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Teaching English Learners in Middle Grades: A Mixed Method Study of the Dispositions, Priorities, and Instructional Practices of Urban Bilingual, ESL, and Content Teachers

Elizabeth Cardenas-Lopez
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TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN MIDDLE GRADES: A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF THE DISPOSITIONS, PRIORITIES, AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES OF URBAN BILINGUAL, ESL, AND CONTENT TEACHERS

Elizabeth Cardenas-Lopez

Reading and Language Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Doctor of Education in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

June 2015
TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN MIDDLE GRADES: A MIXED
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PRACTICES OF URBAN BILINGUAL, ESL, AND CONTENT TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the instruction of middle grade English language learners (ELs) and their bilingual, English as a Second Language (ESL), and content teachers in a large, urban, Midwestern school district. This mixed methods study gathered quantitative and qualitative data using a survey and interviews to examine the preparation, dispositions, and experiences of middle grade EL teachers; their professional development; their instructional decisions related to language and literacy development; and the factors that influence these decisions. Study results aided the formulation of district, school, and teacher level recommendations based on the belief that without equitable, quality instruction, and highly developed and supported EL teachers, these students will not attain the knowledge and skills in content, language, and literacy necessary for success in learning and life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my eternal gratitude to my dissertation chair and advisor, Dr. Donna Ogle, for facilitating the Latino doctoral grant that made possible this once imaginable pursuit of this dream. Her vision, leadership, and invaluable support made me believe I could reach higher educational and professional goals and realize this life-changing endeavor. I am beyond fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from and work with her for the past eight years of my life. I also have heartfelt appreciation for Dr. Antonina Lukenchuk and Dr. Ruth Ravid for their meaningful insights on the methodology perspectives and research methods that helped inform the data collection and analysis of this dissertation and for their unwavering support and guidance. My sincere appreciation extends to Dr. Ruth Quiroa for her thoughtful feedback and words of encouragement throughout all of her revisions. I am also most thankful to Dr. Susan McMahon for guiding the work of the Latino doctoral group and for her mentorship and encouragement.

I hold deep gratitude for the research participants, particularly the 16 interviewees whose contributions added to the richness of this study. I appreciate the time they spent with me sharing their lived experiences, commitment, and frustrations in educating our English learners as well as the dreams they have for these students and their profession. I would like to express my gratitude to the district, departments, and school administrators who supported this research study. I hope you find the results and recommendations to be of value in your important work.

My greatest love and appreciation are for my one of a kind husband, the love of my life, Alfredo, and my three extraordinary children, Alexandra, Alfredo, and
Anaisabel, for their inspiration and never-ending support. Without you and your unconditional love, who I have become, all I do, and this labor of love would not have been possible.
DEDICATION

To my four A-s: Alfredo, Alfredo Jr., Alexandra, and Anaisabel

Alfredo, I admire your adventurous spirit and approach to embracing life. You love me and give me strength. You make me believe all is possible, even in the face of adversity. You are the most loving, caring, and dedicated dad in the universe. Our children adore you and look up to you as the strong and devoted father and husband that you are. I love you and respect you for these and many other reasons.

Alexandra, I am proud of your achievements and of the woman you have become. You have attained the preparation, courage, and wisdom to conquer the world ahead of you. I love you for everything that you are and for being a caring daughter and sister, and my trusted friend. Alfredito, I am proud of the mature, smart, well-behaved young man that you are. Your witiness and intellect amaze me and keep me on my toes. I love you for all that and for your strong convictions. Anaisabel, my baby, I am proud of the brave and confident young lady that you have become. I love you for who you are and cherish your kind spirit and sense of humor. I am blessed to have you and your sister as my best friends.

My four A-s, I love you all with every fiber of my being. You are my blessings and my greatest accomplishments in life. You are my source of energy and inspiration. None of what I am and have accomplished would be possible without your unconditional love and trust. I encourage you to never stop dreaming, never stop learning, for you all have the potential to achieve the unimaginable.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Language and literacy have been foregrounded by changes in the educational policy and practice occurring over the past two decades. Society has raised by quite a few notches the educational bar that all children in the United States—including newcomers—must clear in order to complete school successfully and, ultimately, to survive in the economic and social world of the 21st century. (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2002)

I arrived in this country at fourteen years of age with no knowledge of the American culture, its language and people, and without legal documentation. It was mid-September in the late seventies when my mom and I came to Chicago. School had started; but even though I so wanted to attend, this was not even an option. I had to work to help pay the rent, utilities, and save money so that we could bring my five siblings who had been left behind to our new place in the United States. From the beginning, I worked at the factory where my mom found a job and where I was paid less than $2 an hour. Factory hours were long and the place smelled of rotten fruit and mice, and I hated it. I hated not being able to communicate with the factory managers and workers and with other people in places such as stores, medical clinics, really just about anywhere. I dreaded getting on the bus on our way to and from work where people would try to make conversation with me, people I ignored. I ignored them not because I wanted to, but because I did not understand what they were saying and because I did not know what or how to respond. I felt ashamed, and for a long time, I did not want to be in the U.S. I wanted to go back home. I hated not being with my friends, in my home, with my brothers; I missed all the things I had and loved back home. But more than anything, I missed being in school.
Growing up as an academically uneducated adolescent in this country is something that I wish no teen, regardless of gender, income, culture, ethnicity, or language background, would ever have to experience and endure. It took several years and many factory, restaurant, and other double-shift, low-paying jobs before I found myself at a local library trying to sign up for an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. I knew that in addition to holding tight to my native language and culture, I had to learn English if I ever wanted to have a better-paying job and working conditions than those I was experiencing.

Even though I was literate and fluent in my native language, I knew in my heart and mind that I would not be able to move forward without the English language or a higher education. I was always working or taking care of my siblings so there was never time for me to go to school. However, I had to begin somewhere and the local library seemed like a good place to restart my educational journey. My life literally changed the day I stepped into that library. I met a librarian who guided and encouraged me to find other ways to learn English and to attend a community college where I could start adult ESL classes. The dream to have a college education, a professional career, and a better life began to take shape that day. It was the beginning of a dream and it was a dream that every child and every adolescent around the world, but especially in this country, should be able to have and be able to achieve.

I highlight these turning points in my life to share my own experiences as an immigrant and as an adolescent English learner who had very little academic supports growing up—experiences that have led me to develop a passion for language and literacy education and a career in teaching and educational leadership. Highly motivated by my
own personal experiences and educational interests, I conducted this study on a topic that is not only dear to my heart, but one that continues to be a pressing issue in the field of education with respect to the instruction and supports for English Learners (ELs) and their teachers.

For obvious reasons, the education of middle grade ELs in the U.S., and particularly in the Midwest, is of utmost importance to me. If the goal is to develop bilingual learners and citizens, I know from my own experiences and those of my siblings that without a proper education in academic English as well as in one’s native language, ELs will not be prepared to pursue higher education and succeed in life. With the new demands of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and new assessments, it is ever more critical that we pay closer attention to the teaching and learning needs of middle grade ELs because these students are in a critical point in their school and social life—a time when things become progressively challenging both academically and socially, particularly for middle grade ELs. Additionally, there is great need to continually advance our search for efficient ways to support teachers who work with these students. The nature of these supports can be uncovered and pursued by identifying teachers’ strengths and needs as professionals and instructors of EL students and by probing for more effective and creative ways to provide these supports.

**Background of the Study**

English learners are the fastest growing student population in U.S. public schools; within the last decade, their numbers have increased by over 50%, while the general student population only grew by 7%. In fact, it is predicted that by 2025, ELs will constitute 25% of the U.S. student population (National Education Association, 2012).
The increasing number of ELs in U.S. public schools along with the heightened expectations for their academic achievement will have a substantial impact on every school and teacher as they work to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the EL-focused standards of the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), and the Teachers of English of Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) consortiums (TESOL International Association, 2013a).

The challenges presented by the CCSS are equally daunting for both ELs and their instructors. Indeed, the high expectations of the CCSS put an enormous pressure on bilingual, ESL, and content teachers who must translate these expectations into meaningful instruction leading to the success of all middle grade ELs. For the purpose of clarification, it is important to note that the term “middle grade teachers of ELs” is used interchangeably with the terms “bilingual and/or ESL teacher” and “content teacher of ELs.” For the successful implementation of the CCSS and the English Language Development (ELD) Standards, all middle grade teachers of ELs must work together in designing instruction around the CCSS and the rigorous content it outlines for students’ mastery (TESOL International Association, 2013b). Furthermore, educators of ELs are expected to enact state and district policies and regulations on the implementation of effective programs and services for ELs. Harper and de Jong (2009) have added to the notion that indeed, the responsibilities of teachers of ELs, particularly those in middle grades and high school, are varied and complex; yet, the supports they receive to perform their jobs effectively are sporadic and inconsistent at best.
In order to achieve the high expectations of the CCSS, it is assumed that all teachers must have the knowledge and preparation they need to meet such high demands. Valdés, Kibler, and Walqui (2014) stated that although bilingual and/or ESL teachers have not been part of the policy conversation surrounding the CCSS, they are responsible for effectively implementing the new standards and for the achievement of their students. However, the reality is that most teachers, including teachers of ELs, are currently not prepared enough to implement the CCSS with success (Santos, Darling-Hammond, & Cheuk, 2012). Significant preparation, resources, and ongoing professional development are needed, particularly for those working with middle grade ELs, because this is the period in elementary or middle school when content and the use of academic language becomes increasingly difficult for English learners and “without a robust effort to build all teachers’ capacity to teach ELs, these students will not succeed” (TESOL International Association, 2013b, p. 9).

