

MAINSTREAM TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN MEETING THE ACADEMIC
AND LITERACY NEEDS OF ADOLESCENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my dear husband, Sulaiman Alaraini, for always wholeheartedly supporting me through the thick and thin. Thank you for always pushing me to strive for greater successes and for always being my guiding light through this long and difficult journey. I am forever grateful for your love, patience, and encouragement that have helped me make it this far.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	xi
List of Abbreviations	xii
Abstract	xiii
Chapter One	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Research Questions.....	9
Significance of the Study	10
Definition of Terms	12
Summary	15
Organization of the Dissertation.....	15
Chapter Two	17
Adult Learning Theory and the Social Constructivist Theory	20
Mainstream Teachers of ELLs.....	21
Mainstream Teachers’ Role and Responsibility in Teaching ELLs	22
Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Mainstream Teachers of ELLs.....	23
PD of Mainstream Teachers of ELLs.....	25
Needs for PD for Mainstream Teachers.....	27

Current issues in PD for Mainstream Teachers of ELLs	30
Mainstream Teachers of ELLs’ Perceptions and Attitudes of PD	33
Reforming PD for Mainstream Teachers of ELLs	37
Changing Mainstream Teachers’ Beliefs and Attitudes	38
Interest and Engagement of Mainstream Teachers in PD.....	39
Closing Mainstream Teachers’ Learning Gap about ELLs’ Teaching	41
Instructional Strategies of Teaching ELLs in Mainstream Classrooms.....	43
Supporting Mainstream Teacher Learning within the School Setting.....	46
Summary	48
Chapter Three	52
Qualitative Research.....	53
Case Study.....	55
Context.....	56
School district	57
Setting	60
Participants.....	62
Lakewood PD Activities.....	67
Data Collection.....	68
Individual interviews	70

Focus group interviews	70
Field notes journal.....	72
Memos.....	72
Procedure and Data Analysis	72
Validity	75
Research Timeline.....	77
Summary	78
Chapter Four	79
Participants' Personal and Professional Backgrounds	79
Findings	90
Attitude and Perception	93
Teachers value PD experiences	93
Teachers build on their personal and professional experiences.....	98
Teachers acknowledge the vital role of organizational support in teaching and understanding of the academic and social needs of ELLs and their families	102
Teachers remain critical of some PD opportunities	104
Language and Content Integration	109
Mainstream teachers ought to consider literacy as an integral part of their daily and routine instructions.....	111

Teachers benefit more from practical and authentic PD.....	118
Teachers gain better teaching experiences through social interactions with their peers	124
Differentiation.....	132
Teachers demand PD programs be based on their prior knowledge.....	133
Teachers desire the content of PD to be relevant to their current situation	137
Teachers want to have a voice in their learning opportunities.....	141
Time	145
Teachers require PD materials to be divided into segments	146
Teachers desire to have ample time to master content covered.....	149
Teachers seek opportunities to reflect and follow up on their professional practices	154
Summary	159
Chapter Five.....	161
Discussion.....	163
Implications	172
Implications for Instructional Practices	173
Implications for Teacher Education.....	175
Implications for Teachers' PD	176

Implications for Policy.....	178
Implications for Research	180
Limitations	182
Final Thoughts	183
Appendix A	186
Appendix B	188
Appendix C	190
Appendix D	191
Appendix E	193
Appendix F.....	194
Appendix G	195
Appendix H.....	196
References	197

List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1. <i>Participants' Detailed Demographic Information</i>	65
Table 2. <i>Participants' Detailed Teaching and PD Experiences</i>	66
Table 3. <i>Research Timeline</i>	77
Table 4. <i>Initial Codes, Categories, and Eventual Themes Emerging from Data Analysis</i>	91

List of Abbreviations

Professional Development	PD
English Language.....	EL
English Language Learners.....	ELLs
English as a Second Language.....	ESL
Professional Learning Community	PLC
Curriculum Learning Team.....	CLT
Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol	SIOP
Pedagogical Content Knowledge.....	PCK
Wilson Public Schools District	WPSD

Abstract

MAINSTREAM TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN MEETING THE ACADEMIC AND LITERACY NEEDS OF ADOLESCENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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There is a learning gap between what mainstream teachers ought to know and practice to effectively teach English language learners (ELLs) and what they know and practice in actuality when working with adolescent ELLs. This study employed a qualitative method to assess the effectiveness of teacher professional development (PD) opportunities from the perspectives of mainstream teachers of ELLs. This research is best situated within social constructivist theory and the theory of adult learning. By listening to the voices of ten experienced mainstream teachers from a middle school, I was able to shed some light on their attitudes and perceptions about their PD experiences amid teaching ELLs.

Generally, the views of the participating teachers provide a holistic picture of how teachers make meaning of their experiences of their PD activities. A key finding of this study indicates that the main challenge mainstream teachers face is figuring out how to successfully enhance ELLs' English proficiency while teaching them the content of the subject area. The participants openly expressed their desire and interest to learn and apply

new instructional strategies and practices through a cohesive set of PD offerings rather than one-shot PD. While the participants revealed that their previous PD activities had partially helped them improve their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions toward teaching ELLs and toward PD opportunities, they mostly relied on their previous experiences and prior beliefs when developing their attitudes toward teaching ELLs. Differentiating PD to meet teachers' different learning needs was also highlighted by many of the participants as a major suggestion for improving PD opportunities. Within the concept of differentiation, participants highlighted the need to get special training on supporting those ELLs with varying degrees of English proficiency and academic abilities. The findings of the study also revealed that mainstream teachers need sufficient time to shift their thinking and start practicing what they have learned in PD activities.

Chapter One

In recent years, the number of English language learners (ELLs) attending K-12 schools in the United States has dramatically increased, with more than 10% (or more than 5.5 million) of the K-12 student population being labeled as ELLs (Hersi et al., 2016; Polat & Cepik, 2015). While it takes approximately three years for ELLs to exit English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and join mainstream classrooms, it is important to note that not all adolescent ELLs succeed in becoming proficient in English, which may result in them becoming long-term struggling readers while underperforming academically (Calderon et al., 2011; Gandara et al., 2005; Hamman & Reeves, 2013; O'Brien, 2011; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). The alarming and persistent low academic performance of ELLs, as compared to non-ELLs, leads to major challenges for mainstream teachers as well as school and district leaders on how best to support adolescent ELLs during their school years and beyond.

In examination of this issue in providing effective support for adolescent ELLs, research findings reveal that mainstream teachers are largely not well-equipped with the right pedagogical content knowledge and skills, social and cultural knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes needed to meet learning needs of these students (Coady et al., 2015; Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Lee & Buxton, 2013; Téllez & Waxman, 2006; Yoon, 2008). While there is an increase in professional development (PD) opportunities for mainstream

teachers of ELLs (Ballantyne et al., 2008), little is known about the effectiveness of these PD programs, through the lenses of mainstream teachers' perspectives of how these programs assist them in adequately instructing ELLs (Rice Doran, 2014; O'Brien, 2011).

Teaching adolescent ELLs can be more effective if content area knowledge and English language acquisition are integrated, which in turn, places more responsibility on mainstream teachers to get the proper training and education on how to effectively teach literacy strategies in their subject areas to adolescent ELLs (Molle, 2013; Yoon, 2008). To better employ content-based instruction for ELLs and to support more effective literacy program implementation, it is essential that mainstream teachers participate in high quality PD, which builds their instructional capacities, as well as social and cultural awareness and understanding needed to adequately educate adolescent ELLs (August et al., 2010; Berg & Huang, 2015; Coady et al., 2015; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Jiménez et al., 2015). By inviting teachers of ELLs to share their experiences and perspectives about these PD programs, PD opportunities for teachers of ELLs and ultimately the teaching practices which best benefit EL students may be improved (Gandara et al., 2005; O'Brien, 2011; O'Neal et al., 2008).

Statement of the Problem

An initial review and assessment of the literature on the availability, extent, and effectiveness of PD for mainstream teachers working with ELLs revealed that there is a gap between what mainstream teachers ought to know and practice to effectively teach ELLs and what they know and practice in actuality when working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms (August et al., 2010; Coady et al., 2015; Franco-Fuenmayor et al.,

2015; Molle, 2013; Short, 2013). This gap in professional learning significantly contributes to the observed achievement gap exhibited between ELLs and non-ELLs (Berg & Huang, 2015).

In general, K-12 PD has consisted of the generally accepted practice of in-service activities (e.g., collaboration, co-teaching, peer meetings, and workshops). Yet, the impact and effectiveness of these PD opportunities remain questionable. Current PD opportunities, in most of their forms and types provided for mainstream teachers to assist and support ELLs, are both limited in quantity and are considered ineffective to a large extent in supporting mainstream teachers to adequately teach ELLs (Berg & Huang, 2015; Bunch, 2013; Coady et al., 2015; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Molle, 2013; Lee & Buxton, 2013; Téllez & Waxman, 2006). Borko (2004) elaborates on this issue by arguing that “the professional development currently available to teachers is woefully inadequate” (p. 3). In contrast to the traditional PD programs provided to content area teachers, Knight and Wiseman (2006) asserted, “the results of professional development for teachers of diverse populations are even more problematic” (p. 391).

Many mainstream teachers are not only unprepared to teach ELLs, but more importantly, they are unaware and less informed of the critical role they play in having an impact on supporting and meeting the learning needs of ELLs (Bunch, 2013; Calderon, 2009; Coady et al., 2015; Gandara et al., 2005; Molle, 2013). O’Neal et al. (2008) argue that even when mainstream teachers participate in PD programs to help them enhance their teaching strategies and practices of ELLs and gain some understanding of their

culture and diversity, they learn more about ELLs and their qualities but less about how to directly and effectively teach this group of students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of teacher PD opportunities from the perspectives of mainstream teachers of ELLs. In conducting this study, PD is defined as those training activities such as collaboration with colleagues and workshops, college courses, or seminars which are planned and implemented by schools and school districts to support mainstream teachers in how best to meet the academic and literacy needs of adolescent ELLs. PD opportunities can be significantly enhanced by engaging mainstream teachers in the planning and implementation processes of PD, including getting their ideas and suggestions for the content, delivery, and outcome of these programs (Coady et al., 2015; Gandara et al., 2005; O'Brien, 2011; O'Neal et al., 2008). This can be accomplished by listening to the voices of mainstream teachers about their experiences with and perceptions of the quality of PD opportunities.

To accomplish this goal, I conducted a case study in which I described and assessed the role and impact of PD programs adopted by a selected middle school to support mainstream teachers in meeting the academic and linguistic needs of ELLs. More specifically, I interviewed a group of mainstream teachers to describe and assess, from their perspectives, the effect of these PD opportunities on their pedagogical content knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes pertaining to the teaching of adolescent ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

There are different theories on teacher education, but this study on the perceptions of mainstream teachers of the effectiveness of PD activities in enhancing their teaching of ELLs is best situated within social constructivist theory and the theory of adult learning. Beck and Kosnik (2006) state that a social constructivist theory of teaching and learning is postulated on an epistemology that suggests “the primary purpose of knowledge is to help learners function in the world, not to describe universal reality” (p. 10). According to the social constructivist theory of learning, therefore, knowledge is constructed from lived experiences and social interactions between people in social or educational settings (Palincsar, 1998).

Through the construction of new knowledge, learners assimilate information into previously held cognitive structures as well as make necessary changes in those structures. Further, during the process of knowledge acquisition, and for new data to be meaningful, it is not just simply acquired, but it needs to be truly constructed and assembled by the learner. The latter approach of knowledge construction represents a major transformation from the traditional model of teacher education programs which “operate in a system of isolated and fragmented courses, passing on knowledge about teaching to frequently passive students” (Short, 1993, p. 156).

Constructivism, therefore, may offer a lens through which teachers develop their perceptions based on their own PD experiences that are influenced by prior knowledge and skills. Consequently, teachers’ perceptions can be refined or changed by both personal transformation or by participating in a particular experience such as PD

programs. Through participating in PD activities and opportunities, learners will engage in some type of questioning and reflection about their experiences and will eventually interpret and construct new knowledge and skills that they can implement in their future teaching strategies and practices.

In effect, the social constructivist theory assumes learners make sense of new information by linking it to what they already know and hopefully integrating it into previous knowledge and skills. By participating in PD activities, learners, or mainstream teachers in this study, have ample time and variety of occasions to receive, analyze, and construct new information and hopefully develop a new understanding of the information through their own personal reflections and experiences. This actually explains how participating mainstream teachers in PD activities construct, interpret, and integrate their personal reality with their perceptions of what they have learned and experienced in those PD opportunities.

During actual PD activity processes, teachers develop new understandings and perceptions with regards to their teaching strategies and practices through learning from and interacting with teacher educators, PD instructors, and peers. Equally important, PD participants have an opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills by interacting in a very productive and meaningful way with the content presented in the PD activity and by collaborating with others (e.g., their peers), who bring in rich teaching experiences and pedagogical content knowledge and skills in the subject covered by the underlying PD. Through collaboration, teachers may construct new knowledge based on their experiences and those of others about how to enhance teaching practices of ELLs.

By applying a social constructivism perspective, I sought to learn from individual experiences and perceptions to both understand the reality of PD opportunities and explain how these PD experiences can be enhanced to meet the ultimate goal of improving the teaching strategies and practices of teachers of ELLs. Research findings greatly suggest that PD experiences in which teachers are engaged need to be more active, collaborative, flexible, personalized, relevant, and socially constructed to meet the teaching needs of today's teachers of ELLs (Stewart, 2014). Therefore, this study utilized open-ended questions as a vital element of qualitative research to construct meaning by listening to the voices of mainstream teachers and by attempting to understand their lived experiences regarding their participation and perceptions of PD opportunities.

Effective and sustained PD can be also viewed and understood within the theory of adult learning. Adult learning incorporates principles that assume that unlike the teaching of children, adult learners are expected to be self-directed and potentially ready to learn, as they are driven by the fact that they have an instructional deficiency. Also, adult learners, by default, tend to strive for direct and immediate application of the new skills and knowledge they have acquired (Knowles, 1980, 1984).

Learning can be described as a continuous and interactive process, and adult learners can build new knowledge and skills by refining or rejecting their prior knowledge. In this process, learners (in this case mainstream teachers) already have their own beliefs, knowledge, and skills about how to make sense of their reality of teaching ELLs (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003). Consequently, PD introduces these teachers to a new reality, or understanding of teaching practices and knowledge that they may use to make

connections with their prior knowledge, allowing them to eventually integrate and implement what they have learned in their mainstream classroom practices (Risko et al., 2008).

Adult learning, additionally, is largely driven by individual, personal factors, which include but are not limited to teacher beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and school and district culture (Guskey, 2000; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003). In an education program of adult learners, a transaction process between the learners and the teacher takes place through the learners' active participation in the identification of their learning needs and the planning of how these needs will be met (Knowles, 1980). Teachers who gain maximum outcomes from PD are those who “monitor their own ideas, and thought processes, compare and contrast them with those of others, and provide reasons why they accept one point of view over another” (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003, p. 35).

School contexts greatly affect the learning outcomes that can be gained during site-based PD, and formal school leadership, and schools' cultures and norms greatly influence how mainstream teachers (as learners) collaborate and interact with each other. Further, research findings significantly indicate that formal school leaders play critical roles in promoting positive and effective PD, through promotion of culture and norms, which could largely contribute to the improvement of instructional practices of ELLs (Gallucci et al., 2010).

Given the vital role of mainstream teachers in closing achievement discrepancies exhibited between ELLs and non-ELLs, it is equally important to simultaneously close the gap in teacher education. Effective teacher training programs are expected to have a

significant impact with varying degrees on teachers in terms of changing their pedagogical knowledge, skills, attitudes, and perceptions towards the teaching of ELLs, which, subsequently enhances their instructional strategies and practices. Since mainstream teachers of ELLs need to improve their pedagogical content knowledge, skills, attitudes, and perceptions towards the teaching of ELLs, they should receive training on how best to teach ELLs, both within formal education and in-service settings.

In the examination of training opportunities, however, mainstream teachers may have different experiences with such PD, which may enrich intended benefits of these programs (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003). Some teachers may change their negative attitudes and perceptions about the teaching of ELLs by engaging in PD programs. It is this aspect of the relationship between PD opportunities and their effect on mainstream teachers of ELLs that this study aims to tackle. In effect, a new approach to teacher PD is emerging in K-12 education, prompting a paradigm shift from the traditional model of teacher PD to a more progressive model of PD that takes into account the diversity of the K-12 student population by meeting the learning needs of ELLs within all student groups.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study of the PD opportunities available for mainstream teachers of ELLs:

1. What do mainstream teachers believe is the impact of PD opportunities on their perceptions and attitudes regarding teaching ELLs?

2. What do mainstream teachers believe is the impact of PD opportunities on the degree to which their pedagogical content knowledge and skills support the academic and literacy needs of ELLs?

Significance of the Study

In order to elevate the achievement of ELLs, mainstream teachers require the support and commitment of school leaders and school districts in areas related to foundational linguistic knowledge and skills specific to the teaching of ELLs (Coady et al., 2015; Kibler & Roman, 2013). This also includes introducing PD opportunities related to cultural awareness, attitudes, and beliefs. To bridge the gap in mainstream teachers' capacity to help educate ELLs, new and creative ways to improve the effectiveness of PD should be considered.

Additional research in this endeavor is necessary to better understand the most effective ways to positively change mainstream teachers' attitudes towards teaching ELLs, address challenges teachers are facing in implementing what they learn in PD, and identify innovative solutions to improve PD to better support teachers of ELLs in improving their knowledge and skills about teaching. Teacher preparation and PD opportunities could be a solution to not only address the problem of teacher quality in the US, but also to solve the problem of shortage in trained teachers who can work with ELLs (Short, 2013).

During my work as an ESL teacher and as a graduate student, I have conducted preliminary research about struggling readers in middle and high schools, which involved visiting a number of secondary schools and meeting with reading specialists and ESL

teachers. Within these visits and conversations, I noticed that there is a knowledge gap between ESL and mainstream teachers on how best to deal with and teach ELLs. Consistent with prior research findings (Baecher, 2012; Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015) and through my initial class observations, and consideration of feedback from ESL teachers, I noticed that mainstream teachers in middle and high schools are facing major pedagogical and PD challenges which may hinder their abilities to better identify and support struggling readers—most of whom are classified as ELLs.

To acquire more insight into how effective PD programs are in those schools that have an ELL population, I conducted this case study about one specific middle school. In this study, I interviewed a group of mainstream teachers to listen to their experiences and concerns about PD programs offered by the selected school, with emphasis on how effective these programs are in supporting them in meeting the learning needs of ELLs. This study contributes to the extant literature on PD for mainstream teachers of ELLs by focusing on the experiences and perception of mainstream teachers about the PD opportunities in which they have been engaged.

I utilized the feedback of mainstream teachers to evaluate the degree of effectiveness of these PD opportunities in developing the pedagogical knowledge and skills of mainstream teachers to adequately integrate and teach the academic literacy with content knowledge and skills to the targeted ELL population. I measured effectiveness of PD in this setting by analyzing responses of mainstream teachers to questions about the effects of PD on their knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of ELLs, and improvement in instructional strategies and practices in mainstream classrooms. Additionally, by listening

to the voices of mainstream teachers of ELLs, this research helps to identify areas of continuous learning needs in PD.

Definition of Terms

For conducting this study, the following terms describe and define the key vocabulary used in educational and research settings.

Collaboration. Within group dynamics, collaboration refers to a group of people such as teachers sharing common attributes and interest and working together systematically and interdependently to improve results (Haberman, 2004).

Content area teachers. Content area teachers are those who teach core academic subjects in K-12 schools such as science, mathematics, language arts, and social sciences.

Content-based instruction. Content-based instruction (CBI) focuses on the integration of language and content instruction, ranging from content-driven approaches (e.g., immersion, partial immersion, sheltered subject-area courses) to language-driven approaches that focus on the development of language through the content instruction (Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Snow et al., 1989; Stoller, 2004).

English language learners. The term English language learner (ELL) has been recently and widely used to refer to a student who has limited English language proficiency, especially in terms of reading and writing, and is working toward developing proficiency. The term ELL, to a large extent, replaces the old description of Limited-English proficient (LEP), as an effort to switch schools' efforts and focus on "learning" as opposed to a focus on "limitation" (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). For the

sake of this study, ELLs are defined as those who have already completed their required ESL program and have joined mainstream classrooms.

Professional development experiences. Professional development experiences refer to those professional experiences that help teachers to grow in pedagogical knowledge and skills, therefore making them more valuable and productive teachers, and in turn, allowing them to be in a better position to meet the learning needs of their ELLs.

Mainstream classrooms. Mainstream classrooms are classrooms where content area teachers serve ELLs simultaneously with general education students.

Mainstream teachers. Mainstream teachers are classroom teachers who provide educational services to all students, including those students with special needs such as ELLs or special education, in a regular classroom setting. Teachers in mainstream classrooms are also referred to as content area teachers.

Professional development. It is learning to earn or maintain professional credentials such as academic degrees to formal coursework, attending conferences, and informal learning opportunities situated in practice. It has been described as intensive and collaborative, ideally incorporating an evaluative stage.

Pedagogical content knowledge. Possessing pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is viewed as a teacher's ability to approximately organize information of knowledge, by blending content and pedagogy so that students are able to assimilate and learn the content (Bunch, 2013). Within the learning environment, PCK is knowing those structures within a content field that help to confer some appropriate level of understanding to advance students' understanding of a subject.

Social constructivist theory. It refers to the theory of knowledge in sociology and communication that examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality.

Teacher attitudes. Teacher attitudes refer to the opinions, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs possessed by teachers in general, which could influence their teaching styles and interactions with students in the classroom (Reeves, 2006).

Teacher perceptions. Perception refers to the thoughts or mental images which teachers have about their professional activities and their students. Teachers' perceptions are shaped by their background knowledge and life experiences. Most importantly, these perceptions greatly influence their teaching and professional style as well as their behavior.

Teachers' professional development. Teachers' professional development can be defined as "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitude of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students" (Guskey, 2000, p. 16). Simply put, PD is a comprehensive, sustained, and intense approach to improving learners' effectiveness in increasing student achievement (Hirsh, 2009).

Theory of adult learning. The theory of adult learning provides insights on the ways in which learners change over time, while proposing strategies to capitalize on the strengths of adult learners (Weimer, 2002).

Summary

For those who are identified as adolescent ELLs, further investigation is warranted towards a focus on the continuous and growing enrollment of ELLs and their low academic and literacy performance, especially as these students come from different cultural and educational backgrounds (Rubinstein-Avila, 2004). This section presented a background on the issue related to the teaching of ELLs, including their noticeable growing number within the K-12 school system and the observed achievement gap among ELLs as compared to their native peers. The statement of the problem to be investigated in this study was also identified, followed by specifying the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and organization of the study.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters: introduction, literature Review, methodology, results, and discussion. The introduction, chapter 1, includes background of the investigated problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of key terms used in the literature, and the study's limitations. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review pertaining to the problem of how best to support mainstream teachers to teach ELLs. Chapter 3 identifies the methodology adopted in this study. More specifically, this section of the study outlines the participant selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The main findings of the study are presented and discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the study with

some analysis and discussion of the results, and their implications for practice, educational policies, teacher education, PD, and research.

Chapter Two

The number of ELLs continues to increase, and currently, more than 5 million (10%) of the US student population consists of these students. Yet, based upon the body of research dedicated to increasing the effectiveness of the teaching for ELLs, educational efforts at the federal, state and local levels remain unsatisfactory. Data reveal that the educational performance of ELLs continues to decline, and the achievement gap between ELLs and native-speaking students widens (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013; Yoon, 2008). The extant research on the academic performance of ELLs provides ample evidence about observed achievement gaps between native-speaking students and ELLs (Goldenberg, 2011; Lee & Buxton, 2013; Lucas et al., 2008; Kibler & Roman, 2013).

ELLs are best defined as those students whose native language is one other than English, and who are learning English as a second language (Escamilla, 2007; Hamman & Reeves, 2013). It is evident in the United States, however, that ELLs are a heterogeneous group of students, representing more than 400 different cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, with varying levels of English proficiency, educational knowledge, and learning skills (Goldenberg, 2011). Educational and cultural background is a key factor that significantly contributes to their potential educational performance. Some ELLs have relatively sound and competitive educational and economic backgrounds, while others have experienced inferior and disrupted educational and economic circumstances.

Even after completing their required ESL programs and joining mainstream classes, a great number of adolescent EL students may still experience academic and literacy difficulties (Calderon et al., 2011). In fact, today's adolescent ELLs' difficulties with reading and writing may have begun early in their elementary school years, and for most EL students, these literacy problems were not adequately addressed. This has resulted in many EL students either dropping out early from school or being unable to graduate from high school (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Other adverse effects of ELL's poor literacy skills are likely linked to future challenges in colleges and/or joining the labor market (Batalova et al., 2007; Snow & Biancarosa, 2003).

A majority of the documented ELLs were born in the United States (Capps et al., 2005), and are therefore broadly identified as long-term English learners (LTEL). This alarming phenomenon of LTEL is clearly a testimony of the failure of schools to academically and linguistically serve this population. To resolve this issue and to be effective in teaching ELLs such as LTELs, schools need to go beyond just meeting the learning needs of students themselves, and work toward understanding the social and cultural factors involved in their learning process (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Escamilla, 2007; Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015).

Statistics demonstrate that on average, ELLs' academic achievement is extremely low as compared to non-ELLs. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2015), fourth-grade ELLs, for example, scored 37 points below non-ELLs in reading, and 45 points below non-ELLs in math. The achievement gaps for ELL eighth graders were even greater, as their scores were below

the scores of non-ELLs by 49 points in reading and 43 points in math. The actual gap between fourth-grade ELLs and non-ELLs in terms of the percentage of Below Basic category on NAEP was 37 points for reading and 25 in math. The achievement gaps for ELL eighth graders between the two groups was 47 in reading and 40 in math. In another performance measure, the number of ELLs who do not graduate from high school is extremely higher than that of native English speakers (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). This is especially true for ELLs, as they possess common attributes and challenges that hinder their ability to perform well academically, with the dual challenge of attempting to advance in academics while still learning the instructional language of English. EL students' struggle to adequately read and write, which contributes significantly to the achievement gap between them and non-ELLs within the public-school system (Batalova et al, 2007; Snow et al., 1998).

The national achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs will eventually lead to a global achievement gap between US students and other international students, especially those from developed countries, which is manifested by the latest performance scores of US students as compared to those of other international students (OECD, 2016). The increase in this global achievement gap would eventually lead to major and damaging effects on the economic competitiveness of the US labor market. Yet, the gap between the two groups of students (ELLs vs. non-ELLs) remains unresolved, and it is unlikely to close in the near future due to the limited interest, attention, commitment, and investment by policy makers, school districts, and teacher educators to find high-quality and effective ways to support and improve the learning needs of ELLs (Calderon et al.,

2011). Perhaps mainstream teachers can, if prepared and properly trained appropriately, make significant improvement in ELLs' literacy and academic achievement (Knight & Wiseman, 2006).

Adult Learning Theory and the Social Constructivist Theory

According to the adult learning theory, when adults like teachers are engaged in any type of learning such as PD, it is assumed that they are self-directed learners, they bring a wealth of experience to the educational setting, they enter educational settings ready to learn, they are problem-centered in their learning, and they are best motivated by internal factors (Knowles, 1984). In addition, Knowles (1984) presented four central principles that explain how to best develop training for adult learners: (a) as they are engaged in a learning experience, adults desire to be involved in how their training is planned, delivered, and executed. In the process, they want to control what, when, and how they learn; (b) adults gain more when they can pull past experiences into the learning process by drawing on what they have previously known to add greater context to their learning; (c) as opposed to rely on memorizing facts and information, adult learners need to solve problems and use reasoning to better gain the new knowledge and skills they are presented; (d) adults want to know how to apply new information in their workplace, meaning what they are learning needs to be applicable to their situations and be implemented immediately.

In addition, Knowles (1984) eloquently explained the process of learning for adults occurs in real life situations (e.g., PD), which is uniquely different from the process of learning for children. The process learning for adults needs to be applied with

the consideration of the underlying assumptions of adult learning. There are seven steps to the learning process for adult learning: (a) creating a cooperative learning climate; (b) planning goals mutually; (c) diagnosing learner needs and interests; (d) helping learners to formulate learning objectives based on their needs and individual interests; (e) designing sequential activities to achieve these objectives; (f) carrying out the design to meet objectives with selected methods, materials, and resources; and (g) evaluating the quality of the learning experience for the learner that includes reassessing needs for continued learning.

Mainstream Teachers of ELLs

The increasing and somewhat alarming trend in the number of ELLs places great responsibility on secondary subject area teachers and educational stakeholders (e.g., principals, coaches, teacher educators, developers, and researchers) to provide high quality instruction for ELLs. In particular, mainstream teachers are expected to have the interest, willingness, and pedagogical capabilities to accept and assume responsibilities to adequately serve the academic and linguistic needs of this group of students (NCELA, 2011; Yoon, 2008). Adding to the complexity of the problem of not satisfactorily meeting the academic needs of ELLs, there is a shortage of highly qualified ESL teachers, and it is estimated that on average, there is only one ESL teacher for every 37 EL students (Pawan & Ortloff, 2011). This shortage places more responsibility on mainstream teachers to support the learning needs of ELLs.

Unlike the teachers of only English-speaking students, mainstream teachers of ELLs are faced with the demand and challenge of not only supporting the academic

requirements in subject areas for ELLs, but to concurrently promote English language and literacy development for this group of students. It is not uncommon to find that mainstream teachers who specialize in areas such as history, math, or science utilize a specific set of instructional strategies, practices, and assessments (one size fits all), regardless of what types of students they have in their class literacy programs (Escamilla, 2007). The alternative is to adapt instructional practices that ensure the integration of language and content in order to meet the learning needs of ELLs.

