and children who did not understand well soon gave up their activities and initiated behaviors that disrupted the class atmosphere. Therefore, because of the large learning gap, it seems to be that doing activities suitable for each child's level helps them learn English.

In contrast, the Green school was a non-LAP school and has approximately 300 students in K-3 as a typical public school. This school has seven identified ELs and many possible ELs.

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Since it had no EL teacher nor sheltered class, ELs received interventions from reading specialists and special education teachers. Out of seven students, four students had IEPs due to comprehension issues. These ELs also had to take the NWEA three times and the WIDA ACCESS test once. Most students were second-generation immigrants. Below is the summary of observation notes of two types of interventions provided for ELs in the Green school.

Children entered the Reading Specialist's classroom. A group of six children of similar English proficiency levels sat at a desk lined up in a long row. Ms. Lisa sat in the middle and taught students professionally for 30 minutes. It was an activity designed to support for students struggling in a particular area of the most recent assessment. One of them was an EL. She didn't have a chance to use her native language because she took the intervention class with the other five non-ELs. Still, she was actively engaged in activities with a very confident attitude, perhaps because she received activities that fit her level.

Another learning opportunity for ELs was in special education. The group was divided into two groups, K-1, and 2nd to 3rd grade. The teacher provided students with about 30 minutes of class in line with the IEP and provided one activity along with individualized instructions to each child because there was a difference in level between individuals. Like Reading Intervention, students had no opportunity to speak their native language other than English. However, like the Reading Specialist, the special education teacher was very professional and provided English instructions that fit the students' level. Although both teachers were professional, they did not utilize ELs' cultural and linguistic knowledge in their instructions.

4.2. Welcoming and Affirmative Environment: "the culture naturally comes out"

Across the Orange and Green schools, I noticed some commonalities and differences related to district-wide initiatives and the number of ELs. In terms of similarities, for example, at the Orange school, in addition to the decoration mentioned above of the school's interior, there were many events honoring various cultures like a high-diversity district. There was an international holiday calendar in the district, so there was a day to commemorate the national holidays of children's home countries such as Ramadan. In addition, because there may have been children who felt uncomfortable with religious differences about existing U.S. holidays, teachers approached them sensitively and did not celebrate them significantly. There was often food sharing before COVID-19, so there was a lot of time to understand each other's culture through food exchange. Laura, an EL teacher said,

> Cooking is another thing that we used to do a lot. I miss that because of COVID, but almost every week somebody would bring me food from their house. They would explain what they made from their house and they would give it to me and I would eat it right in front of them. Pho is a wonderful food. Like they felt like they were giving something from their culture to me, I valued it and I loved, you know, I've had Samosa, I've had chicken and rice. I've had egg rolls. I've had spring rolls. I've had Pho the soup. Oh my goodness. So I miss that because when they are able to give and bring something from their culture, it makes them feel so good. So hopefully in the next couple of months, we will start to cook a little bit together. We'll cook some rice, I have a rice cooker. A couple of times this year somebody's brought me in food and I show it to the kids. I'm trying to think of what else. I just think that I love to know where they come from. I like to go to their house. I've been to let's see in here, so, oh, and then also I've like, Becky

[anonymous]'s mom. So I had her sister two years ago. I have had another sister rather

two years ago. I see. When you get this relationship with the family and they have the

siblings. You can go on and on, there's a comradery. So that's one way that we share each

other's worlds.

Along with the food sharing and teaching siblings, teachers naturally knew their students'

families more and felt comradery as a community. Green school also celebrated different student

subgroups through reading months event and international holidays recognition.

At the district level, cultural brokers increased students' sense of belonging by delivering

the necessary resources and information to parents in their native language. Because translation

support was also available over the phone or an online application, parents could receive support

quickly when communicating with teachers or principals. Furthermore, many systems supported

EL students and families. For enhancing EL's learning, the Blue district provided after-school

tutoring and summer programs. Beyond student education, the district also offered parent

education (high school diploma) for preparing for their jobs in the U.S. to help them to settle as a

member of this community. Therefore, as a symbol of the resettlement city, the Blue district

received many requests from other districts and even European countries that face the influx of

refugees. The local newspapers also reported how the district created systematic support to help

refugee children. These continuous efforts have created an inclusive and welcoming environment

for ELs. Laura, an EL teacher, talked about how cultures naturally came out.

We celebrate Ramadan, we talk about Ramadan. We have a lot of fasting that goes on

during that time. So we have booklets that we create and make. And we study different

figures from our Hispanic culture. We did a lot on Dia de Los Muertos. We talked about

the Day of the Dead. I have a little girl from Mexico. So we celebrate and of course the

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holidays, a lot of our Nepali kids with what is the holiday? I can't remember what the

name of it is. But to celebrate, we'll do an international night at the end of the year, every

classroom in our school takes a different country and decorates their room and talks about

the culture of that one. But naturally, I think the culture comes out. I see girls who are

either wearing hijab in my room and then they're braiding somebody else's hair. They're

very like some girls are very nurturing to others. I think the kids love to talk about their

holidays and what they do at home and their chores. That's why they love a job in my

classroom because many of these kids have chores at home and they help to raise their

brothers and sisters.

As she said, the culture naturally came out through students' appearance, dress, food, holidays,

and languages in daily lives. Likewise, the Blue district valued various cultures of ELs by

creating a welcoming atmosphere in many ways.

Compared to no chance to speak any mother tongue of ELs in Green school, Orange

school has eight bilingual assistants who each have 20 to 30 years of experience helping ELs at

schools, and it was a more comfortable atmosphere to interact with adults of various languages

and cultures besides white classroom teachers. As little translators, all the classmates played a

role in interpreting the teacher's instructions by acting as interpreters for children who had just

come to the U.S. In this atmosphere, ELs were naturally exposed to various cultures and

languages, so they felt included. Susan, an EL Teacher, said,

So since there's so much Swahili, Swahili is the one that I hear the most. Speaking

together. They don't even know that they are speaking different languages because one

kid pointed to one of my Arabic speakers today and said, you speak Swahili. They don't

know. They're so good at communicating. They don't even pay attention. They're code-

switching.

As she explained, ELs often utilized their first languages unconsciously as translanguaging, but

they understood each other due to the communication context. Therefore, although both Orange

and Green schools celebrated cultural diversity and supported English development through

district initiative events and programs, the LAP school provided a more open learning

environment for the use of ELs' primary languages naturally in school settings.

4.3. Limited Professional Learning

The district recruited EL teachers who have a TESOL endorsement. However, due to a

huge teacher shortage, teachers without the endorsement could be hired. Therefore, 30% of

teachers did not have a TESOL endorsement, but do have previous experiences of teaching ELs.

And all EL teachers and general teachers received the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

(SIOP) training for four days due to the high diversity of students and ELs attending non-LAP

schools. SIOP refers to a framework to enhance students' academic language proficiency by

providing comprehensible input designed for students coming to the classroom with various

linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Echevarria et al., 2008). Although SIOP is a tool to give a

more simplified speech and visible clues for enhancing English comprehension, it seemed

limited in utilizing student language and culture as assets for instruction because all teaching

mainly relied on English-only instruction. This finding was aligned with research, which said,

while SIOP was developed and marketed as a great approach for teaching ELs, it is limited by

the fact that the majority of its 30 features are close to general good practices which seem to

apply to all K-12 students, not particularly to ELs (Crawford & Reyes, 2015). Despite these pros

and cons, the Blue district chose this protocol as a great approach to teaching ELs in sheltered and multi-tiered classrooms. Currently, through six district's PDs over a year, EL teachers have been trained on the themes of inclusion, critical race theory, and equity issues.

Through the monthly ESL steering meetings, EL teachers and the bilingual department team members met to discuss issues around attendance, enrollment, graduation, and instruction. In these meetings, EL teachers confessed the difficulties of instruction for five to six different reading levels of ELs. And bilingual department officers shared an upcoming ESL webinar series for enhancing instruction. And now they were trying to find an academically rigorous curriculum aligned with WIDA test results for ELs. For this, a certain curriculum expert was invited to discuss the content and the pilot plans in the April meeting. In addition, my participants utilized this meeting to share information about how many new arrival students will come and what language support they need to prepare. They also shared the recent translation technology for interactions between parents and educators in the conference and home assignment by phone call or online applications. The district also utilized google classroom to share all information and learning materials with all educators who are supporting ELs.

These types of support for teachers' learning were aimed at enhancing ELs' English proficiency for intensive language acquisition to build a strong foundation of English which will lead to academic content area learning. The district emphasized the importance of biliteracy, which benefits college attendance and future job prospects for high school students and encouraged the bi and multilinguals' language acquisition for secondary students who already have L1 proficiency. However, for early grade students, the purpose of all instruction is to quickly acquire English proficiency since early graders are assumed to learn English easily. Juan, the bilingual department administrator, said, "The particular range of grades that you are

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working on is probably the easiest population of ELs to educate. When they're little, they're sponges. They just learn." While the district emphasized the importance of bilingualism and biliteracy, students' L1s were largely unsupported in the early grades, because so much attention was paid to helping them acquire English as quickly as possible while they were still young enough to acquire it with relative ease.