According to Valdés et al. (2014), content area teachers who serve ELs need guidance in how to recognize and teach academic language and language structures and functions through the implementation of both the CCSS and the ELD Standards. Thus, the expertise that bilingual and/or ESL teachers already have in the area of language acquisition will play a critical role in supporting content area teachers and in the successful implementation of the CCSS and ELD standards (TESOL International Association, 2013b).

With such high demands, all educators of ELs need assistance designing and providing standards-based instruction for this vulnerable group of students. Finding meaningful ways to support middle grade teachers of English learners in this endeavor
has been a deep concern of mine—one that has troubled me in my role as a classroom teacher, a language and literacy specialist, and a director of a district-level department where I was responsible for providing access to quality supports for ELs and their teachers. The results of this study provided a rich discussion on the dispositions, preparation, instructional goals, and on the professional needs and strengths of bilingual and/or ESL, and content teachers, and identify practical ways to support their growth as effective educators of middle level ELs.

**Statement of the Problem**

The focus on rigorous instruction around a new set of standards together with the emphasis on high-stakes testing and new accountability measures for schools, teachers, and students require educational researchers to give strong attention to the preparation and ongoing professional development supports for teachers, with a particular emphasis on teachers of ELs. The purpose of this study was to explore and draw a deep understanding of the dispositions, preparation and skills, and the instructional goals middle grade teachers bring to the instruction of ELs in these grades. A second goal was to examine what these teachers need to help them bridge the gap between where they are in the implementation of rigorous CCSS- and ELD-focused instruction for their ELs and illuminate the professional learning experiences that could provide them appropriate support. This study also examined the divide between the preparation and practices of bilingual and/or ESL teachers and the general language and reading/literacy theory and pedagogy that inform general content teachers’ practice.

There is much that needs to be done to successfully educate middle level ELs to be ready for high school, college, and careers. Teacher researchers and bilingual and
language theorists have consistently argued that in order to prepare ELs for the future, teachers must be responsive to the linguistic, cultural, and academic needs of the EL population in their schools (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014; Jimenez et al., 2015). Just recently, the Education Department pledged to prioritize the needs of language learners and one of the major priorities highlighted was the need to increase teachers’ effectiveness in serving ELs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This was welcome news that further supported the purpose and goals of this study. In light of the renewed efforts to improve the achievement of ELs, and given the multifaceted challenges these students and their teachers face, “policy and practice must be based on the evidence we have” (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 43).

My personal and professional experiences in teaching and learning language and literacy in both English and Spanish in a Midwestern, urban school district, led me to conclude that acquiring academic language, the language of school, is not only challenging, but a very complex and lengthy process—one that necessitates perseverance on the part of the learner and strategic supports from more knowledgeable and experienced users of the language. I learned that pre-service general education and bilingual/ESL academic preparation programs are very different and typically do not connect with one another; instead, they develop different bodies of knowledge. Language development programs do not use literacy or build upon literacy to the extent necessary to help teachers expand the academic knowledge and skills of ELs.

Additionally, literacy programs do not build teachers’ understanding of how language development influences students’ literacy learning. Therefore, I am deeply interested in exploring how the development of language and literacy, especially in
academic content areas, are intricately related and influence one another. Finally, my own teaching and leadership experiences led me to appreciate the importance of addressing teachers’ needs as well as those of the students. It is imperative for all teachers, particularly for teachers of ELs, to receive ongoing, sustained supports so as to continue developing their practice and their ability to provide quality instructional learning experiences for their students.

Danielson (2007) stated that the complexity of teaching is well known and that such complexity extends over several aspects of the work (p. 2). Teacher research has concluded that teaching is also cognitively and emotionally demanding (Bransford & Danielson, 2005; Danielson, 2007). Such teaching complexities and demands are exacerbated for teachers who are responsible for the academic success of English learners (DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera, 2014; TESOL International Association, 2013b). According to teacher researchers, how teachers approach their instruction and how they make decisions on what and how they teach the students in front of them vary greatly based on their preparation and expertise (Hammerness et al., 2005).

Some studies have suggested most teachers, including bilingual and/or ESL teachers, provide instruction based on what they learned during their pre-service preparation programs, and typically, the way they were taught throughout their schooling (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). I know this was my experience as a classroom teacher of fifth grade and middle level dual language learners. Had I not had the opportunity to engage in extensive language and literacy graduate level courses, I would not have had the slightest idea of how to design and provide meaningful language and literacy instruction for my students, and I would not have known how to engage in
meaningful collaboration with my colleagues to strengthen my practice and improve the success of our students collectively. The majority of teachers, particularly bilingual and/or ESL teachers and content area teachers, do not have such opportunities (Danielson, 2007; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). This suggests that teachers of ELs do not typically possess a full understanding of how ELs grow academically, especially students in the middle grades. This is a problem that impacts every level of the educational system and it’s not just a local issue, but a nationwide concern that must be addressed with respect to the education of ELs.

The Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, English Language Development (ELD) standards, and high-stakes accountability tests require teachers of ELs to develop and demonstrate a foundational level of knowledge around content and pedagogy that incorporates a deep understanding of the language of the discipline(s) and the literacies required to make complex content comprehensible to ELs (Santos et al., 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2013; Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014). Moreover, teachers of ELs and content teachers who also instruct ELs need to develop and apply a “foundational understanding of language development and strategies for teaching English learners” (Santos et al., 2012, p. 108) across disciplines and instructional contexts. “The best policies and standards will not ensure excellence without highly qualified educators and specialists, which is especially true for the field of English language instruction” (TESOL International Association, 2013b, p. 9). The achievement of this goal requires strong and sustained collaboration among content, bilingual, and ESL teachers as well as a strategically designed professional development program that is ongoing and involves
the active participation of all teachers of ELs (Santos et al., 2012; Walqui & Heritage, 2012).

Adding to the challenge of ensuring effective instruction and supports for ELs is the nationwide dilemma of insufficient numbers of available, qualified bilingual and ESL teachers and content teachers with the appropriate bilingual and ESL pedagogy. Studies and policy reports indicated that initial preparation and ongoing professional development supports for teachers across the U.S. were highly uneven (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Harper & de Jong, 2009; TESOL International Association, 2013b). Teachers typically have very different levels of knowledge and skills (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), and the wide variance of roles and responsibilities of bilingual and ESL teachers, together with differences in teacher preparation, certification, and credentialing, contribute to the dilemma of ensuring teacher quality in relationship to ELs (TESOL International Association, 2013b; Valdés, Kibler & Walqui, 2014).

Teacher Preparation and Quality of Teaching

The current reality is that all teachers, including teachers of ELs, typically do not exit pre-service programs with the knowledge and preparation they need to move their students to higher levels of language proficiency and academic success (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Valdés, Kibler, & Walqui, 2014). In addition, educators of middle grade ELs normally do not have access to ongoing professional development opportunities that build their expertise in the use of scaffolds and strategies aligned to the language and literacy demands in the discipline (Santos et al, 2012; Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014). All teachers, but teachers of ELs in particular, need ample practice in the implementation of novel ideas, concepts, and teaching strategies in their instruction.
Santos et al., (2012) stated that “just as students learn by doing, teachers also learn practice in practice” (p. 109). Thus, shifts in teacher practice require varied and sustained support structures to train educators how to implement new, advanced practices in language and literacy instruction, curriculum planning, and assessment (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Danielson, 2007; Santos et al., 2012).

The renewed standards movement and the arrival of the CCSS suggest that teacher preparation and professional development programs for teachers, especially for teachers of ELs, need to be designed to support deeper content, complex language, and the performance expected of these students (Santos et al., 2012). Undeniably, bilingual, ESL, and content teachers who work in middle grades ELs also need to develop mastery of instructional strategies and approaches that assist in teaching these students the knowledge and skills demanded by the CCSS and the ELD standards (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014).

**Demands for Achievement of Middle Grade ELs**

The CCSS seek to provide a more consistent and equitable learning experience for all students in classrooms across the nation, including ELs. This is to ensure that movement from one state or district to another “will no longer carry with it the threat of learning the same material over again, or worse, missing something completely” (Kendall, 2011, p. 33). With respect to the education of English learners, inconsistencies in learning expectations, the lack of curriculum alignment, and interrupted or no schooling experiences are all issues that greatly affect the learning opportunities and outcomes of ELs (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). However, the new standards underscore the importance of closing these gaps in learning for this student population. Thus, for the
reasons previously noted, the challenges of educating ELs have increased exponentially. In a thorough analysis of existing research on teaching ELs, Goldenberg (2008) suggested: “what we can do is provide guidelines based on our strongest research about effective practices for teaching ELLs” (p. 8).

According to Walqui and Heritage (2012), an intended outcome of the CCSS that impact all students and their teachers is to improve the culture of learning in classrooms across the country by raising the education bar. Additionally, these authors proposed that the CCSS are about increasing language capacities and asking for high-level discourse in classrooms across content areas, all with an increased level of complexity. Thus, the expectations predicated by the CCSS present an opportunity for teachers of ELs and school leaders to consider the shifts in practice that must occur so as to support the success of ELs.