Mainstream Teachers' Role and Responsibility in Teaching ELLs

A large body of research has found that mainstream teachers are not only unprepared to teach ELLs, but more importantly, they are unaware and less informed of the critical role they play in having an impact on supporting and meeting the learning needs of ELLs (August et al., 2010; Ballantyne et al., 2008; Bunch, 2013; Coady et al., 2015; Molle, 2013; Téllez & Waxman, 2006). Furthermore, studies in this area reveal that secondary mainstream teachers may not be attentive to their ELLs' learning needs over students' academic careers. This occurs as many ELLs have been identified as academically and linguistically struggling students throughout their K-12 school grades due to the fact that they repeatedly did not achieve required reading level benchmarks in the standardized tests administered to them (Ballantyne et al., 2008).

It is widely accepted that closing the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs requires closing similar gaps in teacher preparation programs and the ongoing and sustained PD programs that are used to support mainstream teachers to adequately teach ELLs (Calderon et al., 2011). To help support the academic and literacy demands of this

specialized group of students, mainstream teachers need to assume responsibility for their students' instructional needs, while developing foundational understandings of the cultural and social knowledge of ELLs and building adequate pedagogical capacities to promote their own learning towards teaching ELLs.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Mainstream Teachers of ELLs

The capacity of teachers to educate ELLs has not been adequately addressed in most states, despite the issuance of educational policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (previously the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)) and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that address issues of student diversity and the need to help prepare teachers to teach ELLs (Coady et al., 2015). In fact, only a few states (e.g., Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas) require all general education teachers to have some training on how to teach ELLs, separate from re-certification of licensure (Peter et al., 2012). Still, it is widely accepted that most mainstream teachers are struggling to discover and learn how best to teach ELLs, with most of them being unaware of the underlying learning needs of this population of students (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Lee & Buxton, 2013; Lucas et al., 2008).

In contrast to mainstream teachers, ESL and bilingual teachers are perceived as being more aware of their role and understanding of the learning needs of ELLs; however, it can be argued that this group of teachers remains somewhat unprepared to effectively teach this group (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Lovette, 2013). Franco-Fuenmayor et al. (2015) examined emerging issues related to ELL et al.s teaching and learning, including teachers' knowledge of instructional practices for ELLs, research on

bilingual programs, research-based instructional strategies, and knowledge related to second-language development. Based on a sample of 225 bilingual/ESL teachers in a large suburban school district in Texas, Franco-Fuenmayor and her colleagues (2015) reported that most teachers were not properly informed and trained in areas pertaining to bilingual education and knowledge related to second-language development. The findings of the study also revealed that bilingual/ESL teachers were not being provided with information about research on bilingual education and best practices that should be utilized to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students.

While there is strong evidence suggesting that secondary mainstream teachers are less prepared to deal with and help adolescent ELLs to overcome their academic problem, there is still limited effort reflected in educational reforms and policies to resolve this issue (Hamann & Reeves, 2013; Leko & Mundy, 2012; Paris and Block, 2007). Hamann and Reeves (2013) concluded that middle and high school teachers of identified ELLs were substantially less prepared for supporting the academic and literacy needs of ELLs than their elementary peers. Based on the answers of 371 state and local secondary literacy teachers, 27 directors or coordinators of adolescent reading programs, 22 district-based supervisors of literacy or language instruction, and 21 professors of literacy education, master's level teachers of reading or English, or site-based administrators, Paris and Block (2007) concluded it is imperative for all secondary teachers to consider literacy as an integral part of their daily and routine instructions.

Leko and Mundy (2012) examined three secondary special education teachers' implementation of reading knowledge and strategies acquired during a two-year

preparation program. The results of the study indicated that teachers' instructional decisions were driven by contextual factors, including school-adopted curriculum and students' abilities and needs. Similarly, Janzen (2007) found that individual learners and teachers themselves frame the instruction of secondary teachers. This argument can be applied to the case of teaching literacy in content area classrooms to EL students who have varying levels of English proficiency and, as such, require more specialized and differentiated instruction than non-ELLs (Watkins & Lindahl, 2010).

PD of Mainstream Teachers of ELLs

Issued in 2001, the NCLB law was considered a major change in school reforms that focus on the issue of teaching ELLs (U.S. Department of Education (2001). NCLB (2001) required that each State create an accountability plan that included implementation of academic and performance standards for all students. States were also required to show that ELLs were progressing in their proficiency of the English language by meeting annual measurable achievement objectives (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). By definition, the NCLB law placed the responsibility to effectively teach ELLs on each individual state. On December 10, 2015, ESSA was established to replace NCLB. To measure the progress made by EL students, a report called "Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)" was generated every year, which includes a summary of the outcomes of standardized tests administered within school districts. As a result of the issuance of the NCLB (2001) and ESSA (2015) coupled with CCSS (2010), schools in each state began to enroll ELLs from the time they first arrived into mainstream classes along with non-ELLs. These educational requirements placed more responsibility on the part of

mainstream teachers to properly serve ELLs but fell short in addressing and enforcing teacher training on how to properly teach EL students.

While federal policies such as NCLB (2001) and the CCSS (2010) have generally addressed the academic needs of ELLs, many scholars and researchers argue that such policies do not adequately address mainstream teachers' PD and commitment to quality native-language instruction (Gebhard, 2010). Hawkins (2004) contended that educational policies set at the federal, state, and local levels are being developed without the participation and contribution of educational researchers and professionals. This, in turn, adds to the complexity of having more teachers lacking sufficient and necessary preparatory or professional knowledge for how to best serve ELLs' learning needs. Even professional programs that are developed and implemented at the state and district levels are considered ineffective in supporting mainstream teachers in instructing ELLs (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015).

As more ELLs are enrolling in mainstream classrooms in schools across the United States, especially in the states of Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas (both in rural and suburban schools), all teachers are required by federal and local educational mandates to support and meet the learning needs of ELLs to achieve academic success. Under NCLB, for example, schools could not make AYP unless all student subgroups, including ELLs, met targeted progress benchmarks. However, limited support and incentives were provided for teachers to professionally build the knowledge and skills they needed to adequately enable them to serve the academic needs of the growing population of ELLs (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Peter et al., 2012).

Despite the issuance of federal, state, and local laws, and funding allocated to programs targeting teaching ELLs, the educational outcomes for ELLs has a limited outlook in terms of success (Hawkins, 2009). Poor performance, on the part of ELLs, has motivated researchers to call for immediate intervention and correction on the part of policy makers, school districts, and teacher educators. This urgent demand to change how ELLs are viewed and taught by mainstream teachers is highly warranted, given the increasingly observed growth in numbers of ELLs in US classrooms. There is a high cost to be paid for having low performing ELLs in all grade levels, who are more likely to drop out of school, and turn into “unproductive citizens” through eventual incarceration or unemployment (Lovette, 2013).

Needs for PD for Mainstream Teachers

Ample research evidence, supported by the continuous and growing number of low performing ELLs, suggests that a primary solution to the problem of ELLs may be to invest in PD programs for mainstream teachers (Coady et al., 2015). PD programs should focus on closing the gap between the foundational knowledge, skills and dispositions needed by mainstream teachers to effectively educate ELLs. Teachers can both build upon and continuously develop their teaching capacities in general, but more importantly, to meet the academic literacy needs of the growing student population of ELLs. This may occur through formal college programs in teacher preparation and continuing education, certification and licensure programs, and those collegial environments built upon collaboration and coaching with continuous PD opportunities.

With the growing number of ELLs, coupled with their low literacy and academic performance as compared to their native speaker peers, it is widely recommended that mainstream teachers be more informed and educated about how to teach reading to ELLs. School districts provide different types of PD, including workshops, online training, cycles of peer observation and feedback, school visitations, research inquiry and action research, and university courses, all of which are utilized to train in-service teachers in improving their instructional practices. In addition, teachers may voluntarily engage in PD experiences, or may be required to do so through district or state-level mandates. There is no consensus, however, on what type of PD is best for teachers and whether or not to require and mandate that teachers participate in PD or to provide it as an option for teachers to decide upon (or a combination of both). It is critical, therefore, to create an open dialogue with mainstream teachers to find effective ways to train them and positively change their attitudes and beliefs when working with ELLs.

Concurring with many researchers, Tran (2014) asserts that the purpose of PD is to continuously improve the knowledge and skills of mainstream teachers. However, there continues to be areas of major disagreement and heated debate at the policy and research levels concerning the terms of its status, the extent and timelines of training opportunities, the degrees of its effectiveness, the factors affecting its use (including cost), and the possible and relevant ways to improve it. In a mixed method based study involving 144 PK-12 teachers with five or fewer years of teaching experience in two local school districts in central Texas, Tran (2014) found that PD played a major role in helping and supporting teachers to improve their self-efficacy. In this study, self-efficacy

was related to the following: more utilization of inquiry-based practices, higher teacher confidence levels, positive long-term teaching and learning behaviors, more use of differentiated instruction, and more use of real-life examples to enhance learning. Through the utilization of interviews with selected groups of teachers and classroom observations, Tran (2014) conducted five case studies to acquire insights into the reflections of teachers on their experiences in relation to PD. The analysis of these five cases revealed that PD led to pedagogical changes which not only increased teachers' content knowledge base, but also promoted positive thoughts, attitudes, and actions towards ELLs' learning and academic achievement.

Researchers have also reported the finding that teachers who instruct in a bilingual education system have significantly better knowledge about how best to teach ELLs than those teachers who support ESL programs only (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015). This finding could be explained by the degree of quality and quantity of preservice education that bilingual teachers have prior to working with ELLs. This research indicated it is important for bilingual/ESL teachers to be knowledgeable about effective research-based instruction for ELLs, as well as be highly competent in implementing best practices for ELLs, including first- and second-language acquisition, and effective organization and management of instruction (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Gandara et al., 2005). This finding indicated that the lack of preparation on the part of ESL/bilingual teachers (to effectively work with ELLs) validates that mainstream teachers are more likely to face on-going problems as to how to better meet ELLs' academic and social needs.

Current issues in PD for Mainstream Teachers of ELLs

There are various factors which clearly affect the degree to which PD advances mainstream teachers' knowledge and skills in improving the teaching of ELLs. These factors include: federal, state, and local policies related to the teaching and assessment requirements (Kibler & Roman, 2013); funding available to support PD (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016); bilingual and mainstream teachers' linguistic, social, and academic knowledge and skills (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015); the beliefs, attitudes, desires and interests of mainstream teachers to engage in specialized PD programs aimed toward developing their knowledge and skills about how best to teach ELLs (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013); and the degree of commitment, support, and involvement of school districts and school leaders (Molle, 2013).

Urmston and Pennington (2008) and Gandara et al. (2005) explained that mainstream teachers were not able to adopt newly learned strategies and practices in their PD due to the constraints and difficulties they were facing, including issues with wide variability in academic and English needs and levels, teacher-parent communication, large class sizes, numerous responsibilities, unmotivated students, and pressures to prepare students for required tests. The findings of these studies highlighted a common research finding among educators that teacher-parent communication is an issue, especially for maintaining professional interactions between schools and students' families in relation to ELLs and their learning (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

Many schools across the States have been using one or more models of teaching ELLs, including: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), Cognitive Academic

Language Learning Approach (CALLA), Quality English and Science Teaching (QuEST), and Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), but the extent of usage and effectiveness of these methods of teaching, however, is not clear (Short et al., 2012). This finding can be explained in part by the reality that not all schools are required by laws or mandates to implement such programs. Also, it is worthwhile to notice that there may be no incentives or sufficient budgets provided for schools to implement certain research-based or instructional models to effectively teach ELLs. In essence, it is left to the discretion of school and division-level administrators, and in certain cases for ESL/mainstream teachers, to determine whether to adopt such programs and to what extent they will implement them in their classrooms (Daniel & Conlin, 2015). If the teachers are well-educated and trained in theories about effective practice, they may be able to design their own models—but that is often not the case.

Research findings revealed that only about 25% of mainstream teachers have reported enrolling in PD specific to the teaching of ELLs (Ballantyne et al., 2008), which suggests the need to openly discuss and resolve the problem of teaching and learning of ELLs at the policy, research, and school levels. Research on teacher preparation for ELLs largely focuses on either practicing teachers without reference to their professional preparation, or teachers' attitudes towards ELLs (Kibler & Roman, 2013). By conducting a research synthesis that examined 19 studies which addressed the issue of what types of PD were used for in-service teachers who work with ELLs, Knight and Wiseman (2006) found there was little guidance on how to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to be successful in effectively teaching ELLs. Knight and Wiseman

(2006) also reported that the studies identified in the research synthesis did not provide any evidence on the impact of the various PD activities on teachers' classroom behavior or students' learning.

In most teacher education programs, the issue of student diversity has not been substantially integrated and discussed in the learning context of K-12 education (Berg & Huang, 2015; Calderon, 2009; Coady et al., 2015; Goldenberg, 2011; Kibler & Roman, 2013; Molle, 2013). It is evident that there is a mismatch between what PD communicates and instructs, versus realities and demands of classroom environments and contexts. This is especially relevant to the degree of effectiveness of PD, and the impact of PD on the learning and performance of ELLs. In a study involving interviews and classroom observations of 23 K-12 teachers in one urban and three rural school districts, Berg and Huang (2015) reported that teachers who taught in culturally and linguistically diverse settings felt they learned little from typical teacher preparation opportunities. The researchers concluded these opportunities did not address the academic needs and issues pertaining to the teaching of ELLs.

Concurring with many researchers, Ballantyne et al. (2008) and Calderon (2009) reported most staff development programs do not significantly contribute to the level of instructional quality needed to effectively educate ELLs. By surveying 5,300 educators in California, Gandara et al. (2005) found most teachers had little or no PD designed to support them in teaching ELLs, with only 43% of teachers (who instructed a large percentage of ELLs) indicating they received only one or no in-service training which focused on the teaching of ELLs. Similarly, Cervone (2010) reported that out of four

school districts in Connecticut, 70% of the 356 surveyed teachers, who worked with ELLs in mainstream classrooms, did not feel adequately prepared to work with ELLs, and 64% of teachers had not received any specialized PD. Cervone (2010) also found that the degree of quality of training provided to teachers varied from one school to another, and from one PD program to another.

Based on the review and analysis of large-scale national studies on PD, Blank and de las Alas (2009) concluded that most PD programs designed for mainstream teachers are not well developed to effectively meet the key characteristics of effectiveness. They measured effectiveness of PD programs by a number of attributes, which include but were not limited to the following: a content focus, collective participation in designing and implementing PD programs, an alignment to State standards, and sufficient time (Blank and de las Alas, 2009). Penuel et al. (2011) contributed significantly to the literature by highlighting the importance of focusing on the effectiveness of PD targeting teachers. They provide strong evidence that PD can be more effective when factors such as program duration and proximity to practices and teachers' professional communities are considered. Their research utilizes a convincing theoretical framework based on the constructs of the role of context in teacher learning as a result of in-service PD.

Mainstream Teachers of ELLs' Perceptions and Attitudes of PD

Researchers on the issue of effective PD recommend that all types of PD activities should be utilized to educate mainstream teachers to view content of PD not only from their own perspectives, but most importantly from the perspectives of their students, especially ELLs. PD allows for first-hand experiences with improving and integrating

new teaching practices for ELLs through intensive interaction and discussions about the subject at hand, and by actively engaging in meaningful dialogue with colleagues.

It is well established in the literature that PD is greatly promoted and practiced throughout schools and districts, with the intention to enhance instructional practices for all students, including ELLs (Birman et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997). While engaging in continuous and effective PD, teachers have the opportunity to provide their input, while being engaged in critical reflection through their involvement in meaningful collaboration and interactive discussion with designated PD instructors, teacher leaders, and/or coaches.

A recent survey that examined teachers' perspectives toward inclusion of ELLs in regular classes, found that lack of time and professional inadequacy were two important factors that greatly affected them in meeting the learning needs of their students, some of whom are ELLs (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). The results of this study revealed there was no consensus among mainstream teachers, however, about the need to get additional training on how best to instruct ELLs. Some mainstream teachers reported lacking adequate special training to work with ELLs where others indicated that there is no special training required to work with this group of students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Mueller et al., 2006). In the latter, mainstream teachers erroneously perceived their students as equal in all aspects, including their English language proficiency.

By surveying 3,000 novice in-service teachers, Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) concluded that mainstream teachers regard their PD programs for teaching ELLs as inadequate. This finding is further supported by O'Brien (2011) and Rice Doran (2014),

who reported that teachers perceive all types of PD, especially those they receive in colleges or through school districts, as unsatisfactory. However, teachers in these studies indicated that they greatly benefit from on-site-based support provided by dedicated ELL educators. In another study conducted by O'Neal et al. (2008), it was reported that only 25% of mainstream teachers felt they were prepared to teach ELLs. However, teachers revealed that they were willing and eager to participate in PD regarding ELLs.

There are perceptions which some mainstream teachers have about ELLs, such as not feeling responsible for teaching ELLs in a manner which differentiates for their English learning needs, or disregarding the literacy differences between ELLs and non-ELLs. This may be further explained by the notion that those who are identified as long-term English learners (LTELs) often possess good conversational skills but lack academic language and literacy skills. This may lead some teachers to misperceive that their EL students' language abilities are commensurate with other native-English speakers in a class. Hansen-Thomas et al. (2016) concluded this assumption on the part of some mainstream teachers, which disregards the differences in their students' English language proficiency, could have major negative implications for the academic performance of ELLs. These misconceptions would likely lead to an increase in the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs.

The research findings on the degree of preparation of mainstream teachers for teaching ELLs reveal that a majority of mainstream teachers feel unprepared to adequately teach the growing and demanding population of ELLs (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Gandara et al., 2005; Lovette, 2013). While it is essential to provide high

quality professional support to mainstream teachers to develop their pedagogical and sociocultural knowledge and skills to adequately teach ELLs, it is vitally important to pay close attention to teachers' commonly held beliefs about teaching ELLs in their classrooms. Teachers' perceptions of their capacity to teach ELLs significantly contributes to their overall beliefs and attitudes about instruction.

Research findings also demonstrate that teachers who feel that they are well prepared to teach ELLs are likely to hold positive attitudes and beliefs about their work, while teachers who think that they are ill-prepared are likely to possess negative attitudes and beliefs (Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010). The same conclusion can be made about the direct relationship of the levels of teachers' preparation to teach ELLs and their pedagogical content knowledge and skills (Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010). Concurring with many researchers on the positive effects of enhancing mainstream teachers' self-efficacy for teaching ELLs, Gandara et al. (2005) suggested that well- prepared mainstream teachers of ELLs have "a sense of self-confidence regarding their ability to teach EL students, a finding that echoes a broader body of research on teacher efficacy in general and its effect on student achievement" (p. 3).

Overall, research has revealed that secondary mainstream teachers are not equipped to assist struggling adolescent ELLs, suggesting the need to identify and propose areas of instructional improvement (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015). Polat and Mahalingappa (2013) argued that public schools "have failed to serve this important student population (ELLs) adequately" (p. 3). While PD programs for teachers with adolescent struggling readers can be credited for a

marginal improvement in bridging the gap in literacy education (Baecher, 2012), there is still a need to reexamine present PD opportunities, at the levels of concerned policy makers and educators, in order to support mainstream teachers of ELLs to ensure their effectiveness.

Reforming PD for Mainstream Teachers of ELLs

Teacher education in areas concerning the learning needs of ELLs is a multifaceted and complex process. Teaching ELLs requires that all mainstream teachers possess a high level of proficiency in knowledge and practices needed to promote and support the language development and academic achievement of their students (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015). In alignment with the CCSS and the forthcoming Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2012) expects that ELLs “must simultaneously learn how to acquire enough of a second language to participate and learn in academic settings while gaining an understanding of the knowledge and skills in multiple disciplines through that second language” (p. ii). Unlike ESL teachers, mainstream teachers need to learn about integrating pedagogical language knowledge with the teaching of the core subject areas for which they are responsible. Without proper and effective PD, Calderon (2009) argued, it will be rather difficult to find teachers who possess and effectively use language, content knowledge, and skills domains, especially when working with ELLs.

Experiences related to PD are multidimensional, incorporating more than just provisions for teachers with a basic set of instructional strategies. Teachers may be able to deliver high quality instruction to linguistically diverse students, particularly ELLs,

when they are exposed to a complex set of experiences, beliefs, knowledge, and skills (Kibler & Roman, 2013; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008). Calderon et al. (2011) argued that enhancing the quality of instruction and teachers in terms of integrating and understanding the linguistic and socio-cultural aspects of ELLs would lead to both better instruction and educational outcome for ELLs. Based on the aforementioned research findings that have been presented thus far, there are a number of factors that need to be addressed in PD to ensure the success and effectiveness of such programs, while helping to prepare mainstream teachers in adequately meeting the learning needs of ELLs.

Changing Mainstream Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes

A large body of the literature suggests that the best way to support and promote teachers of ELLs is to ensure the focus of PD programs is making positive changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs, teachers' classroom practices, thus leading to an outcome of student achievement (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). Teachers' beliefs largely influence their pedagogical decision-making pertaining to curricular frameworks, instructional practices, and interaction with ELLs. Negative, and somewhat biased teachers' beliefs about teaching ELLs, will adversely influence how and what instructional practices are employed by mainstream teachers to educate these students. Consequently, the failure of mainstream teachers to adapt new and modified instructional strategies and practices will definitely lead to poor performance of ELLs as a result of the unjust denial of equal access to the rigorous education offered to non-ELLs (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; O'Brien, 2011; Urmston & Pennington, 2008). There are other factors that influence teachers' beliefs about the language development and academic

achievement of ELLs in mainstream classrooms, including: gender, sociocultural experience, bilingual education, teacher education, and in-service experience (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). For example, teachers who have rich, personal sociocultural experiences are more prepared to effectively support and work with ELLs.

In this direction, PD programs should be redesigned to ensure that teachers will be able to understand and possess knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of ELLs, PCK (including knowledge of accommodations and assessments which addresses the learning needs of ELLs), and the involvement and engagement of ELLs' families and communities in education. Research on PD supports the notion that all content teachers should regularly enroll in training programs designed to not only help them better understand their EL students' cultures and to how communicate with students and their families, but also gain specific skills in dealing with ELLs in the regular classroom (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

Interest and Engagement of Mainstream Teachers in PD

The interest and engagement of teachers who work with ELLs in the designing, conducting, and providing feedback about PD is proven to be both beneficial and productive as these teachers are considered to be the most influential change agents in the context of the teaching and learning of ELLs (Gandara et al., 2005; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013; Yoon, 2008). There are certain realities that mainstream teachers face, such as their own self-interests and motivation to effectively work with ELLs, the realities of relatively large class sizes, and pressures to prepare students for standardized assessments. As these constraints could be anticipated ahead of planning and

implementing PD, it is rather important to consider their relation to and their impacts upon promoted practices during PD programs (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

Research results reveal that most teachers who work with EL students possess the desires and interests to increase their professional knowledge and skills to effectively work with these students (Cervone, 2010). Gandara et al. (2005) concluded that some teachers showed an interest in observing successful teachers and their practice, collaborating and planning with their colleagues, and building coaching relationships in an ongoing manner rather than a “one-shot” PD. Baecher (2012) and Farrell (2008) argued for using mainstream teachers’ feedback in designing teacher PD programs. They contend that mainstream teachers should be invited to communicate their experiences with the personal, social, and psychological demands of working with ELLs, as these students struggle to adapt to the realities of their learning environment. Jiménez et al. (2015) explained a three-pronged framework to guide PD for teachers of ELLs. The proposed framework emphasized the need to prioritize teachers’ dispositions toward ELLs, while examining their PCK and their ability to implement that knowledge.

Teachers should be engaged in providing feedback about how PD programs have or have not met their teaching needs and concerns. He, Prater, and Steed (2011) completed a needs assessment prior to conducting PD sessions for 75 teachers in a school district. The survey results revealed that most teachers rated themselves as average in regard to their competency in the areas of current trends in ESL instruction, the research and theories related to language learning, and relevant assessment issues. This research suggests PD modules should specifically address the needs of teachers who work with

linguistically diverse populations and within different types of bilingual/ESL programs (Coady et al., 2015; He et al., 2011). To increase the chances of improving the effectiveness of PD, researchers have offered that it is critical to conduct a needs assessment prior to developing PD, especially when teachers are working with linguistically diverse students and within different types of bilingual/ESL programs. This ensures that the PD may be customized to support mainstream teachers in meeting ELLs' learning needs. Additionally, teachers need more extensive and repeated field experiences and hands-on teaching experiences to develop solid understandings of literacy practices (Baecher, 2012).

Closing Mainstream Teachers' Learning Gap about ELLs' Teaching

When the content of teacher preparation programs fails to connect with the real-world knowledge and skills that teachers of ELLs need to succeed on their teaching mission, a learning gap develops that cannot be closed (Coady et al., 2015). To support mainstream teachers of ELLs in enhancing their teaching practices, teacher educators and PD instructors/facilitators need to pay close attention to the realities faced by teachers of ELLs. By tapping into feedback from teachers of ELLs, as well as classroom observations, teacher educators should be better able to identify, understand, and resolve the challenges that teachers of ELLs are likely to encounter based on first-hand knowledge (Baecher, 2012; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). While teaching ELLs, mainstream teachers face a multitude of issues, which include but are not limited to a lack of cultural understanding, a lack of being prepared to support students in learning English, and a lack of pedagogical strategies in teaching content area literacy (Coady et

al., 2015). These problems, in turn, create a learning gap between what mainstream teachers know and what they should know that can only be closed through the investment in and delivery of PD.

The extant research on the value of PD for teachers of ELLs suggests that there is a demand to consider new ways of how PD can be improved. As indicated in the previous section, traditional PD programs lack the integration of language, literacy, and subject matter that are considered essential in teaching ELLs, and they have failed to build mainstream teacher's capacity needed to teach ELLs (Howard & Aleman, 2008). Lucas (2011) stated that the predominant conclusion of the literature on the extent, status, and effectiveness of PD is that mainstream teachers should be involved in opportunities to acquire "special knowledge and skills" to best meet the learning needs of ELLs (p. 6). Additionally, Calderon (2009) contended that language and reading specialists as well as subject-area teachers have not adequately addressed language, literacy, and content needed to support and promote the learning of ELLs.

It has become imperative to engage mainstream teachers who teach ELLs in extensive specialized PD programs, with the sole purpose of raising their awareness and understanding of the learning needs of ELLs, as well as developing their PCK and skills specific to the teaching of ELLs in their classroom (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). Teachers should have sufficient knowledge in second language acquisition processes and applications of ESL methods and strategies. PD designed for this purpose should focus on the ability to teach the academic content and skills in English to students who are still in

the process of learning and mastering the English language from an academic perspective (Lucas et al. 2008).

Instructional Strategies of Teaching ELLs in Mainstream Classrooms

When designing and implementing PD programs to support mainstream teachers to properly teach ELLs, schools and districts should ensure that such programs specifically address the need to incorporate literacy components into the learning of content specific material. Public school systems and researchers have made recommendations to examine and evaluate current programs, practices, and instruction provided to ELLs to ensure that the quality of learning provided to them matches the quality of learning given to English-speaking students (Molle, 2013). In many studies, researchers argued that the achievement gaps between ELLs and non-ELLs are largely due to the lack of instructional focus on the integration of language and content (Berg & Huang, 2015; Bunch, 2013; Calderon et al., 2011; Tellez & Waxman, 2006; Tran, 2014).

The extant literature on ELLs suggests that there is a critical need to assess currently employed PD programs and resources and determine which instructional strategies are more effective in meeting the academic needs of ELLs (Coady et al., 2015; Molle, 2013). There has been a growing interest and support for the use of advanced models of teaching ELLs that integrate the teaching of English and subject content instruction (Coady et al., 2015; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Snow et al., 1989). While it may seem natural to teach language to ELLs within the context of key main subject areas such as science and math, this approach contrasts with many existing instructional approaches

of teaching ELLs in which subject area content strategies are not utilized when teaching the English language to these students.

In comparison to the traditional model of teaching ELLs (e.g., separate classrooms for ELLs), more schools are recently adopting immersion (e.g., co-teaching) models to teach and integrate ELLs in the classrooms (Coady et al., 2015). These models of sheltered instruction provide better opportunities for mainstream teachers to be attentive to and supportive of the learning needs of ELLs through a collaborative process of working and cooperating with ESL and bilingual teachers as well as interacting and engaging with ELLs during their early phases of learning the English language (Pawan & Ortloff, 2011). However, many schools may be using “one size fits all” literacy programs that are not tailored to the specific needs of ELLs (Escamilla, 2007). In these contexts, the issue becomes whether all students should be taught and evaluated equally (regardless of their linguistic, cultural, academic, and social backgrounds), versus teachers differentiating instruction according to the types and academic needs of students targeted (e.g., ELLs).

Snow et al. (1989) explained that it is more effective to shift from teaching English language and literacy skills and strategies in isolation to teaching those within content-based instruction. The latter approach of instruction requires some degree of collaboration and sharing of responsibility between ESL and mainstream teachers for teaching ELLs. By collaborating with ESL teachers, it will be possible for content area teachers to gain access to knowledgeable support networks for instruction of these students. Stoller (2004) indicated there are several models that lend themselves to ELLs’

teacher preparation models, with an emphasis on the integration of language and content instruction or content-based instruction, ranging from content-driven approaches (e.g., immersion, partial immersion, sheltered subject-area courses) to language-driven approaches that focus on the development of language through content instruction.