4.4. Fragmented Instruction, Curriculum, and Assessment

While the Blue district has multiple efforts to value ELs' primary languages and cultures overall due to a high diversity of students outside of instruction, it was rarely found utilizing their languages and cultures during instruction. Curriculum, instruction, and assessments were fragmented and not connected systemically. Because of district demands, teachers had to utilize a mainstream curriculum and conduct given tests. Therefore, to meet student needs, teachers had to reinvent extra activities that fit students' levels with additional assessments. EL teacher Laura said, "We have to write everything. We have to invent it. We have to figure it out. We have to find programs." In addition, regarding bilingual assistants' help, the lesson plans were not shared in advance, and their roles were limited to helping basic level students since they did not know the objectives of each lesson, which especially required an understanding of the high level of academic concepts serving grades K-8.

Furthermore, to provide an appropriate level of instruction, there needed to be more teachers, but the district has faced a teacher shortage. Therefore, sheltered classrooms are an inevitable choice to teach as many ELs together as possible, considering the relatively low number of EL teachers. Sheltered ESL classrooms refer to an approach providing English as a second language (ESL) instruction for ELs through comprehensible input by integrating teaching

subjects, English development, and study skills, aiming to help students be ready for mainstream classes (Combs et al., 2005; Echevarria & Graves, 2003; Macías et al., 2013). However, for providing comprehensible input, students should be at a similar level of English proficiency. Since a classroom has a wide range of levels of English proficiency, whole class instruction and even small group activities were not effectively working to meet the needs of students with a wide range of English readiness. Confronting the dilemma between core curriculum exposure demand, students' wide range of English proficiency, and assessments and intervention mandates, EL teachers struggled to meet their goals for their students.

Since standardized tests (NWEA and WIDA ACCESS) did not impact the teachers' instruction, additional assessments had to be conducted to diagnose the struggling areas of students and to apply those results to their instruction. The time spent assessing students ultimately reduced instructional time. EL teacher Laura said,

> We just need an overall assessment for EL students in the United States That will show
> where they start and their growth. So our goal as teachers is to make a year and a half of
> growth. So these kids can catch up and then take the NWEA with all of our nation.

Although WIDA shows ELs' readiness to take mainstream classes, no matter its results, ELs had to take NWEA standardized tests and receive interventions according to its results. These unaligned curriculum, instruction, and assessments in the Blue district became another contextual challenge to enacting the RBG3.

4.5. Ways to Value ELs' Primary Languages and Cultures

As described above, teachers mostly celebrated EL's primary cultures through learning about international holidays and international night events as the notion of multiculturalism, such

as as food, festival, and fashion (Meyer & Rhoades, 2006), but did not utilize their primary languages and cultural knowledge for instruction. Sometimes teachers asked students for simple words or sentences to translate into their primary languages, but that was all. Teachers had to expose them to the mainstream reading curriculum, which requires grade reading levels and provides activities that fit into their English proficiency level. Therefore, there was no particular time to utilize culturally responsive instruction. Students only used their primary languages with their peers who had the same first language, or with bilingual assistants when they were in the beginning level. Regarding why CR-S instruction was not working in her classroom, an EL teacher Susan gave me an example. Last year, she had university students, who studied in the TESOL program and prepared to become EL teachers, in her classroom for apprentice teaching. These students prepared a math lesson for her students utilizing students' primary languages. Susan said,

> I had university students who are in TESOL. So they really do that a lot. Oh, bring in the home language and it kind of doesn't work. I'll give you an example. One group couldn't find all the languages. So they just did six, which is only half. So is that better than none? I don't know. Because then you're including six languages and excluding other languages. And so they made a poster of it was some math vocabulary. It was oh 10. I think it was like place value, tens ones. And they had written it in a different language while none of these kids understand and read. Even if they speak the language, they don't read it or write it. So it just didn't work. They [university students] tried because that's what they're learning…Yeah. I learned totally different things from what I do.

As described above, university students could not find half of the languages through internet translation, which means there is a hierarchy among minority languages as well. For example,

while Spanish, Arab, or Swahili were dominant languages used by the majority of ELs in the Blue district, Farsi was only utilized by a few ELs. Furthermore, even though ELs were fluent speaking in their first languages, most of them at an early grade did not know how to read and write in their first languages. In addition, since there were over 10 different home languages (9 Swahili, 2 Kinyarwanda, 1 Fula, 1 French, 1 Hashto, 4 Arabic, 1 Hmong, 1 Spanish, 4 Napali, 1 Kuchen, 1 Farsi) and cultures in a classroom, Susan was worried about how to embrace those languages and cultures equally. As a result, English was utilized as a common language for interaction between students and teachers. Susan explained, due to this communication necessity, their students learned English faster.

> Because there are so many different languages, right? English is their common, which I love because they're kind of just forced to speak English and learn English way faster than I would learn another language because they have to communicate.

Like other non-ELs, these ELs had to take standardized tests four times annually (NWEA three times and WIDA ACCESS test once for grades 2 and 3), so they had to be equipped with English as fast as they could. Teachers believed that ELs must have a fundamental foundation of English in early grades. Otherwise, they would not learn academic content in upper grades. The main purpose of a sheltered classroom was to teach students to acquire grade-level English proficiency to move them to general classrooms.

In this context where students from a wide range of languages, cultures, and levels of English proficiency took frequent diagnostic assessments, early grade ELs tended to lose their primary languages as their English proficiency develops. EL teacher Laura reported,

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I noticed a lot of kids are losing their first language and I tell them they need to talk at

home. So because the job market will be much more available to them if they are

bilingual.

While this might successfully support fast English language acquisition for most students, it did

not support bilingualism or biliteracy in contrast to schools that offered bilingual programs. The

forced English acquisition learning environment might deprive students of the first language's

cognitive and academic development before students master English (Ovando, 2003). Without

home or extracurricular support, ELs might have a rare chance to develop both or multiple

languages, especially in urban contexts. Since ELs pressed to learn English quickly tended to use

English at home, with parents who were not fluent in English, this change might affect parents'

authority for parenting and intimacy among family members, which might lead to difficult inter-

general relationships or even to the rejection of home culture (Combs et al., 2005)

4.6. Policy Messages to ELs in Urban Contexts

Because of the multitude of assessments that students were required to take in the early

grades, ELs were deprived of the time to slowly grow their English alongside their home

language(s). Even though ELs will be exempted from retention eventually, their learning

environment was continuously giving them messages they should exit from the label "EL"

quickly. Students were showing test anxiety: although they were offered readable passages in

school activities, they skipped them automatically due to painful experiences in standardized

tests, assuming they could not read the passages before even trying. Confronting frequent

failures discouraged students from learning with confidence. This message was justified by the

belief that if ELs could not reach English proficiency as the test required, it would lead to the

failure of further academic opportunities and the job market. However, the learning process is as important as the learning outcome. Are ELs realizing that the learning process is meaningful and enjoyable in this environment?

In the middle of district mandates and student needs, teachers supporting ELs tried to find a balance. Regardless of their readiness for English, ELs were required to take the standardized tests designed for non-ELs, inevitably receiving a score in the lowest percentile. The third grade EL teacher, Laura, said,

> They [parents] want to know that their child is trying and working hard and growing. And that's what I tell them. I just brief over it [test result]. When I talked to the parents, I said, she is there, kindergarten. She needs to work harder, but I don't want them to feel like their child is [way below]. It's not her fault. She is new. If I went to Africa and took a test, we would not expect that. We cannot expect that of our international community. We have to change. I talked to teachers over in Europe and they have a huge influx also in London of EL learners. And everyone is facing this transitional population in America and all over the world moving in and out of different ELs. And we have to change our educational system to reflect that and be more accepting of changing our curriculum to accept that progression.

In addition, regarding standardized tests for refugee ELs traumatized by coming from a war zone, Laura expressed her concerns that,

> Right now, this wave of kids who have come in the last year is coming traumatized. Some of these children from Afghanistan they're traumatized. So I'm going to sit them down and tell them to take a test. You see? And that the fear, the anxiety that they may feel, but I have to, right. It's just that we have to.

By completing minimal compliance such as writing up IRIPs, and enduring frustration looking at students taking standardized tests, teachers tried to find the best ways to teach students in their way. She also said,

> I think the biggest challenge and the biggest drawback is the fact that the state has this ridiculous law. I want to be able to assess my kids where they're at, and I want their growth target to be a year and a half where they come in because I can speed them up. But I can't speed them up to a third grade. But so they [the district] are strapped by what is required by them. Even though they understand the challenges of a child speaking another language, they're strapped by the demands that the state has for these children.