Furthermore, the intensified expectations around language in the CCSS signify major challenges for ELs because they must use the language they are learning to access and learn more difficult material. Pompa and Hakuta (2012) stated that the new standards represent “a seismic shift for ELs because of the prominent role that language plays in them” (p. 124). Although this shift is intended to work to the advantage of ELs, it will not be without its challenges because they are expected to learn complex content and language skills while simultaneously learning the English language. A critical issue to consider is how correspondence between the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), English Language Development (ELD) standards, and the CCSS are tackled by states and school districts to address the learning, instruction, and assessment needs of ELs (Pompa & Hakuta, 2012).
Standards from Language Organizations

In addition to attending to CCSS requirements when planning and delivering rigorous EL instruction, educators must also consider TESOL Pre-K–12 English Language Proficiency Standards 2006 and the WIDA ELD 2007 (Graves, August, & Mancilla-Martinez, 2013). Graves et al. (2013) suggested that, while the CCSS do not give specific attention to the needs of ELs, English language development standards and the TESOL standards were specifically created for ELs. Both sets of language standards were developed with the collaboration of hundreds of ESL teachers, language and literacy specialists, school administrators, researchers, and assessment specialists. These language development standards “acknowledge the central role of language in the achievement of content and highlight the learning styles and particular instructional assessment needs of learners who are still developing proficiency in English” (Graves et al., 2013, p. 6).

Rationale for the Study

Undeniably, middle grade English learners and their teachers must receive attention in this era of Common Core State Standards, together with the ever-present emphasis on increasingly difficult, high-stakes assessments. Recent educational policies and reform actions have placed a call to action to better prepare ELs for the rigorous demands of the new standards and high accountability tests (Pompa and Hakuta, 2012; TESOL International Association, 2013b). The CCSS expect ELs to perform at the levels of their English-speaking counterparts and to demonstrate use of the academic language in deep and accelerated ways (Walqui & Heritage, 2012). The high expectations and language demands of the CCSS represent a challenge for meeting the
varied and complex needs of ELs (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014). Equally important is the demand to identify the instructional strengths and areas for continued professional growth of those teachers who work with middle grade ELs. These educators must receive the specific guidance and support needed for successful instruction of their ELs.

As previously noted, an increased understanding of what works as well as what is required to effectively educate middle grade ELs and to efficiently support their teachers present two important bases for this study. Middle grade English learners comprise one of the highest at-risk student groups in the U.S. due to the intense socio-emotional aspects that arise during this pre-adolescent and adolescent stage of development, the increasing complexities of their academic content, and the need for English “academic language” to learn new, challenging material (August & Shanahan, 2008; Ogle, 2008; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). In addition, this diverse and growing population of EL students in the school district that participated in this study has not consistently experienced the benefits of having teachers with the training and expertise that accelerates their own professional development so they are able to respond to their students’ academic, linguistic, and socio-emotional needs.

Situated within this context, this study focused on examining what teachers of middle grade ELs know about their students’ development, their own dispositions and practice in relationship to these students, and what preparation and supports are most helpful in enhancing their practices. Thus, this study employed a mixed-methods design involving the participation of middle grade teachers of ELs, including bilingual and/or ESL teachers as well as content teachers who currently work with middle grade ELs in schools across a Midwestern school district in a large, urban city. The research methods
entailed the administration of an online survey to volunteer participants, followed by one-on-one interviews with selected individuals who meet the selection criteria and consent to participate further in this qualitative phase of the study. Using a sequential mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis, the quantitative and qualitative data sets were collected and analyzed separately and then connected and interpreted so as to draw rich and thick descriptions of the results (Creswell, 2012).

**Research Purposes and Questions**

This study has several research purposes. The first purpose was to seek to identify and analyze the dispositions, preparation, and instructional practices that bilingual, ESL, and content teachers of middle grade ELs use to effectively design and deliver quality standards-based instruction to ELs. The second purpose was to examine the perceptions and attitudes that these teachers bring to the instruction of middle grade ELs so as to draw insights into those factors that significantly contribute to how these educators prepare their students to achieve the rigorous demands of the CCSS and reach proficiency in academic English. The third purpose of this study was to better understand how middle grade teachers of ELs make instructional decisions related to language and literacy for their students in the context of the CCSS. The fourth purpose of this investigation was to probe the professional learning opportunities that further inform and support the practices and professional growth of bilingual, ESL, and content teachers as well as those activities which teachers themselves deem important and necessary to their practice.

The primary research question that guided this study was: *What makes the middle grade teachers’ of English learners instructional practices useful and effective and what*
influences their instructional decisions when teaching middle grade-English learners?

The following sub-questions that also guided this study flow from the primary research question:

1. What are the middle grade teachers’ of English learners dispositions for providing focused language and literacy instruction in the context of the Common Core, and how are these dispositions being shaped?

2. What are the qualifications, preparation, experience, and professional priorities teachers of middle grade English learners report are necessary in the instruction of their students?

3. What are the professional learning needs of teachers of middle grade English Learners and how are they addressing these needs?

**Significance of the Study**

Motivated by the need to learn from the ways teachers draw on what they have learned in preparation programs, in classroom experiences, from collaboration with their colleagues, and from professional development, this study described and highlighted new perspectives on current and novel ideas of how effective teachers of middle grade ELs design and deliver instruction to their students. Drawing on the pragmatic and constructivist perspectives as well as teacher learning theories, this study examines and illuminates the dispositions, expertise, preparation, and instructional priorities that middle grade bilingual, ESL, and content teachers bring to the instruction of their ELs.

I believe the results of this study can assist teachers of ELs in understanding how they make decisions in teaching ELs and can aid them in examining the instructional approaches and strategies they use in the instruction of these students. The findings of
this study can also help teachers to look at their practice from a different perspective and find ways to engage in sustained collaboration with their colleagues. More broadly, the results of this study can be used to expand the participating district’s views and practices around the preparation and professional development needs of its teachers of ELs in the following areas:

1. Providing successful academic English and content instruction for ELs in bilingual push-in and pull-out settings, in English immersion contexts, and departmentalized classrooms;
2. using ELs’ native language to advance reading skills in English, build content knowledge, and teach language transfer;
3. providing instruction in the ELs’ native language to help students achieve bilingual and bi-literacy goals;
4. developing a deep understanding of the close relationship that exists between academic language and literacy and use this knowledge to advance the academic English proficiency and content knowledge of their ELs;
5. helping to build capacity of content teachers who also work with middle grade ELs around language acquisition theories and culturally relevant practices;
6. allowing bilingual, ESL, and content teachers opportunities to collaborate in planning, designing, implementing, and redirecting instruction that improve the achievement of ELs; and
7. working with higher education institutions on refocusing the preparation and professional development of teachers so that they have more experiential opportunities in working with ELs
Theoretical Lens and the Inquiry Process

This research study has been informed by epistemological and methodological assumptions of pragmatic and interpretive paradigms of research (Brosio, 2000; Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a; Lukenchuk, 2013) that encapsulate essential features of Constructionism (Gutek, 2004; Ozmon & Craver, 2008). A sequential mixed-method study is considered an appropriate approach to investigate the previously noted research questions (Creswell, 2012; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). Chapter three provides a thorough description of the theoretical positioning of this study, its research design, its sources of data, and the methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review draws from the fields of language acquisition, bilingual education, literacy, teacher development, and educational research so as to examine a wide variety of views regarding the instruction and achievement of English learners (ELs), in particular middle grade ELs. It provides an analysis of seminal and recent reports on language acquisition and literacy development with respect to the preparation, practice, and the needs of bilingual, ESL, and content teachers who service English learners in the middle grades. This review examines research on demographics and instructional settings for ELs in an effort to provide a context for this study and help expand understanding about the challenges and opportunities the CCSS present for middle grade English learners and their teachers.

In addition, this chapter analyzes research that provides baseline information and clarifies current understandings about the preparation, dispositions, knowledge of content and pedagogy, and the instructional priorities of middle grade bilingual, ESL, and content area educators. An examination of the language acquisition process, the integration of language and content teaching, and the literacy development of ELs are provided in an effort to highlight the multifaceted instructional priorities and needs of ELs, particularly those in the elementary middle level school. The relationship between language and literacy with respect to the instruction of middle grade ELs, teacher quality, and the preparation of bilingual and/or ESL and content teachers is also explored. Finally, this literature review attempts to extrapolate meaningful information about practices and
strategies considered to be promising in the instruction of middle grade ELs in mainstream content area, bilingual, and ESL instructional contexts.

Teacher preparation and professional development researchers have suggested that quality teaching is an important predictor of student outcomes (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). The synthesis of research data on teacher preparation and professional development assisted in understanding effective ways that successful bilingual and ESL teachers improve their practice and advance student learning. Literature on teacher preparation programs of bilingual and/or ESL teachers and general education teachers is reviewed so as to understand how teachers make decisions about what they teach, how they teach, and how they go about addressing their professional learning needs.

**Essential English Learner and Teacher Development Areas for Review**

**English Learner Demographics**

According to the U.S. Department of Education, ELs represented a population of approximately 4.4 million school age students in the United States. About one-third of all ELs in this country were foreign-born, including refugees and students who have undocumented status (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). Two-thirds of the ELs were born in the United States (Soltero, 2011), and most of the U.S. EL population was concentrated in the states of California, Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado, Alaska, Oregon, and Texas.