Alternatively, Pawan and Ortloff (2011) described these models in terms of the level of responsibility assumed by ESL and mainstream teachers with respect to the teaching of ELLs. According to Pawan and Ortloff (2011), there were three shifts of responsibilities in content-based instruction, ranging from: (a) default responsibility by the language teacher, (b) sharing of the responsibility by ESL and content area teachers, (c) to training of both groups of teachers in content-based instruction in order to assume responsibility individually or jointly in educating and academically advancing ELLs in their classrooms. For example, under CALLA model, ESL teachers aligned their instruction with content area teachers by integrating the content area subjects in the language classroom. In contrast, the sheltered instructional approach simultaneously provides academic and language support for ELLs beyond the two or three years of mandated ESL instruction, by promoting sustainable PD, engagement, and collaboration of ESL and mainstream teachers in the instruction of ELLs (Short et al., 2012).

The literature, as well as current practices coupled with the observed and growing achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs, strongly advocates for both the use of differentiated instruction and the delivery of more academic, linguistic, and social support for mainstream teachers when dealing with ELLs (Calderon et al., 2011). For this to occur, however, all teachers of ELLs, rather than just a designated “language” teacher,

need to have the pedagogical and sociocultural capacity to work effectively with ELLs. This includes having sufficient PCK in linguistic, teaching and communication skills, cultural understandings, sensitivity, and positive attitudes and beliefs.

Yoon (2008) suggested that it is imperative for teachers of all subject areas, including math, science, and social studies, to be able to provide direct and explicit vocabulary and comprehension strategy instruction to ELLs. Also, teachers should use text-based cooperative learning activities to allow for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation and for application of new vocabulary. In principle, it is left to the discretion of school administration, and in certain cases for ESL/mainstream teachers, to determine whether to adopt such instructional strategies and to what extent they will implement those strategies (Daniel & Conlin, 2015). This suggests that teacher educators should search for more innovative ways to support mainstream teachers of ELLs. If the teachers are well educated in the theory about effective practice, they might be able to design their own models. Yet, this is often not the case.

Supporting Mainstream Teacher Learning within the School Setting

Unlike the traditional PD programs (e.g., one-shot workshops, college courses), it is argued that sustained, job-embedded professional learning is considered more effective in supporting mainstream teachers of ELLs (Cobb et al., 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; O'Brien, 2011). This implies that the most appropriate and sustainable solution, to continuously support mainstream teachers to effectively educate ELLs, is by providing professional support for teachers in their classrooms. In these settings, it is important for school leaders to promote professional learning communities where a focus is placed on

the needs of ELLs. Within their roles, school leaders are expected to encourage and support collaboration among impacted teachers, as well as invest in teacher leaders and instructional coaches to promote on-site PD for teachers in general, and in meeting the academic and literacy needs of ELLs.

School leaders (both administrators and teachers) can make the difference in improving instructional practices in mainstream classrooms, by transforming their school culture, norms, and classroom practices as well as promoting a culture of collaboration and sustained PD. Administrators may greatly influence the way teacher leaders, specialized teachers, and instructional coaches perform. Additionally, during periods of transformation, principals can establish the relevant culture and norms in the school to promote positive changes in instructional practices for ELLs (Gallucci et al., 2010; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Teacher leaders can greatly assist in this regard as well. Acting as instructional leaders, designated teacher leaders can play a key role in supporting mainstream teachers in meeting the learning needs of ELLs (Portin et al., 2006). Teacher leaders have wider and more intensive instructional experiences with all types of students (including ELLs), and in doing so, are better positioned to provide academic and administrative support to mainstream teachers. In settings of professional partnerships, teacher leaders can act as change agents in improving the learning practices of ELLs.

Collaboration between ESL teachers and/or instructional coaches and mainstream teachers can also be an effective PD vehicle for supporting mainstream teachers with ELLs. By working with ESL teachers, mainstream teachers will likely assume some

responsibility for the teaching of ELLs. Additionally, collaboration between ESL teachers and mainstream teachers can take different forms, including collaborative teaching in mainstream classrooms (e.g., co-teaching), advising, and consulting. In this regard, instructional coaches may be optimally utilized, as they may serve as mediators between district directed reform efforts and classroom practices. Using data from a longitudinal study of three reforming school districts and their partnership with a university-based third party organization, Gallucci et al. (2010) adopted a conceptual framework developed by Harré (1984) and elaborated by the Vygotsky Space to describe how coaches' learning through participation in PD activities, with coaches' learning directed towards supporting the learning of others (e.g. teachers).

Limited information is known, however, about how mainstream teachers learn to develop the knowledge and skills needed to provide effective literacy instruction for ELLs (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas et al., 2008). A large body of the literature proposes that further studies of teacher PD in mainstream education are needed (Baecher, 2012; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; O'Brien, 2011; Walqui, 2000). Walqui (2000) contends that "research is needed in several areas to better inform the implementation of effective programs for English Language Learners at the secondary school level" (p. 206).

Summary

In this section, a comprehensive review of the literature was presented pertaining to the issue of professionally developing mainstream teachers to better support and meet the learning needs of the growing population of ELLs. In this review of the extant

literature surrounding the problem under investigation, a detailed discussion was provided about the related literature, including descriptions of demographic data and achievement of ELLs, the conditions facing mainstream teachers teaching ELLs in general education classrooms, the types of instruction provided to ELLs (e. g., content-based instruction and sheltered instruction), the current issues in PD programs provided to mainstream teachers with ELLs, and the opportunities which are available to reform and/or enhance these PD programs to better prepare mainstream teachers to effectively teach ELLs.

In reviewing the extant literature on PD for teachers with ELLs, the following major key issues clearly emerged:

- There is an imperative need to professionally develop not only ESL teachers, but more importantly, mainstream teachers to adequately meet the cultural, academic and linguistic needs of EL students, with more attention to the development of ELLs' literacy knowledge and skills (Gandara et al., 2005),
- Federal, state, and local educational policies are neither specific nor detailed as they pertain to supporting and guiding teachers who deal with ELLs in terms of promoting proper and adequate teacher preparation and PD opportunities (Gebhard, 2010),
- There is a lack of relevant foundational knowledge (e.g., PCK) and skills on the part of mainstream teachers (both pre- and in-service teachers) to enable them to effectively develop the academic literacy and content area knowledge of adolescent ELLs (Lee & Buxton, 2013),

- There is a number of contributing factors such as beliefs, interest, desires, willingness, attitudes, values, and perceptions of mainstream teachers that affect their acceptance and support of PD programs related to students in culturally and linguistically diverse settings (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013),
- There is an urgent need for mainstream teachers to integrate academic language development and content area knowledge and literacy skills when teaching and working with ELLs (Bunch, 2013; Cummins, 2000), and
- Current PD opportunities should be assessed to consider how to improve their content and delivery to ensure their effectiveness (Berg & Huang, 2015; Lee & Buxton, 2013).

Research on the role of teachers of ELLs has mainly focused on the need to promote and implement PD opportunities to help support mainstream teachers in improving their classroom instruction to ELLs (August et al., 2010; Baecher, 2012; Gebhard, 2010; Goldenberg, 2011; Lee & Buxton, 2013). However, little is known about the effectiveness of these PD opportunities and how these programs are best aligned with the teaching and learning needs of adolescent ELLs (August et al, 2010; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Hawkins, 2004). This study investigated the effectiveness of PD activities from the perspectives of mainstream teachers of ELLs. In line with research findings and recommendations, I met with mainstream teachers of ELLs to hear their voice and get their feedback and perceptions about the effect of PD opportunities on their teaching of ELLs. In essence, teaching ELLs requires that all mainstream teachers possess a high level of proficiency in pedagogical knowledge and skills needed to promote and support

literacy development and academic achievement of their EL students (Franco-Fuenmayor et al, 2015).

In alignment with the CCSS and the forthcoming NGSS, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2012) asserted that “English language learners (ELLs) thus face a double challenge: they must simultaneously learn how to acquire enough of a second language to participate in an academic setting while gaining an understanding of the knowledge and skills in multiple disciplines through that second language” (p. ii). In response to federal and state policy educational mandates regarding the efficacy in teaching of ELLs, coupled with the observed student diversity in K-12 across the country and the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs, mainstream teachers need to learn more about the imperative needs to integrate pedagogical language knowledge and skills of ESL with the teaching of the core subject areas for which they are responsible (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Short, 2013).

Given the research gaps identified above as well as the imperative need to search for more innovative ways to improve the instructional practices of ELLs, this study intended to acquire feedback from and perceptions of mainstream teachers of ELLs on the effectiveness of PD opportunities to help them in supporting the academic and literacy needs of ELLs.

Chapter Three

Research findings on PD opportunities for mainstream teachers of ELLs indicate that there is a major gap between what mainstream teachers of ELLs ought to know and practice in classrooms and what they actually practice in their classrooms (Coady et al., 2015; Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Molle, 2013; Short, 2013). This gap suggests that there is a need for research regarding how to bring the research to ELL teachers so that it may inform and enhance their instruction. This gap in PD for mainstream teachers of ELLs prompts further investigation of this issue, which I pursued by interviewing a selected group of mainstream teachers of ELLs in a middle school and asking them to describe their perceptions and experiences of their PD opportunities.

In this chapter, I will introduce and discuss the selected research design and methods for the study of the perceptions of mainstream teachers on the degree of effectiveness of PD opportunities for supporting them in meeting the academic and learning needs of ELLs. Additionally, a description of the study setting, and the selection of the study participants is presented. Finally, the procedures governing the data collection and analysis are introduced and discussed, with a critical analysis of the concepts and principles of qualitative research that influenced this study's design.

For the purpose of conducting this descriptive qualitative research, a case-study research design was employed. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe and assess mainstream teachers' perceptions of the impact and effectiveness of PD on their attitudes toward teaching of ELLs. By listening to the voices of mainstream teachers

of ELLs, and by collecting and analyzing the answers and feedback from these participants who teach in a suburban middle school in a mid-Atlantic state, I was able to acquire meaningful information about and interpretations of mainstream teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of PD opportunities in supporting their teaching of ELLs.

To shed more light on the issue of the perceptions of mainstream teachers of ELLs relative to their PD opportunities, the following two research questions guided this investigation:

1. What do mainstream teachers believe is the impact of PD opportunities on their perceptions and attitudes regarding teaching ELLs?
2. What do mainstream teachers believe is the impact of PD opportunities on the degree to which their PCK and skills support the academic and literacy needs of ELLs?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research can be defined as a multi-layered approach that involves an interpretive, naturalistic technique to the understanding and interpretation of the underlying social setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The primary focus of qualitative research is to understand and interpret a social or educational phenomenon which can be largely uncovered by providing voices to those individuals who otherwise may not be heard (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

From a methodological perspective, it is important to understand that the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative research is the researcher, with the outcome of the study being detailed and descriptive in nature (Patton, 2015). The descriptive

knowledge that can be produced in qualitative research is used to answer not only *what* is happening, but *how* it is happening in the real world or lived experiences as described by participants of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the voices, perceptions, and experiences of mainstream teachers of ELLs were elicited in order for them to describe and assess their perceptions and experiences of the effectiveness of the PD opportunities in which they participated. The primary intent of soliciting their insights was to discover ways in which PD programs may be enhanced for meeting the ultimate goal of improving instructional practices for ELLs.

Experts assert that the primary focus of qualitative research is to construct a systematic strategy for answering queries about how people or individuals get a sense of their world or reality and how later they assign meaning and interpretations to their experiences (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2011). Qualitative research allows for methods which may be used to gather meaningful knowledge about individuals' experiences and perceptions of a particular social setting.

In this study, I investigated the role and effectiveness of PD to support mainstream teachers in their work with ELLs, by using social constructivist theory and theory of adult learning as frameworks to guide both my methods of data collection and analysis. As outlined in Chapter 2, PD can be explained by the concepts and principles of social constructivist theory (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Patton, 2015) and theory of adult learning (Knowles, 1980, 1984). Together, these theories provided considerable understanding of (a) how teacher PD influences and enhances the instructional practices, perceptions, and attitudes of mainstream teachers of ELLs; and (b) how this PD translates

into supports for the learning needs of ELLs (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003; Risko et al. 2008; Stewart, 2014).

The social constructivist theory as applied to teacher PD assumes that by participating and actively engaging in PD, characterized by cooperative and collegial learning experiences and support, teachers can develop new understandings for instructional strategies and practices (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). Similarly, adult learning theory views adult learners as self-directed learners, who are continuously eager to learn and practice new and enhanced instructional approaches (Knowles, 1980, 1984). An important premise of this research is that mainstream teachers of ELLs are motivated to employ new strategies, practices, knowledge and skills they have gained during their active participation in PD opportunities.

Case Study

As one type of qualitative research design, case studies have been utilized as a means to generate new, meaningful, and informative knowledge concerning the perceptions and experiences of individuals in a social setting or workplace (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the current case, mainstream teachers are viewed as an integral part of the world in which they live, with particular focus on their learning and instructional practices in both classrooms and PD settings.

Concurring with other qualitative researchers, Yin (2011) explains that a case study should satisfy certain conditions pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation. When utilizing case studies, qualitative researchers need to specify and consider all factors influencing the case(s) under research, including contexts, situations, time, and

activities. Additionally, case study research design allows for in-depth and multiple sources of data collection (Maxwell, 2013). Creswell (2012) explains that “the case study research approach is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or case over a time period through detailed, in-depth data collection and reports that include description of the case and themes” (p.13). For the purpose of conducting the current research, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade mainstream teachers of ELLs in a middle school comprise the bounded system to be explored and investigated.

The choice of a case study approach is most appropriate when qualitative researchers attempt to describe an individual’s experiences and perspectives using multiple sources of information, such as focus groups, semi-structured interviews, field notes, journals, documents, and field observation (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2011). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that the decision to consider qualitative case studies is based on the notion that case study design is selected specifically because qualitative researchers are interested in the insights, discoveries, and interpretations of individual experience as opposed to hypothesis testing. Since the purpose of this research was to study the perceptions and experiences of mainstream teachers with PD opportunities designed to meet the learning and social needs of ELLs, a case study research design was considered most appropriate.

Context

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), when searching for the best case to study, it is imperative to “establish the criteria that will guide case selection and then select a case that meets those criteria” (p. 99). As this study aimed to listen to mainstream

teachers' experiences and perceptions about PD programs targeting the improvement of teaching adolescent ELLs, it seemed natural to target a middle school, high school, or both. A middle school was selected based primarily on the following criteria: (a) the school has a relatively large number of ELLs in all grades and (b) the school and the school district have been implementing a number of PD programs for mainstream teachers of ELLs. In alignment with qualitative research rules of ethics, the school has been given the pseudonym of Lakewood Middle School (hereinafter referred to as Lakewood) to protect the school's and participants' confidentiality. The school has a diverse student population, representing various countries, languages, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds. Demographic data provided by the school officials indicated that the school population includes a number of immigrants, long-term ELLs, and international students.

Overall, about 40% of Lakewood's student population are ELLs. Mainstream teachers have access to various PD opportunities at the school and school-district levels. Based on my initial assessment of the PD opportunities available from which teachers at Lakewood might choose, it was obvious that there was tremendous organizational support from both the school and school district to promote and enhance teachers' instructional practices.

School district

Lakewood is one of the public schools in the Wilson Public School District (WPSD) in a mid-Atlantic state. According to publicly available data on WPSD's website, the student population in WPSD as of the academic year 2018-2019 was approximately 28,000. The demographics of the students in WPSD were 46% White,

27% Hispanic, 10% Black/African American, 9% Asian, and 8% Other/Multiple.

Students come from 146 countries, with a total of 107 languages spoken.

Interestingly, while there were more than 9,000 (33%) students who came from non-English backgrounds and who were classified as entry-level ESL students, only 5,000 (18%) were enrolled as ELLs in mainstream classrooms. This is due mainly to the county's policy to enroll new ELLs into an ESL program for a period of time. Once they completed the advanced level WIDA 5 (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (5) or the intermediate levels (WIDA 3 or 4) of the ESL program, and attained a satisfactory level of English proficiency as measured by WIDA tests, they were integrated into mainstream classrooms and, as such, are referred to as ELLs. WIDA is widely utilized by school districts across the nation to assess the quality of instruction provided to EL students. WIDA has developed five English Language Development standards to help ensure that students proficiently understand and comprehend English in both social and academic contexts.

Recognizing and understanding the urgency to support and advocate to improve the instructional practices for ELLs, the WPSD developed its own mission for teaching and supporting the EL student population. WPSD adopted an ambitious mission that assumes that all English learners attain their fullest potential while building on their diverse language and cultural backgrounds. WPSD's Department of English Learners expresses its intention to fully collaborate with school staff to guide, support, and monitor instruction that helps develop academic language and content knowledge to accelerate student progress. The Department also cooperates with WPSD staff to raise awareness

about ELLs and build effective parental and community involvement that endorses student achievement. This initiative by WPSD to engage, support, and train the families of ELLs about their role in advancing their children's education is highly supported by research findings (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

According to WPSD's website, the academic data show that on average, as EL students progress through the program and attain English language proficiency, their State assessment results consistently match or exceed non-ELLs performance. For the academic year 2018-2019, about 94% of ELLs at WPSD who attained proficiency passed their Reading state assessment, whereas only 92% of the WPSD's non-ELLs passed the same Reading state assessment. Another key performance indicator for the WPSD's relatively successful record of serving the EL student group is the active participation of the district families in ELLs' or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) activities. As of academic year 2018-2019, more than 18% of the district families were involved in these types of services. This meaningful initiative on the part of WPSD to engage ELLs' families in schools' ESOL activities—including raising awareness, providing orientation programs, and conducting training workshops of what ESOL entails and expects from parents of ELLs—is supported in the research literature (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

The participants in this study praised WPSD for their distinguished accomplishments in promoting and advancing ELLs, which are largely attributed to the hard work and determination of WPSD's Department of English Language Learners supporting the staff in the District as well as all of the schools' administrators and

teachers' work to close the achievement gap between non-ELLs and ELLs. A senior administrator at WPSD noted that the District has been working on improving the academic and social learning of its whole student population consistently over the years, but only recently made a major commitment to make a paradigm shift by promoting and launching more specialized programs, training, and resources to support the academic and social needs of the EL student and family population.

Setting

Lakewood, with its large EL student population, is nonetheless considered to be in the top 20% of schools in WPSD, compared to district and state averages. Additionally, since it was classified as an art and communication technology school in 2008, teachers have been supported in their efforts to integrate arts and communications technology in the school curriculum. As of the academic year 2018-2019, there were about 1,000 students attending Lakewood, 70% of whom were minority students, which is higher than the state average of 50% (Lakewood Website, 2018). The demographics of the students enrolled at Lakewood in the same period were: 48% Hispanic, 27% White, 11% Black/African American, 7% Asian, and 7% Other/Multiple.

It is worth noting that the participants in this study teach more culturally and linguistically diverse students than anticipated, with about 70% of the total number of students classified as minorities. There is no valid, documented explanation or justification for the relatively high number of EL students at Lakewood except possibly that more immigrant families, particularly Hispanics, find it more attractive economically and socially to live in this area. Another possible explanation for this phenomenon is the

notion that Lakewood is embracing and promoting more academic and social programs to support the EL student and family population. The White student proportion of 27% is relatively high and is probably attributable to the draw of the art/technology program; otherwise, the proportion of minority students, attributable to the nature of the neighborhoods would likely be larger.

Lakewood's average pass rates for all of the 2018-2019 State assessments were relatively lower than the state and district averages, with no significant differences from previous years. For that academic year, the breakdown of the pass rates for the total students and for ELLs respectively are as follows: reading 76% and 23%; writing 78% and 25%; mathematics 83% and 50%; science 79% and 32%; and history 81% and 39% (Lakewood Website, 2018). These poor results for the EL student group place the school under tremendous pressure to develop and implement plans to address achievement gaps and ensure that all students have the resources they need to succeed.

In accordance with WPSD's requirements to maintain and follow up on students' academic performance, Lakewood has planned and implemented a School Management Plan, which sets a number of school management goals aimed at closing the achievement gaps between ELLs and non-ELLs, including the following:

1. The gap in achievement between African-American and White students will be reduced.
2. The gap in achievement between Hispanic and White students will be reduced.

3. Lakewood will engage the community in accomplishing the School Management Plan Goals.

To address student achievement, the following School Performance Priorities and Actions were taken by Lakewood for the academic year 2016-2017:

1. WPSD SIOP Training for the science, math, and social studies teachers.
2. Professional Learning for Writing across the Curriculum by content areas
3. Implementation of Lucy Calkins Writing Units of Study—Writing Workshop (5-day training during preservice).
4. Positive Alternative Learning Supports PLUS for Special Education and High Intensity Language Training Teachers (Wilson Tiered System of Support Tier 2--Flex EXCEL: ELA Interventions and Support during Teacher Advisory period).

It should be noted that these initiatives were implemented in the academic year 2016-2017 and continued throughout the academic year 2018-2019, the academic year in which the data were collected for the purpose of this study.

Participants

A purposeful selection of 10 mainstream teachers for individual interviews and a focus group was adopted based on a specific set of criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The main selection criterion was to locate an appropriate and informative group of mainstream teachers who served one or more ELLs in their mainstream classroom and have participated in PD programs related to teaching ELLs. A study sample size of 10 participants is considered an ideal number to reach saturation in homogeneous groups

(Guest et al., 2006). Research findings reveal purposive sampling is primarily used in case studies to help in the development of deeper understanding and examination of the underlying issues in a case or group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) argues that

the logic and power of qualitative purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of specific cases: information-rich case. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term “purposeful sampling” (p. 53).

Similarly, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contend that the use of purposeful sampling is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96).

After receiving approval from the school’s principal, the district school board, and George Mason University’s IRB (See Appendix A) to conduct this study, an email invitation was sent to all mainstream teachers at Lakewood to explain the nature of the research and invite them to participate in the study (See Appendix B). Consistent with standard case study procedures, the email included a statement explaining that all collected data would be kept confidential and used only for research reasons. This initial email was sent by one of the school administrators. Through Lakewood’s principal, I was also allowed to attend two staff meetings in which I was given the opportunity to explain the objective and scope of the study and ask teachers to consider participating in the project by responding to the email they had received.

With the approval of the school district and the great support and cooperation of the school administrators, ten mainstream teachers voluntarily agreed to be interviewed individually and in a group setting. Accordingly, I sent a second email to thank the ten teachers for their agreement to participate in the study and to gather some basic data about them such as class assignment, years of experience, and number of PD programs related to teaching ELLs they had attended (See Appendix C). Additionally, consent forms were given to the participants to sign indicating their willingness to participate in this study (See Appendix D). The collected demographic data were then used to determine if all the 10 teachers, who agreed to participate met the criteria to participate in (1) one-on-one interviews and (2) focus group interviews, both of which were used primarily to capture the perceptions of mainstream teachers regarding their PD experiences and the impact of these PD experiences on their pedagogical knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach ELLs.

Table 1 shows detailed demographic information of the study participants (all names are pseudonyms). It is evident from the data shown in Table 2 that most of the participants were females (8 out 10), which is consistent with the documented number and percentage of female teachers in the United States being significantly greater than their male counterparts. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2018), about 77% of U.S. public school teachers were female and 23% were male for the academic year 2015-2016. Similarly, 72% of Lakewood's school instructional teachers were female and 28% were male for the academic year 2018-2019.

Table 1*Participants' Detailed Demographic Information*

Name	Gender	Subject Taught	Grade	Languages Spoken
Amy	F	English	8 th	English
Anna	F	English	8 th	English, Spanish, French
Carlos	M	Social Studies	7 th	English, Spanish
Emily	F	English	6 th	English
Jenna	F	Math	8 th	English, Urdu, Spanish
Julie	F	Health/PE	6 th , 7 th , 8 th	English
Mark	M	Social Studies	7 th	English
Kate	F	Science	6 th	English
Megan	F	English	6 th	English
Sarah	F	Social Studies	7 th	English, German

Note. PE = Physical Education.

The participants taught a variety of subjects: English (4 participants), social studies (3 participants), math (1 participant), science (1 participant), and health/physical education (1 participant), which helps not only in getting varied perceptions about PD opportunities from different teachers and from multiple fields, but also to understand their wide-ranging academic needs and challenges. Interestingly, 4 of the 10 participants (Anna, Carlos, Jenna, and Sarah) had mastered more than one language, including French, German, Spanish, and Urdu, which probably helps these teachers to have a positive attitude toward teaching ELLs and a good understanding of the learning and social needs of these students and their families. All four of these participants indicated that they feel that they are more receptive and understanding of the special language/academic needs of ELLs mainly due to their bi- or

multilingualism. Additionally, three of the participants (Amy, Anna, and Jenna) had TESL certificates.

While all of the participants had more than 10 years of teaching experience in general subject areas, their experience with teaching ELLs marginally varied. As shown in Table 2, there were nine participants with more than 10 years of teaching ELLs and one participant (Julie) with fewer than five years of teaching ELLs. Another point of descriptive data relates to the number of PD activities taken by each participant. All of the participants had engaged in PD programs that focused on understanding and teaching ELLs, ranging from 2-5 programs (3 participants) to more than five programs (7 participants). Overall, the participants' demographic data confirm they were relevant to the study and thus well situated to produce meaningful insights and feedback about their experiences with PD programs that were designed to prepare them to better teach and support ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

Table 2

Participants' Detailed Teaching and PD Experiences

Name	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Teaching ELLs	Number of PDPs (ELLs) Attended
Amy	> 10	> 10	> 5
Anna	> 10	> 10	> 5
Carlos	> 10	> 10	> 5
Emily	> 10	> 10	> 5
Jenna	> 10	> 10	> 5
Julie	> 10	2-5	2-5
Kate	> 10	> 10	2-5
Mark	> 10	> 10	2-5
Megan	> 10	> 10	> 5
Sarah	> 10	> 10	> 5

Lakewood PD Activities

In accordance with the requirements of WSPD, Lakewood has been promoting and implementing several PD opportunities throughout the school year. The format of these activities is either formal or informal and they are hosted either in-house or at WSPD. Lakewood also encourages and supports teachers to pursue graduate degrees or enroll in graduate classes of their choice at the university level. At Lakewood, teachers are provided with multiple platforms such as PLCs and CLTs in which teachers can freely engage with each other, learn from one another, and observe each other's teaching (e.g., learning labs).

With the support and partnership of the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) focused on applied linguistics, the WPSD promoted and implemented a district-based SIOP for selected groups of the district staff and leading teachers. Starting 2011, CAL conducted an advanced 4-day workshop SIOP and whole-school introductory SIOP training to K-12 teachers. During the course of the SIOP training, CAL provided in-school assistance to teachers to increase their understanding of sheltering instruction through job-embedded PD such as lesson study, guided lesson planning, and coaching. Additionally, CAL extensively supported the district in measuring implementation levels through observations and by applying the SIOP. Thus, the participants in this study had the opportunity to participate in several district-based PD activities, including the basic workshop in SIOP and the associated follow-up observations and assessments.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, data are collected primarily from various and rich sources, including individual interviews, focus group interviews, and documents (Creswell, 2012). To enhance the validity of the findings, qualitative researchers and scholars strongly suggest the utilization of triangulation through utilizing multiple methods of data collection (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2011). For example, qualitative researchers may use both interviews and classroom observations to investigate the impact of PD on mainstream teachers' instructional practices. In this study, I utilized mainly two sources of data collection: semi-structured interviews with participants and focus-group interviews. Additionally, throughout the course of all of the interviews, I took field notes and memos to keep track of any interpretations, reflections, and observations I had.

According to Bogden and Biklen (2007), qualitative researchers choose to employ interviews "to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (p. 96). Similarly, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) and Patton (2015) argue that by asking appropriate questions, individual interviews help to provide some insights about lived experiences of participants from their own perceptions. Interviewing is considered an important qualitative research tool that helps researchers to better understand the study participants' perceptions of the world they live in through an interpretation of the participants' responses (Creswell, 2012).

When compared to individual interviews, focus group interviews provide opportunities for participants to hear each other's responses and exchange comments (Patton, 2015). One of the essential characteristics of focus-group interviews is its group dynamics. As opposed to individual interviews, group dynamics helps in generating deeper and richer data through the social interaction of the group members (Thomas et al., 1995). It is possible, however, that some participants might actively participate more, and be ready to answer any relevant question in individual interviews rather than in focus groups, due to social and political constraints.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), when performed thoroughly, the integration of individual interview and focus group interview data should result in an enriched description of the phenomenon's structure and its essential characteristics. For this reason, I made use of both the focus group interviews and individual interviews as data collection methods to gather information from participants.

The order of the data collection was as follows:

- First round of individual interviews
- First focus group interview
- Second round of individual interviews
- Second focus group interview

This way, I was able to generate four data sets. I then used data integration, which involved moving back and forth between the four data sets to discover data convergence, divergence, conformability, and complementarity (Fenech Adami & Kaiger, 2005;

Halcomb & Andrew, 2005). By using data collection triangulation and data integration, the trustworthiness of findings was enhanced (Paton, 2015).

Individual interviews

I sent an email invitation to each participant and asked her/him to participate in a one-to-one interview. Each participant was given the option to select the appropriate time and place to meet. As shown in Appendices E and F, the semi-structured, face-to-face individual interviews included open-ended questions and lasted for approximately 25-30 minutes each. A subsequent individual interview was arranged with each participant except for Megan who could not make the second interview, totaling 19 individual interviews. I used a digital voice recorder to record the interview. During the individual interviews, I used follow-up questions and prompts to obtain further insights from the participants.

Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews were selected to gain rich information and broad understanding and knowledge about the impact and effectiveness of PD from the participants' perspectives. Focus group interviews are a natural setting for participants' voices to be heard and these voices are enriched by the obvious and meaningful interaction, dialogue, and collaboration between participants with diverse views (Kruger & Casey, 2009; Patton, 2002). During the process of the focus group interaction and collaboration, data are essentially socially constructed by means of interaction and collaboration of the focus group members. If effectively planned and managed, focus group interviewing may result in special insights not obtainable through other methods of

data collection, such as individual interviews (Patton, 2015). Open-ended questions are recommended to use in qualitative studies to extract participants' views about the issues under investigation (Creswell, 2012).

I conducted two focus group interviews. Appendices G and H show the focus group interview protocol and questions. I sent an email invitation to all of the participants and asked them to participate in the two focus group interviews. All of the participants agreed that afterschool hours were the ideal time to meet. With the coordination and help of the school administration, a meeting room equipped with all necessary equipment was reserved for the two focus group interviews. During the interviews, I used a digital voice recorder to record the interview. I also served as the moderator and tried to listen and be as objective as possible in order not to have any influence on the participants' views. At the beginning of each focus group interview, I gave a brief introduction about the study and indicated how important and valuable their inputs and voices were to the study. In addition to using the questions in Appendices G and H, I made use of follow-up questions and prompts to gain additional information from the participants

There were six participants in the first focus group (Amy, Anna, Jenna, Mark, Megan, and Sarah) and six in the second group (Amy, Jenna, Julie, Kate, Mark, and Sarah). Four of the 10 participants attended both focus groups (Amy, Jenna, Mark, and Sarah). During the focus groups, the participants had ample opportunity to engage in an intensive and meaningful discussion (e.g. questioning one another, commenting on each other's' experiences), which, in turn, resulted in increasing the depth of the inquiry and uncovering new or misunderstood facets of the PD targeting teachers of ELLs.

In effect, the utilization of focus group interviews as an additional source of data collection helped in understanding what was happening at Lakewood with respect to PD opportunities. This approach also improved the quality of data collected by informing the crafting of the kinds of questions that were asked during the interviews.

Field notes journal

During and after each individual interview and focus group interview, I documented my reflections in my field note journal. By raising questions about what I observed and perhaps by speculating on some meanings and explanations, it was possible to engage in preliminary data analysis. In these journals, I recorded my perceptions, experiences, and interpretation of responses to the interview questions, provided descriptions of body language, and documented notes on any interruption or disruptions that took place, while including any additional thoughts and/or concerns (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Memos

I wrote memos throughout all of the phases of the research project to help me think through my ideas, concerns, and questions. The use of memos significantly assisted me in conducting the data analysis as explained below.

Procedure and Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis and data collection typically occur simultaneously (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which suggests the need to iterate and diversify data collection. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “Data analysis is a complex procedure that involves moving back and forth between concrete

bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation,” and “the practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to your questions” (p. 202-203). Data analysis includes the examination, categorization, tabulation, and recombination of the evidence obtained from the study. Through discovery of important underlying patterns and trends in the data it may be possible to construct meaningful interpretations, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the results (Patton, 2015).

Coding is the main component in qualitative research analysis because themes emerge based on the codes developed. Codes could be “single words, letters, numbers, phrases, colors, or combinations of these” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 199). For this study, data analysis and the coding processes were conducted following Merriam and Tisdell (2016) data analysis methodology as outlined by their suggestions for developing coding based on the data collection, with the use of triangulation. Using case study analysis, all the information collected through individual and focus group interviews, field notes, and memos, were viewed and analyzed collectively in order to generate and construct meaningful interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Based on the data collected, I classified the data into four streams: (a) first individual interviews, (b) first focus group interview, (c) concluding individual interviews, and (d) concluding focus group interview. After each interview, I listened to the recorded interview and documented my reflections and notes, with ongoing interpretation relative to the social constructivist theory and adult learning theory framing this study. Then, I transcribed the interview data, went over the interview again and wrote

my reflection of it, as well as wrote my plan and additional notes for the next interview in another memo.

After completing all individual and focus group interviews, transcribing them, and critically reading the texts, I started coding the transcripts using a mix of manual and computer management systems (e.g., NVivo coding protocol). I used an open coding process because as I examined the rich descriptive textual data generated from the interviews I was able to manually make notation texts (potential codes) to every bit of data, phrase, and/or expression I considered relevant for answering the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I started the initial data analysis by manually coding the data collected from all interviews using an open coding process, with reference to the reflections and memos I took after each interview. As explained earlier, this type of coding is essential and relevant to the type of qualitative research I conducted as it helped me to “capture any data with a word or a phrase that seems to be responsive to [my] research questions” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 208).

During this process of initial coding and analysis, I tried to be as expansive as possible to identify any part of data deemed to be useful. I also made a consistent review of the data from the interviews until saturation was reached. In qualitative research, saturation is defined as a description of no new information or evidence in a data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This manual coding process marked the first step in the data analysis phase and helped me to identify and construct meanings and knowledge from the rich collected data.

Next, I utilized NVivo coding to generate initial codes which helped me to validate participants' answers by using their direct quotations as codes. This coding enabled me to maintain the integrity of participants' voices by documenting their feedback and most importantly selecting appropriate and prominent quotes that were used to describe their perceptions about the value of PD opportunities in which they had participated.

The third round of coding was performed using axial and analytical coding to analyze and group segments or codes into categories. After developing the codes, I color-coded the responses to generate categories. Then, I aligned the categories to the various perceptions that the participants indicated were related to their experiences in PD programs. To ensure the completeness and accuracy of the coding and analysis of the narratives portrayed by participants, I repeated the previous processes of data analysis to obtain more meaningful categories from the collected data set. By applying this process, I was able to simultaneously combine categories into emerging themes.

Validity

To ensure the validity of the data collected and results generated, a triangulation method was employed by considering multiple data collection methods, including individual interviews, focus group interviews, field notes journal, and memos. As I acted throughout the study in a full capacity as the researcher, interviewer, and interpreter, I made use of both member checking and critical friend. First, I made use of additional triangulation by sharing my initial findings with the participants from analyzing data collected from the 19 individual interviews and the two focus group interviews. At the

beginning of the second individual interviews, I shared the initial findings from the first individual interviews and first focus group interviews with each participant. After analyzing and interpreting the data collected from all of the interviews, I conducted member checking by sending an email to each participant including a summary of the findings of the study and asked for their comments and additional input.

Overall, the feedback I received from some of the participants after I sent them a summary of the findings of the study was positive and informative. The following are representative of the responses I received from some of the participants:

Anna: Your executive summary nicely caps the discussions we had group and individual.

Emily: Thank you for doing this important work. I agree with the findings; in particular that PD is most effective with peer collaboration.

Kate: Your conclusions look accurate to me.

Mark: I agree with all of what you wrote. Thank you for advocating for us and for sharing this with me!

Sarah: Thank you for sharing your conclusions with me. I feel you accurately captured in your summary the key points we communicated

An additional step I took to increase the validity of my findings was to seek the help and input of a critical friend, who has a professional and academic background in the field of teaching ELLs. She has a Ph.D. in education and has had extensive training in qualitative research, and as such was in a good position to lend support with the research design, formulating interview questions, coding, and interpreting my subsequent findings

based upon my participants' answers in the study. In the process, she read a sample of the interviews, provided her own codes and categories, and presented some interpretations of the data collected. In sum, her suggested codes and data interpretation were consistent with my overall findings.

Research Timeline

My initial plan was to spend approximately two school years (academic years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020) completing the project. As shown in Table 3, the project included the following activities: searching for a list of middle schools candidates for the study, selection of an appropriate and representative middle school, approval of IRB at George Mason University, approval of the selected school district, interviewing mainstream teachers via 2 individual interviews and 2 focus group interviews, and analyzing and interpreting the interview data collected.

Table 3

Research Timeline

Selected Middle School - Initials Visits	November 2017
George Mason University IRB Approval	May 2018
Selected School County Approval	August 2018
1 st Round of Individual Interviews	October 2018
1 st Round of Focus Group Interviews	November 2018

2 nd Round of Individual Interviews	April 2019
2 nd Round of Focus Group Interviews	May 2019
Initial (Simultaneous with Data Collection) Data Analysis	Fall 2019
Final Data Analysis	Spring 2020

Summary

This study employed a qualitative research case study design to investigate and describe mainstream teachers' perceptions of the degree of the effectiveness and impact of PD opportunities on enhancing instructional practices of mainstream teachers with ELLs. The school selected was Lakewood Middle School, which is located in the mid-Atlantic region, and hosts more than 1,000 students, more than 40% of whom are classified as ELLs. The design of this study used four data collection methods: semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews, field notes, and memos to capture participants' experiences and perceptions about PD programs for teaching ELLs. I used both a mix of manual and NVivo coding protocol to construct initial codes. Based on the codes generated, I utilized axial and analytical coding to analyze and group codes into categories, which were combined to generate themes.

Chapter Four

Given the well documented gap between what mainstream teachers of ELLs ought to know and practice in classrooms and what they actually practice (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Molle, 2013; Short, 2013), this study was undertaken to gain additional insight into the attitudes and practices of mainstream teachers of ELLs based on their experiences with relevant PD opportunities. This project was conducted by interviewing 10 mainstream teachers of ELLs at Lakewood Middle School, located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, in which participants were asked to describe their attitude and perceptions of their PD experiences and opportunities. In this chapter, I will provide descriptive data about the participants. Then, I will describe and discuss the findings of this study by the four themes and with reference to the two research questions that guided this study.

Participants' Personal and Professional Backgrounds

To better understand the participants' educational backgrounds, professional careers, and experiences—which when taken together helped in the interpretation and explanation of the findings—a short biographical description about each participant follows.

Amy. Amy is an English teacher who has been teaching for more than 20 years. At the start of her teaching career, she taught history, focusing mainly on the content relating to history without referencing the language aspect. Later, she had the chance to teach in Japan and taught English to ELLs there. She came back to the United States with

a clearer and wider perspective regarding the necessary methods of teaching content and language successfully for ELLs.

Amy appreciates and is very devoted to the opportunities that distinct PD programs provide as she views them to be extremely beneficial in informing teachers of successful methods for teaching ELLs. She attended the SIOP training program and expressed that the program addressed different levels of teachers in order to successfully enhance their understanding of the necessary methods for teaching ELLs. However, Amy pointed out that it would also be extremely beneficial to her and her colleagues if the PD programs would provide checkups and feedback on the teachers' implementation of the different strategies in their classrooms. Nonetheless, Amy emphasizes that PD programs still excel in helping subject-area teachers, such as those of math and science, to incorporate aspects of the English language whilst enhancing the curriculum they teach to their EL students. While undergoing the sessions and training with the PD programs, Amy recognized the importance and benefits of teacher collaborations, as sharing ideas and strategies among teachers aided her in improving her teaching strategies for ELLs. In terms of improving aspects of the PD programs, Amy feels that these programs could be better improved by having a more interactive way of delivery that could be more memorable to teachers, thus aiding in implementing the ELL teaching strategies in their classrooms.

Anna. Anna is an English teacher with a license in teaching ELLs and extensive teaching experience of ELLs in both elementary and middle school settings. Anna is very open and willing to try new ideas and strategies that could help her develop her methods.

She is devoted to PD and is always willing to adjust her mindset to implement a variety of methods in her classroom. Anna expresses that “there are always new things coming out,” showcasing her desire to learn and obtain the growing knowledge around her that she wishes to learn and implement in her classroom and teaching style. Anna is also very empathetic with her students in terms of supporting and encouraging them and works to understand their social and educational backgrounds.

Anna strongly believes that teachers should develop their teaching skills and strengthen their abilities to meet the literacy needs of ELLs through the PD programs provided as well as during their own time. Anna had participated in a great number of PD programs and has received and conducted “The Inner Reliability Training,” giving her the capability to provide professional feedback to other teachers. Overall, Anna also strongly believes in the importance of collaboration between ESL teachers and content-area teachers. Anna strives for and takes advantage of any arising opportunities to help her develop her teaching methods and style to successfully improve the level of her EL students.

Carlos. Carlos is a social studies teacher who first started his teaching career in Miami, Florida where there was a large percentage of ELLs. There he was able to obtain extensive experience with teaching ELLs. Carlos also has an existential connection to the immigrant experience as he came to the United States as a young child. When Carlos was teaching in Miami, he was able to attend multiple PD programs related to teaching ELLs. When he moved to the mid-Atlantic, Carlos was introduced to the SIOP professional development training. However, Carlos felt that he did not require that much training

related to teaching ELLs because of his prior extensive teaching experience at Miami as well as his personal and professional experience as an immigrant, which allowed him to connect and relate to what most of the ELLs are undergoing when learning a new language.

Teaching in both locations, Carlos was able to observe the distinct teaching strategies presented in the PD programs of those different regions and how they would work to ultimately improve the English level of ELLs. With his own personal experience as an immigrant, Carlos understood the academic and social challenges that ELLs are facing as he himself underwent those struggles. With that, he was able to strongly connect with and understand his EL students and relate to their academic and social struggles, allowing him to further aid them on their journey of mastering the English language. Furthermore, Carlos noticed that, in addition to educating and improving the English level of ELLs, it is essential to also educate their parents, as he believes they are an essential aspect of the student's life and can greatly contribute to the English language improvement of their children.

When participating in PD programs, Carlos expressed that, based on his vast amount of experience in teaching and connecting with the EL students, he is already familiar with most of the teaching skills and strategies presented. As a way of further improving aspects of PD programs, Carlos suggests that he would greatly benefit from learning about the distinct cultures of the EL students as that could aid teachers in understanding how best to approach their EL students and possibly improve their English language abilities. Carlos implied that understanding EL students' cultural backgrounds,

as well as their lifestyles, could be essential for teachers in order to craft suitable methods for ELLs to master the English language.

Emily. Emily is an English teacher with a master's degree in reading education. Emily has been teaching for over 20 years and started her career as a special education teacher and later became an English teacher. She has taught in an elementary school setting for a long time where she interacted with a great number of ELLs.

Emily attended a PD program of SIOP training for two years. She expressed the many benefits that the SIOP training provided her in terms of the strategies that she could implement in her classroom to further advance her approaches for developing her EL students' language skills. Additionally, Emily has a strong desire to improve her own methods of teaching in order to successfully meet the needs of her EL students. She said she gladly goes out of her way to learn more methods to teach ELLs and shares any successful method that she implements with her colleagues in order to help improve the EL student population in her school area. In addition to attending and learning from the beneficial strategies presented in PD programs, Emily also appreciates and highlights the significance of collaboration between teachers and learning from her peers to improve their teaching methods as a whole and benefit the EL students collaboratively.

Jenna. Jenna is a math teacher who has been teaching math for many years. Aside from teaching math, Jenna is also licensed in teaching ELLs and has extensive experience with teaching and interacting with EL students over the course of her teaching career. Jenna speaks three languages, one of which is Spanish, which she learned in order to support the majority of her EL students who also speak Spanish.

Jenna attended multiple PD programs such as the SIOP training programs. She expresses her overall satisfaction with and appreciation for the specialized strategies that the SIOP program offers as well as its way of delivering ideas and methods that are easy for teachers to utilize in their classroom to teach ELLs. She also emphasized how PD programs allowed her to become more aware of the specialized strategies necessary to teach ELLs and some that she noticed she was missing and from which she could greatly benefit. Being a math teacher, Jenna underlines the difficulties that can sometimes arise when attempting to teach English and subject-area content to ELLs. She indicated that PD programs can be utilized in supporting mainstream teachers to better teach ELLs, but teachers need more time and effort to fully benefit from these developmental activities. Overall, despite being highly experienced with teaching ELLs, Jenna still strives to discover additional strategies and methods that she could further utilize to improve her teaching as well as her EL students' educational levels.

Julie. Julie is a health and physical education teacher who started teaching ELLs only four years ago. Julie is not experienced or well informed about the specialized strategies that need to be implemented when interacting with EL students. However, she is willing to learn more about the methods that would best improve her capability to teach and communicate with her EL students.

Julie always reaches out to her colleagues and seeks help from other departments when struggling to communicate with and teach her EL students. She was able to attend the SIOP PD program training, which she said was intriguing and very informative. However, Julie indicated that these PD programs are not as beneficial to her because they

are not accompanied by continuous follow-ups and monitoring to ensure that teachers are attempting to implement the teaching strategies they were taught in the programs in their classrooms.

Julie expressed how she is struggling to teach as physical education classes include all levels of students, including newcomers who do not know English at all. She suggests that the physical education classes are easier to teach than the health classes because the students who are struggling in English tend to follow and copy the physical movements and activities of their classmates. However, her teaching of and communication with ELLs proves to be difficult when she conducts the nine-week health curriculum. Julie worries that her limited skills in teaching and communicating with ELLs and their inability to understand English can affect their basic knowledge of important health concepts needed for future learning. She expressed her hope that, with continued teaching methods presented in PD programs as well as support and guidance from her colleagues, she can improve her capabilities to successfully communicate with and educate her EL students.

Kate. Kate is a science teacher with a master's degree in natural resources. She has a total of twenty five years of teaching experience. She has taught ELLs in both elementary and middle school settings. Kate was able to attend a four-day workshop of the SIOP advanced training program during the course of an academic year where she was also able to conduct the SIOP learning lab related to the scientific teaching aspects. Kate prefers training and learning with workshops in which teachers are able to discuss, share ideas, and have time to plan with different strategies that can be incorporated in the

classrooms with colleagues. Kate shows great passion and determination when collaborating and working with science and other subject-area teachers in Curriculum Learning Team (CLT) and Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings.

While undergoing and conducting the training sessions in the SIOP PD program, Kate emphasized the program's beneficial strategies that aid in integrating both the language strategies with the content aspects, such as improving ELLs' English and academic skills. However, Kate claims that improving both language and content knowledge and skills for ELLs can prove to be difficult at times, but PD programs such as SIOP can provide some assistance. Kate felt that the PD programs provided her, as well as her colleagues, with motivation and determination that aided and expanded her perspective when it comes to successfully teaching and improving the academic level of ELLs.

Mark. Mark is a social studies teacher with a master's degree and a total of nineteen years of teaching experience. He has taught middle school students for the duration of his career and has been teaching at Lakewood for the past thirteen years. Mark expressed his satisfaction with the school district, which has offered many PD programs. He was able to attend PD programs centered around understanding culture and diversity among his students, learning to better interact with them, learning to teach students of different cultural backgrounds, learning to be aware of and sensitive to students' experiences and needs, and lastly learning the way to reach all students' needs fairly in the classroom.

Mark attended two sessions of SIOP beginner training. He also was the beneficiary of the informal SIOP training that was presented by teachers who have attended more advanced SIOP programs. He exhibited a positive attitude toward training and learning from other teachers, which he views as constant PD that has helped expand his perspective, knowledge, and skills regarding the most effective methods in teaching ELLs. Although he taught ELLs, Mark was unlike some of the other participants because he was not an immigrant and was not fluent in another language. Overall, Mark felt extremely appreciative of the opportunity to attend PD programs as they allowed him to gain greater understanding of necessary actions he needs to undertake in order to successfully develop his ELLs' language competencies and social studies content knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, Mark reported that he greatly enjoyed the idea of collaborating with his colleagues regarding the different strategies they all observed in professional PD and how they implemented them in their classrooms. He finds it extremely beneficial to undertake some peer learning from his colleagues whom he deems to be more experienced and knowledgeable, and accordingly is eager to learn more from them and the PD programs.

Megan. Megan is an English teacher with more than 20 years of teaching experience. She said she focuses on building a good relationship with her students. Megan has degrees in both English speech and theater. She recognizes the overall importance of both speaking and listening skills and their significant impact on students' performance. She supports her students' struggles with the English language by providing

them with books to read at school or home. She expresses that “getting them to be literate means they need books in their homes,” suggesting that she is willing to undertake the necessary steps to provide as many resources as she can for her students to help improve their level of English competency. Despite the fact that Megan is an English teacher, she stressed that she always goes out of her way to support her students, especially ELLs, with other subject areas they find difficult.

Throughout her teaching years, Megan recognized that her students were in need of more strategies and methods targeted to support and improve their English literacy and overall academic needs. With that, Megan has taken advantage of all the opportunities that the school or district provides for teachers, such as PD programs, to help teachers meet their students’ needs. Megan was able to attend the multiday intensive SIOP program, which she claimed was very beneficial. Megan desires to improve her teaching skills and often attends training sessions in order to obtain more beneficial resources to improve her students’ English level. She is also taking a technology class focusing on ELLs which provides her with more resources to help her students, further demonstrating her determination to improve her own skills that would in turn help her advance her students’ skills. Megan, with the help of PD programs, is eager to learn and obtain all the necessary techniques and teaching methods to support other teachers and her students.

Sarah. Sarah has been teaching social studies for the past 16 years. Before she started teaching at Lakewood, she worked as a secretary. Her entire teaching career of 16 years has consisted of teaching ELLs. Sarah is bilingual in English and German. She acquired her German language through her constant verbal interactions with her mother.

Over the years, she obtained the basic interpersonal communication skills in German but lacked in the academic language aspect. Her personal experience in acquiring a second language aided her in understanding and empathizing with her students who are also undergoing the challenges of acquiring a second language.

Sarah is much attuned when it comes to incorporating specialized strategies into her teaching. She expressed that she is always eager to discuss and share successful ideas and strategies that could benefit her and her colleagues in their teaching methods. She attended a PD session that utilized an advanced training program of SIOP for four full days spread out over the course of the year. The program focused on providing teachers with strategies they could utilize to deepen the academic understanding of the English language for ELLs.

While the SIOP program proved to be effective, Sarah advises that teachers need an adequate amount of time to digest and implement the specialized strategies presented in these PD programs. According to Sarah, granting teachers more time to fully break down and process the strategies presented would allow them to slowly implement and execute those strategies successfully in their classrooms. Sarah expressed how attending a PD program is helpful, but upon returning to the classroom it becomes difficult to recall the essential strategies discussed and the effective methods of implementation.

Further, Sarah conveyed that, in addition to attending PD programs, there is still a great amount of study and practice needed to successfully apply the strategies in classrooms and ultimately aid in the academic development of ELLs. PD programs, like SIOP, allow teachers to be exposed to different strategies that they could potentially

utilize in successfully teaching their ELLs. However, Sarah emphasized that attending one session of a PD program will not immediately lead to teachers becoming proficient in effectively teaching ELLs, but rather it requires determined efforts from teachers as well as a sufficient amount of time to be able to implement these strategies effectively.

Ultimately, Sarah felt that the PD programs she attended presented new ideas and granted her greater insight into effectively teaching her students.

Findings

Table 4 shows the codes, categories, and eventual themes that emerged from the interview data analysis. The themes are: the effect of PD opportunities on mainstream teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms; the need for PD programs to address integrating language and subject-area content; the need to take into account mainstream teachers' abilities, experiences, and pedagogical knowledge and skills prior to designing and implementing PD activities; and the extent of PD impacts due to the limitation of time during and after taking PD activities.

The research questions were:

1. What do mainstream teachers believe is the impact of PD opportunities on their perceptions and attitudes toward teaching ELLs?
2. What do mainstream teachers believe is the impact of opportunities on the degree to which their PCK and skills support the academic and literacy needs of ELLs?

I will also provide an interpretation of the findings in relation to social constructivist theory and adult learning theory.

Table 4*Initial Codes, Categories, and Eventual Themes Emerging from Data Analysis*

Codes	Categories	Themes
Positive impact Support teachers Improve instructional practices Reinforce positive attitudes SIOP training Concerns	Valuing PD	PD opportunities help teachers develop positive attitudes and perceptions toward teaching ELLs.
Personal experiences Professional experiences Experienced teachers Qualified teachers	Past experiences influence	
Learning opportunities Develop pedagogical knowledge Enhance skills PLC CLT Provide resources Concerns	Organizational support	
Literacy and content Challenges Paradigm shift Responsibility Natural integration Professional experience Student diversity Differentiated instruction	Literacy & content integration	Participants place great emphasis on the need for PD programs that address integrating language and content in mainstream classrooms
Develop pedagogy Practical strategies Teacher expertise ELLs' learning needs Theory to practice SIOP training Hands-on techniques Modeling	Increasing teacher abilities	
Social interaction Peer observation Peer feedback Sharing knowledge Mentoring Co-teaching PLC CLT Coaching	Collaboration	

Informal school based PD SIOP training		
Survey teachers Abilities Interests Expectations Needs Perceptions Professional experience Pedagogical knowledge Diverse learning needs Differentiate training Best practices	Build on foundation knowledge	It imperative to differentiate PD activities based on mainstream teachers' abilities, choices, readiness, interests, expectations, involvement in the PD processes, teaching and professional experiences, and pedagogical knowledge and skills
Relevant to classroom setting Professional experience Outside consultants Teachers as instructors Practical strategies Learning needs	Make a real-world connection	
Professional experience Teachers expertise Involvement Teachers' voice Active participation Teachers' choice	Teacher involvement	
Overload information Spread over time Time limitation Focused programs Specific training In depth content	New information broken-up into fragments	Participating teachers are concerned about the lack of time allocated for PD programs, including planning, scheduling, content, delivery, amount of information, implementation, feedback, self-reflection, and follow- up activities.
Time constraints Time to practice Best practices Self-reflection Different mandates	Adequate time to comprehend	
Time limitation Self-reflection Follow up activities Organizational support Administrators' awareness Time to practice	Reflection & follow up	

Attitude and Perception

The first theme that emerged from the analysis of the data collected during all rounds of interviews (individual and group interviews) was that ***PD opportunities help teachers develop positive attitudes and perceptions toward teaching ELLs***. Even though some of the participants had minor reservations and at times expressed some concerns and drawbacks about PD training they had participated in, nonetheless, most of the participants were still collectively very positive about their roles, perceptions, and attitudes toward teaching and supporting ELLs. Overall, they attributed the positive change in their attitudes and perceptions toward teaching ELLs and toward implementing instructional strategies and practices to many factors such as PD opportunities. Equally important, there are other factors that support and interact with PD opportunities, including: personal and professional experiences, and school and district organizational support in teaching and understanding of the academic and social needs of ELLs and their families. These results are widely supported by the extant literature on the value and positive impact of PD opportunities on mainstream teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward teaching ELLs (Coady et al. 2015; Cobb et. al. 2003; Darling-Hammond et al. 2002; Franco-Fuenmayor et al. 2015; Molle, 2013; O'Brien, 2011; Short, 2013).

Teachers value PD experiences

Most of the participants perceived their PD experiences, both within-school informal or formal PD and outside-school PD, as critical and integral parts of satisfying their continuous instructional development needs. When they were describing their previous PD activities, most of the participants suggested that their experiences with PD

programs largely reinforced their positive attitudes and perceptions of ELLs and teaching practices. For example, Mark, a social studies teacher, praised and promoted school and district based PD initiatives to support content teachers to improve and support their teaching of ELLs. He further argued that, for him and for many other teachers who were experienced or novice, PD activities

break down the walls I had in my own head about what the world should be ... I started to see the value in the knowledge and skills that other people had, as well as the value in student experiences (2nd focus group).

The positive perspective of the participants on PD opportunities is consistent with the assumptions of adult learning theory that adult learners (e.g., teachers) recognize the value in professional training and are willing to focus on learning (Knowles, 1980, 1984).

The view of the positive impact of PD programs on teaching ELLs was reiterated and confirmed by all of the participants. Commenting on one PD workshop he attended, Carlos, a social studies teacher, indicated that the value of it was “huge,” a comment that was echoed by Anna, Kate, Mark, and Sarah, who positively recalled their experiences with one particular SIOP training. Kate, a science teacher, also described her experience in SIOP as “just good instruction” (1st individual interview). I probed further to learn more about what Kate had learned and liked about her PD experiences, especially about those PD strategies and practices that she was able to apply in the classroom. She replied,

Some of these activities I can absolutely apply. Actually all of them I could, it's just a matter of time and there's so many to choose from. I can pick and choose to what I think is going to work best for me as a teacher... I liked that autonomy

within this... if I'm trying to build background knowledge, for example, I can go and look at these 10 activities. If I'm trying to build your vocabulary, I can go and look at these activities... like there's a whole different way. [The instructor] gave us, like real things that we can do in class...she knew this stuff and it was all everything you could learn and apply. And then that's the participant workbook. So, I think I could absolutely use this. And the way it's set up, there's like vocabulary building, ways to promote oral language, academic language, objectives... it's like a handbook, just helpful (1st individual interview).

Anna, an English teacher, perceived PD experiences in general as having a “very positive impact ” and she added that “I do know I have picked up things over time that have helped craft my teaching ability, and I know I've always got more room, I could learn to do more” (1st individual interview). Sarah, a social studies teacher, also spoke very positively about her experience with the same SIOP training program, revealing that it was “the best PD that I received last year. That was using this program, it's called SIOP” (1st individual interview)

Mark provided a compelling testimonial about the valuable lessons he learned from participating in many training programs, particularly the relevant pedagogy and essential instructional practices and techniques that he and all of the other mainstream teachers learned to help their ELLs in improving their reading and writing knowledge and skills. “[These practices] helped our students decode and deconstruct and build context a lot better than what they were doing before”, Mark asserted (1st focus group). Carlos came to realize the imperative need to learn how and what to teach when he switched his

professional career from history to teaching social studies. Carlos further noted how things have significantly changed in his classroom after adopting what he has learned in PD activities he had attended. He asserted that “as teachers go through reading comprehension and math and EL strategies, they come to realize that there is a need to consider the linguistics and all this, and that...what EL students needed [was] to see it visually” (1st individual interview).