Likewise, teachers believed that this testing environment is not educational, but they were required to comply with the demands of the district and state. Teachers had to reassure ELs by saying that the test was not for measuring students' ability, but for providing information about where teachers could help. Teachers knew students' levels through observing students' participation, assignments, and activities without the standardized tests. They knew best what students needed without the test results.

All my participants in the Blue District deeply cared about their students and wanted to provide meaningful learning experiences with a growth mindset despite scarce resources and many students who had never been to school before or did not have US preschool experiences. They taught and helped newly arrived students from refugee camps, doing what they could, if not in a very satisfying way, with limited resources all day.

The policy sensemaking of EL teachers shaped by this working environment delivered the message to ELs that they had to acquire grade level English proficiency as fast as they could.

Teachers knew that tests and intervention paperwork didn't mean much to ELs, but they had to be compliant, and the time to prepare and plan instructions for ELs had disappeared. Therefore the EL classroom looked like a small society representing diversity and globalization, but only English could allow students to reveal their identities. And as they learned English, the students' locality gradually blurred, and it felt like they were gathering as a point in the English culture.

4.7. Summary

Through the lens of the critical cultural policy sensemaking framework integrated by sensemaking cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002), critical sensemaking theory (Mills et al., 2010), and culturally responsive sustaining education (NYSED, 2018), I found sensemaking of my participants in urban contexts was shaped by not only suggested four factors (policy information, communities, prior experiences, and situated contexts) in the existing literature and but also pedagogical relationships and power dynamics caused by federal political stance toward immigrants and refugees, the different notion of ELs and bilinguals, approved assessments by districts, and linear comparison between districts having a high number of ELs. These factors shaped urban educators' sensemaking in support of ELs.

Their sensemaking impacted ELs' learning in the classroom. Applying four elements of culturally responsive sustaining education (welcoming and affirmative environment, inclusive curriculum and assessments, high expectation and rigorous instruction, and professional learning), I found while the Blue district celebrated the values of the cultural diversity of ELs, their primary languages and cultures were not utilized as the core of instruction in a classroom surrounded by a test-driven accountability system that required rapid English acquisition for ELs. This quick acquisition of English resulted in the tendency of early grade ELs' losing their

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first languages in urban contexts unless home support for developing first languages exists. EL teachers were required to utilize mainstream curriculums that did not fit into the vast range of English levels of current ELs.

Although teachers in the Blue district were trained with SIOP, this model was not for teaching multilingualism, but for supplementing English-only instruction with more visible clues and strategies for enhancing comprehension of instruction. In addition, the classroom structures consisting of more than 10 different languages also became barriers to teachers utilizing students' primary languages and cultures equally and effectively involved with the mainstream curriculum.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is organized as follows: 1) summary of findings, 2) contributions to the literature of policy sensemaking, third grade retention policy, and culturally responsive sustaining pedagogy, 3) implications for policy and practice, 4) limitations and future research, 5) significance, and 6) closing thoughts.

1. Summary of Findings

The district case study investigated how educators in urban contexts engage in policy sensemaking of Michigan's RBG3 law in support of ELs and how their sensemaking impacts ELs' learning experiences. Through the analysis of 18 interviews, 47 hours of observations, and 25 documents collected from December 2021 to April 2022, my participants (four district administrators, two former literacy coaches, one principal, two EL teachers, one reading specialist, one special education teacher, one EL family) shared their perceptions and lived experiences regarding policy enactment and ELs' learning. The research questions were:

1. How do policy actors in the urban context– including district and school leaders, and teachers– make sense of RBG3 in support of ELs?

   a. What influences the actors' sensemaking around RBG3 for ELs?

   b. What do the actors believe RBG3 requires administrators and teachers to do for EL students, and how do they feel about these requirements?

   c. What power dynamics and tensions exist in the process of sensemaking regarding RBG3's underlying premises? How do actors perceive them?

2. How do the actors' sensemaking regarding RBG3 impact how a school provides learning

   experiences for ELs?

   a. What is the phenomenon of ELs' learning experience in reading instruction and

      interventions?

   b. In classrooms, how are ELs' first languages and cultures recognized?

   c. How does the sensemaking of teachers evolve into messages to EL students?

1.1. RBG3 Policy Sensemaking in Urban Contexts in Support of ELs

In the process of policy sensemaking regarding RBG3, I found these five factors

influenced urban educators' sensemaking: 1) educators' pedagogical relationships with ELs

along with their perception of the notion of learning, 2) policy information, 3) prior experiences

and knowledge, 4) formal and informal communities, and 5) situated context. Above all, situated

challenging contexts highly impacted the policy sensemaking in setting the expectation from

intended policy enactment and effects. I identified contextual challenges such as dysfunctional

infrastructure, no instructional planning time caused by a teacher shortage, lack of funding for

instructional improvement, a high number of IRIP students and paperwork, low attendance and

emotional issues, low parental involvement, and learning loss imposed by COVID-19.

I found urban educators initially interpreted the core elements of RBG3 as policymakers

intended. They reported that this policy required accountability for students' learning,

emphasized the urgency of early literacy, and included common language in terms of

assessments and interventions. However, due to the challenging contexts of the urban area, they

engaged in motivated reasoning, which led them to decide to refuse some elements of the policy,

such as retention, because in their context it was both unrealistic and harmful to retain a high

number of third graders in the same system. They also critiqued the policy for its narrow definition of success, measured only by standardized test scores, and ignored students' ongoing growth and mastery of English. This evoked negative emotions, a sense of unfairness, insult, and frustration. This motivated reasoning and emotions made educators reconstruct the policy messages as effectively worthless because they did not create meaningful change for their students. They also saw the policy promoting colorblindness toward students and blaming multiple stakeholders. As a result, they engaged in minimal compliance. In the end, they wished for mercy from the state regarding exempting students from retention as much as possible and for teachers to have a sense of calling to teach continuously "nonetheless." In particular, when sensemaking in support of ELs under RBG3, educators perceived unrealistic exemption requirements for multilayered ELs, continued failure messages from the test that discouraged students' learning motivation, and increased test anxiety.

In this policy sensemaking process, formative contexts and organizational rules caused tensions in how educators supported ELs. First, the fluctuating federal government's political stance on immigrants and refugees required the flexibility of the Blue district's EL support policies. Due to a high number of newly arrived students recently because of the federal government transition, the district needed to tweak its policies in response to students' basic English levels, which required different structures of classrooms and additional human resources. Second, the different notions of bilinguals as ELs and non-ELs caused the perception of ELs who need to exit their label. Third, standardized tests and diagnostic assessments approved by the district limited the usage of teachers' own assessments created by considering their current student's levels. Last, linear comparison of EL achievement without considering ELs' multilayered characteristics in urban contexts brought a strong negative sense around the policy.

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In this circumstance, the Blue district was against the retention itself, but selectively focused on data tracking and interventions by choosing partial representations of the policy in a loosely coupled enactment process (Schwenk, 1984).

1.2. ELs' Learning Experiences under RBG3

From the culturally responsive sustaining education perspective, the Blue district created a highly welcoming and affirmative environment in various ways (international holiday calendars, reading months, international nights, cultural brokers, and bilingual assistants). The district also provided SIOP training for all EL and general teachers to support diverse students. During monthly EL meetings, teachers and the bilingual department shared new information about relevant policies, upcoming professional development webinars, and current difficulties in instructional support. However, while the district valued students' languages and cultures outside of instruction, it was rarely found that they applied students' assets inside of instruction. The instruction mostly focused on English exposure. A huge gap between the requested district's reading curriculum as mainstream content and ELs' varied English proficiency levels caused misleading instruction, lessons became incoherent and lacked clear goals. Fragmented curriculum, instruction, and assessments made teachers who support ELs juggle how to support ELs effectively.

In this circumstance, ELs received the policy message that they need to have a quick transition from primary language to English. Because their classrooms consisted of more than 10 different languages and cultures, teachers could not utilize students' linguistic and cultural knowledge in their instruction. In addition, because EL teachers were so focused on increasing students' English readiness, and because they only had access to the curriculum used in

mainstream classes, teachers had little time for culturally responsive instruction. In this situation, early grade ELs, especially those who have less support from home, tend to lose their primary languages as they advance in English proficiency.

2. Contributions to Literature

This study contributes to extending the literature of policy sensemaking by adding a critical lens to interpret sensemaking, of retention policy effects by revealing policy mechanisms to a particular student subgroup, and of culturally responsive pedagogy by investigating the dilemma between CR-S and accountability system.