In the Midwestern state in which the school district participating in this study is located, the 2013 EL population was over 200,000 students and more than 80% of these were Spanish speaking. In the district where this study took place, approximately 16.5%
of the total student population was identified as being ELs, 86% Spanish speakers, and approximately 11,000 of these ELs were in grades six through eight. According to district’s data, this number did not include ELs whose parents had refused bilingual services or students who had met the state’s exit criteria and could no longer be classified as EL according to the state’s definition. If these two groups were included, the total numbers of ELs in this district would be substantially higher.

The EL population in the U.S. is not a monolithic group because it represents great variation in terms of languages spoken, parents’ education, ages, English proficiency levels, countries of origin, as well as in cultural, educational, economic, and linguistic backgrounds (Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner, LePage & McDonald, 2005; Soltero, 2011). There are ELs whose parents may have had the opportunity to attend school through college, and others are illiterate with no opportunities for schooling. Some EL students may have gone to preschool, attended sporadically, or are highly literate by the time they arrive in school. Indeed, it has been well recognized that there are some ELs who arrive at school with advanced levels of content knowledge and literacy in their native language, and others arrive with interrupted schooling or with very limited experience with school (Crawford, 1999; Cummins, 1986; Freeman & Freeman, 2007).

Additionally, some ELs enter school with basic knowledge of the English language, but are not literate in their native language. There are others who arrive to school not speaking speak a word of English. Most ELs are born in this country, but there are also ELs who are new to the U.S. and to the American school environment. All of these variables influence the acquisition of academic knowledge, the development of
English as their new language, and the overall performance of ELs (Goldenberg, Rueda, & August, 2006; Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

**Challenges and Opportunities in the Instruction of ELs**

Studies conducted by August and Shanahan (2006), August and Snow (2008), Garcia and Godina (2004), and Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) have shown that the lack of adequate literacy skills presents a bigger challenge for students of diverse ethnic backgrounds and ethnic groups who may already struggle in school due to linguistic, economic, socio-emotional, and cultural issues. ELs constitute one of these groups.

Some theorists and researchers, such as Valdés, Bunch, Snow, Lee, and Matos (2005) and Walqui & van Lier (2010), have suggested that part of the problem for ELs, especially those in middle grades and high school, is that the focus of language instruction revolves around the teaching and learning of discrete language skills isolated from core curriculum. Soltero (2011) suggested the idea behind such an approach to instruction of ELs is that these students will learn English fast enough to transition them into general education classrooms within a year or two. Therefore, instructional approaches that are not centered on rich content, language, and literacy strategies and skills that build the academic content and the language proficiency of ELs will not yield the goals and outcomes expected of English learners and their teachers (Echevarria, Short, & Vogt, 2008; Baker et al., 2014).

Other researchers have noted that English proficiency is the most important predictor of school success in the U.S. (Echevarria & Graves, 2011). Indeed, inadequate development of academic English and literacy skills is associated with lower grades, lower performance on academic content tests, and lower graduation rates of ELs.
The CCSS pose additional demands for ELs and their teachers. Well-prepared and qualified teachers of ELs who teach in bilingual and English immersion settings will need to “demonstrate knowledge of the language of instruction to levels consistent with the demands of the literacy and content standards” (Brisk & Proctor, 2012, p. 115) in order to teach these students effectively.

Although the state of our knowledge on how to improve the achievement of middle grade ELs continues to evolve, there is still much more that we need to learn and do about the preparation, knowledge, dispositions, and instructional priorities of the teachers who teach these students. Some researchers have argued—and I agree with this argument—that teacher quality and the quality of teaching are even stronger predictors of the success of students, especially of success of ELs in U.S. schools (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Valdés, Kibler, & Walqui, 2014). Evidence in teacher preparation and development has suggested that content and language teachers who work with middle grade ELs have very different levels of knowledge and skills for teaching these students (Santos et al., 2012). These contentions suggest then that the achievement gap of ELs will persist if appropriate attention is not given to the preparation and professional development of their teachers.

**Factors That Influence the Success of Middle Grade ELs**

Over the past decade, the dramatic increase of the EL population in schools across the nation along with the persistent achievement gap of ELs have sparked the urgency to reexamine the teaching and learning of these students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Harper and de Jong (2009) argued:

School has become a high-stakes environment for K–12 ELLs who are increasingly taught in mainstream classes where they are expected to meet grade-
appropriate standards developed for fluent English speakers and where they must demonstrate achievement through standardized assessments in English. (p. 137)

According to these researchers, the idea behind this premise assumes that educational reforms developed for fluent English-speaking students will work well enough for ELs to be adequately served within mainstream frameworks for curriculum, content, teacher preparation, and student achievement. However, for this premise to become a successful reality for teachers of ELs and their students, appropriate preparation, resources, and ongoing supports are needed for this group of teachers and students.

Recent reports have suggested that placement of ELs in programs and classes that lack proper instruction of English, lack instruction and supports in the native language, and lack appropriate preparation of teachers diminish the opportunities for language development and academic achievement for these students (Harper & de Jong, 2009; TESOL International Association, 2013b; Valdés et al., 2014). Bilingual researchers Freeman and Freeman (2007) and Soltero (2011) have argued that ELs placed in these instructional settings become socially isolated and disengaged from meaningful learning and peer interaction. Moreover, there are a number of other factors that contribute to the academic struggles of ELs. Three of the most relevant factors are: (a) the diverse cultural, academic, social, and linguistic capacities among ELs; (b) the limited teacher knowledge and skills related to the teaching and learning of ELs, particularly around language and literacy; and (c) the lack of knowledge in designing and implementing rich and appropriately challenging language and literacy programs for ELs (Guofang & Edwards, 2010). The combination of these three factors represents an enormous challenge for successfully educating ELs, and if not appropriately addressed very soon,
ELs’ language proficiency will not advance to high levels of cognition and their academic achievement will continue to decline ever more drastically.

With respect to the education of ELs, the CCSS are also regarded as a catalyst for change in teacher preparation and supports (Bunch, Kibler & Pimentel, 2012; Walqui & Heritage, 2012). Several researchers have made the point that the CCSS represent a great opportunity for teachers of ELs to hone in on the language and literacy skills ELs need to successfully navigate between the rigorous language and literacy demands of the CCSS, academic content, and their English proficiency levels (Ogle, 2011; Pilgreen, 2006; Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

**Teacher Preparation and Professional Development**

It is common knowledge that teachers are the most important factor in students’ academic learning (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Numerous research studies have been conducted to document teacher preparation and teacher development practices and programs (Snow, 2002; Ruddell, 2004; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005; Taylor & Pearson, 2002). These studies concluded that quality instruction and quality teachers are the essential elements for the achievement of all learners.

Additional studies identified the need to improve teacher preparation at all levels of the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In spite of these research efforts, we have not gained enough knowledge on teaching effectiveness and quality teachers; however, there is enough evidence that serves as a foundation of what pre-service preparation programs need to focus on to develop exemplary teachers and to create the support systems teachers need for ongoing
professional development and growth (Snow, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Staehr Fenner, 2014).

Snow et al. (2005) concluded that all programs of professional learning have the responsibility of promoting teachers’ lifelong learning dispositions, and that early education programs carry the initial and crucial burden of “helping teachers understand and accept their obligations as professionals who will be in constant need of new knowledge and growth” (p. 213). In their analyses, Snow et al. (2005) emphasized the need for pre-service programs to help teachers develop the tools needed to acquire new knowledge as an ongoing process of their development. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) provided an expansive analysis of teacher preparation approaches, and they masterfully presented the elements teachers must have in their possession to become high-quality, reflective teachers from the first moment they enter a classroom.

However, most studies and reports on teacher preparation and professional development have failed to recognize bilingual and ESL education as an essential element of teacher preparation and teacher effectiveness (Harper & de Jong, 2009; TESOL International Association, 2013b). Students having greater needs for support in order to achieve well, ELs in particular, are typically not in classrooms with teachers who have the academic, linguistic, and cultural knowledge that is necessary to ensure their success in school (Hammerness et al., 2005; Santos et al., 2012; Walqui & Heritage, 2012). The lack of preparation of teachers who educate ELs across the education spectrum, through no fault of their own, has most likely contributed to the achievement gap of ELs. More studies are needed to determine the magnitude of this impact.
According to Ogle (2008), Austin and Morrison (1961) were among the first researchers to address the issue of quality teacher education. They conducted seminal studies of the preparation of teachers to teach reading. The results of their studies were bleak. They identified that about half of the college programs had only one separate reading course that was required for elementary teachers, which amounted to four to 11 class hours spent in meeting the requirement for reading preparation (Ogle, 2008). These few hours of reading/literacy coursework are not nearly enough for teachers to develop deep knowledge about reading and literacy instruction in general and specifically, about teaching reading and academic English to ELs. Even though the teacher preparation landscape seems to be improving since Austin and Morrison’s initial findings, more needs to be done to ensure pre-service and in-service programs provide the type of pedagogical and content knowledge as well as the practical experiences teachers need in ensuring the success of all students (Hammerness et al., 2005).

The preparation and specialization of bilingual and ESL teachers does not look much better either. For instance, in the Midwestern state where this study took place, in most bilingual and/or ESL programs offered by institutions across the state, teachers who pursue the licensure and the endorsements required for the instruction of ELs are only required to take one course in methods of teaching. The content of these courses include methods in teaching language arts, math, science, and social science. The endorsement courses may include a reading course as an elective option. However, courses in the specific teaching of academic English and literacy are not required by the state. These minimal requirements around the instruction of language and literacy, which are essential
in the teaching and learning of academic content, do not only affect teacher capacity, but also impact the effectiveness of the instruction ELs receive from these teachers.