Anna, Sarah, Mark, and Carlos stressed the need to develop the pedagogical knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach ELLs. Anna, Sarah, Mark, and Carlos had similar views and experiences with PD opportunities, but Emily offered more interesting descriptions about her positive experiences of PD training including attending graduate courses at the college level as well as the district-based training programs on SIOP. She asserted that she learned a great deal from participating in one SIOP training, where she was introduced to and trained on best instructional practices for supporting EL students. Similarly, Amy, an English teacher, felt that SIOP was the most helpful and supportive tool for her ELLs, compared to prior PD training that focused only on ELLs’ cultures, and social and educational backgrounds.

Megan and Sarah affirmed their peers’ positive perspectives about the value and impact of PD programs on their teaching practices and attitudes. Referring to her experience with the SIOP training run by the school district, Megan, an English teacher, believed that it was relevant because “they make me think about how I’m teaching and how kids are receiving the information and what background knowledge they need” (1st individual interview). For Sarah, the SIOP PD program she took, was exceptionally

cohesive. She stated it was “soup to nuts. It was a complete approach” (1st focus group). Sarah felt that for the first time that she actually received something that incorporated a cohesive approach which she was able to utilize to help her EL students access the curriculum in her classroom. In another interview, Sarah elaborated on the value she received from one particular SIOP PD by indicating that

the materials that they provide, the instructor that was there. She was excellent.

And they have a couple of other people who can also provide that kind of leadership in the workshops. That was excellent. It was a great foundation for me from which I could [use] this spring forward.” (1st individual interview).

Anna, an English teacher, echoed Sarah’s opinion about the value of some PD activities they had participated in. Anna narrated her good experience with one PD program that she considered “so much more cohesive” (1st focus group) as well as timely and efficiently implemented, and was also followed up with some post-PD activities (e.g., observations). According to Anna, participants in this PD training were able to implement what they had learned in the classrooms. Also, she revealed that they had the opportunity to come back to the training and talk about how it went. “That was very impactful,” she said (1st focus group). As all participants in this study were required by WPSD to get training on SIOP, they stated that it was SIOP that had the biggest effect on their teaching of ELLs.

Consistent with adult learning theory, Megan, Sarah, and Anna were able to not only learn the concepts and information introduced in the program but most importantly to have the essential opportunity to practice and apply them in the classroom. In these PD

activities, a transaction process between the learners (mainstream teachers) and the PD instructor took place through the learners' active participation in identifying their learning needs, which was how to best teach ELLs (Knowles, 1984).

Teachers build on their personal and professional experiences

Most of the participants clearly communicated that they attributed most of their positive attitudes and perceptions toward teaching ELLs to their personal and professional experiences and their academic and social backgrounds. Referring to and applying adult learning theory, researchers have argued that learners (in this case, teachers) have their own initial beliefs, knowledge, attitude, and skills about how to make sense of their reality of teaching ELLs (Loucks-Horsley et al, 2003). Accordingly, most mainstream teachers greatly depend on their previous experiences and prior beliefs when developing their attitudes toward teaching ELLs (Sousa, 2017; Stewart, 2014). This finding is corroborated by many of the participants, like Sarah, who believed that developing a positive attitude and perceptions toward teaching ELLs is not necessarily driven by PD alone. Sarah elaborated further on this issue and asserted that it is also “an attitude that you bring with you based either on your experience or on your temperament and your personal interests” (2nd focus group). Further, Kate revealed that “at least, I think that the longer I teach, the more I'm able to evaluate what's going to work for me. I think that comes into what [Sarah] was saying about temperament and personal experience” (2nd group interview). When adult learners go through a new experience such as PD training, they will definitely be able to build new knowledge and skills by refining or rejecting their prior knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes.

The following informative exchange between Sarah (social studies), Jenna (math), and Kate (science) during the second focus group supports participants' assertions that they have a positive attitude and perception toward teaching ELLs that goes above and beyond mandatory and/or elective PD training:

Sarah: I think that a lot of teachers will come to the work already with an open view because they're bringing their personal experience to the table. Then there are others who are what I would call children in the world. They're fascinated by the globe and they're not ethnocentric in their perceptions. They too will come to the table open.

Jenna: I don't think teachers would last very long in [Lakewood] if they didn't have that openness to other people and cultures.

Kate: We've seen that because they don't teach here any longer.

Reflecting on her experience with her immigrant and bilingual mother and that of her husband's extended family, Sarah partly attributed mainstream teachers' attitude and perception toward educating ELLs to where they come from. For example, she expressed the belief that if a teacher comes from a multicultural background, has family members who come from other countries, or taught abroad for a period of time, then this is likely to give the teacher a different, positive perspective. Amy, Anna, Carlos, and Jenna also expressed this same belief. Sarah elaborated further on this perspective toward non-English-speaking students when she spoke about her husband's extended family who lived in the countryside and had limited exposure to other cultures and languages. Sarah explained that some members of her husband's extended family are "very narrow in their

perception of people from other countries because they didn't have a lot of experience” (2nd focus group).

Being an immigrant himself, Carlos offered a rich and meaningful testimonial of the importance of families in supporting and advancing their ELLs academic and social needs. Because he went through the experience of being an EL student himself, and progressed to work with ELLs, but this time as a teacher, Carlos believed that he understood the social and academic implications of being an EL student. He explained,

I came [to the United States] when I was five, and I spoke only Spanish at home. Never English at home, and I understand what it's like. I have the immigrant experience, so it's hard. And that's why I know when I see kids that come in ...I'm like, 'That's not really the best way or the best approach for this.' I can understand it because I've been in that seat (1st individual interview).

Connecting with his successful educational and social journey as an immigrant to the United States, Carlos strongly and passionately advised that it is essential to expand the teaching of ELLs to include the education and communication with their parents. He believed that

the ones that don't have the support at home, they struggle mightily. They struggle a lot... Parents need to know the truth. They need to be given the tools. They need to know what is going on so that they're better prepared (2nd individual interview).

The effect of ELLs' families on their children's academic and social advancement is widely supported by research findings (Hansen-Thomas et al, 2016). Teacher-parent

communication is especially critical for maintaining professional interactions between schools and students' families in relation to ELLs and their learning.

Common among most of participants was the continuous positive impact they have had on their teaching of ELLs from their professional experiences. Emily, like many other teachers, had the opportunity to take elective classes in college that focused on the academic and social needs of ELLs, which, in turn, had positively contributed to the growth of her professional career as a mainstream teacher dealing with ELLs. Similarly, Amy professionally transformed after her journey to Japan from working as an English as a Foreign Language teacher, to teach ELLs with a different perspective and more understanding of, not only the academic needs but equally important the literacy needs of this student population. After many years in teaching students who vary in their English proficiency, she realized that some ELLs were struggling in their academic studies mainly due to their low proficiency level in English. She was certain that the only way forward to better help ELLs excel in the academia is to tackle English while simultaneously teaching the content.

Kate echoed Amy's and Emily's perspective on the positive impact of previous professional experience on improving the teaching of ELLs. She referred to her teaching experience as

You have to teach all of it... I think a lot of maybe secondary teachers, as the global child. I think the older you get, the more it levels out. You might have students who are second language, but they're very skilled and gifted and think very mathematically, or they might think very scientifically... For me, I have to

make sure that kids, all kids are able to navigate the curriculum (2nd individual interview).

Anna indicated that her “experience is very mixed” as she dealt with ELLs at the elementary and middle schools settings for a long period of time. She added that she “had training in the past and also I’ve done the inner reliability training to actually give feedback to other people” (1st individual interview). After so many years of teaching mathematics in the elementary and middle schools and dealing with ELLs at various levels of English proficiency, Jenna became more convinced than ever that mainstream teachers ought to pay more attention to the language needs of ELLs in their classrooms. These assertions by this group of experienced participants are corroborated by research findings, which indicate that highly qualified and experienced teachers have a high level of confidence in their abilities to meet the special learning and social needs of ELLs (Gandara et al, 2005).

Teachers acknowledge the vital role of organizational support in teaching and understanding of the academic and social needs of ELLs and their families

Developing a positive attitude and perception toward teaching ELLs requires a cultural change in schools, a culture that embraces and supports EL students. Given the culture at Lakewood, which is characterized by PD support and high expectations from both the WPSD and the school administrators, the mainstream teachers at Lakewood have much to gain from these PD programs. Participants gave major credit to the WPSD and Lakewood administrators for their strong belief in and support of improving ELLs’ academic and social needs. As indicated previously, the WPSD has adopted many

initiatives and platforms at the school and the district levels to enhance and enrich the pedagogical knowledge and skills of mainstream teachers of ELLs, including PLC and CLT.

While Emily, an English teacher, echoed her fellow participants' views on the value of some PD activities, she credited the WPSD for allowing teachers to develop their pedagogical knowledge and skills. She believed that "[WPSD] is aware that there is a need to support teachers with ELLs and that they're moving in that direction. I believe that our school does provide adequate support PD opportunities for people teaching ELLs" (1st individual interview). Moreover, the WPSD continued to provide other PD opportunities to mainstream teachers, including the opportunity to pursue graduate degrees; with partial financial support.

Similarly, Anna and Megan both suggested that WPSD recognizes that Lakewood mainstream teachers need extra support due to the large EL student population at the school. Megan assumed that "pretty much everyone in the building has done the SIOP training," a PD program that is, according to Megan and many of the participants, "so helpful for all students, not just English language learners, but particularly for the ELLs" (1st individual interview). Both Anna and Megan believed that Lakewood provides adequate resources and support including PD opportunities for mainstream teachers who teach ELLs. Furthermore, Kate believed that she was so fortunate because she was a part of a very supportive public school district (e.g., WPSD).

It has a ton of resources. I think the training that we get is pretty good for the most part. So, I'm kind of lucky that I teach for a county with the resources. I don't know if that's true everywhere. I hear it's not (1st individual interview).

School administrators should pay more attention to the issue of organizational support and work closely with the school district prior to engaging teachers in any PD activity to have mutual understanding of what is needed to ensure the success of the post PD activities. School administration may choose to introduce new and/or modify some organizational elements to further support and enhance the teaching of ELLs. School administration can also provide certain peer-to-peer collaboration platforms to support mainstream teachers. Many participants were concerned with the school administrators because of their limited follow up on ensuring that teachers implemented what they had learned in PD programs.

Teachers remain critical of some PD opportunities

Although all the participants generally shared a positive view of the value of PD, they still held some reservations and described drawbacks of some of the PD activities they had engaged in previously, especially those that were planned and managed from outside the school. Having more ELLs in their classes as well as in the school as a whole, participants felt that it would be in the students' best interest if mainstream teachers received more training on how to best teach this group of students.

However, most of the participants complained about the lack of proper planning for the PD activities, the training being incomplete or incohesive, and having competing agendas with some of their previous PD activities. Based on her insights and experiences

in some PD workshops, Anna suggested that most PD activities do not focus on one thing; instead they are “just like scattershot” or “drive-by” (1st focus group). The participants did not shy away from expressing their dissatisfaction with some of their previous PD activities that failed to bring about a noticeable change in their pedagogy and instructional practices while their ELLs continued to struggle. Under these circumstances, some participants expressed their preference not to be called on for future PD programs. Sarah recalled her negative experiences, however, with some PD programs as being “a piece here, a piece here, a piece here” (1st focus group).

Amy reaffirmed the need to continue PD but with more emphasis on advancing the pedagogical knowledge and skills of mainstream teachers of ELLs. She made her argument in favor of the continuation of PD programs but with some improvement. Amy thought that “Lakewood has done a pretty good job, but they need to continue” (1st individual interview). Amy eloquently articulated her positive views and perceptions of the previous PD sessions she had attended, but cautioned that these PD activities were not adequate enough to meet the pedagogical knowledge and skills required by mainstream teachers of ELLs or provide them with the appropriate practices they most needed. Consistent with adult learning theory, the data collected in this study largely suggested that teachers prefer to have PD opportunities that focus on connecting theoretical concepts and instructional strategies to practice (Beck and Kosnik, 2006).

Participants also commented about their experience of using “learning labs.” The labs came into existence after an extensive theoretical training on SIOP, as teachers at Lakewood were instructed to use them to exchange and share knowledge and skills about

what they had learned as well as to observe one another in the classroom as they applied what they learned from SIOP. However, many of the participants who went through the learning labs experience suggested in many instances that it is a great follow up. For example, Sarah noted the learning lab “is not a great way to learn how to fully implement strategies that are going to support second language learners” (2nd individual interview). The learning lab platform was thoroughly debated during the first focus group interview. Overall, participants complained that there was no master guide to help them through the implementation phase of the SIOP and absence of technical feedback to improve their instruction with ELLs. During this focus group interview, Sarah described the setting in these learning labs as “the blind leading the blind” (1st group interview).

As indicated previously, Julie, the health and physical education teacher, had very limited access to PD opportunities targeting mainstream teachers of ELLs as well as limited exposure to experiences with ELLs. In fact, she had never taught any ELL or ESL students prior to joining Lakewood. Julie complained that the school administrators assumed that she was aware of EL students’ academic and social needs and that she was well prepared to teach and train them. Due to the lack of State assessment requirements for health/physical education subjects, and the notion that the school and the school district do not consider these subjects as core to students, Julie believed that teachers of these subjects are

an afterthought on a lot of things... We've written curriculum where you talked about specific content, but we've never reached that. And I don't know if it's just

because some of those other schools don't have the population we have, so they don't think it's a need. So it's not on their radar... (1st individual interview).

Moreover, she voiced concern about being unprepared and less informed about the best instructional practices to utilize when dealing with EL students. Julie stated that there is a large percentage of kids that have multiple levels of English... and it's a juggling act and we in PE [physical education], when we go to health, we don't have any help. Like they have help in the academic content areas with teacher's assistance, to help groups get through the lessons. We don't have that. So, I think it just adds to the maybe the negative parts of teaching (1st individual interview).

Julie further elaborated on her potential disadvantage in this regard, admitting that she was not sure how “effective” she was with students who did not have the language skills. She was concerned about what her ELLs may miss in terms of knowledge and skills related to health and physical education. Given their low level of English proficiency, Julie suggested that they will be at a disadvantage with regards to understanding critical issues related to their identity, sexuality, reproduction, and other health aspects.

In a related comment, Carlos stated that he had more PD opportunities related to teaching ELLs when he was teaching in Miami, Florida than what was available at Lakewood. The latter can be explained by the fact that only a few states (e.g., Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas) require all general education teachers to have some training on how to teach ELLs, separate from certification or licensure (Peter et. al, 2012). The limited access and opportunities for mainstream teachers to get PD training on how best to teach ELLs is further supported by research that indicates that only about

25% of mainstream teachers have reported enrolling in PD specific to teaching ELLs (Ballantyne et al, 2008).

Most participants felt PD had a positive impact on their knowledge and pedagogy. Given the notion that it is in the best interest of their students, all participants characterized themselves as being open-minded to learn something new from the PD, regardless of years of teaching experience or previous training on the subject areas. However, there were some outliers. In many instances, Carlos indicated that he does not need to enroll in typical, redundant PD programs related to teaching ELLs. He explained that

the way the system is set up here, I don't really need to go in and get as many tips and tricks because I have so much already and it isn't like when I was in Miami where I had to figure out how to help out a level one student deal with the fact that he's in a classroom with an advanced student. That's such a huge gap to try and fill. Here, at least the student is already somewhat level, you can kind of give them strategies on what to study, where to go, how to repeat things (1st individual interview).

Carlos believed that he already mastered effective skills and instructional practices, and that there was nothing new for him to learn in this field. However, he did suggest that he would love to get more training on understanding other cultures and how to approach other cultures when discussing government... I need someone to explain to me the reason behind why some kids are so apprehensive, why they're so quiet. Explain to me the culture of the child, as opposed to ... Because I think that will

benefit me a lot more in understanding the children that I have in there (1st individual interview).

Another outlier was Julie, the health and physical education teacher, who had some training but had not used it or interfaced with anyone to help in understanding how to better teach ELLs. She revealed that

even as our [PD] within the physical education and athletics and health, we've never had [PD] [for] English language learners in that big overall school wide setting. Not when I was part of the high schools and not now that I'm part of the middle school, we've not had that... I think we live in like two different buildings here. We have the academic people are there and the arts and electives are over here (1st individual interview).

Julie was not inclined to blame the school or the school district but rather herself and the physical education department for not being actively involved in PD programs which targeted the improvement of teaching ELLs. She explained “it might be a failure on my part” (1st individual interview).

Language and Content Integration

The second theme was that *participants place great emphasis on the need for PD programs that address integrating language and content in mainstream classrooms.*

This theme was perhaps the most common concern raised by all participants, a finding broadly confirmed by previous research (Lucas et al., 2008; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). Participants’ views and perceptions about what PD programs ought to include are also supported by previous research findings that suggest the principal challenge

mainstream teachers are facing is figuring out how to effectively improve ELLs' English proficiency while teaching them the content of the subject area such as math, science, language arts, and social studies (Molle, 2013; Yoon, 2008).

Researchers suggest that mainstream teachers, by far, play a significant role in promoting their ELLs' academic and linguistic progress (Reeves, 2006). As reported in the literature, however, most mainstream teachers are struggling to discover and learn how best to teach ELLs, with most of them being unaware of the underlying learning needs of this population of students (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; Lee & Buxton, 2013; Lucas et al., 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising that in all of the interviews conducted for this study, participants expressed their interest in and preference for having PD opportunities that focus more on how to integrate literacy skills with the academic subject taught on one hand, and to effectively manage teaching their students who may vary in their English proficiency.

For the most part, participants expressed their interest in learning and applying strategies related to such topics as planning and applying best instructional practices with coaches and peers, co-teaching with ESL or reading specialists, gaining awareness and understanding of ELLs' background knowledge, managing instructional strategies such as scaffolding, promoting critical thinking for ELLs, and supporting students with different language levels. More specifically, participants believed that mainstream teachers ought to consider literacy as an integral part of their daily and routine instructions, that they benefit more from practical and authentic PD activities, and they

generally gain more, rich experiences through social interactions with their peers through formal and informal PD such as peer-to-peer, mentoring, co-teaching, and coaching.

Mainstream teachers ought to consider literacy as an integral part of their daily and routine instructions

Researchers have reported that many content-area teachers consider accommodating ELLs in their classrooms as a frustrating and challenging job and erroneously perceive their students as equal in all aspects, including their English language proficiency (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). In this context, therefore, the major continuous challenge facing mainstream teachers of ELLs is how to teach the content while improving and enhancing ELLs' language knowledge and skills; a challenging paradigm shift (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003). Carlos openly sympathized and connected with ELLs by confirming the frustration that some EL students frequently have to deal with: "What eats them up is they might be the greatest doctors in their country, but they can't differentiate context in language in English, and they can't pass the exams because of that" (1st individual interview). In essence, Carlos suggested that most EL students very likely know the content in terms of the knowledge and skills needed but "they just can't do the reading and that is what hurts" (1st individual interview).

Jenna echoed Carlos's perspective and insight about the language difficulties ELLs are facing. Jenna advised that it entails hard work on the part of mainstream teachers to improve their pedagogy while teaching the academic content: "[Integration] takes a while; it doesn't happen overnight", she attested (1st individual interview). In these settings, students are expected to learn and interact with the new vocabulary introduced.

Jenna admitted, however, that it is a challenge to integrate language with content because much of the information is theoretical. Consequently, mainstream teachers struggle with how to effectively integrate literacy strategies and content in their classrooms (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Gandara et al., 2005).

Kate, on the other hand, stated that she has already learned a great deal about what and how to integrate literacy instructions in her mainstream classroom. More specifically, she stated that what she learned from SIOP is “integrating a lot of language strategies within a content area, which is where I am.” She explained further that she wanted “to have more content that's already adapted for me” (1st individual interview). In particular, Kate desired to learn and practice strategies introducing the content with language support. On her own initiatives, Kate often used many resources to support her EL students’ language knowledge and skills such as “Newsela,” an online resource which offers students up-to-date, high-interest articles that are indexed to students’ reading levels. She mentioned that her short-term goal, however, was to get professional assistance to “write detailed, informative scientific content at a lower level. That's what I need” (1st individual interview). Having mainstream teachers apply basic instructional strategies such as leveling the reading, however, may lead to an undesirable academic outcome: “Sometimes they also miss a lot of very important information,” Kate argued (1st individual interview).

Amy and many other participants collectively realized that they have a responsibility to accommodate the linguistic needs of ELLs in their mainstream classrooms. Amy believed that “teachers that have been here [at Lakewood] a while

understand that they're all English teachers, they're all reading teachers, even if they teach science or history" (1st individual interview). Megan echoed Amy's assertion and added that "all of us in this building teach reading and writing no matter what subject we're teaching" (1st individual interview). This finding is largely supported by research which concludes that it is imperative for all mainstream teachers to consider literacy as an integral part of their daily and routine instructions (Brozo & Fisher, 2010; Cummins, 2000; Paris & Block, 2007; Risko et al, 2008; Snow et al. 1989).

Prevalent throughout the individual interviews with most of the participants and during the two focus groups interviews was the belief that the only way forward is to think of the solution to the problem of meeting ELLs' language needs as no more than a natural integration of language and content in all mainstream classrooms. In this context, Megan best described the process of integrating literacy skills with content in mainstream classroom when she said, "We are all doing it. It's just natural" (1st individual interview). Snow et al. (1989) explained that it is more effective to shift from teaching English language and literacy skills and strategies in isolation to teaching those within content-based instruction. For the most part, most participants did feel reluctant, however, to implicate anyone other than themselves for not being able to adequately integrate language and content, but they explained that they still needed support and proper and continuous training in this regard.

Amy mentioned that she did not realize the importance of integrating content with language until she started teaching English as a foreign language in Japan. After her social and teaching experiences in Japan, Amy started teaching history again, but this

time with a different perspective on teaching ELLs. She thought, “Okay, I need to teach the content of history, but they don't know plurals and they don't know the subject–verb agreement. So, how can I kill two birds with one stone?” (1st individual interview). Amy, like many of her colleagues, revealed that by learning and practicing how to set language objectives and provide adequate language support—specifically direct vocabulary support—EL students find it easier to achieve content objectives.

Jenna, a math teacher, further commented that using the proper pedagogical methods she learned during SIOP training and the subsequent follow-ups and coaching sessions greatly improved ELLs’ participation in content classes. She added that the best, most effective way to teach ELLs was “to attack the language and the math concepts and skills simultaneously” (1st individual interview). Given her vast teaching experience of mathematics in elementary and middle schools with all types of students including ELLs, Jenna came to recognize that although such an approach is “very tedious, quite difficult, but if you do it the correct way they generally tend to learn and they tend to do pretty well” (1st individual interview). Jenna’s understanding of the connection between language and content, especially for ELLs, is supported by research that suggests well-prepared mainstream teachers of ELLs (like Jenna) have “a sense of self-confidence regarding their ability to teach EL students, a finding that echoes a broader body of research on teacher efficacy in general and its positive effect on student achievement” (Gandara et al., 2005, p. 3).

Consistent with research findings, Amy, the English teacher, spoke about the importance of integrating literacy strategies with the academic content. She encourages

all teachers, especially novice teachers, to modify and improve their instructional strategies and practices to ensure the integration of language with the content taught (Paris & Block, 2007). Amy felt that at the beginning of practicing the idea of integration in mainstream classrooms, it is “overwhelming, but there is a point where there's like a paradigm shift. And you realize like, ‘Oh yeah, we all are English teachers. We all are responsible’” (1st focus group).

Accepting and promoting the responsibility on the part of mainstream teachers to fully consider and accommodate the linguistic needs of ELLs while teaching them and other regular students the academic content was emphasized by many of the participants. For example, Anna stated,

It's bridging the divide between saying you're a content teacher, that's true, but you can integrate vocabulary in units and throughout the unit, and it's not outside of what you're doing. It's taking just that one slight little extra step to define a couple of words at the beginning of the day that you're going to be encountering or specialized vocabulary, and just finding little steps. That's what the SIOP model is supposed to be doing for the content teachers, training them on how to integrate that. I think there's still this mindset from content teachers, unfortunately, that you're asking me to do something extra and you're putting more work on me, when in fact it doesn't have to be that. It should be more natural integration (1st individual interview).

The issue of student diversity in terms of their English proficiency levels was discussed throughout all of the interviews in this study. As indicated by all participants,

they need professional help on how to effectively manage teaching their students who may vary in their English proficiency. Megan asserted that she needed

more time and I don't have a magic wand for that. But because of that, I have kids in a class reading from the third grade level to a college level, and kids who understand at WIDA six level as opposed to kids who have grown up with parents who have Masters and Doctorates and at the dinner table are using words that are advanced, I need more help differentiating (1st individual interview).

Anna shared Megan's perspective on the imperative need on how to manage teaching ELLs with different language levels. Anna stated that "what I'm struggling with, and that is when I have these really diverse level differences. How do you bridge those better without having to separate the class" (1st individual interview).

Sarah echoed the other participants' concern by confirming the notion that mainstream teachers "struggle with differentiating for our students in our classrooms" (1st focus group). Emily explained that it is important that as "the teacher is expected to teach at various levels and I would like to see that in practice." Emily added that when she attends a PD she wants to see videos of a class "where the students themselves are across a spectrum of abilities and then watch how that's managed" (2nd individual interview).

Jenna echoed her peers' concerns about the need to get proper training on how to deal with different levels of English proficiency, hoping "to see anyone coming in and teach a group like that may be differentiating for levels of kids" (2nd individual interview).

Mark, on the other hand, expressed his desire to receive practical PD when teachers have a "kid [who] has this level, [and] this kid has that level. How do we get

them to work together?” (1st individual interview). Further, Carlos indicated that he would like to learn more about “how to scaffold different levels, and then how to understand which kid gets what. That's important because not all kids learn the same” (2nd individual interview). Eventually, teachers ask for guidance and change in PD in this regard, as explained by Julie; “If we can have a PD where you come in and you say, you bring your lesson, any lesson, and then you adapt it to these different languages, different learning languages, different levels” (2nd individual interview).

The arguments made by many of the participants centered on the limited focus of existing teachers’ PD opportunities on the integration and discussion of the issue of student diversity in the learning context of K-12 education (Berg & Huang, 2015; Calderon, 2009; Coady et al., 2015; Goldenberg, 2011; Janzen (2007; Watkins & Lindahl, 2010). This suggests that there is a mismatch between what PD communicates and instructs versus the realities and demands of classroom environments and contexts; a gap that needs to be addressed by organizers of PD programs.

It was obvious from the interpretation of the data that participants preferred to receive training on how to scaffold and develop reading, motivate and inspire love for reading, build reading stamina in students, and develop EL students’ critical thinking. Carlos suggested that in PD, it is essential to train mainstream teachers on how to effectively engage EL students in assignments and practices that would induce critical thinking. According to Carlos, introducing and encouraging critical thinking for some ELLs “tends to be one of the biggest issues with EL students, because they don't have the support at home to do some of the higher level order thinking skills that some homework

is required to do,” (2nd individual interview) suggesting that there is a need to involve ELLs’ families in their children’s education. Sarah echoed Carlos’s perspective that there is a lack of emphasis on developing critical thinking for students in general and ELLs in particular. She was not reluctant to admit that “there is a decline in critical thinking. And so, when children are given a sheet, the first thing is, ‘I don’t know what to do.’ ‘Have you read the directions?’” (2nd individual interview). Carlos and Sarah were not hesitant to blame some teachers who tend sometimes to simplify reading for ELLs instead of providing the appropriate instructional practices with more emphasis on critical thinking and reading comprehension.

Teachers benefit more from practical and authentic PD

Above all, participants asked for more PD programs that are practical, in which they will be exposed to instructional approaches and materials they can use right away. Many of the participants explained that they would like PD programs to first build on foundational knowledge and expertise and then gradually and periodically start to increase teachers’ abilities to integrate vocabulary and comprehension skills with content. This assertion is consistent with research findings that suggest it is essential to engage mainstream teachers of ELLs in practical and specialized PD programs, focusing on raising their awareness and understanding of the learning needs of ELLs, and developing their PCK and skills needed to effectively teach ELLs in their classroom (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). Participants agreed that they would like to have PD programs focus more on the ability to teach the academic content and skills to students who are still in the process of learning and mastering the English language (Lucas et al., 2008).

Amy explained that

Most of the PD we've had here has been very practical and related to the classroom, not just big theory. I think they start off with a theory and just to get people understanding. But then they always include strategies and examples, and they give us things to take back to the classroom and try, which is really helpful (1st individual interview).

She also added that these professional experiences have helped her to

plant the seed in my head so that ...to start thinking that way is good. Because I know the students that I work with, and the things they like and don't like, but it's that person who gave me the ideas, starting the whole thing. So, it's good (1st individual interview).

Similarly, Mark spoke positively about his PD experiences, particularly the practical aspect of it. He remembered in one PD training they were told “Here's an hour, make something to use” (1st individual interview) and they were encouraged to spend some time to apply what they had learned. He believed this was positive as they could immediately start making it during the PD time and then they could “apply it more quickly with less of our own personal time being spent on it. That's good, especially if we can go as a CLT to the training, and that we can collaborate during the training. That's ideal” (1st individual interview).

The arguments made by Amy and Mark are consistent with the existing literature that suggests it is better to have some discretion on the part of mainstream teachers of ELLs, especially those who are well educated and trained in theories about effective

practice, to determine how and to what extent they will implement new instructional approaches and materials in their classrooms (Daniel & Conlin, 2015). Definitely, certain types of coordination with the school and division-level administrators should be followed prior to making any significant instructional changes. Emily also indicated that “there are a lot of strategies that I've learned from [PD] that I then feel like I have an easier time following through with and applying in the classroom, when I have peer support. So, that's helpful” (1st individual interview). Emily added that “throughout the school year where we worked with SIOP teachers and they did come and observe us teaching and give us feedback and it was pretty intensive” (1st individual interview). Amy's, Mark's, and Emily's assertions about the value of having practical PD are consistent with the adult learning theory, which postulates that being at a mature development stage, adults have a more secure self-concept than children, which allows them to relate, share, and discuss real-life applications during PD activities with their peers and the PD instructor (Knowles, 1980, 1984).