2.1. Policy Sensemaking

This study contributes to expanding the policy sensemaking literature by establishing the critical cultural policy sensemaking framework integrated with sensemaking cognitive framework (Spillane et al., 2002), critical sensemaking theory (Mills et al., 2010) and culturally responsive education elements (NYSED, 2018). By combining these frameworks, this study could capture the power dynamics caused by formative contexts and organizational rules that influenced individual and collective sensemaking in urban educators. Furthermore, considering the policy impacts on a particular marginalized student group, this framework also embraced four elements of culturally responsive sustaining education to capture how marginalized students experience learning while receiving the policy messages from teachers and school activities.

This study's findings suggest how result-oriented policy, like RBG3, enabled educators to create motivated reasonings for their behaviors and decision-making through critical policy

sensemaking, and how challenging contexts impacted their negative emotions which led to partial selection of policy messages and minimal compliance.

In addition, this study highlights different sensemaking according to multi-stakeholder positions from district administrators to an EL family, along with their individual professional background and knowledge. This study shows that only filtered information is encountered in lower positions like teachers, making the policy more difficult to understand and limiting the opportunity to interpret the policy in various ways, thereby losing the opportunity to improve the urban environment in reverse use of a policy.

Furthermore, this study also contributes to understanding how the third-grade retention policy that enforced test-driven accountability system clashed with the values of culturally responsive sustaining pedagogy and the broader meaning of learning shaped by pedagogical relationships with students and professional experiences of teachers.

2.2. Third Grade Retention Policy Impacts for ELs

This study also contributes to expanding the third-grade retention policy research, especially by expanding the small volume of qualitative research on the retention policy effects. While many existing quantitative studies on the test-driven retention policy shed light on the effects of increased standardized test scores and graduation rates, only a small amount of research focused on inequality structures and how they caused students' fragmented reading skill acquisition. However, there was no exclusive research on ELs. By conducting qualitative research for ELs, this study contributes to understanding how educators shape their sensemaking of the third-grade retention policy in support of ELs and how ELs experience their learning in schools and classrooms. This study primarily focused on ELs who mainly consisted of

immigrants and refugees from low SES families in urban contexts, demonstrating how the retention policy delivered frequent failure messages to these particular ELs, discouraging their learning motivation.

Like RBG3, most policies applying the same standards and assessment procedures have exemptions or accommodations for ELs, but these additional actions may not result in equitable assessments (Cummins, 2000). Although the RBG3 exemptions for ELs that prevent retaining students due to language barriers seem reasonable, ELs continue to be included in mainstream standardized norm-referenced tests that provide potentially harmful data (Cummins, 2000). However, if ELs are excluded from the all-accountability process through exemptions, there will be a risk of systemic ignorance of ELs' progress (LaCelle-Peterson, 1994).

To avoid this scenario, the Office of Civil Rights guaranteed that ELs access mainstream classes, reasoning that this would provide equal educational opportunities. However, in EL classrooms, when teachers were required to use the mainstream curriculum, they could not adequately address the wide range of English proficiency levels among their students, who had different first languages, levels of parent support, and previous schooling experiences. While the classroom consisting of a majority of monolingual English speakers still shows differences in English proficiency leve ls, vast differences among highly diverse ELs even make grade-level distinctions absurd (Fien et al., 2008). This made it difficult for EL teachers to plan robust instruction to develop individuals' English proficiency.

Like what Huddleston (2015) found, the Blue district also changed the retention policy exemption process from the parental appeal for retention waiving to parental permission for retention in order to prevent less-educated parents from losing their chances to appeal to waive retention. Therefore, unreasonable expectations for ELs' language acquisition within three years

of required exemptions may not affect ELs' retention in the end. However, exemptions cannot justify low-performing ELs' painful testing experiences and still risk functioning as excluding ELs from the accountability system while justifying the normalized test-oriented learning environment.

As Huddleston and Lowe (2014) found, minority students, including ELs in Georgia, experienced less pleasure in learning experiences from fragmented reading skill acquisition for test preparation. Although Figlio and Ozek (2020) showed the increased performance of retained EL students in Florida, the study does not address whether their learning has been meaningful and whether their primary languages and cultures have been valued in the process of learning. As my study found, the sense of accountability emphasized by the RBG3 brought score-oriented colorblind conversations and a narrowed definition of learning. In other words, the only teaching that was valued was teaching that improved test scores.

In this circumstance, although teachers supporting ELs perceived ELs' initial lag period in the process of language acquisition as a natural process of learning, it caused dilemmas and tensions since a score-oriented accountability system forces administrators to focus on statistical learning progress to measure student performance, teacher evaluation, and school quality (Linquanti, 2001). Eventually, this system forces teachers to emphasize the rapid language transition from primary languages to English, which is especially problematic with ELs from early grades that are in critical periods for their bi- or multilingual development.

2.3. Devaluing CR-S Pedagogy in Accountability System

This study also contributes to the culturally responsive sustaining education literature by suggesting why CR-S could not be working effectively under the test-driven accountability

system (Sleeter, 2012). RBG3 increased the conversation around score-oriented learning. The logic of intervention and data tracking that impacts teachers and parents brought more pressure, via accountability measures, on student achievement in schools, as measured solely by standardized tests. Although RBG3 has many exemptions as loopholes which can be abused, urban schools already recognized the expected policy result as punitive. Because the students' growth is measured only through data tracking from the standardized tests, schools' locality and students' individualized contexts have been eliminated in conversations around student achievement scores, which are the only way that learning outcomes are measured.

By obscuring other aspects of learning, these test-based accountability measures set the resource-constrained schools and districts that serve disproportionately marginalized students up for failure in the eyes of the state (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). Because the narrow definition of school quality in the test-driven accountability framework leaves little room to value the knowledge students bring to school, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse schools are perceived negatively compared to privileged homogeneous schools, which reinforces the deficit narrative that is already in place for linguistically diverse children of color (Inequality & Schools, 2014).

In this normalized testing-oriented accountability system, CR-S pedagogy may lose the chance to stand at the core of instruction; rather, it will be recognized as a nice addition or supplement to the core curriculum or be considered valuable only when it functions as providing better learning to improve test scores (Conner, 2010). As a result of the devaluation of CR-S pedagogy and overvaluing of test scores, the assets students bring to schools may partially be acknowledged to celebrate their diversity but not be central to their learning.

This result might be explained by the fact that the Blue district did not emphasize the elements of CR-S pedagogy as one of the district-initiative priorities yet. However, I argue that although the district would require teachers to apply this pedagogy in their teaching with the notion of fidelity, in this test-driven system, its function may be viewed limitedly as a tool to increase test scores.

This study's finding is well-aligned with Sleeter's (2012) research about how context-blind education reform rooted in neoliberalism driven by standardized curriculum and assessments marginalizes CR-S pedagogy. In addition, it shows how this pressure distorted and oversimplified the meanings of CR-S pedagogy and its practices in classrooms in the form of cultural celebration and essentializing stereotyped cultures. In this learning environment, while urban minority students' home cultures are celebrated, they are not adequately utilized as core resources for their learning (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010)

3. Discussion on Relationship Between Learning, Assessment, and Teacher Trust

It is necessary to understand the pain of struggling children being tested continuously. While young students must frequently experience success to enjoy learning, under this policy context emphasizing the standardized test results as teaching and learning outcomes, low-performing early graders have received a message of constant failure. Frequent assessment checks seemed to exist not to help children credibly, but to control the anxiety of policymakers and government who were not in the classrooms, resulting in a lack of trust in teachers, and, ultimately, teacher burnout (Dworkin & Tobe, 2014). Instead of buying, training, and distributing assessment tools, it is necessary to allocate more resources, raise salaries, and trust teachers' expertise in assessing their own students and making professional decisions. Rather

than relying on the calling of a few teachers in urban schools, it is crucial to create an environment that does not require "a calling" for the sake of sustainability. Therefore, creating an equitable school environment for developing collaborative teaching professions across districts and states in the long term must be prioritized in order to revitalize teacher trust in education (Hargreaves& O'Connor, 2018).

Frequent assessments deprived ELs of the opportunity to grow slowly by delivering continuous failure messages and taking away their opportunities to benefit from culturally responsive instruction that incorporated their languages and cultures as assets. It prevented educators from accommodating the natural lag in English development experienced by many emerging bilingual students and resulted in emphasizing only rapid English acquisition by English exposure. Exempting these children from retention is not the only task, but separate curriculum and assessments for these children are needed, as well as an approach that takes into account the situation of refugee children who have limited or interrupted former schooling experiences. EL teacher Laura said,

> And I don't think the policymakers understand psychology either. Even a child who knows English, you cannot tell that child that you have to learn these skills by this year. you can't make the brain… It's like, they're ready for the things that we're pushing too soon, you know, we're pushing them in second grade, but their brains weren't ready for it until third grade. So it's a competition in our culture. But I think they don't know how to make it work.