**Preparation of Teachers of ELs and Bilingual Students**

As previously stated, more needs to be done to revamp teacher preparation programs particularly in the preparation of teachers who teach ELs and bilingual students. Harper and de Jong (2009) reported inconsistencies in states across the nation on the minimum course requirements and on the number of hours of professional development teachers should acquire in order to be certified or credential to teach ELs and bilingual students. Even in states where there seem to be strong regulations for pre-service preparation programs, teachers are not leaving these programs with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach diverse groups of students, and they are even less prepared to meet the linguistic, cultural, and socio-emotional needs of students who speak languages other than English (National Center for English Language Acquisition, 2011). Policy and advocacy groups are still insisting upon new approaches to teacher preparation to ensure pre-service and in-service teachers have the core knowledge and skills required to provide high-quality and effective instruction for all learners, including ELs (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Pompa & Hakuta, 2012).

Investments in teacher preparation should be made to ensure pre-service and in-service teachers of ELs develop extensive knowledge of the students, the content, the language, and effective literacy practices (Brisk & Proctor, 2012; Solter, 2011). Lucas and Villegas (2011) suggested teachers of ELs should have knowledge and experience in second language acquisition, culturally relevant practices, and literacy development and have positive attitudes towards bilingual and ESL students. This is a common belief
among bilingual and ESL educators and researchers (Freeman & Freeman, 2007; Soltero, 2011; Walqui & van Lier, 2010; Wong Fillmore, 2011).

**Elements of Effective Schools and Effective Teaching**

On one positive note, there is quantifiable and quality data coming from effective schools that nurture and develop quality teachers and produce successful students in reading. Taylor and Pearson (2002) described Hoffman’s (1991) examination of research on effective schools and posited that in his work, Hoffman “uncovered” that effective schools shared eight recurring attributes:

1. a clear school mission;
2. effective instructional leadership and practices;
3. high expectations;
4. a safe, orderly, and positive environment;
5. ongoing curriculum improvement;
6. maximum use of instructional time;
7. frequent monitoring of student progress; and
8. positive home-school relationships. (p. 366)

Although Hoffman (1991) identified these essential attributes that characterize effective schools, the attributes related to quality teaching and teachers were not necessarily linked to student impact. Hoffman’s study did not present evidence that these attributes result in effective teaching and learning experiences for ELs either. Since Hoffman’s landmark study, other studies and work have taken place in an effort to identify elements of good teaching that describe the work for which they are preparing their students.
Danielson has done extensive work in this area and as result, developed a framework for teaching that applies the standards for both student learning and the essential elements that are involved in the complex role of teaching. Danielson’s (2007) Framework for Teaching consists of four major domains:

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

Domain 3: Instruction

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

Each domain has four to five components and three to five essential elements that, when taken together, provide a coherent definition of good teaching that informs the recruitment and hiring of teachers in any school district and “is aligned with their approaches to mentoring, professional development, and teacher evaluation” (p. 11).

Even though Danielson’s Framework for Teaching is an excellent tool that represents critical aspects of the teachers’ responsibilities involving their daily work with students, the framework does not address the additional responsibilities and expectations required of teachers who work with diverse learners, mainly ELs, nor does it address how such implications would impact the academic success of these students. Thus, there is a pervasive need to provide practical supports and definitions of good teaching as it relates to the practice of bilingual and ESL teachers as well as the need to establish correlations between proven practices, quality teaching, and EL achievement.

One could assume that, based on the results of Hoffman’s (1991) study, effective teachers utilized effective practices, improved their curriculum and instruction, maximized use of instructional time, and frequently monitored student progress and, as a
result, had a positive impact on student achievement. Though it appears that the ways in which the teachers involved in Hoffman’s study showed effectiveness in the practices they used, the teaching qualities they exhibited and how these correlated to student impact were not methodically examined.

Taylor and Pearson (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of prominent reading research with the goal to unravel the “instructional” and “organizational” factors that led to improved student achievement (p. 362). In the thorough analysis of what they identified as effective instructional practices, the authors concluded that effective quality instruction was evident in classrooms where teachers demonstrated excellent classroom management, balanced literacy instruction, small group instruction, and the use of higher order thinking skills (p. 367). Taylor and Pearson stated:

The success of effective schools suggests that the common denominator for reading achievement is commitment and hard work that focuses on the classroom-level and school-level practices consistently identified in this research as important in helping students become proficient readers. (p. 372)

These findings and the results of other studies indicate that systemic efforts in improving student achievement should begin at the classroom and school levels and not from district, state, or nationwide initiatives that are distant from the realities of everyday classroom needs and responsibilities (Raphael et al., 2006). Instruction reforms should begin at the teacher level with individual and collective groups of teachers learning and working together to make change happen and to sustain that change (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2007).
Attributes of Influential and Effective Teachers

In an analysis of multiple sets of studies of effective literacy teachers, Ruddell’s (2004) findings suggest that influential teachers are those who demonstrate high levels of excellence in literacy teaching and those who have a major influence in the personal and academic lives of students. The teachers who make a difference in the academic life of students, according to Ruddell’s conclusions, are individuals who (a) use highly motivating and effective teaching strategies; b) help students with their personal problems; (c) create a feeling of excitement about the subject matter, content, or skill area they teach; (d) exhibit a strong sense of personal caring about the students; and e) demonstrate the ability to adjust instruction to the individual needs of the student (p. 982).

In addition to these attributes, low- and high-achieving students who were surveyed and/or interviewed in Ruddell’s studies identified exemplary teachers in almost identical ways. Ruddell (2004) corroborated students’ perceptions of influential teachers through observations and video-recorded analyses of students from kindergarten through the university level and included the following characteristics:

1. Influential teachers use clearly formulated instructional strategies that provide for instructional monitoring and student feedback on their progress.
2. Influential teachers possess in-depth knowledge of reading and writing processes as well as content knowledge, and they understand how to teach these processes effectively in their classrooms.
3. Influential teachers frequently tap internal student motivation that stimulates intellectual curiosity, explore students’ self-understanding, use aesthetic imagery and expression, and motivate the desire to solve problems.

4. Influential teachers use sparingly any external student motivation, such as using achievement pressure to “please the teacher.” (pp. 982–983)

In addition, Ruddell (2004) provided other important findings. The longitudinal data suggested that between kindergarten and grade eleven, high-achieving students were taught by, on average, 3.2 influential teachers, but low achievers were instructed by only 1.5 influential teachers (p. 982). These findings are a striking contrast to the ratings teachers received in years past as part of outdated teacher evaluation protocols. Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) concluded from their research that students need effective literacy teachers for at least three consecutive years. Although this conclusion is sometimes challenged, the importance of good teaching is not. Fortunately, changes and new efforts in teacher evaluation systems are ensuring that all students from pre-kindergarten to grade 12 have access to quality teachers and quality instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Such changes and systemic efforts, however, cannot be separated from ensuring teachers, particularly teachers of ELs, have access to adequate preparation and supports along the way in order to warrant their success and the achievement of the students they teach (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Walqui & Heritage, 2012).

**Implications for Effective Teaching and Teacher Effectiveness**

Hiebert and Martin (2001) and Darling-Hammond (2000) noted that research-based practices have an effect on student achievement only to the extent that teachers
adopt these practices. Evidence provided by these researchers suggests that although teachers have adopted new forms of instruction, the basic forms of instruction have not changed over the past 100 years. In a study conducted by the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), researchers found that most American teachers, even those who say they implement new reform models, still teach using traditional practices. In other instances, teachers distort research findings to conform to their existing practices. Such reports indicate that teachers do not easily change instructional practices as suggested by research and education reforms (Snow, 2002, pp. 47–48).

How teachers engage in professional experiences that support further development of their knowledge once they finish pre-service requirements is a limitation in the research base that Hoffman, Roller, and the National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction (2001) noted in their study. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) suggested in-service teachers should continue to develop three types of knowledge in order to produce students who are prepared to succeed in the global society: (a) knowledge of the subject matter and curriculum goals, (b) knowledge of the learners and their developmental context, and (c) knowledge of teaching (p. 11). Each of these categories has additional subcomponents that explain in more detail the knowledge and experience teachers must acquire and continue to develop in order to teach effectively as qualified and experienced teachers (p. 11).

Issues about transformation of literacy practices could also be exacerbated if the local schools do not have a clear vision of effective literacy practices, strong leadership, curriculum rigor, and a sense of accountability on everyone’s part (Elmore, 2004; Raphael et al., 2006). These underlying elements are similar to those described by
Hoffman (1991), Taylor and Pearson (2002), and Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005). As a starting point, Raphael et al. (2006) emphasized that, as part of the process in school reform efforts, existing practices at the school and classroom levels must be evaluated so as to identify areas of need, and that any changes made must be guided by relevant research.

**Effective Teaching for ELs and Bilingual Students**

The review of the literature showed that there has been an increased interest in seeking ways to improve the academic performance of students who are linguistically, culturally, ethnically and racially diverse, especially of students who arrive at school with a language other than English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Fisher et al., 2008; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Shatz & Wilkinson, 2013; Soltero 2011; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Teacher interactions with culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students have been studied and found to be turning points in effectively accessing and teaching these students. For instance, in Ladson-Billings’ (2009) seminal study of quality teachers of African American students, the researcher determined that culturally-responsive and linguistically-appropriate instruction do matter in the teaching and learning practices of linguistically and culturally diverse students.