Commenting on her experience in the SIOP training, Sarah further clarified that she regularly utilized all the SIOP course booklets in her classroom as she found them very hands-on. She also added that “it was particularly helpful because there were many practical strategies that can be applied to help English language learners access the curriculum (1st individual interview). During the first interview with Sarah, she explained how she took apart this approach, step by step, and then picked out different strategies she could use in the classroom. Kate agreed with Sarah on the valuable benefits they got from attending SIOP. Kate thought that “the [PD] that we had, especially the SIOP

training. I think it's good for most students...I think it's a good model. That's why I continued to use it" (2nd individual interview). Reciting his good experience with SIOP where he learned and mastered certain techniques that he could directly apply in his classrooms, Mark indicated that "There haven't been many [PD] classes I've taken for English language learning that was not immediately usable. It's always been very focused and helpful" (1st individual interview).

Participants also expressed their desire to receive readily applicable materials to learn and master instructional strategies and best practices, to observe modeled successful lessons; and to get support on how to approach the content and make it accessible to ELLs. Anna, for example, expressed her desire "to get some real tangible hands on techniques and ideas that I can start seeing use in my classroom and it'll produce results" (2nd individual interview). Commenting on the value of one PD workshop she attended at a college, Anna suggested that it

looked like it would've been fantastic because it would have been something you can utilize immediately in your classroom. It had very practical application. So, I think that's the continuing is, if I'm going to take the time out to learn these new things, I want to see direct impact on improving my instructional quality (2nd individual interview).

While Anna and her fellow participants agree in principle that PD programs should be reformed to support mainstream teachers in meeting ELLs' learning needs, they still need more extensive and repeated field experiences and hands-on teaching experiences to develop solid understandings of literacy practices (Baecher, 2012).

During the first focus group interview, many of the participants expressed their desire to have more practical PD activities that they can utilize in their classrooms. Jenna, for example, explained that it is very important in PD activities to start the presentation of the materials from a theoretical point of view followed by a practical guidance and examples from real-life applications. She suggested to the PD organizers to

do this, give us a practical suggestion. This would benefit way more [ELLs] and just speaking generically about the proper ... what you're actually doing differentiating notes, differentiating handouts, would make a much, much, much bigger difference than putting up a content and language objective (1st focus group).

This finding is supported by social constructivist theory that assumes that learners are active in the construction of knowledge and meaning and that learning should take place in authentic and real-life environments (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Palincsar, 1998).

Additionally, Anna stated that for a PD program to be practical and useful, it needs to be integrated, not separate, and just show how it blends better. I think if people could see some excellent examples of teaching, like I said, some video shots, maybe five minutes, doesn't have to be real long periods, but at different phases through a unit, then they could see how that evolves and how people naturally incorporated the concepts into their overall curriculum (2nd individual interview).

Anna added that teachers

need to see it modeled by another teacher who's really gotten the concept down, and maybe not just one isolated lesson but maybe videotape [of] a willing teacher

for a few lessons within a unit, maybe two or three snippets of lessons throughout a unit showing maybe at the beginning, ‘Okay, we’re going to do this vocabulary instruction. But then in the middle, how do you practice that language process?’ (2nd individual interview).

Emily argued that as teachers are expected to teach at various levels, they expect to see the same in PD activities. At least, she suggested, “it would be useful to have a series of videos where we can watch a class develop at different levels (2nd individual interview).

Across subject area classes, participants had been utilizing many literacy strategies they had learned during their previous PD programs, including brick and mortar, sentence stem, scaffolding with graphic organizers, 20-word summary (summarization), and gap (missing information) strategies. Consequently, the participants were able to come up with specific and practical strategies that they could utilize and apply in their classrooms right away. Amy expressed her support for the need to engage teachers of ELLs in PD activities with real-life applications that train them on how to support the academic and linguistic needs of ELLs in the mainstream classrooms instead of only learning the cultural and legal aspects related to the EL student population. Megan also asked for more practical PD training because her “kids are so needy” (1st individual interview). For Amy, what she and her colleagues have received from participating in PD activities they considered a very good start, but “there are other additional things that would be helpful.... I think at [Lakewood], we have a really big need” (1st individual interview). As widely reported in the literature, most experienced teachers of ELLs, like Amy and Megan, have the desires and interests to continuously

improve their pedagogical knowledge and skills to effectively work with this group of students (Cervone, 2010).

Carlos voiced his concern, however, that in the absence of authentic and practical PD training on the integration of language and content, some average-to-smart EL students, who may have some difficulties with reading and writing, are increasingly vulnerable to becoming struggling students; and eventually becoming unproductive citizens (Batalova et al., 2007; Snow et al.1998). As discussed in the literature, this problem, coupled with the fact that there is a significant increase in EL students attending public schools in the United States, could eventually lead to major and damaging effects on the economic competitiveness of the U.S. labor market (Lovette, 2013).

Teachers gain better teaching experiences through social interactions with their peers

One striking finding in this study is that many participants consistently perceived their within-school informal or formal PD, such as peer collaboration, peer observation and feedback, mentoring, and coaching to be their most meaningful PD experiences. At Lakewood and with the support of WPSD and school administrators, mainstream teachers have the opportunity to participate in within-school informal or formal PD meetings across subject areas and grade levels, amongst and with language specialists and content specialists. By utilizing many of the platforms availed by the school and supported by the WPSD such as the PLC and CLT, participants reported that they can learn from one another, share pedagogical knowledge and skills, and observe and assess each other's teaching methods (e.g., learning labs). Co-teaching with subject-area teachers, ESOL specialists and mentoring new teachers are very common at Lakewood.

Through these types of within-school informal or formal PD activities, participants indicated that it is easier and more time-efficient to share pedagogical knowledge and skills across and between different classrooms and subject-area teachers, hold PD sessions in smaller groups consisting of the same grade level or subject-area teachers, or engage and learn from reading specialists and ESOL teachers. Additionally, these platforms help teachers to connect theory to practice as well as avoid the outside judgment and evaluation that sometimes exists in traditional, district- or outside-based PD training. By viewing language teaching as an integrated process as opposed to a discrete discipline, new ways of engaging with colleagues are introduced at Lakewood (Brozo & Fisher, 2010; Cummins, 2000; Risko et al 2008).

Kate explained that she felt fortunate because as mainstream teachers of ELLs, they are

sharing ideas and the culture, I think at least here at [Lakewood] and the schools I've been here in [WPSD] because I've always taught in schools that have second language learners... But I've got lots of folks who help. So it's very collaborative and I really appreciate that because that's how we get better (1st individual interview).

This way, PD opportunities provide practical settings to have first-hand experiences with improving and integrating new teaching practices for ELLs through intensive interaction and discussions about the subject taught, and by means of collaboration and actively engaging in meaningful dialogue with colleagues (Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Snow et al, 1989; Stoller, 2004).

Mark shared Kate's views on the importance and impact of peer collaboration on improving the English and academic levels of their ELLs. He believed that

it's best when teachers who see it working in their classrooms, share it. That's the simplest way to put it. That kind of [PD] is best. So within a school it's great, within a school district it's great if it's already being used and shared, so it's ready to go, you don't have to change much about it (1st individual interview).

Mark also expressed his preference in learning from other teachers. He indicated that

there've been formal [PDs] and then just informal teacher to teacher kind of [PD] and those have been the most when I learned just from peers. I have only been at the beginner level [of SIOP]... I've learned from people who took the advanced and they shared the advanced things (1st individual interview).

Mark added that he wanted to “learn more about ways that social studies teachers use SIOP strategies in the rooms from other teachers” (2nd individual interview).

During my first interview with Emily, she eloquently provided a good explanation for her preference for peer collaboration. She suggested that peer collaboration in all of its types is the most useful procedure for teachers' professional growth. Emily revealed that she “was hearing from my peers what they thought I could do better, and having my peers share with me what ideas they had” (1st individual interview). Among the peer collaboration procedures, Emily perceived the peer feedback to be

the most useful, because we have a lot of staff who have many years of experience so we all have different levels of [PD] in the field of working with

ELLs and some people have Master's degrees in teaching English as a second language (1st individual interview).

She revealed that “when we were able to teach, where our peers come and watch us and then tell us what else we could do, that was the most helpful” (1st individual interview).

This finding is consistent with how the adult learning theory accounts for social interaction as an important part of the learning process (Knowles, 1980, 1984).

Megan, on the other hand, revealed that she and many other teachers at Lakewood informally and selectively initiated many platforms to help share pedagogical knowledge and skills. She frequently talks to the other teachers about what they are doing, and shares what she is learning. Although her teaching assignment was English, Megan described how she has developed her own initiatives over time to support her ELLs to understand, math literacy in the simplest language possible. For example, she was using a book written by her sister, also a math teacher, to help EL students when they have trouble with math due to the notion that math definitions are different than the English equivalent of the same words. Julie, the health and physical education teacher, often sought the help and support of the reading specialists and/or ESOL teachers at the school to provide her with “tools to work with ELLs as far as language goes and putting up word walls” (1st individual interview). She thought that collaboration between content teachers and ESOL teachers is extremely helpful, and imperative for the success of ELLs. The participants’ perceptions of good experiences with and preferences for peer-to-peer PD activities are supported by prior research findings (Baecher, 2012; Farrell, 2008; Gandara et al., 2005; Stewart, 2014). As postulated by the social constructivist theory of learning, teachers

construct knowledge and skills from lived experiences by interacting with other teachers in educational settings (Palincsar, 1998).

Consistent with the extant literature, most of the participants expressed their desire to observe successful lessons to collaborate and plan with their colleagues, and to develop coaching rapports in an ongoing manner rather than just a “one-shot” PD (Cervone, 2010; Gandara et al, 2005). It is worth noting that collaboration across subject areas supports both student learning and content-area teachers’ professional growth (Cummins, 2000; Risko et al 2008). Emily asserted that it is most beneficial “when we start off in a meeting working in groups and then have substitute time to go work with each other in each other's classrooms so that we can support each other and provide each other with shared materials” (1st individual interview). Furthermore, Anna thought it was better to get teachers in the same content area, either in the same school or even better from different schools, to fully engage in PD activities relevant to their field of teaching and what ELLs might be facing in these areas. She also suggested that such workshops can be scheduled at the district wide meetings, which all of the academic departments have on a monthly basis. During these monthly meetings, one session could be dedicated for PD activities related to teaching ELLs. In these settings, Anna explained that you can “team people up and say, ‘Okay, you know this is coming up in this unit. How can you add a SIOP model into this?’ Everybody takes a little piece and pulls it together” (2nd individual interview).

Furthermore, Kate indicated that by utilizing in-school collaboration platforms such as CLT and PLC, mainstream teachers within each subject department or within

each grade level are able to share knowledge, resources, and ideas that can be utilized to teach ELLs. Kate explained

It helps to have a team of colleagues that you can try things with and develop it together. I try it in my room, and they try, he or she tries it in his or her room and then we come back and talk about it. To me, I collaborate that way (2nd individual interview).

On another note, Julie advocated for content-area-based PD activities, even though she reported a lack of PD within the physical education, athletics, and health department on how to teach and train ELLs. When I probed Julie to further explain why she thinks it is important for her to get more training on how to meet the learning needs of ELLs, she clarified that there is a written curriculum that includes specific content, and that she is concerned about the different treatment her department is receiving with respect to PD opportunities as opposed to how other academic departments are treated with respect to PD opportunities.

In contrast to her previous teaching jobs at other school districts where there was less emphasis on PD, Amy came to recognize and highly value the PD at Lakewood and WPSD, especially the school's encouragement to have teachers collaborate. She asserted that she is "glad that [Lakewood] values [PD]. Because I've worked in other places where ... not really professional. It's just like, 'Okay, good luck. Here's your class'" (1st individual interview). More specifically, she enjoyed peer-to-peer observation. She revealed that "having like a partner or people you can go to, or a friendly observation to just give you ideas would be good" (1st individual interview). Amy further noticed that

there is a difference between administrators and peers with respect to feedback and observation. She classified the latter as a healthy environment. She explained that

when we get observed, it's mostly the administrator who has to observe at certain times of the year or prepare for this observation. And when they walk in, you know it's an observation. So it's not just, 'Okay, let me know what's happening with my lesson. What are the students doing when I'm over here doing something?' Because another person can be observing those students and see what's happening (1st individual interview).

Megan echoed Amy's assertion about the need to have positive, healthy feedback and observation, she noticed that this type of observation has a very positive effect on students' learning. She said that "observers in the classroom who are here to help, the kids will respond well to and they'll go to for support" (1st individual interview).

Another way of collaboration at Lakewood is the introduction of a one-year mentoring program for novice teachers, which has been perceived positively and as rewarding, both educationally and professionally by many of the teachers who benefited from such programs. Amy proposed to build on the idea of having a mentor program at Lakewood. She said

One thing that I think would be good is a continued mentor program. So I know teachers, when they come to [Lakewood] a new teacher gets a mentor who they can ask questions of and give them advice about things throughout the year...Even second year teachers, third year teachers, they still need that... somebody (1st individual interview).

Amy reflected on her experience with some teachers she had worked with as a mentor. According to Amy, these novice teachers indicated that “it was really helpful ... just to come in sometimes and just give ... some suggestions” (1st focus group).

Most importantly, some participants suggested that peer-to-peer-based PD programs are most beneficial to improving their instructional practices due to the absence of time pressure they face when enrolled in PD activities organized and delivered by outside consultants as well as the additional skills and abilities possessed by some teachers that can be utilized to strengthen the academic knowledge and literacy of ELLs. Commenting on her experience with one SIOP training she took, Anna revealed that she mostly liked the follow-up that took place after a couple of months, and learning how to observe other teachers in a SIOP lesson and give them meaningful feedback according to the SIOP model. Amy echoed Anna’s perspective on the value of follow ups and observation, but she preferred to engage with and learn from both highly experienced and skillful Lakewood teachers. “I’d rather do more from [Lakewood] teachers than be like, ‘We’ve got it right,’ and then move on,” Amy said about some of her previous PD activities (1st group interview). Commenting on the benefits of engaging in in-house PD, Amy believed that “in-house knows what we need and they know our population and they know what each teacher's doing in science and social studies and what the challenges are. So they can address that” (1st individual interview).

In another note, it was interesting to listen to participants suggesting the use of social media like Twitter or Facebook as platforms to exchange ideas and best practices.

Mark, for example, advocated for the utilization of the Internet to learn and promote PD and perhaps do trainings online. He explained

that's been awesome. And YouTube and other things where we can share, Twitter, and share strategies much more easily, but it is still coming down to the idea of when do I have time to write this all into a lesson (1st individual interview).

Differentiation

The third theme was that participants collectively argued that *it is imperative to differentiate PD activities based on teachers' abilities, readiness, interests, expectations, involvement in the PD processes, choices, professional and teaching experiences, and pedagogical knowledge and skills*. Ample research evidence indicates that teachers vary in many aspects. This could include educational qualifications, teaching experiences, general PD experiences, specific ELLs PD experiences, and existing pedagogical knowledge and skills (Lucas, 2011). Consistent with research findings on the importance of differentiation in PD, participants in this study uniformly suggested that PD activities should be designed and implemented with differentiation in mind (Bunch, 2013; Calderon, 2009; Coady et al., 2015; Gallucci et al., 2010; Gandara et al., 2005; Molle, 2013).

Participants expressed their desire to engage in PD activities that take into account their prior knowledge, to make the content of PD more relevant to the teaching of ELLs, and to have a voice in their learning opportunities. By surveying targeted mainstream teachers about their attitudes, perceptions, interests, experiences, pedagogical knowledge, and skills prior to designing and implementing PD programs, more relevant and effective

PD activities can be developed and implemented to fulfill and improve the pedagogical knowledge and skills of mainstream teachers of ELLs.

Teachers demand PD programs be based on their prior knowledge

Teachers have rich experiences, both academic and social, that provide the basis for PD activities. Most participants argued for PD differentiation. For the most part, all participants agreed that in order to ensure the appropriateness and effectiveness of PD activities, targeted teachers need to be surveyed prior to designing and running PD programs to collect and analyze information related to their attitudes, perceptions, interests toward teaching ELLs on one hand, and their teaching experiences, academic and professional abilities, and pedagogical knowledge and skills on the other hand. Such information should then be analyzed and used as a basis to design and deliver PD programs as well as plan post-PD and follow-up activities for the targeted and surveyed mainstream teachers. In essence, this is what all participants would like to see happening in future PD programs. Similar to many groups of students who require certain types of instruction, teachers also have diverse learning needs that must be considered by the organizers of PD initiatives. This finding is supported by the adult learning theory that assumes that adults, like children and youth, have their own specific learning needs (Knowles, 1980, 1984).

Emily elaborated on the issue of differentiation in PD by explaining that she did not

find it as useful when somebody is hired from the outside to come in, because they tend to share information to everyone at the same level. And we're all

teaching different students at different levels. And also, teachers come with a variety of background knowledge... [The consultant] did not differentiate what is being taught to the teachers so that we all receive the same training even if we already did that training before” (1st individual interview).

Jenna further supported Emily’s assertion about the need to survey teachers prior to the PD activities to discover their needs and objectives. She explained that it would be practical and logical to differentiate during the delivery of the PD workshop and said “it would be nice if they differentiated and said, ‘Okay, have you heard these 25 times? Feel free to leave’” (1st individual interview). The assertions by Emily and Jenna are consistent with prior research findings (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015).

Carlos affirmed his peer’s dissatisfaction with some PD activities and explained that “sometimes I end up in PD's where I'm like, I'm just kind of like watching the clock because I already know all that stuff” (1st individual interview). Anna also expressed her concern about the limited benefits she had received from participating in some of the PD programs in the past. She explained that “you're going to have different things be more meaningful, of course, than others. I'll be generous, say 60% of the time it's useful, 40% it's like, well, that was a waste of my time” (2nd individual interview). Participants’ assertions about the importance of differentiating training, which are supported in the literature (Guskey, 2000), suggest that randomly assigning teachers to PD programs would seem to ignore the fact that each individual teacher possesses different teaching experiences, abilities, interests, and competencies. This finding is supported by the

constructivist theory that assumes that learning starts with an individual's prior knowledge (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Palincsar, 1998).

According to participants, school districts and school leadership ought to consider integrating differentiation into the PD curriculum to mimic the actual classroom setting in which teachers have to work with ELLs who possess varying degrees of English proficiency. Generally, all participants supported the utilization of PD differentiation. Emily, however, admitted that it is not an easy task to differentiate for the different levels of background knowledge teachers bring to the PD experience. Nonetheless, she remained supportive of differentiating PD activities to account for the variances in teachers' abilities and expertise. Emily explained:

I think all of the [PD] that I've ever received, there's been a mismatch because the coach comes in and teaches a whole class lesson and then when they leave, the teacher is expected to teach to different ability levels. And I would like to see coaching at different ability levels (1st individual interview).

Furthermore, Sarah explained that “if we are trained within best practice and the message is best practice is the expectation in your classroom when you're teaching, then lead by example. When you're teaching us, use best practice on a consistent basis” (1st focus group). Anna affirmed her fellow participants' testimonials by indicating that “you're gonna expect us to do best practices as teachers for our students, and yet in our own PD department, you don't necessarily provide the same modeling” (1st focus group).

It is evident from the participants' feedback that they want to see PD instructors apply some level of differentiation while they are lecturing and applying certain

instructional methods. During the first focus group interview, participants discussed how frustrated they get sometimes when they attend PD programs that do not add any value to their knowledge. Sarah argued that perhaps one of the major challenges school administrators are facing is when they start planning and assigning PD programs among teachers. The challenge is how to assign an entire staff of people who are all in different places of the spectrum in terms of proficiency in pedagogical knowledge and skills to different PD programs. Sarah explained, “Just like we struggle with differentiating for our students in our classrooms, our school administrators are struggling with differentiating for us” (1st focus group). She, however, emphasized that as it is so essential to adopt it for students, it is equally important for teachers, because “best practice is just as important for adult learning as it is for adolescent learners” (1st focus group).

With her vast experience in PD training coupled with strong personal interest in self-learning and PD, Anna was also unhappy about some of her PD experiences which she felt were to a large degree unbeneficial. She stated, “I don't wanna be bored to death with just the outlines” (1st focus group). Anna felt frustrated about having to attend redundant PD workshops like SIOP and explained, “We’ve already had it six times,” (1st focus group). She elaborated further on this issue and called for assessing targeted teachers prior to delivering any PD activities:

I mean, how much is there to learn about this? Because a lot of us do have the experience and it does get really redundant after a while. I think which is like, ‘Enough, we got it.’ The new staff sure, make sure they're trained. But evaluate,

what does your staff already know? Stop forcing things down our throats (1st focus group).

Participants collectively suggested that as schools systematically differentiate instruction for students who have diverse learning needs, it seems equally important to structure PD activities with differentiation in place for participating teachers who, as adult learners, have different learning needs that ought to be considered in planning PD activities. Sarah explained that “Student choice is best practice; adult choice is best practice. But for some reason, best practice isn't extended to us the way that we are expected to apply it to students” (1st focus group).

Teachers desire the content of PD to be relevant to their current situation

PD programs need to be relevant to school setting and student population. As postulated by adult learning theory, it is expected that PD be relevant to teachers' lives (Knowles, 1984). The unique, different instructional setting and composition of students for each teacher or group of teachers may be overlooked by some outside consultants when conducting PD programs. In my second interview with Emily, she complained that one of her PD instructors was not aware of what exactly mainstream teachers do in the classrooms. The content of the PD workshop was related to teaching new language learners at the secondary level, whereas Emily and her middle school peers did not have those students in their mainstream classrooms. Emily noted “The information that we were getting was not very relevant to the mainstream teachers” (2nd individual interview) and she asserted that the PD should have been targeting ESL teachers or elementary school teachers.

Many participants discussed the need for outside consultants to understand teachers' professional backgrounds and teaching settings, especially with respect to their particular student population (e.g., ELLs). Mark stated that sometimes outside consultants share an idea, but it doesn't apply to our student population, so it's not useful. For instance, when I used to teach sixth grade, I would use things that would never work very well here, because I didn't understand how kids thought, and I didn't understand the EL population (1st individual interview).

Emily added that she would like to learn more about the methods of supporting ELLs who have certain communication needs, such as ELLs with autism, or ELLs who have other disabilities or learning disabilities. She felt that they need extra help in meeting the literacy needs of these groups of students and suggested the "greatest area of need, is when our ELLs come to us with more complex needs, as opposed to just learning English by itself" (1st individual interview).

Participants argue that research and theory are good to know but must be applicable to their student population and have practical takeaways. Risko et al. (2008) explained that, when modeled and implemented correctly, PD programs introduce mainstream teachers to a new understanding of teaching practices and knowledge that they may use to make connections with their student population. This, in turn, will allow teachers to eventually integrate and implement what they have learned into their mainstream classroom practices.

In my first interview with Sarah, I asked her to share how the composition of different groups of students impacts their learning needs. She explained that at Lakewood

they have a large group of EL students, along with those with special needs, who are considered proficient in English but are reading two or three levels below grade level, and gifted children, who are reading at upper high school, almost college level, all mixed in one class. For Sarah and many of the participants this is a very challenging educational task for teachers and for administrators to deal with every day and in every classroom.

She cautioned, therefore, that

if I'm sitting there listening to someone give advice, information, that has not had that experience, I often find that that person really doesn't understand the setting in which I'm operating. And sometimes, the things that they suggest that we do, are not applicable to our situation, and won't be successful (1st individual interview).

Constructivist theory requires that the content of PD programs be relevant to teachers' existing settings (Palincsar, 1998). Similarly, Anna argued that it is important to have PD instructors who are familiar with student diversity and its effect on instructional practices in the classroom. She explained that “depending on what their background is and where the teachers have come from, you've got teachers from places that maybe they haven't really had to encounter English language learners before. And then this is a new taste” (1st individual interview).

Jenna expressed concern about having PD instructors who do not have teaching experience and very likely have little connection to practice:

Actually very often when we have these consultants come in and present I think to myself, ‘I know much more than you do and I do it every day in my classroom so

there's nothing that you're telling me that is either new or revolutionary, or maybe a lot of what you're telling me is not really workable in my classrooms. So, yeah I'll let you know if life is not working' (1st individual interview).

In contrast, Jenna suggested that “receiving [PD] from someone who's actually a practitioner [might be better] as opposed to someone who's out there doing this for a living. I think it varies. Teachers sometimes tend to be good” (1st individual interview). Similarly, Carlos, Emily, Mark, and Sarah revealed their preference to have more PD programs led by teachers as opposed to only outside PD consultants:

Carlos: So, the [PD] professionals themselves, they're great. They're just not as immersed as I've been. So, I have expectations that are a little different.... So, that's why I can't bring my expectations and say that ‘Oh, this is what I did here’ because I just have a different viewpoint altogether than what anyone else is going to say (1st individual interview).

Emily: The professional learning that happens at school is most useful when teachers are able to help each other (1st individual interview).

Mark: I like the [PD] that's led by teachers more than I like the ones from consultants, outside businesses that are offering a system or program (1st individual interview).

Sarah: Teachers have credibility. If you have someone coming in with some sort of PD that has not actually been in the classroom it falls flat. Because that person really does not have an understanding, a realistic perspective, of what the classroom setting is like (1st individual interview).

It can be argued that the participants' dissatisfied sentiment with outside consultants delivering PD programs are mainly due to the lack of focus on the practical aspects of PD opportunities, especially to those relevant to mainstream classroom settings. This, in turn, may explain why many of the participants expressed their preference to engage in peer-to-peer PD activities.

Teachers want to have a voice in their learning opportunities

As postulated by the adult learning theory, adults need to be involved in the planning of their learning (Knowles, 1980, 1984). As indicated by several of the participants, the involvement of teachers prior to, during, and after conducting PD activities is essential to ensure the effectiveness of such activities. Baecher (2012) and Farrell (2008) contend that mainstream teachers should be invited to communicate their expertise and experiences with the personal, social, and psychological demands of working with ELLs, as these students struggle to adapt to the realities of their learning environment. Accordingly, participants indicated that they wanted to observe and actually “feel” the impact of PD training in their classrooms by learning from their peers, particularly from those with exceptional expertise and professional certification.

With extensive professional training coupled with SIOP certification, Anna, for example, has offered many times to help in leading workshops focused on the concept of integrating language with content in mainstream classrooms. She added that she knew other teachers with other areas of strong expertise who, for some reason, have not been utilized to actively participate in the planning and delivery of some PD activities. Anna contended that “we wanna have these workshops in-house, but then we don't really

survey the staff and say, ‘Do you have a special skill? Could you please tell us, we have a database to draw off for these PD days?’” (1st individual interview). Amy’s argument for the need to involve teachers, especially those who have good and relevant teaching experience, is further supported by other participants. They expressed their desire to have PD activities performed by a teacher to ensure the applicability of the PD content. However, in the case where PD activities are run by persons from outside the school, it is essential to make sure that PD instructors have practical experience. These arguments by the participants are corroborated by prior research findings that suggest mainstream teachers should be invited to play an active role in assisting with PD activities in some capacity to increase the chances of transforming their “special knowledge and skills” to best meet the learning needs of ELLs (Lucas, 2011, p. 6).

From her previous PD experiences, Emily believed the most relevant PD is when teachers have a voice in how and what PD activities to choose and apply. She indicated that “it’s just important that it be at a convenient time where teachers can meet as a group, and colleagues can work together” (1st individual interview). Similarly, Kate expressed her preference to participate in workshops because she better connects with peers. She revealed that she likes “to be able to discuss things and be able to bounce ideas off people” (1st individual interview). Unlike some of her PD experience that was all lecture-based format, Amy indicated that she had been

in really good [PD] where the professional who’s presenting is using the techniques that they’re teaching us, and they’re doing a rotation of activities, and

we're standing up and we're doing the things that they're telling us to do in the classroom (1st individual interview).

During the second focus group interview, I divided the participants into two groups and asked each group to design a PD program from their perspective as experienced teachers and based on the existing Lakewood environment, where almost 50% of the student population are ELLs. They very much liked the idea of being in charge of planning and designing the PD program. As the coordinator of the second group, Mark summarized his team's plan for the PD program as follows:

First, we introduced the concept that is the focus of the training and then explain the what, the why, and the how, the rationale behind the training. Why is it important? Two, explain examples of how it works, include then time for the learning teachers to practice the thing they're hearing, because we all learn best by doing. Number three, go deeper into explanation. After everyone has had a chance to put to use what they've been learning, then the instructors explain the nuances that we may have missed that help us understand it better. That doesn't also include that after we practice, we get to hear critiquing of what we did well, what we need to improve upon. That would come from the professional presenter in the room who knows the material. Then there should be a break.

These PD programs designed by the participants can be viewed as a direct application of adult learning theory, which suggests that a transaction process between the learner and the instructor takes place through the learner's active participation in identifying their learning needs and planning how these needs will be met (Knowles, 1984).