Each student has their own developmental path of learning. Educators need to have patience until students are ready to learn for the next step. By trusting teachers' teaching along with their

assessments, which happened naturally during class activities, administrators should have patience before requesting outcomes.

4. Implications for Policymakers, Practitioners, and Researchers

This study provides several implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in terms of understanding hidden prerequisites of the policy, importance of teacher voice, and language hierarchy in culturally responsive instructions.

4.1. *Policymakers: The Hidden Prerequisites of RBG3*

Since NCLB was enacted in 2000, urban schools have suffered from failure messages created by standardized tests. This RBG3 law added another burden to already overloaded teachers: the requirement that teachers write IRIPs for most students. Although this policy intended to provide individualized intervention for students' needs, it worked in urban contexts as another paperwork load that did not result in instructional improvement chances through coaches and PDs due to lack of funding and a teacher shortage. In the urban context, practices of retaining kindergarteners over the last decade have shown that retention did not positive impact on proficiency. Through these previous experiences, my participants in the urban context have doubted the retention effect, predicting that it will only create another year of third grade in a broken system. This solid belief from previous failure experiences led them to have low expectations toward RBG3 and to perceive it as punitive. The urban district's contextual challenges evoked negative emotions in the process of policy sensemaking regarding RBG3. Out of five elements, this situated context was what educators most frequently described as impacting how they made sense of the policy (Resnick, 1991).

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In other words, it is necessary to investigate what multiple forms of hidden or unnoticed prerequisites the policy required in the process of policy enactment (Honig, 2006). Focusing on urban educators' perceived challenging contexts, it can be possible to assume what foundations are needed to enact the RBG3. Through this study's finding, the following questions need to be asked.

1) Does this district have a functional infrastructure such as a district-level data hub to track student scores and monitor IRIPs?

2) What is the teacher retention rate? How many teachers are licensed? How could the district improve teacher working conditions to raise their retention rate?

3) How much time do this district's teachers have for instructional planning?

4) How many students in this district have interrupted schooling experiences before entering kindergarten?

5) If the district has low parental involvement, in what ways does the district create a supportive environment by providing wraparound services that alleviate poverty to increase parents' literacy involvement?

6) Does this district have funding to hire enough coaches and interventionists?

7) What emotional support does the district need to provide to meet their specific students' needs?

The answers to these questions will lead to a rich discussion on the district's infrastructure to organize a systemic approach, teacher retention for consistency to create a professional community, instructional time to enhance teaching quality, student readiness shaped from former schooling, parental involvement partnering with teachers, funding for coaches and interventionists for instruction improvement and timely support for students, and social-

emotional readiness for learning. This process will make educators set up the expectation from the policy in their context by acknowledging "what works for whom, where, when, and why" (Honig, 2006, p. 4) to determine behaviors.

Therefore, before expecting the policy effect, the policymakers should consider whether their required prescriptive policy messages have hidden prerequisites to enact the policy for districts, schools, and teachers. As shown in this study, RBG3 had hidden requirements for reaching expected outcomes such as a stable teacher retention rate, students' readiness and pre-schooling experiences, a manageable number of IRIP students, and enough coaches and interventionists. Confronting the lack of these human and material resources along with family dynamics, urban educators could not expect the outcome the RBG3 intends. Rather, they showed minimal compliance. Therefore, state policy representatives should investigate what contextual challenges district and school-level educators perceived before enacting the policy, rather than judging policy effects simply by the reading score improvement of all Michigan third graders.

4.2. Practitioners: Teacher Voice in Policy Interpretation and Implementation

In this study, I found that administrators and teachers had inequitable access to policy information. Only administrators had access to a broad range of policy documents and a community in which to interpret the policy. Teachers, who received only fragmented information filtered through the administrators, interpreted the policy narrowly, focusing on the measurable behaviors that they "had to do" as a result of the policy, such as writing IRIP's (Coburn, 2005; Spillane, 2000a). Administrators perceived their role as selecting the policy messages to deliver to teachers, in order to prevent teachers from becoming overwhelmed by too many tasks from multiple policies. Therefore, the district chose to ask for the minimized task for teachers, and the

principal created a data tracking assignment according to what he perceived as important in the policy.

However, this approach may hamper teachers' deeper understanding of policy and deprive educators of opportunities for rich discussion among administrators and teachers. This is especially true in district Blue's context, which presented many challenges for the school and its teachers. In the decision-making process at the district level, the voice of teachers as forefront actors in classrooms where teaching and learning happens should be included to share what they expect and need from professional perspectives. Their expertise as proactive meaning makers needs to be included to critically evaluate policy messages in a formal meeting. Through this process, the district could give teachers a chance to form their own interpretation of this policy and to set up the direction within which it will be implemented in this situated context. Furthermore, by creating solidarity, they can discuss ways to improve the urban educational environment by using this policy in reverse as a basis for resisting this policy or requesting the right to work in a better environment. Teachers would then have more cognitive development and motivation to enact policy in a better way that fits into this urban context (Coburn, 20001).

Furthermore, as the forefront actors, teachers should be proactively engaged in the discussion of fully shared policy information. As this study found, most teachers encountered these policy messages through district training in IRIP writing. Instead of accessing the full information and discussing its possibilities and barriers on their professional experiences and knowledge, teachers were only required to know what they have to do in the policy implementation as a policy target (Ball et al., 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to provide opportunities to have an in-depth discussion around the policy, not only for district and school administrators but also for teachers who are teaching in the classrooms.

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4.3. Researchers: Hierarchy Between Dominant and Non-Dominant Minority Languages

The existing research on language acquisition development is based on dominant minority languages such as Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese (e.g., Gottado, 2002; Relyea and Amendum, 2020). However, when a classroom has more students speaking more than ten different languages, teachers struggle with how to embrace and apply this high diversity in their instruction. Unless ELs are in bilingual programs, which only provide dominant languages such as Spanish or Chinese as additive bilingualism, EL students with non-dominant minority languages should develop the first language from home or community support, otherwise, they may lose their primary language under this learning environment as subtractive bilingualism (Lambert, 1974). In the context of linguistically heterogeneous ELs in a classroom, although they were allowed to use translanguaging in classroom interaction (García, 2009), most of their exposure to unlimited multilingual dynamics took place outside of classroom instruction, which was generally English-only.

The Blue district had a great system of cultural brokers who served as mediators and translators to support interaction between multi-stakeholders and emphasized multicultural book usage, which equally embraced diverse students' characteristics (Noguerón-Liu, 2020). These added multicultural values helped students naturally accept linguistic diversity, have an open mind to all different languages, and develop their identities (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2014). However, in contrast to having a high number of ELs, there was a lack of efforts to accumulate each culture's fund of knowledge systemically to be utilized as a core of instruction (Moll et al., 1992). ELs' non-dominant minority languages were valued as a tool to learn English, with little economic benefit for future jobs. The case where Farsi speakers learn English was different from the cases where Spanish or Chinese speakers learn English. Therefore, it is necessary to

acknowledge that there is also a hierarchy between dominant minority languages and non-dominant minority languages and another layer of effort may be needed to accumulate the knowledge of non-dominant minority languages and cultures to be equally embraced in instruction.

Traditional bi- or multilingual education research has been conducted in dominant minority language communities, where one or two languages have been used at the classroom or school levels (e.g., Gottado, 2002; Relyea and Amendum, 2020). Therefore, there was a lack of research about how teachers embrace these different languages and assets inclusively and equally in their instructions in a classroom with more than ten different languages and cultures.

The non-LAP school has a few ELs without EL teachers, and only the WIDA ACCESS test measures the current English immersion instruction outcome without any particular EL support; its result did not impact teachers' instruction. In this school, ELs were invisible. In contrast, the LAP school has high numbers of ELs with EL teachers and bilingual assistants, where through sheltered classrooms, students received EL services, but it has been limited to the mechanism of subtractive bilingualism in the form of an English immersion system with SIOP-trained EL teachers and bilingual assistants' support for basic English proficiency level students without continuing this first language development systemically.

Therefore, it is impossible to apply the traditional bi or multilingual approach where many home languages exist in a classroom. In the context of subtractive bilingualism, additional multilingual values (such as allowing translanguaging and code-switching between peers having the same first languages, helping basic levels of classmates as translators, and recruiting bilingual assistants to help newly arrived students' initial language acquisition) are limited to developing students' non-dominant minority language to reach biliteracy, which ultimately

replaces their first languages with English as they progressed in English proficiency (Lambert, 1974). Therefore, EL researchers need to investigate how to utilize this high diversity of ELs in instruction.