According to Ladson-Billings (2009), effective teaching stems from teachers using culturally relevant practices in their day-to-day instruction with and for all learners in their classroom. Similar to Hoffman’s (1991) and Ruddell’s (2004) findings, high self-esteem and high regard for others are essential characteristics of influential teachers who apply culturally relevant practices in their classrooms. Teachers with culturally relevant practices acknowledge and value racial, cultural, and linguistic differences and use them
as funds of knowledge to motivate engagement and improve the academic, social, and behavioral achievement of their students (Gotlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014; Soltero, 2011). To better understand the linguistic and academic needs of ELs, teachers need to have knowledge of the language acquisition processes and understand and consider the implications of this for teaching and learning.

**Tenets of Language Acquisition**

Language is one of the most captivating aspects of human growth. Language is the window to the world. Language, as a thought process and a social enterprise, depicts the history of who we are, where we come from, and how we develop and interact as humans. Humans use language to function in social and academic life and to reason and communicate for different purposes and in varied contexts. How language develops is an intricate process and one that educators must know and understand in order to make their practice more effective.

One can only marvel at the ease in which infants at just a few months of age begin babbling utterances that in a short time develop into words, which then form into sentences, and then finally result in the expression of complex thoughts (Lightbown & Spada, 2002). How do children at a very early age accomplish the use of language and produce coherent utterances? What helps children learn simple words that later transform into complex thoughts and coherent sentences? Would language develop the same for late language learners and for learners of other languages? It has been noted that the role of a first language positively influences the development of a second or third language (August & Calderon, 2006; Garcia, 2014; Goldenberg, 2008). Though second-language acquisition is a complex process, studies have suggested that children and adults who are
literate in a first language can acquire a new language with more ease if and when they are motivated to learn the new language for practical or integrative reasons (Baca & Escamilla, 2002; Baker et al., 2014; Wong Fillmore, 1985). Valdés et al., (2005) pointed out that children and adults who are learners of English as a new language in the context of school benefit from explicit instruction, practice, and feedback in the use of academic English in ways that are consistent with the language learning objectives and the expectations of school. An on-going debate exists among educators, linguists, psychologists, and neuroscientists as to how language learning occurs in all humans, and this debate is likely to continue for some time (Brunner, 1986; Lantolf & Thorne, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 2002; Stone & Learned. 2014).

Language acquisition appears in the early language of children as a seamless natural process, and the cross-linguistic similarity in which language acquisition occurs in children all over the world is striking (Crain & Lillo-Martin, 2008). During the early months of life, children pay attention to the vocal sounds emitted from their parents and are able to hear and distinguish the subtle differences between these sounds. Within months, children’s own verbal communication begins to reflect the distinct nuances of the languages they are learning in their environment (Lightbown & Spada, 2002; Snow & Ferguson, 1977). By the time children reach the preschool years, their ability to understand and use language to communicate develops more rapidly. However, the metalinguistic awareness—the ability to extract and treat meaning separate from the symbolic representation of language—is a much slower process, and studies have determined that metalinguistic awareness develops rapidly when children begin to learn
to read (Lightbown & Spada, 2002, p. 2). These findings have significant implications for educators and certainly for learners of two or more languages.

Various studies examining the language acquisition process indicate that language acquisition follows developmental stage patterns that span across the early years of childhood. Crain and Lillo-Martin (2008) provided expansive explanations of what children accomplish in terms of language development at each of the developmental stages (pp. 25–32) and conclude that language development in children seems to be internally driven—that it comes from within the child, rather than from any outside influences (p. 14). Much of the research on first language acquisition has focused on how children develop grammatical morphemes in English. Implications for learners of English as another language have yet to be determined.

Lightbown and Spada (2002) pointed to Brown’s 1973 study as one of the best known studies of this development in children’s first language acquisition process. Brown’s longitudinal study of the language development of three children (whom Brown called Adam, Eve, and Sarah) provided a major contribution to the field. Brown discovered how these children acquired 14 grammatical morphemes overtime, and that these morphemes were acquired in a surprisingly similar progression (p. 4). The following is a partial list of the grammatical morphemes Brown studied and these are listed in the approximate order of their acquisition by Adam, Eve, and Sarah:

1. Present progressive: –ing (Mommy running)
2. Plural: –s (two books)
3. Irregular past forms (Baby went)
4. Possessive: ‘s (daddy’s hat)
5. Copula (Annie is a nice girl)

6. Articles: “the” and “a”

7. Regular past: –ed (She walked)

8. Third person singular simple present: –s (She runs)

9. Auxiliary: “be” (He is coming) (p. 5)

According to Brown’s findings, a child who had mastered the morphemes at the bottom of the list was sure to have mastered those at the top, but the reverse was observed to not be possible. These results indicate that there is a natural progression or order of acquisition in a child’s first language. However, the three children that were studied by Brown did not acquire these morphemes at the same rate, which illustrates why some children learn to speak faster and more fluidly than others in early developmental stages (Lightbown & Spada, 2002, p. 5). Yet again, the implications of these findings have not been directly correlated to the development of the English language in students who are learning English as another language.

Another longitudinal study identified that children learned the functions of negation very early and that, even though children had awareness of these negations, they were not able to express these negative functions until much later when they had learned the grammatical rules (e.g., no go, no cookie, I can’t do it, I have no more candies) (Bloom and Lahey, 1978). In their landmark study, Bloom and Lahey (1978) found similar consistency in how children learn to form questions in English. According to their findings, there is a predictable order in which the wh- words emerge. First is the What word (Whatsat? Whatsit? What is that? What are these?). Soon after, Where and Who words emerge. Around the age of two, the word Why comes next; and finally, when
children begin to make sense of different behaviors and have a better sense of time, the *How* and *When* words emerge (Lightbown & Spada, 2002, p. 6–7).

In similar studies, it has been noted as well that children’s development in ability to use more complex questions as they progress in age ties in with their cognitive development and to the types of questions and tasks they are asked and assigned (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011). This notion is of critical importance for ELs and their teachers. For ELs who are developing academic English and are at various levels of proficiency, it is crucial that all teachers of ELs provide their students with sufficient scaffolding in the use of English and assist them in developing the cognitive and metacognitive strategies that promote self-monitoring, self-regulation, and problem solving skills in learning a new language, and in learning content in a new language (Echevarria et al., 2008; Soltero, 2011).

**Language Acquisition Theories**

Sociocultural theory supports communicative approaches to second language learning through mediation processes (Brunner, 1986; Lantolf & Thorne, 2009). Vygotsky’s (1978) *zone of proximal development* approach to instruction suggests that struggling learners, including ELs, would benefit from the support of a more knowledgeable other. Yet, for learners of English as another language, such scaffolds would need to be explicit, consistent, systemic, and contextual. In practical words, language acquisition supports for ELs need to be embedded in their academics, across contents and learning settings.

Vygotsky (1978) described the biological endowments in language learning as the brain’s elementary functions and presented language learning as thought processes that
involved higher forms of thinking. Language learning, according to Vygotsky’s ideas, involves symbolic artifacts and cultural practices that allow humans to shape their innate disposition to language learning. According to Brunner (1986), supporters of the Vygotskian approach to language development, such as Luria and Cobb, argued that environmental input, mediation, and the presence of the knowledgeable other would not only impact the language acquisition of the learner, but aid in the transformation of oneself as an active participant in the language and culture of the community. These theoretical foundations are not only critical to knowing and understanding first language acquisition processes in sociocultural contexts, but their application to language acquisition and the learning of English as another language is fundamental.

Unfortunately, more often than not, English learners in schools across this country are not exposed to rich social and contextual language-learning activities while engaged in complex academic learning. Without appropriate language development scaffolds or mediations, ELs in this country, especially those in middle grades and high school, will continue to struggle in academic learning because they do not have the academic language to support it.

**Second Language Acquisition Perspectives**

In their explanation of second language learning approaches, Lightbown and Spada (2002) failed to include Cummins’ model of the two types of language proficiency ELs develop as they transition to proficient levels in English. Cummins determined that second language learners first develop *basic interpersonal communications skills* (BICS) in English, primarily as a social language, and they acquire it within six months to two years of entering school (Cummins, 1986). This social English is very much dependent
on clues—visual gestures, conversational responses, and physical interactions—that rarely happen in the classroom (Crawford, 1999, p. 130).

Cummins (1986) also suggested that ELs must attain *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP) if they are to succeed in cognitively demanding learning activities in reading, writing, mathematics, science, social science, and other critical content areas. The arrival of the new standards suggests this assertion must become a reality in the instruction of ELs. For this to be possible, Cummins and others have stated that it takes five to seven years to develop CALP, and that cognitive academic language develops best when building on the learners’ experiences and knowledge of their first language (Brunner, 1986; Crawford, 1999; Cummins, 1986; Pinker, 1989). This argument corroborates the fact that, when instruction validates the linguistic and cultural foundations ELs bring to school, meaningful learning and improved performance occurs (Cummins, 2003).

The sociocultural theory, informed by the work of psycholinguists such as Vygotsky, Luria, and Brunner (Brunner, 1986; Lantolf & Thorne, 2009), provides the theoretical foundation that language learning involves thought processes, environmental input, and mediation processes. These are also the foundations of second language learning theories. Based on these premises, second language learners begin to reconstruct themselves as learners and members of the environment through their new language, their appropriation of a new inner voice from the voices, sounds, and symbols around them. In doing so, second language learners experience Vygotsky’s (1978) ontogenesis process as they develop their inner speech from the social speech of others and from the environment around them. To this end, speech, a form of productive language,
demonstrates language competence in the highest forms of thought and process, and is the result of language acquisition and not the cause of it (Krashen, 1985; Lantolf & Thorne, 2009).