Teachers' choice was widely cited by participants as a key factor affecting the quality of PD activities. Allowing teachers to have a choice in their PD definitely enhances their level of engagement and benefits from participating in such PD activities. At WPSD, teachers can pick and choose among many PD options to identify the ones they think are going to work best for them as mainstream teachers. Kate, for example, expressed her satisfaction with the wide PD opportunities to choose from the WPSD level and added "I liked that...if I'm trying to build background knowledge" (1st individual interview). Similarly, Jenna spoke highly of the exceptional and generous support teachers are getting from WPSD in the form of providing a wide range of PD opportunities. She admitted that "[Lakewood] very often gives us choices, so whenever we have early release, very often they have like many different sessions going on and we can pick the ones that might be helpful for us" (1st individual interview). Megan confirmed her fellow participants' assertion about the generous support they are receiving from WPSD in terms of providing PD opportunities free of charge, and added that "every year there are lots of classes to help us support second language or third language learners" (1st individual interview). In line with adult learning theory, Sarah felt relatively good about having the ability to choose a course or a PD program that would add to her knowledge and skills. She revealed that "it would be an asset, would learn a great deal, and I'd see the need for it in my classroom. So yeah, I think teacher choice is another huge component of that" (1st focus group).

Overall, PD needs to be designed for teachers across subjects, years of teaching, exposure to knowledge about the topic, and student types. PD opportunities should have

something helpful for everyone, not only teachers, at a school like Lakewood with a significant number of EL students. Thus, mainstream teachers' different learning needs ought to be considered by any PD program. Furthermore, when enrolled in PD workshops, teachers should be treated and dealt with as adult learners and as such, instruction and learning experiences should be differentiated to better meet their individual learning objectives (Knowles, 1980, 1984).

Time

The fourth theme was that that *participants are concerned about the lack of time allocated for PD programs, including planning, scheduling, content, delivery, amount of information, implementation, feedback, self-reflection, and follow-up activities.*

Research findings suggest that time is an important factor that affects mainstream teachers' ability to master and apply newly learned instructional strategies and practices needed to better meet the learning needs of their EL students (Blank & de las Alas, 2009; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). In this study, participants reported that they invariably struggle with time constraints as they try to deepen their understanding of new learning strategies and best instructional practices to better teach ELLs.

Applying new strategies and techniques is not an easy process for mainstream teachers. They need time to apply what they have learned as they continue facing problems with teaching their students who may vary in their English proficiency. In this context, Jenna explained:

I need more time and very often with [ELLs], they're trying to catch a moving target. So, then you have to think of what's more important to them? Is it the skill

or is it a concept? Is it a combination of both with the language? And then you know if you don't have enough time you teach them the concept, you teach them the skill, and you throw in as much language as you can in that amount of time. So, the language might get the short end of the stick in those situations (1st individual interview).

Given the notion that she has demanding EL students in terms of their literacy and academic needs, Megan indicated she needed more time to implement newly introduced learning strategies and practices but argued she does not have “a magic wand for that” (1st individual interview). Participants believed that it is essential within PD programs to distribute and manage the PD materials and activities in such a manner that ensures teachers’ comprehension of the content. After that, they should have time to apply and integrate these strategies and learning methods into their classrooms, plan and practice with colleagues (e.g. give and receive feedback), master content, follow up activities, and reflect on their teaching practices.

Teachers require PD materials to be divided into segments

Throughout all of the interviews, participants repeatedly suggested that it is best to break up the PD materials and related activities over a long period of time (e.g., months). Referencing one of her PD experiences, Sarah indicated that certain PD activities were helpful to a large degree and “what's really helped me the most was that four-day training. It was for four days, all day long, spread over the year” (2nd focus group). Similarly, Kate indicated that she thought that

It's good to spread things out a little bit, to not have all the training over three days. It's too much information for most people to absorb. So to break it up over a certain months or weeks I think it's more important too (1st individual interview).

In line with adult learning theory, the participants as adult learners preferred to receive new information broken up as opposed to getting a great deal of information in a very short time span (e.g., a one-day workshop) (Knowles, 1984).

For the most part, all participants attributed their limited benefit from PD opportunities to the lack of time allocated to the components of these programs. Kate complained that some of the PDs she attended had bombarded her with a large chunk of information in a very limited time and she explained that “When people just throw stuff at me, it bounces off” (1st individual interview). Anna agreed with Kate on the need to integrate time into the PD curriculum to guarantee that teachers learn and apply the new materials. Anna explained that they “want that balance of yes, you want information, but you don't want so much that you just are completely tuned out and overwhelmed, because then it's not helpful. You just blank out on it” (1st individual interview).

Lecture is traditionally utilized when introducing new information to teachers or confirming their prior knowledge. However, this teaching approach may not necessarily lead to increasing the knowledge and skills of teachers, changing their attitudes, or stimulating higher order thinking. Sousa (2017) explains that “the lecture method allows a lot of information to be presented in a short time. However, the question is not what is presented, but what is learned” (p. 106). Kate spoke extensively about the need to

consider breaking up information in PD activities as opposed to listening passively to an instructor. Reflecting on how PD programs should be structured, Kate explained that

The content is fine as long as you give us short bits of information and then let us work together to try to create something with it and then come back. I have a very hard time...I'm just like an 11-year-old. I cannot sit and listen to somebody have a three-hour presentation. I can't do that. But what I can do is I can listen for a little bit and try to apply it and fit it in and then come back and talk about it (1st individual interview).

As the case with adult learners, teachers expect to receive PD materials that are straightforward, focused, and ready to be implemented in their classrooms. Anna suggested that “when they can give you something to take away with... and try it out, it's not so overwhelming. I think that's a huge, huge success” (1st individual interview). It is evident that teachers desire to have PD programs that are simple, focused, and practical. Anna suggested to keep PD simple because “if you start throwing stuff out that has tons of prep work, people aren't going to follow through. They just aren't. They're going to say, ‘I don't have time for this’” (1st individual interview).

Teachers wanted to keep the PD topics more specific and more in depth instead of breadth. In depth content is essential to ensure teachers’ ability to understand and apply new instructional practices. Sarah argued that “people who led a quick presentation. They provided a lot of great information but the depth wasn't there, and I'm a person who appreciates depth. I don't like things that are just skimming the surface” (1st individual interview). Kate supported Sarah’s argument to have PD that is more in depth and

detailed as opposed to go to a two hour or so workshop and said she did not like PDs where “you learn about everything... [Because] that's a waste of my time. I would rather have a whole day, or two or three days, and focus on one thing and then have to go back and plan and use it” (2nd individual interview). Additionally, Amy said she desired to be part of PD programs that “give more depth than just a shallow explanation, covering the basic, even if they take longer periods” (2nd focus group).

Participants argued that in the absence of factoring time into all of the PD facets, they may not be able to absorb and apply the information introduced during these PD activities. It is quite clear from the participants' feedback about their PD experiences that it is essential for teachers to have the PD content spread out over time instead of delivering an overload of information in a short period of time, making it more difficult to absorb and apply.

Teachers desire to have ample time to master content covered

According to adult learning theory, adults must have time to analyze, think, and assimilate the new knowledge they receive at any PD activity (Knowles, 1980, 1984). Penuel et al. (2011) provided strong evidence that PD can be more effective when factors such as program duration, proximity to practices, and teachers' professional communities are considered. To induce positive change in the instructional practices of mainstream teachers, they need time for planning, strategic thinking, implementation, analysis, and reflection.

Throughout all of the interviews, participants found PD to be most helpful when they were given time to practice and experience the strategies as well as time to

evaluate and process them. Just as the time factor impacts students' learning needs and practices, Kate also argued that mainstream teachers "need time, time to practice, time to collaborate, time to analyze what we've done. And so often we don't have that analysis time, and that reflection" (2nd individual interview).

Sarah asked to have "more time to master [the content/strategies] before you give us something new" (2nd focus group). Accordingly, Sarah suggested that school districts and school administrators consider allowing more time for teachers to master those techniques introduced in PD programs before getting new content or strategies. She elaborated on how imperative it is to factor in time when planning and implementing PD programs:

We always have to be on every single moment and often we have to shift the gears really quickly because of something that's occurred. If we can master something, then we can draw on it without even thinking about it. It will become instinctual, but we're never given the opportunity to make it to that point where we've mastered something to that level. That's a shame because there's a lot of great information out there from which our children would benefit and yet I feel like a lot of it's going down the drain before we can catch it and save it and use it (2nd focus group).

The lack of time was reported by all of the participants during their individual interviews and the focus group interviews, as contributing to less rewarding PD activities (Penuel, et al. 2011; Tran (2014). They voiced their concern about the limited time allocated to comprehend the content, to practice, and to master what they had learned,

and most importantly, to implement post-PD activities. To resolve the time limitation, they suggested that teachers already have been educationally prepared, and they continuously receive some PD training on new instructional strategies and practices. In order to make the most of these new best practices, they need more time to employ them effectively in their classrooms (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

During the first focus group interview, all participants voiced their concern about the limited time allocated for PD activities. In this context, Sarah discussed the importance of considering the time factor when planning and implementing PD activities,

I constantly feel like I'm a jack of all trades and a master of none. And that is a very uncomfortable place for me to be...there's a lot of value in the things that we're doing but we are not given the respectful time that it deserves...because I'm pretty sure that's the ultimate goal, is for me to then transfer it into my classroom and put it into practice. And I always feel like it's like a drive-by. So, I really think that it's because we have so many competing agendas (1st focus group).

Throughout all the interviews, participants indicated that they were interested in attending as many PD activities as they could, but to make PD worth their time and investment, they are often faced with a time barrier. It is quite clear from the evidence gathered in this study that time is of essence when it comes to PD activities. In these PD programs, time is a commodity that most teachers do not have, because they have busy schedules that include aspects like classwork, preparation, grading, and readings. In addition to all of these pressing requirements, they also need additional time for the preparation work they have to do if PD occurs during school hours, as well as keeping up

with mandates and changes related to instruction and assessment. Mainstream teachers, like those in this study, desire to be engaged in productive and useful PD opportunities that are worth their time. As postulated in adult learning theory, it is essential that PD activities be adapted to teachers' busy lives (Knowles, 1980, 1984).

Carlos explained that teachers have busy schedules and they may find it hard to find sufficient time to meet PD programs' preparation work. He asserted that

sometimes you don't have the time because you have other things to do and other readings to do, especially in the climate we live in. There is a lot to do, and sometimes that's what [PD] is. It's a large concept, broken down so that you can get something to work right as a teacher... This is the way we're approaching this (1st individual interview).

It is quite evident by the participants' testimonials that they would appreciate having time to be able to master what they have learned before they move to something new (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Julie said, for example,

Give us some information but then allow us to apply it and practice it in that same setting, within our content here. So, give us a template and then have us fill in the template based on what we're teaching. It's okay if it's science, but if you can show me how they're going to break down their lesson on genetics then I can break down my lesson on how the heart works (1st individual interview).

On the other hand, Jenna spoke about some of the difficulties teachers face when applying the methods of PD activities into their mainstream classrooms, especially with

respect to the lack of sufficient time needed to meet the varying levels of the literacy needs of ELLs. She explained that:

It's very difficult like I said, here this is the SIOP structure, this is what you do and you have to have your content and language objectives. You have to have your hook and you have to get kids in. You have to put up the vocabulary. You get the kids to interact with the vocabulary. That's a lot of information and that's theoretical. How do you actually practice that in your classroom? And it takes a while, it doesn't happen overnight. And maybe you should start with one small thing and go from there. You can't take everything that they teach you and do it all at once and do it every day (1st individual interview).

Jenna invariably identified time as perhaps the most critical factor impacting PD programs. She suggested that

if I had more time, I would go into those [new learning strategies] much more and I would be able to get them [ELLs] to understand these more language intensive problems. So, for me I think it's more a time factor than it is strategies (1st individual interview).

This argument by Jenna, in effect, reflects how mainstream teachers value the time needed to learn and master techniques to best teach ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

Participants suggested that PD can be more fruitful when teachers are provided with ample time to master the newly introduced strategies and practices in PD programs. Learning is a continuous process that requires sufficient time to accomplish the objectives set by school leaders and educators. In this learning process, there are building and

subsequent blocks in which teachers need time to learn, practice, collaborate, and to reflect.

Teachers seek opportunities to reflect and follow up on their professional practices

As stated by many participants, teachers should be given enough time to practice the new instructional strategies they have learned and have an opportunity to reflect and follow-up based on applying the new instructional concepts and methods. Kate indicated that it is important within PD programs

to teach a little bit and then have time to plan with colleagues. Planning is so necessary. And then to be able to come back and talk about what your results were, what you found helpful or not helpful. So that has been the most helpful I think (1st individual interview).

All participants revealed that they would like to be able to come back and talk about the results of their newly learned SIOP teaching strategies with their assigned PD instructor and their peers. Self-reflection was cited extensively by all participants as important for mainstream teachers following PD.

Participants commented on their experiences with the SIOP lab training as being a very good one and said it was especially good for new teachers at Lakewood. Many of the participants noted the SIOP lab allowed for teachers to evaluate their own work and be self-reflective. This suggests that one of the main objectives of PD programs should be to help teachers become more self-reflective in order to improve their instructional practices in mainstream classrooms. This finding is supported by the constructivist theory, which assumes that teachers must be taught to be more reflective in their

professional and instructional practices (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). Jenna came to realize that self-reflection is essential to guarantee not only the transfer of new knowledge to teachers, but also to ensure the proper practice of what has been learned in the classroom, and as such should lead to good results with ELLs. She highly recommended all teachers practice self-reflection to enhance their teaching practices. For Jenna, “experience is the best teacher if you're willing to reflect and if you're willing to use what you've learned and combine it with what you see in the classroom” (1st individual interview). According to the adult leaning theory, adults need time to reflect on the new knowledge and skills they receive from PD activity (Knowles, 1980, 1984).

Follow up activities were highlighted by many of the participants as a key to successful PD. In my first interview with Anna, I asked her to describe her PD experience with respect to the applicability of follow up and feedback. She explained:

We had a class, and then we have a four day [workshop] through CAL. That gave them a concentrated training on SIOP techniques, but then their follow up of like, ‘Okay, now you're in the classroom, how are you utilizing this?’ So the people who've gone through that type of training and then have that consulting, that feedback later on from outside professionals, I feel like that made a big difference (1st individual interview).

Furthermore, Kate suggested that

There should be some kind of proof to show that you have actually done a strategy, because a lot of times some people will say, “Oh, that's great.” And then

they go back and they don't apply it. So I think there needs to be some kind of application parts to the training (1st individual interview).

Also, Julie revealed that she did not have the opportunity to have other teachers observe her teaching and give her feedback. She expressed her interest to “reach out to those teachers and spend some time watching them and seeing how they break the information down” (1st individual interview).

Amy highlighted that because of time constraints, even district and school administrators may overlook the ultimate goal of PD programs, which is to enhance the pedagogical knowledge and skills of teachers, and, in turn, should be reflected in teachers’ classroom practices, and should lead to the improvement of ELLs’ academic performance. Amy suggested that content teachers should be thinking about “what’s the language objective for today’s lesson” (1st individual interview) that best serves the academic content and enhances EL students’ literacy. She further argued that even the school administrators need to be aware of the best way to validate how the language objectives are met in mainstream classrooms instead of just following observational routine checks. In these settings, it is often the case that the term “language objectives” is written on the board but without proper application and updates thereafter.

The same analogy can be made about the potential value of the “learning lab” platform associated with SIOP, which was the long-term training program for all teachers adopted by WPSD and was designed to allow for shared knowledge and skills among mainstream teachers, in addition to the CLT and PLC platforms. Concerned about the lack of sufficient time given between the delivery of the training course and the post-PD

activities associated with the SIOP program, Kate argued that she “would have liked to have seen some time to be able to settle in and let it cook and stew before we had to do the learning lab” (2nd focus group). Related to her experiences with the SIOP training and its integral follow up component, learning lab, Kate thought the SIOP training would have been more successful “if they had had some more time in between the two. That would have been a nice refresher course” (2nd focus group).

Amy stressed the possibilities of losing track of the actual objectives of PD programs, warning that especially

...there's so many things that teachers have to be thinking about that if there's no requirement and nobody checking that they're doing it, it's gets put on the bottom of the list. So I think for principals, they should use their power to encourage and more than encourage, require certain things in terms of teaching language (2nd individual interview).

Mark agreed with Amy about the lack of professional and timely follow up of PD activities. He argued that “the [PD] you go to, they'd just ask you are you going to try using it, and you say yes or no, and that's the end of it. They never follow up to see if we did use it” (1st individual interview).

In other instances of PD experiences recounted by the participants, many viewed their PD programs as focusing mostly on content delivery, without proper and timely follow up. They argued that without allocating time for follow up, there is no value in attending such PD programs. Anna, for example, complained that the follow-up activities after observing the teacher, which were associated with a PD program she took, were

very minimal. As evidenced by the participants' responses, in the absence of appropriate and timely follow-up activities, there is a high probability that some teachers might be less inclined to participate in future PD activities. Sarah asserted that she may not enroll in future PD programs because "How do we improve [PD] in your experience for lack of follow through. [It] certainly would make people less inclined to participate if the follow through isn't there" (1st focus group).

Given this prevalent concern of most participants about the lack of timely follow-up activities of many PD programs, Sarah raised the ultimate question in the first focus group interview about how to improve PD. This prompted Sarah and Anna to engage in a meaningful and informative exchange around this critical issue. The discussion reflects their perspectives on their PD experiences, especially with respect to the potential risks of scaring teachers away from participating in future PD opportunities that do not meet their expectations for follow ups:

Sarah: I would feel so defeated if I had been through that experience that you just described and then it went into a black hole somewhere. Then the next time they ask me to do something like that, I am pretty sure I would probably decline, because I wouldn't ... that was a huge investment and time on your part. And then it didn't come to fruition.

Anna: Yeah, and it's like just, I don't mind but I'm all about learning of course, but make it worth my while. If it's worth my while that's great. I'll take a credit plus if it's something I can use. If it's a waste of my time, then we'll [not enroll]

Jenna made it very clear that mainstream teachers are

functioning always in time constraints... The curriculum for math, especially the pacing guide, is relentless. We know literally down to the day what we need to cover, and if we don't, we are backlogged and the benchmark comes, and it shows up in the results of our kids. So we are very much under the pressure of time. And therefore there's not much time to experiment, there's not much time to say, Oh yeah, you know what, if the whole thing fails today, I'll do it again tomorrow. Very rarely do we have that kind of luxury (1st individual interview).

To ensure the success of PD, it is essential to consider the time factor, which appears to impact all planned PD activities, including spreading PD content and activities over time to ensure the maximum benefits for all participants. As opposed to engaging teachers in one-shot PD programs, researchers suggest that PD ought to be offered on a continuous basis in order to improve the pedagogical knowledge and skills of mainstream teachers (Tran, 2014). From a practical perspective, teachers require PD to be an ongoing process that shapes their knowledge in depth over time.

Summary

This chapter presented and discussed the four major themes that emerged from this study of mainstream teachers' perspectives about their experiences with PD with teaching adolescent ELLs. The themes were: the effect of PD opportunities on mainstream teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms; the need for PD programs to address integrating language and subject-area content; the need to take into account mainstream teachers' abilities, experiences, and pedagogical knowledge and skills prior to designing and implementing PD activities; and

the extent of PD impacts due to the limitation of time during and after taking PD activities.

The participants felt that PD experiences and opportunities often helped them to maintain and enhance their supportive attitudes toward teaching ELLs. However, participants' positive attitudes and perceptions were also driven by their personal and professional experiences. Teachers, in general, have many valuable ideas that can be utilized during the PD activities to enrich the PD experiences of both the participants and the instructors. In this context, teachers would like to have the opportunity and appropriate time to share and discuss their perspective and feedback about teaching ELLs. For the most part, participants indicated that it is important to factor in the impact of time on improving the odds for producing successful PD experiences. According to the participants, time to plan, deliver, and evaluate a lesson should inform PD experiences.

Chapter Five

The findings of this study on the attitudes and perceptions of mainstream teachers about the effectiveness of PD activities in enhancing their teaching of ELLs are best explained within social constructivist theory and adult learning theory. The findings are also correlated and contrasted with the extant literature on PD concerning mainstream teachers of ELLs. Teachers seek out continuous learning based on personal interests, wants, and needs. As discussed in Chapter Two, adult learning is largely driven by individual personal factors, which include but are not limited to teacher beliefs, attitudes, interests, perceptions, and school and district culture (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Loucks-Horsley et al. 2003). In the process of learning, new knowledge is constructed to help teachers function in their classrooms. When engaging in a new experience, teachers draw from their own conceptual models to understand the new information and construct their own interpretation of reality. Generally, the views of the participants in this study provide a holistic picture of how teachers make meaning of their experiences of their PD activities.

A large body of research on ELLs suggests that there is a gap between the reality of teaching ELLs and how and what mainstream teachers ought to teach ELLs (August et al., 2010; Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Molle, 2013; Short, 2013). It can be argued that this learning gap largely contributes to the observed achievement gap exhibited between ELLs and non-ELLs (Berg & Huang, 2015). Therefore, the best and practical approach to closing the learning gap is to design responsive, continuous PD programs for mainstream

teachers of ELLs. However, as revealed by research findings, this learning gap can only be closed by improving the ongoing PD programs that are planned to support mainstream teachers to adequately teach ELLs (Calderon et al., 2011; Coady et al., 2015; Stewart, 2014).

To shed some light on this challenging and persistent gap, this qualitative research study was undertaken to listen to mainstream teachers' voices about their PD experiences concerning the teaching of ELLs. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What do mainstream teachers believe is the impact of PD opportunities on their perceptions and attitudes regarding teaching ELLs?
2. What do mainstream teachers believe is the impact of PD opportunities and experiences on the degree to which their pedagogical content knowledge and skills support the academic and literacy needs of ELLs?

In this chapter, I will synthesize the findings of this study with reference to the research questions as well as to the theories that guided this study, which were the adult learning theory and the social constructivist theory. Next, I will explain the implications of the findings from this study with an emphasis on those that are related to educational instructional practices, teacher education, teacher PD, educational policy, and research. Furthermore, I will discuss the limitations of this study, which should be taken into account when reading and interpreting the findings. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by offering my own reflections that were developed throughout the duration of this study.

Discussion

A case study was conducted by interviewing 10 mainstream teachers of ELLs, individually and in a focus group format, from a middle school that was located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. From my analysis of the data I collected, I was able to distill four major themes comprising the main findings from this study:

1. The participants felt that PD opportunities often helped them to enhance their attitudes and perceptions toward teaching ELLs (Research Question 1).
2. The participants place great emphasis on the need for PD programs to comprehend and practice integrating literacy and content in mainstream classrooms with ELLs (Research Question 2).
3. The participants reported that it is critical to consider mainstream teachers' abilities, readiness, choices, experiences, and pedagogical knowledge and skills prior to designing PD activities (Research Question 2).
4. Participants expressed their greatest concern about the extent of benefits PD provides due to the limitation and impact of time during and after completing the PD activities (Research Question 2).

As indicated in the narratives of most of the participants in this study, participants had been actively engaged in PD experiences, as they tried to learn about best teaching strategies and practices to support ELLs. The participants revealed that their previous PD activities had partially helped them improve their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions toward teaching ELLs. Consistent with social constructivist theory and adult learning theory, most of the participants possessed a positive attitude and perception about

teaching ELLs. When adult learners go through an effective PD training, they will be able to construct new knowledge and skills by refining or rejecting their prior knowledge, beliefs, and attitude. As suggested by the social constructivist theory, teachers will gain maximum benefit from PD activities when they actively “monitor their own ideas, and thought processes, compare and contrast them with those of others, and provide reasons why they accept one point of view over another” (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003, p. 35).

Furthermore, Beck and Kosnik (2006) assert that within a social constructivist framework, “the primary purpose of knowledge is to help learners to function in the world, not to describe universal reality” (p. 10). This assertion is relevant and quite applicable to this study as many participants affirmed their immediate need to engage in PD activities that help them to function in their classrooms—to better teach ELLs. Although it is helpful for mainstream teachers to understand the social backgrounds of ELLs, the findings of this study show that it is rather more important to train these teachers on how to better teach their ELLs. Feedback from all of the participants made it clear that they gained new knowledge from PD activities, not only in terms of relevant pedagogical knowledge and skills but also from having a proper platform to question the agenda and content offered during the PD sessions, to share knowledge with other teachers, and most importantly to reflect and assess their prior knowledge and skills regarding teaching ELLs. Although the participants remained committed to attending PD activities, they still had concerns about some of their PD experiences and on many occasions during the interviews they voiced their disapproval of some PD activities.

Most participants openly expressed their desire and interest to learn and apply new instructional strategies and practices. In all of the individual and the focus group interviews, I was impressed by the overall level of professionalism and dedication they showed; though some were more professional and dedicated than the others. In particular, participants indicated that they were to a large degree self-motivated to attend as many PDs as needed because they saw the value of these activities for their career, recognition, and self-esteem. A major finding in this study, however, was that most participants relied primarily on their previous experiences and prior beliefs when developing their attitudes toward teaching ELLs. This is supported by research findings that suggest mainstream teachers of ELLs are mainly driven by their prior beliefs and attitudes (Stewart, 2014).

Another key finding was participants' objection of continuously enrolling in a non-cohesive set of PD offerings. As suggested by many of the participants, there is a lack of well-structured PD programs that are planned, designed, and implemented in a manner that fosters continuous professional and academic growth for teachers. Indeed, it seems that most of the PD opportunities offered to teachers exhibit this common problem of being incohesive. This perspective about the lack of complete, well-structured PD programs was raised and discussed during several of the interviews. In fact, this concern was one of the main issues debated among the participants during the first and second focus group interviews. In various individual and focus group interviews, however, some of the participants referred to the SIOP training as a somewhat complete approach to teaching ELLs. In the individual and focus group interviews, participants identified SIOP as the only PD approach that was cohesive and relevant to the teaching of ELLs.

Moreover, the participants revealed that they remain eager to learn more about integrating literacy practices into their mainstream classrooms. Their eagerness was due mainly to personal and professional interests and as a result of having a large percentage of ELLs in their classrooms. As corroborated by ample research findings, some participants felt that while they possess knowledge of research-based literacy practices, they still lack sufficient practical preparation on how to incorporate that knowledge into content area instruction for ELLs (Franco-Fuenmayor et al., 2015; Lovette, 2013; Lucas et al. 2008; Penuel et al. 2011; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). As postulated by both adult learning theory and the social constructivist theory, teachers with EL students, like most teachers, are problem-centered in their learning, and as such they go into any PD activity with specific learning expectations related to furthering their effectiveness with this group of students. They want to learn how to effectively manage the classroom while meeting the learning needs of EL students and how to integrate literacy strategies with content area instruction in ways that meet the needs of ELLs.

Another major finding of the study revealed that the main challenge the participants faced was figuring out how to successfully enhance ELLs' English proficiency while teaching them the content of the subject area, such as math, science, language arts, and social studies (Molle, 2013; Yoon, 2008). The participants were frustrated about many of the challenges they face in teaching ELLs, and one of the more significant challenges was learning effective ways to integrate literacy skills with the content introduced in their classrooms. The findings of this study also suggested participants felt that some PD programs do not focus on practical strategies they need

most in their classrooms. Research findings indicate that teachers seek hands-on instructional strategies (Baecher, 2012). In the long run, it can be argued that mainstream teachers may adopt the idea of integrating literacy instruction with the content once they realize the impact of doing so on ELLs' academic achievement as reflected in the improvement of their reading and writing skills (Mayher, 2012).

Additionally, participants highlighted the need to get training on supporting those ELLs with varying degrees of English proficiency and academic abilities. Many participants reported that they remain unsure regarding how to manage a class with not only ELLs but also with different sub-groups of the ELLs. They felt they always need more help differentiating instruction, since reading levels in one class could range from third grade to a college level. It should be noted that the issue of how to manage student diversity, both in terms of academic and literacy ability, does not stop at the ELLs, but rather applies across the board for all students. Research findings report that in most teacher education programs, the issue of student diversity has not been substantially integrated and discussed in the learning context of K-12 education (Berg & Huang, 2015; Calderon, 2009; Coady et al., 2015; Goldenberg, 2011). This finding can be extended to teacher PD requiring continuous support as reported in this study. Overall, the findings of this study indicate a significant mismatch between the reality of mainstream teachers' work with ELLs and the kinds of PD experiences and opportunities they have, particularly with respect to dealing with different ability levels within the EL student population.

Differentiating PD was also highlighted by many of the participants as a major suggestion for improving PD opportunities. Teachers have different educational qualifications, teaching experiences, general PD experiences, specific ELLs PD experiences, and existing pedagogical knowledge and skills (Lucas, 2011). Consistent with the extant literature, participants in this study recommended that PD activities need to be designed and implemented with differentiation in mind (Bunch, 2013; Calderon, 2009; Coady et al., 2015; Gandara et al., 2005).

Reflecting on many of their PD experiences, participants acknowledged that they continue to struggle with time as they needed sufficient time to shift their thinking and start practicing what they have learned in the PD activities. They were concerned about finding adequate time to put new knowledge into practice and to have quality time for reflection on new instructional practices to implement in their mainstream classrooms. Time will impact mainstream teachers' ability to master newly learned instructional strategies and practices required to best meet the learning needs of their ELL students (Blank & de las Alas, 2009; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016).

Nonetheless, participants expressed interest in having more practical, relevant, and cohesive PD programs. Among many other factors, participants were concerned about the lack of focus on the implementation aspects of PD programs. They felt they were receiving a lot of information in these programs, but without focusing on the practical aspects of the newly introduced teaching strategies. Clearly, the ultimate goal for teachers attending PD programs is to be able to apply what they have learned in their classrooms. However, the participants remain frustrated that while they want to help their

ELLs, they still do not receive sufficient support, especially during the post-PD implementation phase. Mainstream teachers, like those in this study, at all levels need continuous and timely assistance as they struggle with implementing new instructional practices. For teachers, it is not a matter of gaining new knowledge, but rather it is about sustainability of PD programs through proper and structured follow-up activities.