5. Directions for Future Research

While this study illustrates how urban educators shape the sensemaking of the third-grade retention policy in support of ELs, it also has limitations that future research should address. First, the findings of a single-district, qualitative case study may not be generalized since its small number of participants (total 12) within particular contexts and unique dynamics among the multiple stakeholders who impact ELs' learning experiences might be different from other districts in Michigan. Therefore, future research needs to examine these research questions in different contexts, such as ELs in suburban and rural areas, to compare similarities and differences in educators' sensemaking in support of ELs. However, rather than explicit generalization, the original aim of this study is to analyze lived experiences to understand how and why RBG3 has impacted ELs' learning in urban contexts. In addition, as a qualitative researcher, I recognize that understanding this sensemaking process could improve comprehension of the process of implementing policies in a larger context, much like a single small case study can help to clearly interpret large phenomena (Erickson, 1986). Therefore, this study seeks to explain the retention policy implementation phenomenon in urban contexts for a particular group within the macrostructure in an indirect way.

The second limitation may result from ELs' heterogeneous nature. Since ELs in the Blue district include immigrants or refugees with low-income families, it is hard to say whether the selected ELs' learning experiences may be similar to other ELs'. Therefore, it is necessary to

conduct case studies of multilayered EL subgroups, differentiated by race, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, US resident years, disabilities, former schooling experiences, and first language proficiency to expand the researcher's knowledge of EL's unique learning experiences. Furthermore, this research was a five-month window qualitative case study; future research conduct as ethnographic research about ELs' learning at home, in communities, and in school over one or two years will show their learning experiences in a holistic approach to how resources surrounding ELs support their language acquisition, academic content learning, and identity construction.

Last, this study found the hierarchy between dominant minority languages and non-dominant minority languages which shaped the district policies for ELs to support their primary language development; future research needs to investigate the multilayered challenges of ELs having non-dominant minority languages. While multilingualism research has targeted ELs with dominant minority languages such as Spanish or Chinese, there is a lack of these research about non-dominant minority language speakers who might be exposed to a higher risk of replacing their primary languages with English, especially when heterogeneous EL composition exists in a classroom without continued primary language support. Therefore, revealing their challenges through investigating the learning process at schools will be worthwhile to lead to searching for better support for these students.

6. Significance

Despite the limitations described above, my study contributed to the literature on expanding retention policy, policy sensemaking, and culturally responsive sustaining education for the following three reasons. First, understanding how urban administrators and teachers

critically shape the sensemaking of the retention policy in support of ELs in a qualitative way could enhance the awareness of policymakers and practitioners about ELs' challenges in testing-oriented accountability systems.

Second, through the process of culturally critical policy sensemaking, this study demonstrated how actors' perceptions manifested in their behaviors during reading instruction and intervention for ELs. In addition, the study showed how the current instruction in urban schools was difficult to align with culturally responsive sustaining instruction that extant literature suggests, especially in a testing-oriented accountability system and high diversity of EL composition in a classroom. With the comparison between reality and ideality of instruction for ELs, this study revealed the mechanism through which the RBG3 accountability system hampers culturally responsive pedagogy from becoming a core of instruction.

Third, by describing the process from the sensemaking of RBG3 to the manifested behaviors in instruction for ELs, the study captured how power dynamics affected this process. Specifically, I examined how the embedded power in texts and discourses regarding RBG3 framed educators' perceptions of ELs' English deficiency and how organizational formative contexts and rules affected the decision-making concerning specific support for ELs. The notion of power that this study revealed will be grounded in the reasons that a policy needs to be understood within a particular context by acknowledging embedded assumptions and ideologies, not as perceived as the policy text represented (Brown, 2004). This notion of power, overlooked by existing policy sensemaking literature, will enhance the importance of the role of school educators not as implementing agents who comply and follow the policy but as critical judgmental actors who believe they know what is best for their students.

To sum up, expanded culturally critical policy sensemaking with the awareness of power and better ways of culturally responsive sustaining instruction for ELs contributed to explaining the black box of the retention policy implementation process at a district level, which existing score-oriented quantitative retention policy studies cannot explain.

7. Closing Thought

While conducting RBG3 research during my entire doctoral journey, I have always wondered why US teachers have to be evaluated by students' standardized test scores. This question has been raised from my professional experiences at a public elementary school in South Korea for over ten years. As a teacher, my teaching has never been evaluated by my students' test scores. Korean early grade students did not take any standardized tests annually. Although Korean third-graders at the beginning of the year take a standardized test for the purpose of informing national academic policy, the results were not publicly opened or utilized for comparison between schools. Therefore, teachers could create performance assessments according to the curriculum and conduct them naturally while operating class activities. The purpose of this assessment was not to compare students or schools to one another, but to confirm whether students understand the lessons' key concepts according to their objectives as criterion-referenced models. The assessment could be different among teachers.

In contrast, the reason this RBG3 captured my attention as a researcher was, although comprehensive reading and writing were important for learning academic content in Korea as well, and I have seen how a few students accumulated reading and writing difficulties as they grew up, before third grade, it was rarely found to provide particular all-year-round intervention program along with literacy experts in Korean public elementary schools. Therefore, I assumed

early diagnosis and interventions might be helpful for students. However, while I conducted this study, I found the dilemma that in the context of the test-driven accountability system, frequent assessments conducted for the purpose of interventions could be harmful to teaching and learning in terms of narrowing the definition of learning, ignoring students' context, and increasing anxiety in the process of learning.

Even in urban contexts with scarce human and material resources, educators had to address multilayered students' needs in academic and social-emotional aspects, but there was a lack of acknowledgment of their efforts. Although I have worked in the highest and lowest SES areas in Seoul, South Korea, the basic infrastructures for the public schools were similar. Since the local tax was collected and sent to the government and distributed to schools equally, and most educators basically had to rotate schools every five years for the purpose of teaching and school equality, there was little difference between public schools in terms of fundamental structures and human resources. While the Korean educational system seemed to focus more on equality of education quality, the United States seemed to focus more on diversity in education. Although every system has strengths and limitations, difficulties in urban schools seemed severe coming from this diversity in terms of funding, teaching quality, and curriculum.

I could not reach the exact answer to educational inequity issues rooted in socio-economic history and the philosophical and political perspectives of society. However, meeting my great participants who have shown honest feelings, lived experiences, and pedagogy in difficult contexts made me respect them. In the process of data collection and analysis, when I faced heartbreaking moments, I often had to stop and resonate with their pain, thinking what if I were this teacher, principal, district administrator, or parent, and I had to walk on campus to reduce my sadness and to ponder about the causes of this complex phenomenon. Educational

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problems based on inequality will not be solved easily. But I want to continue to do research that reveals the thoughts and commitments of educators who, despite facing these inequalities at the forefront, look at children holistically, love them wholeheartedly, and teach them with great dedication.

Do Not Blind Your Eyes Toward Students by Score-Oriented Learning.

Music flows.

Maya's eyes start shining.

By drumbeats, her shoulders lightly but rhythmically move.

As music pitches faster, her arms and hands move dramatically.

I saw a great dancer.

She was no longer a daunted young child who struggled to write a word a few minutes ago.

She smiles at me confidently while dancing.

It was beautiful.

APPENDICES

RBG3 and EL Learning Study
Yujin Oh

Research Background and Goals

This research investigates how district and school level educators make sense of Michigan Read by Grade Three Law (RBG3) in support of English Learners (ELs) and how ELs experience their learning under the policy context. This study will contribute to our understanding of how the retention policy is understood, interpreted, and used at the district and school level toward a particular student subgroup, ELs. By exploring EL's learning experience in the environment shifted by the policy, it will help to identify benefits and challenges of the policy for ELs' learning. Using a case study approach, I will recruit one district for study and collect in-depth qualitative interview data from 11-13 participants (4 district administrators, 2 EL relevant specialists, 2-4 EL teachers, 1 principal, 2 EL families), EL-relevant district meeting and intervention observations.

Research Questions

> 1. How do district and school level educators make sense of RBG3 in support of EL?
> 2. How does the actors' sensemaking regarding RBG3 impact how a school provides learning experiences for ELs?

Study Selection

This study will be conducted in person or virtually from Dec 2021 to Apr 2022. The district case study includes:

- One or two interviews with each participant
- 2 observations of EL relevant district/school meetings
- 6-time observations on EL interventions
- 2 days shadowing on EL classrooms

Study Design

(The timeline and frequency can be *flexible* according to your district and school schedules.)

- Dec 2021
  - Initial interviews

- Jan 2021 - Feb 2022

- Observation of selected two ELs including during reading intervention: 30-min to 1-hour block in each of two interventions (grades one and three), three days per week, once at the beginning of Jan and once at the end of Feb. (No recording each class, only taking a field note)
- School meetings

- Feb - Mar 2022
  - Two observations of EL relevant district meetings

- Mar - Apr 2022
  - Last interviews
  - As an appreciation, provide five high-quality, award-winning multicultural children's books for teachers and students, and gift cards for administrators

- Jun 2022
  - Provide a report regarding the results of my research in terms of district policy sensemaking and research-based effective literacy support for ELs

Data Management

All recordings and transcriptions will be stored on my laptop before the completion of this study. By the end of the study, all data will be permanently deleted.