Krashen’s second language acquisition and language learning hypothesis align with the psycholinguistic and sociocultural theoretical foundations. According to Krashen (1985, 1992), language is acquired at the subconscious level, and language learning occurs when the learner knows and thinks about the language he or she is learning. When language learners receive enough comprehensible input from their academic, social, and community environment, language is acquired. In the same way, when language learners become conscious of their language use and monitor their use and understanding of the language, thought and mediation processes are involved at the subconscious and conscious levels—and through these processes, language is acquired and learned in the natural order (Krashen, 1985; Lantolf & Thorne, 2009).

Norton and Toohey (2004) proposed that critical approaches to second language education require commitment to social transformation, justice, and equality. Issues of educational inequities for both teachers of ELs and ELs themselves are very real in many U.S. classrooms. Legislation has touted the importance of highly qualified teachers, yet has failed to recognize bilingual/ESL education as a core content area for teacher preparation; thus, it has failed to address the academic needs of ELs (Harper & de Jong, 2009). Unfortunately, antagonistic views about ELs and towards bilingualism continue. The research, advocacy, and reform communities need to do more to advocate for education equities for ELs and their teachers in this country.
New Directions in Academic Language Learning, and Implications for ELs

New findings and new directions in academic language learning expand the sociolinguists’ perspectives on language learning (Brunner, 1986; Lantolf & Thorne, 2009; Vygotsky, 1968) and Krashen’s (1985, 1992) and Cummins’ (1986) views of language acquisition of English as a second language. From the notion that language is primarily a social enterprise to the notion of thinking about language as syntactic, lexical, and phonemic systems, Walqui and van Lier (2010) proposed that understanding language “is primarily a matter of understanding utterances based on an understanding of the contexts in which they are expressed” (p. 4). Walqui and van Lier suggested that in the context of school, educators should focus on the role of language as a tool for action and communication. For ELs, it is pivotal that, in the context of schooling, language interactions between teachers and students and among students are purposefully planned and utilized in the construction of academic and linguistic knowledge (Echevarria et al., 2008; Soltero, 2011; Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

The common view that children, if immersed in a new language, will acquire it with ease is challenged by the fact that, when it comes to school, language becomes a stumbling block to learning for many of these children for two important reasons: (a) the complexity of acquiring a new language is ignored, and (b) teachers are not equipped with knowledge about those complexities in order to foster the academic success of their language learners (Shatz & Wilson, 2013). Garcia (2014) presented a renewed understanding of the more dynamic interdependence of language and literacy skills reflected in the CCSS that requires all students to use their language abilities to understand and produce texts. This new awareness of the interdependence of language
and literacy is reflected in the practice of simultaneous biliteracy instruction—an instructional approach described as a flexible process in which students’ interaction with two written languages at the same time mediates their learning of both languages (Garcia, 2014, p. 153).

Recent educational policies and reform actions have placed a call to action to better prepare ELs for the rigorous demands of the CCSS and high accountability tests (Pompa & Hakuta, 2012). The CCSS expect ELs to perform at the levels of their English-speaking counterparts and to demonstrate use of the academic language in deep and accelerated ways (Walqui & Heritage, 2012). The high expectations and language demands of the CCSS represent a challenge for meeting the varied and complex needs of ELs. They also present an opportunity in that there is a growing understanding of the nature and functionality of the language needed in school, which has moved the field towards “content-based and task-based teaching” (Harper & de Jong, 2009, p. 141).

Thus, supporting the academic language development of ELs across grade levels and instructional contexts has become paramount. In addition to understanding the complex processes of language learning, and second language acquisition in particular, educators of ELs must understand and be mindful of issues that affect second language learning, such as individual differences of their students’ gender, age, motivation, attitudes, environmental learning, and the style of language instruction (Norton & Toohey, 2004).

In improving classroom practices for language learners, Cazden (2001) proposed that classroom discourse should represent the values and cultural inputs of students, and teachers should provide ample opportunities and venues for using the target language in content learning. This practice is paramount in the instruction of middle grade ELs. All
language learners—in particular adolescents—need to be exposed to meaningful instruction and language learning activities that validate their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and that motivate them to learn and to use the target language for academic and social purposes to much higher levels of cognition (Reese & Gallimore, 2000).

**Implications for Effective Language and Literacy Instruction for Middle Grade ELs**

New demands in teaching and learning, and the need to ensure quality preparation and professional development of teachers—in particular, middle grade bilingual, ESL and content teachers of English learners—call for additional studies to examine the preparation and unique professional needs of teachers. What language and literacy expertise do teachers of ELs need? How do teachers of ELs determine what is important for them to teach and how? What are the instructional goals and priorities teachers of ELs have for these students? What do all academic teachers need to know about content, pedagogy, language, literacy, and instruction in general that will benefit all students and assist the teachers in becoming effective? Ruddell (2004) offered a list of ten essential components for increasing the effectiveness of literacy teachers:

1. Develop clear purpose and instructional plans that facilitate successful development and resolution of instructional episodes.

2. Emphasize activation and use of students’ prior beliefs, knowledge, and experiences in the construction of meaning.

3. Incorporate higher-level thinking questions, questioning strategies, and sensitivity to students’ responses in conducting instruction.

4. Orchestrate instruction using a problem-solving approach to encourage intellectual discovery by posting, exploring, and resolving problems.
5. Monitor students’ thinking, use verbal feedback, and ask subsequent questions that encourage active thinking.

6. Understand the importance of text, task, source of authority, and sociocultural meanings in negotiating and constructing meaning.

7. Involve students in meaning negotiation based on the text by encouraging interaction between the students, the teacher, and the classroom community of learners.

8. Share teacher authority in discussions to encourage student thinking, responsibility, interaction, and ownership of ideas in discussion.

9. Understand instructional stance, the role it plays in setting instructional purpose for students, and the importance of using internal reader motivation to enhance student interest and authentic meaning construction.

10. Develop sensitivity to individual student needs, motivations, and aptitudes, but hold appropriate and high expectations for learning. (p. 994)

In regard to connecting the notions of teacher effectiveness and effective practices for all students, some researchers have suggested that good instruction in general is good instruction for ELs as well, but that additional attention to bilingual and ESL pedagogy is needed (Goldenberg, 2008; Jimenez at al., 2015). Goldenberg (2008) concluded that ELs learn in much the same way as native speakers of English, given that ELs also receive instructional modifications and enhancements as appropriate and needed. In addition, Goldenberg identified the following essential modifications that teachers of ELs should consider when instructing these students:
1. making text in English more comprehensible by using texts with content that is familiar to students,
2. building vocabulary in English,
3. using the primary language for support,
4. supporting ELs in English-only settings,
5. assessing knowledge and language separately,
6. promoting productive interaction among ELs and English speakers, and
7. adding time for processing of language and content knowledge.

Although the recommendations provided by both Ruddell (2004) and Goldenberg (2008) are not exhaustive, they provide a recipe for the success of any classroom teacher, including teachers of ELs, and these should be part of any well designed and structured lesson plan or unit of study that aims to improve the performance of all student outcomes, including those of ELs. Ruddell’s (2004) recommendations and studies on the influential teacher are founded and guided by socio-cognitive theories and by the meaning-construction and meaning-negotiation processes. I argue that Ruddell’s approach to literacy development also embraces Vygotsky’s sociocultural views in that the meaning-negotiation and meaning-construction processes involve the origin of language and thought, which in my opinion, and in the opinion of Lantolf and Thorne (2006), are the foundation of all learning.

In regard to the achievement of ELs, there is no one model or one set of strategies that will yield the high levels of achievement anyone would want for these students. However, a solid foundation of knowledge and pedagogy, deep understanding of language acquisition and literacy development, clear goals and expectations, and ongoing
supports for both teachers and students will certainly improve the performance of students and improve teacher quality and the quality of teaching of all teachers. Goldenberg (2008) stated: “Whatever the explanations for these achievement gaps, they bode ill for English learners’ future educational and vocational options. They also bode ill for society as a whole, since the costs of large-scale underachievement are very high” (p. 11).

Indeed, teachers of ELs find themselves under a lot of pressure. However, knowing about language development, the linguistic and academic needs of ELs should not be the sole responsibility of the bilingual and/or ESL teacher, but of all educators and administrators (Goldenberg, 2008; Harper & de Jong, 2009). As long as the education field continues to ignore these issues, ELs in this country will continue to struggle and fail in higher education. The language and literacy research communities must also do their part in conducting studies that are joint, multidimensional, and multilayered and that include perspectives and approaches from both fields.

**Summary: Ongoing Challenges**

The challenges of educating middle grade ELs are complex and varied, but having knowledgeable and skilled educators working with these students would certainly alleviate some of these challenges. The teacher research explored in this chapter indicated that some progress has been made in addressing the type of knowledge and skills all teachers must acquire in order to successfully educate all students (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2013; Hammerness et al., 2005). It also showed little is known about the preparation and supports teachers of English learners receive and/or require to
efficiently educate ELs in middle grade and high schools in particular (Harper & de Jong, 2009; TESOL International Association, 2013b; Valdés et al., 2014).