It is important to note that the main, mounting challenge for participants was how to change or improve their instructional practices at the implementation stage as opposed to just learning about new strategies and practices. As indicated by most of the participants, teachers in any PD program context can willingly embrace a new learning approach and likely plan to apply it in the classroom, but the question remains: do they? In general, teachers cannot sustain newly introduced PD practices or strategies for a long time because they do not have someone who is experienced to help them on a day-to-day basis with the real-life challenges that may arise. Hence, policy makers and PD organizers must provide support to mainstream teachers during that process. While they are still in the practicing mode, teachers need support after PD sessions are completed.

Consistent with prior research findings, this study provides compelling evidence supporting the imperative need to listen to individual teachers' experiences as a basis for improving PD (Coady et al., 2015; Gandara et al., 2005; O'Brien, 2011; O'Neal et al., 2008). Accordingly, PD opportunities can be significantly enhanced by engaging mainstream teachers in the planning and designing processes of PD designed for teaching ELLs, including getting their feedback on the content, delivery, and outcome of these programs, a finding that was largely suggested by the participants. Given the notion that

teachers are the most influential factor in enhancing the academic performance of students, it is, therefore, essential to listen to their voices about their PD experiences and find ways to meet their needs (Ballantyne et al., 2008; Bunch, 2013; Coady et al., 2015; Netolicky et al., 2019).

From the outset of the interviews, it was apparent that the participants who were English teachers did not have as much difficulty as participants from other disciplines in understanding and applying what they had learned about the strategies and practices related to the integration of language and content from PD experiences. This finding is clearly justified as it is natural to have literacy as an integral part of the curriculum for English. In contrast, the participants from the other content areas continued to struggle when it came to applying best instructional practices concerning the integration of literacy strategies and content. For example, while both Kate (science teacher) and Jenna (math teacher) expressed their satisfaction with some of the PD experiences they had, they also revealed that they still need more practical training on how best to teach vocabulary and comprehension skills within their content areas. For them, the subject content took priority over other requirements such as literacy, especially since they are mandated to follow a sequential curriculum. While Kate and Jenna saw value in literacy, their instructional priorities were affected by their commitment to content instruction and time constraints to meet disciplinary curriculum requirements. In addition, participants preferred to see more PD opportunities that provide a platform to discuss and confirm what they do intuitively as well as provide them with new perspectives on their instructional practices. Perhaps more than anything else, more collaboration between

reading and literacy specialists and content area teachers was desired by many of the participants as a way to help in understanding and mastering the integration of language and content.

Most of the participants expressed their profound desire to have more PD opportunities that are different from what is currently offered to them. Throughout all the interviews, participants expressed their concern about the way these important PD programs have been planned and conducted. When PD activities do not meet their expectations, they are likely to perceive PD as a waste of time and money as well as a missed opportunity to receive training that could help them make a difference in the academic lives of their ELLs. The content teachers in this study desired to engage in professional learning programs that increase their understanding of literacy integration in their classrooms to assist ELLs.

Even when teachers learn a great deal from PD opportunities, they still need school support and resources to ensure the complete success of such programs (Guskey, 2014). Most participants expressed a desire for more than PD workshops. They also wanted additional support from administrators to ensure the success of implementing new instructional practices learned in these workshops. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings was participants' preference to engage in in-house formal or informal PD activities as opposed to only attending typical, formal PD programs. This desire is consistent with research findings that suggest school districts and school leaders should encourage and adopt informal school-based professional learning activities (Gandara et al. 2005).

Given Lakewood's supportive culture for embracing ELLs and the proper and continuous training on how best to teach ELLs, the participants came to understand the importance and recognize the positive effect of integrating literacy skills with the content to address the academic and language needs of ELLs. Consistent with prior research findings, all participants expressed their dissatisfaction with some of the typical, formal "one-fits-all" or "one-shot" PD programs (Cobb et al. 2003; Darling-Hammond et al. 2002; O'Brien, 2011). More specifically, they indicated that existing, formal PD programs have many drawbacks including a lack of focus on the practicality of the content presented, insufficient time allocated to the various PD activities, lack of follow-up activities, and their short-term orientation. Therefore, it is important to listen to teachers' voices who would like to have variety of PD, especially those that allow teachers to share experiences and knowledge and interact with each other in non-formal fashion. Research findings suggest that informed teacher collaboration results in improved student achievement in math and reading (Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications related to instructional practices, teacher education, teacher's PD, educational policies, and future research. This study adds to the literature by documenting the rich experiences of mainstream teachers of ELLs. To make a difference in student outcomes, the opinions of mainstream teachers should be pursued, listened to, and highly valued. In this study, 10 mainstream teachers were given the chance to speak directly about their experiences with PD activities related to teaching ELLs, critique these experiences, and suggest ways to enhance future PD

activities. Providing opportunities for mainstream teachers to share their perceptions of PD activities will eventually lead to construction of more responsive professional learning. Accordingly, participants in this study had the opportunity to voice their concerns and desires about the way PD has been conducted and suggest ways to improve these programs.

Implications for Instructional Practices

The findings of this study can inform the practice of mainstream teachers of ELLs in many ways. Contrary to some research findings, all the participants in this study reported that they understood, recognized, and assumed their professional and ethical responsibility to meet the learning and cultural needs of their ELL student population (August et al. 2010; Ballantyne et al. 2008; Bunch, 2013; Coady et al. 2015; Molle, 2013; Téllez & Waxman, 2006). As discussed previously in this chapter, this practice on the part of participants to accept the responsibility of teaching ELLs was mainly due to the personal interests in and initiatives taken by the participants themselves as well as the supportive educational environment at Lakewood. This suggests, in turn, that other schools in the WPSD and other school districts should fully understand and adopt similar measures to encourage and ensure that their mainstream teachers assume responsibility to integrate literacy skills with content when teaching ELLs.

As indicated by the participants, the impact of PD cannot be totally achieved without organizational support, from both the school and school district leaders. After completing a specific PD program, the focus shifts from participants to organizational dimensions that may be vital to the success of the professional learning experience

(Guskey, 2014). It should be noted, however, that existing, non-flexible or non-adaptive organizational structures may hinder or prevent success, even when teachers' PD responsibilities have been met (Sparks, 1996). In such a situation, the lack of good results in mainstream classrooms does not mean that the training or the PD program was poor or inadequate learning on the part of the participants, but rather due to the organizational regulations that are incompatible with implementation requirements.

School administrators and teachers can make the difference in improving instructional practices for ELLs in mainstream classrooms by transforming their school culture, norms, and teachers' instructional practices, as well as promoting a culture of collaboration and sustained professional learning. Administrators may greatly influence the way teacher leaders, specialized teachers, and instructional coaches perform. And, during periods of transformation, principals can establish the relevant culture and norms in the school in order to promote positive changes in ELLs' instructional practices (Gallucci et al., 2010; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Teacher leaders can greatly assist in this regard as well. Acting as instructional leaders and change agents, designated teacher leaders can play a key role in supporting mainstream teachers in meeting the learning needs of ELLs (Portin et al., 2006).

Another implication of this study is the need to consider engaging and educating ELLs' families in their children' future education, both at the district and school levels. Researchers have highlighted the importance of a teacher-parent communication, especially for maintaining professional interactions between schools and students' families in relation to ELLs and their learning (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). In his

compelling testimonials reported in this study, Carlos stressed repeatedly the importance of understanding and involving ELLs' families in their children's education. It will be informative to document and learn from the lessons behind personal experiences of those successful cases of ELL students and their parents who initially came to the United States with limited literacy and English knowledge and skills, coupled perhaps with poor educational and professional backgrounds. To assist in the educational journey of ELLs, schools should focus not only on teaching ELLs, but also on providing many communication platforms to educate ELLs' parents about the value of education and the support they can provide to their children.

Implications for Teacher Education

Most educational programs at the college and university level include standard, traditional education-related courses and content, but little, if any, training on issues of teaching to student diversity in the learning context of K-12 education (Berg & Huang, 2015; Calderon, 2009; Coady et al., 2015; Goldenberg, 2011; Kibler & Roman, 2013; Molle, 2013). Consistent with these research findings, all participants felt they learned little from their teacher preparation programs about teaching and working with ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Future teachers, therefore, should get much greater exposure to how to teach ELLs, including how to develop a positive attitude and perception about ELLs, how to increase understanding of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, how to practice differentiated instruction, and how to integrate literacy skills and strategies in content area instruction. These changes in educational programs can be made directly through undergraduate and graduate schools or indirectly through school districts by

changing teachers' licensure requirements. School districts can establish additional requirements of potential teachers to ensure they have sufficient knowledge and skills related to teaching ELLs by offering PD that addresses these topics.

Implications for Teachers' PD

Listening to the voices of mainstream teachers of ELLs will open the door for PD leaders and designers to modify and improve PD programs to better meet the learning needs of these teachers. In this study, participants expressed an urgent need to receive support to better teach ELLs, including getting proper and more effective PD. As reported in this study, all participants agreed that there is a mismatch between what PD communicates and instructs versus the realities and demands of their classroom environments and contexts. For both novice and experienced teachers with ELL students, therefore, PD opportunities that are long-term oriented, practical, and cohesive are needed.

Consistent with a large body of research evidence, participants in this study revealed that they were not able to adopt newly learned strategies and practices from their PDs. They described several constraints and difficulties they face during and after the implementation of PD activities, including lack of assessment opportunities of PD experiences, lack of involvement in the development of PD structure and content, overwhelming class work and responsibilities, time needed to learn and practice, lack of focus on practical instructional strategies and approaches, limited teacher-parent communication, and poor organizational support (Gandara et al. 2005; Urmston and Pennington, 2008). To overcome these challenges, participants suggested it is essential

for mainstream teachers to receive additional help from both the school district and school leaders to be able to better serve the learning needs of their ELLs. In addition, the issue of ELLs with disabilities was raised by many of the participants. It is imperative, therefore, that mainstream teachers of ELLs learn about specific and differentiated strategies for teaching ELLs with learning disabilities, a specialized population of ELL students.

Most of the participants expressed a desire to be actively involved in the planning, designing, and implementing of PD programs. Researchers argue that mainstream teachers should be invited to share with other teachers their expertise and experiences with respect to the educational and psychological difficulties of working with ELLs (Baecher, 2012; Farrell, 2008). Many of the participants suggested that there should be a teachers' assessment survey prior to conducting any PD opportunity (Coady et al., 2015; He et al. 2011). Such an assessment should have a long-term focus on determining teachers' competencies and accordingly suggested areas for improvement. School administrators may, for example, conduct a planning session to develop customized PD programs that meet each teacher's interests and needs. Teachers with other areas of strong expertise can be invited to lead PD programs. To implement these suggestions, school administrators should take transformational steps in terms of working closely with teachers, listening more to their opinions and suggestions regarding enhancing teaching practices with ELLs, and providing proper monetary incentives, recognition, and professional growth to induce more effective instructional practices for ELLs.

Given the long-term aspect and intended effect of PD, school districts may find it feasible and worthwhile to make organizational changes by assigning a dedicated PD coordinator in each school. After I received the official approval letter from the WPSD to conduct this study, I met with the PD coordinator at Lakewood. During my meeting with the PD coordinator, she told me that she works as a teacher, but was assigned the responsibility to coordinate with the school district with respect to the planning and scheduling of PD activities. What I propose here is to go beyond serving as a liaison between the school and school district. From the findings in this study about the importance of PD and the notion that such activities are vital to the advancement of teachers, it may be time to consider incorporating organizational changes at the district and school levels to devote more time, budget, and human resources for continuous, ambitious PD. It is not only about scheduling PD activities, but more importantly about keeping track of each teacher's educational and professional growth. Reorganizing PD opportunities may also include monitoring the impact of teachers' PD on student performance over time.

Implications for Policy

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020), about 1.5 billion dollars of federal funding under Title II, Part A, and billions more in other federal funds have been allocated to programs related to the PD of teachers and leaders in public schools. This great investment is evidence that educational leaders are committed to the advancement of student academic achievement through the improvement of teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills. It is expected, therefore, that educational policy

makers are constantly in pursuit of evidence-based research about the impact of PD opportunities on teachers' and students' achievement. Given the increasing number of ELLs in K-12 public schools, it is not clear, however, how much of this budget, if any, is allocated to those PD programs designed for mainstream teachers of ELLs. Despite the generous funding for formal PD activities from school districts, participants in this study showed great interest in informally working with other teachers and learning from each other. This suggests that the funding policy and allocation may need to be reexamined in light of these findings in order to provide additional funding to in-school formal and informal PD.

As reported in Chapter Two, many States such as Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas have already implemented certain instructional and PD rules that require all general education teachers to have PD programs to support their teaching of ELLs (Peter et. al., 2012). Based on the findings of this study and the notion that the number of ELLs attending public schools has substantially increased over time, there is an immediate need to expand this mandate to mainstream teachers in the other States.

At the school district level, more requirements to improve the teaching of ELLs are warranted. Based on participants' feedback after they received a summary of the findings of this study, they indicated that the WPSD continues to provide organizational support in the area of teaching ELLs. In this direction, the WPSD recently (2020) created a new department, which mandates ESL teachers to provide their mainstream colleagues five hours of direct consultation and coaching per year for the next three years. This, in turn, will provide additional organizational support to general education teachers who

have expressed their desire to get direct training and collaboration to support the learning needs of ELLs.

Implications for Research

In this study, mainstream teachers of ELLs described their PD experiences and how these experiences impacted their teaching practices of ELLs. By allowing teachers of EL students to explore common problems and share their experiences, knowledge, practices, and perspectives about their PD experiences, it is expected that future PD opportunities for mainstream teachers of ELLs and ultimately the teaching practices which best benefit EL students will be improved (Gandara et al., 2005; O'Brien, 2011; O'Neal, 2008). Generally, the research on this topic remains in its infancy, and many of the recommended pedagogies for teaching in a classroom with a wide range of languages and proficiency levels are relatively new and untested (Berg & Huang, 2015; Calderon, 2009; Coady et al., 2015; Goldenberg, 2011; Kibler & Roman, 2013; Molle, 2013). Although I was not able to include a different range of experience levels in my mainstream teacher participants, this could be a line for future inquiry in this area. Another line of research is to explore how to develop and apply literacy intervention programs specific to mainstream classroom with ELLs who vary in their English proficiency. Often, intervention programs target struggling students irrespective of their student category (i.e., ELLs vs. non-ELLs).

While there is a great amount of federal funding provided for continuous teachers' PD in general, it is not clear how much is allocated to the PD of mainstream teachers of ELLs. One expects that a significant portion of the PD budget should be allocated to the

improvement of teaching ELLs and strengthening family support of their literacy and learning. It may be worth studying the issue of PD for mainstream teachers of ELLs from both a policy and investment perspective. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct a set of studies targeting mainstream teachers of the same subject area. For example, research can be conducted to listen to the voices of only science mainstream teachers, another study to get the perspectives of math mainstream teachers, and so on.

Another suggested line of research for the impact of PD on mainstream teachers of ELLs is to conduct a longitudinal study. This proposed line of inquiry may involve the examination of a group of novice-to-experienced mainstream teachers of ELLs over a certain period of time, such as a minimum of 3-5 years. The purpose of this type of study would be to document the long-term impact of PD opportunities on mainstream teachers of ELLs. Additionally, this research may utilize a mixed method approach, in which qualitative data (i.e., bi-annual interviews with teachers) and quantitative data (i.e. students' performance) can be collected. Given the vital role of school leadership in supporting mainstream teachers' implementation of new instructional strategies and practices for ELLs, it may be worthwhile to learn more about the leadership perspective on PD opportunities. While this study provides teachers' rhetorical perspectives on their PD experiences, it would be interesting to combine what teachers say about their PD experiences with observational perspectives. Based on the feedback I received from participants, another area of fruitful future research would be to explore the direct connection between professional learning that these teachers received and the extent to which that learning translated into actual classroom practices.

Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted within the context of several limitations. One limitation is related to the fact that the study involved the interviewing of 10 mainstream teachers of ELLs in one middle school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other schools as well as to the whole population of mainstream teachers of ELLs. The participants in this study consisted of a group of teachers in various educational content areas (4 English, 3 social studies, 1 math, 1 science, and 1 PE/health) who taught at a middle school that was highly diverse, particularly having a large ELL student population. Accordingly, the findings must be interpreted within the context of that school, its diverse student population, and the participant pool.

Another limitation of this study was that I acted throughout the study as the researcher, interviewer, and interpreter. To address this issue, I made use of both member checking and critical friends. During the second individual interviews, I shared the initial findings from the first individual and first focus group interviews with each participant. Later, I emailed each participant a summary of the findings and asked for their comments and additional input. Five of the participants responded with agreement with the findings. Furthermore, after transcribing the interviews, I sought the help and input of a critical friend, who has both professional and academic backgrounds in qualitative research to cross-validate my coding, and the interpretation of my subsequent findings based on the interview data. My critical friend provided valuable feedback, especially in the areas of initial coding, and interpretation of the findings.

The reported findings reflect mainstream teachers' perceptions of the impact of PD opportunities on their attitudes and perceptions towards teaching ELLs, and, therefore, it is critical that these perspectives are not to be considered as absolutes. Moreover, it should be noted that I only worked with highly experienced mainstream teachers and they had an average of more than 10 years of experience in teaching. The participants also indicated that they have had a number of PD experiences. As a result, the reported findings may be limited to only experienced teachers.

Final Thoughts

Although there are a number of limitations to this study, the findings add value to the extant literature on teachers' PD. It is important to listen more to the voices of teachers when it comes to what and how PD should be conducted. To make a significant transformation in the classroom, school districts and schools need to identify, listen to, and value the rich experience of teachers. Teachers should be given the opportunity to play an active role in PD processes from the start to the end. In this study, participants expressed the desire to lead PD opportunities. Educational leaders should change how they view and value the teaching profession by putting more trust in teachers and promoting teacher empowerment. Evers and Kneyber (2016) suggest that the only way to transform the educational system is by reforming education from the bottom up; by empowering teachers, allowing them to lead, and dealing with them as trusted change agents. Starting a global movement about transforming the teaching profession, Netolicky et.al. (2019) argue that

Policy and research would benefit from honouring teachers' and leaders' voices, addressing the multidimensionality of work in schools, and acknowledging its situatedness and complexity. Education reforms would benefit from engaging with how teachers and school leaders perceive and describe themselves, their lives, and their work (p. 16).

This study contributes to the literature by documenting the voices of mainstream teachers of ELLs about their experience with PD targeting the teaching of ELLs.

Although there are a few studies that have addressed mainstream teachers' perceptions of the impact of PD opportunities on their teaching of ELLs, an even smaller number of studies focused on teachers' perspectives on education reforms (Coady et al. 2015; Gandara et al. 2005; Molle, 2013; Netolicky et.al. 2019). In addition, this qualitative study utilized multiple data collection methods, such as individual and focus group interviews, which, taken together, provided more compelling evidence about teachers' perspectives of PD programs.

I was deeply touched by the powerful and lived narratives shared by all participants about their teaching experiences of ELLs. I found most of these teachers to be unusually perceptive, dedicated and committed to diverse learners. I understand how ELLs feel as they start a new learning journey; once they complete their ESL program and exit their somewhat learning comfort zone, they become immersed in mainstream classrooms, together with native, non-EL students, academically competing with them, and to a large extent subject to the same assessment standards. In effect, it is new and very challenging in many aspects. They continuously struggle with trying to improve

their English language, while grappling with comprehending complex academic content. I have experienced all of these feelings, frustrations and challenges, but they still proved to be great opportunities.

Appendix A

IRB Approval Form



Office of Research Development, Integrity, and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: May 29, 2018

TO: William Brozo, Ph.D.
FROM: George Mason University IRB

Project Title: [1228070-1] Mainstream Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Professional Development Programs in Meeting the Academic and Literacy Needs of Adolescent ELLs.

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: May 29, 2018

EXPIRATION DATE: May 28, 2019

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited review category #7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The George Mason University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form unless the IRB has waived the requirement for a signature on the consent form or has waived the requirement for a consent process. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the IRB office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed (if applicable).

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

The anniversary date of this study is May 28, 2019. This project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. You may not collect data beyond this date without prior IRB approval. A continuing review form must be completed and submitted to the IRB at least 30 days prior to the anniversary date or upon completion of this project. Prior to the anniversary date, IRBNet will send you a reminder regarding continuing review procedures.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of five years, or as described in your submission, after the completion of the project.

Please note that department or other approvals may be required to conduct your research in addition to IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact Katie Brooks at (703) 993-4121 or kbrook14@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

GMU IRB Standard Operating Procedures can be found here: http://oria.gmu.edu/1031-2/?_ga=1.12722615.1443740248.1411130601

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.

Appendix B

Invitation Letter

September 24, 2028

Dear Lakewood Teachers:

My name is Zahra Alhuwairini and I am a PhD candidate at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia. As a PhD student, I am required to conduct original research. In my research, I intend to collect data related to PD activities provided to mainstream teachers of ELLs. I have been invited here by the Wilson Public Schools District (WPSD) to see if you are interested in participating in a research project to assess the effectiveness of teacher PD (PD) opportunities and experiences from the perspectives of mainstream teachers of ELLs.

I came to know about Lakewood MS and their effort and strive to meet the academic needs of ELLs through some of my colleagues at GMU. I met with some of Lakewood teaching staff as well as the Principal. Lakewood MS was recommended by my dissertation committee members, Dr. William Brozo, Dr. Robert Smith, and Dr. Kristien Zenkov.

By listening to mainstream teachers' voice, this research is expected to reveal characteristics of effectiveness of teacher PD activities. Given the focal role of teachers in advancing the education of students, I anticipate that you will have significant input and feedback that will shape and drive the research project. Guidelines may be established for PD planning, content and delivery, curriculum and teaching methods of ELLs in mainstream classrooms according to the results of this study.

I would like to invite each of you to participate in this research project. You are not obligated to participate if you choose not to. Participation in this project will not affect your career, nor will it require that you do any additional work. Participation simply means that you will be engaged in one group interview and one individual interview at the beginning and end of the Fall Semester of the academic year (2018-2019), for a three-hour participation time for each participant.

I also would like to assure you that all the interview data collected in this study will be confidential, and a pseudonym for your actual name will be used in the research report. Only my advisor and I will have access to the data. I fully understand how busy you are,

but I highly appreciate your active participation in this research project. You have flexibility to select the suitable meeting times.

Please complete this form and put it in Ms. Haley's mailbox by October 5, 2018.

I am interested in participating in this research project:

Name

email

Date

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Professional Development (PD) for Mainstream Teachers:

Q1 Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male

Q2 Years of Total Teaching Experience:

☐ 1 Year ☐ 2-5 Years ☐ 5-10 Years ☐ More than 10 Years

Q3 Years of ELLs' Teaching Experience:

☐ 1 Year ☐ 2-5 Years ☐ 5-10 Years ☐ More than 10 Years

Q4. What Subject Area(s) you are currently Teaching?

☐ Math ☐ Science ☐ Social Studies ☐ English
☐ Arts ☐ Other (Specify):

Q5 Have you attended Professional Development Programs that focus on Teaching of ELLs?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Q5 If Yes, How many (approximately)?

☐ Once ☐ 2-5 ☐ More Than 5

Appendix D

Consent Form

Mainstream Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of PD Programs in Meeting the Academic and Literacy Needs of Adolescent ELLs

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to assess the effectiveness of teacher PD opportunities from the perspectives of mainstream teachers of ELLs. If you give permission to participate, one group interview and one individual interview will be conducted twice, at the beginning and at the end of academic year (2018-2019). The anticipated time to participate in the individual interviews is one hour for each participating teacher. For the focus group, the anticipated time is approximately two hours for the two focus group interviews. A digital recorder will be used to record the audio of the individual interviews and the group interviews. The audio recordings will be transcribed, and data from the transcriptions will be used in the student researcher's doctoral dissertation and in future presentations and publications. To further validate the interview data, I will send an email to all participating teachers to get their feedback about the data collected and conclusions made from interviewing teachers. The anticipated time to read and validate the report sent is about thirty minutes for each participating teacher.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in this project. However, this research is expected to reveal characteristics of effectiveness of teacher PD opportunities from the perspectives of mainstream teachers of ELLs. Guidelines may be established for PD content and delivery, curriculum and teaching methods of ELLs in mainstream classrooms according to the results of this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The interview data collected in this study will be confidential. Your actual name will be removed from all interview data, and a pseudonym for your actual name will be used in the research report. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission.

The audio recordings of the interviews will be stored on the digital recorder until they have been transcribed. Once the group interview and the individual interviews have been transcribed, the audio files will be transferred to two flash drives. One flash drive will be given to Dr. William Brozo (the PI for this study) and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at George Mason University. Only Dr. Brozo will have access to the key to the cabinet. The second flash drive will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the student researcher's home and only she has access to the cabinet key. The audio will then be permanently deleted from the digital recorder 5 years after the study ends. Although focus group participants will be asked to keep the contents of the discussion confidential, due to the nature of a focus group, the researcher cannot control what participants might say outside of the research setting.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Dr. William G. Brozo, Professor of Literacy and Zahra S. Alhuwairini, PhD candidate in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

Name

Date of Signature

Appendix E

First Individual Interview Protocol

Before starting the interview:

1. Interviewer will give the participant a copy of the informed consent form and will review the form with the participant.
2. Interviewer will read: This individual interview will be semi structured and will follow an informal, conversational style. I will present the questions for your feedback. I will use a digital audio recorder to record the interview and also will take notes. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes.
3. Do you have any questions before I begin?
4. Interviewer turns on the digital recorder and notes time.

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Date:

Time of Interview:

Location:

Questions for 1st Interview:

1. Tell me about your teaching experience with ELLs?
2. Tell me about your experience with PD Programs you have participated in at your school or your district related to teaching of ELLs.
3. How relevant were those PD programs to the teaching of ELLs in mainstream classrooms?
4. What types of PD activities designed to support the teaching ELLs have you participated in?
5. Which type of PD activities do you think is more beneficial? Why?
6. What learning strategies and practices would you like to learn more about in order to support ELLs?
7. Do you believe that these PD programs provide you with the needed knowledge and skills to support ELLs? Please explain.
8. Do you feel that you have learned useful theories and teaching strategies and practices from the PD activities you have participated in? If Yes, in what ways?
9. Were you able to apply what you have learned in those PD sessions in your classroom? Please provide an example.

Appendix F

Second Individual Interview Protocol

Before starting the interview:

1. Interviewer will read: This individual interview will be semi structured and will follow an informal, conversational style. I will present the questions for your feedback. I will use a digital audio recorder to record the interview and also will take notes. This interview will last approximately 30 minutes.
2. Do you have any questions before I begin?
3. Interviewer turns on the digital recorder and notes time.

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Date:

Time of Interview:

Location:

Questions for 2nd Interview:

1. Last time you talked about some literacy strategies such as “brick and mortar, sentence stem, and summarization. Can you elaborate on how these strategies support your teaching of ELLs?
2. Does your teaching and professional experience help in terms of understanding how to make these strategies work well in your classroom and understanding the literacy needs of ELLs?
3. Are there any complete PD programs related to teaching ELLs other than SIOP that you know of?
4. Through my interviews with different subject area teachers I noticed that the perspective of teachers of disciplines that are language loaded is different from these teachers of disciplines that are more into content focus, in terms of the PD programs that focus on integrating the language into the content. What is your thought on this?
5. As an adult learner and experienced teacher, what would you like to see different in future PD?
6. Will you participate in any future ELL-related PD programs? Why or why not?

Appendix G

First Focus Group Interview Protocol

Before starting the interview:

1. Interviewer will read: This focus group interview will be semi structured and will follow an informal, conversational style. I will present the questions for your feedback and discussion. I will use a digital audio recorder to record the interview and also will take notes. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.
2. Do you have any questions before I begin?
3. Interviewer turns on the digital recorders and notes time.

Interviewer:

Interviewees:

Date:

Time of Interview:

Location:

Questions for 1st Focus Group Interview:

1. Did you feel that you have benefited from participating in PD programs that are designed to support the teaching of ELLs?
Probe for the following information:
 - Did these PD activities meet your teaching needs to support ELLs? Explain.
 - What learning strategies and practices did you learn more about in order to support ELLs?
2. What types of PD programs do you think are more useful in supporting the teaching needs of ELLs? Explain.
3. How do you evaluate the content and the design features of PD programs related to English language learners in terms of meeting your teaching needs of ELLs?
4. What are the obstacles that prevent you and other mainstream teachers from applying what you have learned in PD programs?

Appendix H

Second Focus Group Interview Protocol

Before starting the interview:

1. Interviewer will read: This focus group interview will be semi structured and will follow an informal, conversational style. I will present the questions for your feedback and discussion. I will use a digital audio recorder to record the interview and also will take notes. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.
2. Do you have any questions before I begin?
3. Interviewer turns on the digital recorders and notes time.

Interviewer:

Interviewees:

Date:

Time of Interview:

Location:

Questions for 2nd Focus Group Interview:

1. Last time we talked about ways to enhance PD programs such as differentiation, teacher choice, and follow up activities to make sure that these PD are effective. What other ways you can add to enhance PD programs to meet your needs in supporting the reading and writing needs of these students?
2. You have recently used the learning lab to observe each other's teaching using SIOP strategies? How does it help in improving your pedagogical knowledge and skills?
3. Describe the collaboration between art, PE and elective-subject teachers and the other subject area teachers or ESL teachers?
4. Will you participate in any future ELLs PD programs? Why or why not?
5. How do you like PD programs to be improved in terms of content and delivery?
6. As an experienced teacher, assume that you are in a school where 50% of your students are ELLs and you are asked to design a PD program. What are the design features that you would like to see in that PD program to support teachers of ELLs? What are the strategies that you would like to include that will help integrate the language into the subject area?

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Biography

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