Risk and Safety Information

This study will not adversely impact students' learning opportunities since the purpose of the study is to describe how students learn in a particular policy context as it is. And also the study will not impact any assessment of educators because collected students' data will not be shared with teachers and educators will only reflect their policy sense and teaching. Participants can say no or withdraw at any time. Conversations in both interviews and focus groups and observation data will not be discussed outside research.

Monitoring and reporting of Adverse Events/Serious Events

If I find any adverse events regarding my research, I will report to Lansing district to solve this problem without leaking any personal data.

Confidentiality

Participants will be identified by pseudonyms, and key identifying characteristics will be altered to disguise their identities.

Study Oversight

This study will be supervised by MSU Professor Kristy Cooper Stein as an advisor of Yujin Oh.

Intended used of data

This data will be utilized for my dissertation, presentation, and publication.

Researcher Responsibilities

- Give an introduction about the purpose of this study to each participant and collect the completed consent forms from each participant.
- Provide a report on how the district and school policy actors shaped their sensemaking collectively on RBG3 in support of ELs and how to provide research-based effective support for ELs in June 2022.
- Collect data as described on the prior page.
- Protect the confidentiality of all participants in the preparation of transcripts, presentations, and publications based on the data.
- Deal with any issues or concerns raised by any participants during this process.

Researcher Contact Information

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APPENDIX B. Participant Consent form for Educators

RBG3 and EL Learning Study

Please consider this information carefully before deciding your participation.

The goal of the research:

This research investigates how district and school level educators make sense of Michigan Read by Grade Three Law (RBG3) in support of English Learners (ELs) and how ELs experience their learning under the policy context. This study will contribute to our understanding of how the retention policy is understood, interpreted, and used at the school level toward a particular student subgroup, ELs. By exploring EL's learning experience in the environment shifted by the policy, it will help to identify benefits and challenges of the policy for ELs' learning. Using a case study approach, I will recruit one district and collect in-depth qualitative interview data from district administrators, principals, teachers, EL students and parents, EL-relevant intervention and instruction observations, and other relevant documentation during the 2021-22 academic year.

Your rights to participate, say no, or withdraw:

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

What you will do in this research:

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed once or twice and be a part of EL-relevant lessons and meeting observations during the 2021-22 academic year. Each interview will take approximately 40 to 60 minutes. During the interview, conversations will be focused on your understanding of and preparation for the third-grade retention law and how you support EL students. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. During the observations, I will observe how ELs learn in interventions, and how educators make decisions in support of ELs. All observation data will be recorded in observation notes.

Benefits:

As a participant in this study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your perception of the third-grade retention law in support of ELs. Additionally, you will have the chance to reflect on the ways you have improved your instructional skills for ELs. As a study participant, you will contribute to learning how policies are implemented at the school level, and how implementing agencies shape their understanding to enact the policy for a particular EL group. Once all data collection is finished, each administrator will be provided a $ 20 digital gift card and each teacher will be rewarded with five multicultural books ($100) to support ELs' learning.

Confidentiality:

Your interview and observation data will be kept confidential. As a research participant, you will be identified by pseudonyms, and key identifying characteristics will be altered to disguise your identity. All schools, districts, and the county will be identified by pseudonyms. Your interview recording, transcription, and observation notes will be stored in my laptop before completion of this research. At the end of the study, all your data will be permanently deleted.

Contact:
 If you have any questions about this research, please contact me or Dr. Kristy Cooper Stein:

Yujin Oh Doctoral Student Michigan State University College of Education ohyujin2@msu.edu Cell: 517-505-0586	Dr. Kristy Cooper Stein Associate Professor Michigan State University College of Education kcooper@msu.edu Cell: 617-777-0423

Whom to contact about your rights in this research:
If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Agreement to participate:

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Date: _____

School / Grade (position): _____

Name (print): _____ Signature: _____

APPENDIX C. Participant Consent form for English Learners' Parents and Students

RBG3 and EL Learning Study

Please consider this information carefully before deciding your participation.

The goal of the research:

This research investigates how district and school level educators make sense of Michigan Read by Grade Three Law (RBG3) in support of English Learners (ELs) and how ELs experience their learning under the policy context. This study will contribute to our understanding of how the retention policy is understood, interpreted, and used at the school level toward a particular student subgroup, ELs. By exploring EL's learning experience in the environment shifted by the policy, it will help to identify benefits and challenges of the policy for ELs' learning. Using a case study approach, I will recruit one district and collect in-depth qualitative interview data from district administrators, principals, teachers, EL students and parents, EL-relevant intervention and instruction observations, and other relevant documentation during the 2021-22 academic year.

Your rights to participate, say no, or withdraw:

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

What you will do in this research:

If you agree to participate, you and your child will be interviewed jointly and your child will be a part of EL-relevant lessons observations (6 times) during the 2021-22 academic year. The interview will take approximately 40 to 60 minutes. During the interview, you will be asked about your experiences with the school and teachers and your child will be asked about learning experiences under intervention programs. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. During the observations, I will observe how your child learns in interventions. All observation data will be recorded in observation notes.

Benefits:
As a participant in this study, you will have the chance to reflect you and your children's learning experiences under the policy context. Once all data collection is finished, you will be rewarded with two multicultural books ($40) for further learning.

Confidentiality:
Your interview and observation data will be kept confidential. School cannot access you and your child's interview data. As a research participant, you will be identified by pseudonyms, and key identifying characteristics will be altered to disguise your identity. All schools, districts, and the county will be identified by pseudonyms. Your interview recording, transcription, and observation notes will be stored in my laptop before completion of this research. At the end of the study, all your data will be permanently deleted.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, please contact me or Dr. Kristy Cooper Stein:

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Whom to contact about your rights in this research:

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Agreement to participate:

Your signatures below mean that you both have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research study and the parent has also given permission for his/her child to participate.

Date: _____

Your child's name (print): _____

Your Name (print): _____ Signature: _____

APPENDIX D. Interview Protocol for EL teachers and Interventionists

<u>**First Interview Protocols**</u>

Personal background
1. Will you describe your background and what made you become an EL teacher (or reading specialist or special education teacher)?
2. Will you describe your roles and responsibilities in this school?

School Context
3. Will you describe your school and district contexts in terms of EL populations and EL community relationships?
4. In your district, what criteria exists to identify ELs?
5. How many EL students are here and who are they? How many ELs are receiving interventions?
6. What types of programs are currently provided for ELs whose first language is not English? (EL classes and EL tutoring services)

Pedagogical Relationship
7. Will you describe what is it like to live and teach as an EL teacher? (Phenomenon of interest)
8. What do you think about your EL students? What do they mean to you?
9. Could you describe a memorable teaching and learning moment you have had with EL students?
10. How do you see students' home languages and cultures in the classroom?
11. What aspects of the growth of ELs make you feel worthy as a teacher? Will you describe experiences that make you want to continue teaching ELs?
12. What do you expect from your students? What learning experiences do you want to give them?
13. Have you ever had students that could not reach the minimum levels or who showed very slow growth? How did you feel about those experiences?

Teaching and Learning
14. What curriculum do you use to provide additional instruction for ELs?
15. What kinds of things do you consider when you plan and organize your lessons?
16. What challenges do you face when preparing your lessons?

RBG3 policy
17. I'm interested in learning about what you think of the Read by Grade Three law. Can you tell me what you understand about the law?
18. How and when did you learn about RBG3 prior to attempting to fulfill the mandate at your school?
19. What do you think about the law? What implications does this law have?

Second Interview Protocol

Policy Sensemaking

1. Please explain the photos you brought which represent your perception of the impact of RBG3 on ELs and teachers.
2. In the first interview, you said (key points of his/her answer).
3. Did your school already have structures/a curriculum in place that made it easier to transition to instruction that fulfilled RBG3?
4. Have you found any changes between the times before and after RBG3 implementation? If so, could you explain the changes?
5. There is an exemption to wave the retention for ELs. What do you think about that?
6. What expectations does your district have related to the law?
7. What expectations do you have for your students related to the law? What has led you to hold this level of expectation?
8. What is your role in the policy implementation?
9. What might be the differences between teachers' needs and district demands? How are you dealing with these differences?
10. What testing tools does this district use to assess ELs' reading?
11. What formal and informal professional learning opportunities do EL teachers receive from the school and district?
12. In what ways do you think the policy supports and/or undermines your teaching and ELs' learning?
13. What other mis-educative things might happen as a result of the policy?

Instruction

14. Are there any chances for ELs to use different languages and share their cultures in your class?
15. How do you and your school value ELs' different languages and cultures?
16. Some researchers suggest that four elements are important to create culturally responsive sustaining education environment (welcoming and affirming environment, high expectations and rigorous instruction, inclusive curriculum and assessment, ongoing professional learning) and how do you think about these things and how do they play out in your classroom and school?
17. Ask questions gained from observation of instructions.

Power and Tension

18. In EL-relevant school/district decision making such as purchasing materials for ELs, how much is your voice heard? Whose voices are considered the most and why?
19. Who is in charge of communication with EL parents about their reading competency? If that is you, what does that communication look like? What are concerns of EL parents regarding the policy?
20. Ask questions gained from school meetings and PD observations.

- All second interviews for district administrators and a principal also began with the photo method like the #1 question of teacher protocols along with the questions raised from school and district meeting observations and relevant documents.

APPENDIX E. Interview Protocol for District Administrators

Professional Background
1. Will you describe your roles and responsibilities in this district?
2. Would you describe your professional background briefly and what made you take this position?

District Context / Programs
3. Would you provide district context related to ELs?

Pedagogy
4. Could you describe a memorable support (or learning) moment you have had with EL students?
5. How do you see students' home languages and cultures in the classroom?
6. What do you expect from your EL students? What learning experiences do you (your district) want to give them?

Programs
7. Would you explain how your district identify ELs and help their learning?
8. What programs and supports have been provided for ELs in your district for valuing their primary languages and cultures? What are the objectives of these programs?
9. How do other non-LAP school teachers access the resources to teach ELs who are not in these three schools?
10. Would you explain the process of EL teacher recruitment and the preparation of PDs to train EL teachers?
11. How frequently does your district have meetings in support of ELs? What are current agendas and who are participating?
12. What challenges do you face in support of ELs in terms of funding, parental involvement, EL teacher recruitment etc?

Policy Sensemaking
13. I'm interested in learning how you think about the Read by Grade Three law. Can you tell me what you understand about the law? How and when did you learn about RBG3?
14. What do you believe RBG3 requires administrators and teachers to do for EL students?
15. What is your particular role in the policy implementation?
16. What expectation does your district have toward EL students regarding RBG3?
17. What do you think about ELs' exemption to waive the retention?
18. What programs and resources did your district provide for EL's learning related to RBG3? Have you found any changes before and after RBG3 implementation? If so, could you explain the changes?
19. Have you found any tensions to implement the law toward ELs?

APPENDIX F. Interview Protocol for Literacy Coach

Professional Background
1. Will you describe your background and what made you take this position?
2. Will you describe your roles and responsibilities?

District and School Context
3. In your district and school, how many ELs are there?
4. At your district and school levels, what programs and resources have been provided in support of ELs?

Coaching
5. In your support for coaching instruction for teachers, have you considered EL students' bilingual or multilingual characteristics? If so, how?
6. Have you received training for instruction that considers the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students? If so, what did it look like? And how did you apply what you learned from the training to your coaching of teachers?

Policy Sensemaking
7. I'm interested in learning how you think about the Read by Grade Three law. Can you tell me what you understand about the law?
8. How and when did you learn about RBG3 prior to attempting to fulfill the mandate at your school?
9. What information have you distributed to your teachers and parents regarding the policy?
10. What communities are you surrounded by that have impacted your understanding about the policy?
11. What do you think about the law? What implications does this law have?
12. Have you found any changes before and after RBG3 implementation? If so, could you explain the changes?
13. What is your role in the policy implementation?
14. What expectations does your district have related to the law?
15. What expectations do you have for your teachers related to the law? What has led you to hold this level of expectation?
16. What might be the differences between teachers' needs and district demands? How are you dealing with these differences?
17. In what ways do you think the policy supports and/or undermines teachers' teaching and EL's learning?
18. What other mis-educative things might happen as a result of the policy?

APPENDIX G. Interview Protocol for Principal

School Context
1. In your school, how many EL students are there? How is the relationship between your school and EL communities?

Pedagogical Relationship
2. What do you think about EL students at your school?
3. In what ways does your school value ELs' first languages and cultures?
4. How does your school communicate with EL parents? What does it look like?

Support for ELs
5. At your school level, what programs and resources have been provided in support of ELs?
6. How many multicultural books does your school have at the school library and in the classrooms? And how do your teachers utilize multicultural books for teaching?
7. Are there chances for your teachers to receive professional learning about culturally responsive instructions for teaching bi- and multilinguals like ELs?

Policy Sensemaking
8. I'm interested in learning about what you think of the Read by Grade Three law. Can you tell me what you understand about the law?
9. How and when did you learn about RBG3 prior to attempting to fulfill the mandate at your school?
10. What information have you distributed to your teachers and parents regarding the policy?
11. What communities are you surrounded by that have impacted your understanding about the policy?
12. What do you think about the law? What implications does this law have?
13. Have you found any changes before and after RBG3 implementation? If so, could you explain the changes?
14. What is your role in the policy implementation?
15. What expectations does your district have related to the law?
16. What expectations do you have for your teachers related to the law? What has led you to hold this level of expectation?
17. What might be the differences between teachers' needs and district demands? How are you dealing with these differences?
18. What testing tools does this district use to assess ELs' reading?
19. Has your school provided parental workshops regarding RBG3 law? If so, can you describe how EL parents responded?
20. In what ways do you think the policy supports and/or undermines teachers' teaching and ELs' learning?
21. What other mis-educative things might happen as a result of the policy?

APPENDIX H. Interview Protocol for EL Parents and Students

Interview Protocols for Parents

Personal Context
1. Tell me about your race, ethnicity, and home country. How did you decide to come to the U.S.?
2. How long has your child attended this school? How is your relationship with school as a parent? How often do you participate school activities?

Parenting
3. Tell me about your first child, (name). What does your child mean to you?
4. Will you describe your most memorable moment with your child?
5. How do you hope your relationship with your child will grow over time?

Learning Experiences
6. Will you describe what is it like to learn as an EL student and parent?
7. What expectations do you have for your child's learning at a U.S. school?
8. How do you feel about the fact that your child is categorized as an English Learner?
9. How was your child's learning before versus during/after the pandemic? How was your child's teachers' instruction?
10. Your child has received extra learning from interventionists. Have you ever watched your child's learning or talked about learning? What does it look like? How do you think your child felt about their learning?
11. Has your child had a chance to use their primary language and show their primary culture(s) at school? If so, would you elaborate on that experience? How did you feel?
12. How do teachers talk about your child's learning? What does the communication look like?

Frustration
13. What does it feel like to worry about your child?
14. When you received the standardized test results, how did you feel? What is it like to see your child struggling?

Family language policy
15. As a parent, what do you expect for their language development?
16. What support have you provided for their bilingual development at home?

Policy Sensemaking
17. Under the RBG3 law, when your child becomes a third grader, your child will take the M-STEP to determine retention at the end of the academic year. What do you know about the policy? And how do you feel about the policy?
18. During K-3, your child has been evaluated three times a year under the policy with WIDA (World- Class Instructional Design and Assessment) and classroom tests. The results determine further support such as interventions with small groups. (If the child receives interventions) what do you think about your child's learning from interventions?

19. Have you ever heard anything related to the policy from school? Have you received the parent workshops announcement regarding Individual Reading Intervention Plans or received the letters relevant to the policy?

Interview Protocols for Students

The following protocols may change when I start observations for students' learning closely at school. I will ask them about their learning experiences at school and how these experiences made them feel in terms of their identity, attitude, and values.

1. Would you introduce yourself?
2. Do you like to learn at school? If so (or not), what makes you feel that way?
3. (If the child learns in EL class) What did you learn from the teacher (reading specialist and special education teacher) in the last class? Can you describe how the EL teacher teaches?
4. Do you like to learn with your teachers? If so (or not), why?
5. Are you confident in speaking/reading/writing English? If so (or not), what makes you feel that? Will you describe the experience?
6. Have you ever spoken or written in your first language at school? If so, when did you use it and how did you feel?
7. (If the child receives intervention programs) When you learned in intervention class, how did you feel?
8. In last week, you took a computer-based test (WIDA test). When you took these type tests, how did you feel? How was the test?
9. Add questions that arise from observations.

APPENDIX I. Observation Protocol for EL Interventions and School Meetings

Date and Location:

Dimension	What I observe	Observer Comment
EL Interventions		
Welcoming and affirming environment		
Inclusive curriculum and assessment		
High expectations and culturally responsive instruction		
Values first languages and cultures		
Pedagogical Relationship		
EL student engagement		
School Meetings		
Perceptions of/expectations for ELs		
Distributed information		
Thought communities		
Perceived situated context		
Similar/contrast Sensemaking		
Socially shared beliefs		
Tensions (power and organizational rules)		

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