The literature examined in this chapter suggested that strategic and situated use of language and literacy play a key role in developing the vocabulary and language required for effective schooling and how learning academic vocabulary is essential to language acquisition (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts Taffe, 2013; Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2002; Nagy & Townsend, 2012; Young & Hadaway, 2006). The literature also noted that academic language and vocabulary knowledge develop and expand in academic contexts (Blachowicz, et al., 2013; Echevarria & Graves, 2011; Gibbons, 2002; Nagy & Townsend, 2012; Soltero, 2011; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). However, some researchers, such as Weber (1991) and Gee (2001), suggested that the body of research has shown narrow and sometimes inconclusive findings on teacher practices that include the instruction of these critical components in the education of ELs. Therefore, more studies are needed to exemplify the instructional routines and tools teachers of ELs employ in the instruction of these students.

Despite of the limited knowledge about middle grade teachers of ELs, many teachers have found ways to attain the preparation and expertise necessary to have their ELs become accomplished learners and users of complex content, academic language, and literacy in English. The insights gained from this study can help develop a better understanding of how bilingual, ESL, and content teachers develop into effective teachers of middle grade ELs; what knowledge, dispositions, and instructional priorities they bring into the teaching of these students; how teachers make decisions on planning, implementing, and redirecting instruction that impact the academic success of middle
grade ELs, and the type of professional learning and supports they seek to further their practice and the achievement of their students.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Although teachers recognize the importance of language skills for learning, they typically have little education in the nature of languages, the acquisition of them, or the many ways languages relate to cognitive or social development. (Shatz & Wilkinson, 2013, p. 5)

Research can be defined as a systematic, purposeful, and disciplined process that is used to collect and analyze information for the purpose of increasing our understanding of a particular situation or phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Research is “a matter of process as well as outcomes” and an important aspect of it is discovery (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 5). Research suggests improvements for practice, though the results of research efforts may not be what are expected (Creswell, 2012). Educators are on a constant quest for improvement and this requires looking into issues and probing for potential solutions. Furthermore, research results help teachers and other educators become more effective in their practice; this effectiveness translates into better outcomes for students (Creswell, 2012, p. 4).

According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), several questions are important to the understanding of research—the pursuit of knowledge:

1. Where does knowledge come from?
2. What is meant by systematically searching for knowledge?
3. How and by whom will the knowledge be used? (p. 2)

There are a number of systems of inquiry or ways of knowing that guide research and are used in the human and natural sciences. Within each of these models of inquiry there are corresponding epistemologies, methodologies, and selected methods (Lukenchuk, 2013).
The most common approaches to research are quantitative and qualitative methods, and in recent years, mixed methods research (Creswell, 2013; Teddie & Tahsakkori, 2009).

Denzin and Lincoln (2008b) posited that quantitative studies concentrate on the measurements and analyzes of causal relationships between variables, hypothesis, and numbers, not processes (p. 14). In quantitative research for example, “survey design provides numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2014, p. 155). In contrast, qualitative studies have as their goal the finding of theory, rather than verification of it (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Qualitative researchers also emphasize the socially constructed nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and the topic of study, and the situational limitations that influence inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b, p. 14).

Another aspect of qualitative research is the opportunity to provide rich and meaningful descriptions of the individual’s lived experiences, meaningful insights into the phenomenon, and an increased understanding from the perspectives of those involved (Merriam, 2000). The mixed methods tradition, on the other hand, employs a combination of the techniques found in both the qualitative and quantitative approaches, and it can simultaneously address a range of both confirmatory and exploratory questions (Teddie & Tahsakkori, 2009, p. 26).

Identifying trends and studying the background, preparation, and attitudes of a sample of the population of interest and interpreting the rich and thick descriptions of the participants’ lived experiences as well as the insights gained from them are methods that are significant to this study. The relatively low number of research studies that focused on the preparation, dispositions, and decision making of middle grade teachers of English
learners (ELs) with respect to the instruction and performance of the student population they teach also propelled the need for this study. The mixed methods approach was well suited for this study because it enabled me to develop a deep understanding of what and how middle grade teachers of ELs teach their students as well as uncover the factors and perceived beliefs that influence their instructional decisions, effectiveness of instruction, and professional growth.

**Research Purposes and Questions**

This study draws on the pragmatic paradigm that distinguishes truth not as “justified belief in a strict epistemological sense, but rather the effectiveness of knowledge demonstrated by the effectiveness of action” (Lukenchuk, 2013, p. 68). Theoretically, pragmatism connects strongly with an empirical-analytical paradigm and has tentative connections with interpretive theories (Lukenchuk, 2013). In education research, pragmatic inquiry involves both quantitative and qualitative inquiry approaches to data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013); thus this paradigm fits well with this study.

Because of Dewey’s strong influence on education, this investigation is grounded on his idea that the sole goal of education is growth, both for teachers and students (Gutek, 2004). According to Dewey’s views, authentic educational goals come from within the person and from the person’s own activity in the environment; as such, growth means that the individual is “learning more effective and meaningful ways to deal with a changing reality and direct or re-direct the course of his or her own life” (Gutek, 2004, p. 76). The assumption then is that if teachers, in this case teachers of middle grade ELs,
think about and act in ways to better their practice and their profession as a whole, the outcomes of their students will improve as well.

Inspired by these views, this investigation focused on elaborating on and adding clarity to the knowledge, preparation, dispositions, and experiences middle grade teachers of ELs bring to the instruction of their students. This study also aims to understand the professional learning opportunities middle grade teachers seek for expanding their professional growth and informing their practice. A third aim of this study is to better understand how these teachers make instructional decisions related to the language and literacy development of middle grade ELs and identify the factors that influence these decisions.

The central question that guided this study is: *What makes the middle grade teachers’ of English learners instructional practices useful and effective and what influences their instructional decisions when teaching middle-grade English learners?*

Additional questions include:

1. What are the middle grade teachers’ of English learners dispositions for providing focused language and literacy instruction in the context of the Common Core and how are these dispositions being shaped?

2. What are the qualifications, preparation, experience, and professional priorities teachers of middle grade ELs report are necessary in the instruction of their students?

3. What are the professional learning needs of teachers of middle grade ELs and how are they addressing these needs?
This chapter elaborates on: (a) the theoretical positioning of the study, (b) its research design, (c) methods of data collection, (d) data analysis and interpretation studies, (e) validation criteria, (f) the role of a researcher, and (g) ethical considerations.

**Theoretical Positioning of the Study**

**Pragmatism**

Pragmatism emerged in the work of American philosophers—mainly Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), and John Dewey (1859–1952). These philosophers posited pragmatism as a system of inquiry that emphasized the practical application of ideas by testing them in human experience (Gutek, 2004, p. 70). Pragmatism is viewed as a philosophy that “encourages [one] to seek out the processes and to do the things that work best to help us achieve desirable ends” (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 119).

Peirce developed the theory of pragmatism. On the testing of ideas, Peirce’s theory suggests that our way of making sense of constant change is through a theory of probability and testing ideas in experience, in the arena of human affairs (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 126). On Peirce’s theory of probability, Gutek (2004) asserted that because certain actions bring reactions that can be expected, it is probable that such reactions will occur at some point (p. 71). Summarizing Peirce’s theory, Gutek (2004) further explained: “With enough work, investigation, and thought, it is possible to formulate tentative generalizations, but never ironclad laws about how the world works (p. 71).

William James popularized pragmatism and in his view of it, knowledge or truth emerges from acting on ideas and in the consequences of ideas. James would say that the
“proof is in the pudding”; that is, “before one can tell if the pudding (the idea) is any good, one has to taste (test) it” (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 127). John Dewey systematized and moved forward Peirce’s and James’ leading ideas of pragmatism to develop his philosophy of experimentalism and instrumentalism. Ozmon and Craver (2008) stated that Dewey’s attention to social action and education gave his philosophy a practical orientation grounded on problem-solving constructs that to this date are still widely used in education and social reform inquiries. Dewey believed that people should make use of ideas for purposes that are useful in solving social problems. By testing the ideas, reflecting on them, and reassessing the ideas as instruments in the solutions of human problems, “we can learn from our efforts and redirect them to better effect” (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 130).

Overall, pragmatists suggest that pragmatism, which is derived from the Greek work pragma (action or deed), “emphasizes the synergy of relations between theory and practice, knowledge, and action” (Lukenchuk, 2013, p. 18). This study is pragmatic in its purposes to: (a) examine the preparation and expertise of middle grade teachers of ELs and the ways in which they enact these in the instruction of their students; (b) identify the ideas and attitudes that guide the decision making of middle grade teachers of ELs and how these are useful in teaching and improving their professional growth, and probably impact the achievement of the student population they serve; and (c) reflect on, interpret, and draw probable solutions to the problems or issues that surface from the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis.

Researchers, school district administrators, and state and federal legislation continue to seek ways that best secure and advance the educational opportunities of
English learners in this country. However, little has been done to identify the preparation, expertise, and professional development that middle grade teachers find meaningful in regard to the instruction of English learners. An additional matter of importance is the fact that more needs to be known about the ways teachers’ dispositions and beliefs influence their instructional decisions and the factors that impact their practice and the performance of their students. In pragmatist terms, this study seeks to investigate: (a) the what and how teachers of middle grade ELs learn and teach, (b) how they seek opportunities for growth and how they act on such opportunities, (c) how they approach and problem-solve the challenges they encounter for the betterment of their students, (d) how they act on their beliefs, and (e) how they reflect, assess, and redirect their actions.

**Constructionism**

Nelson Goodman, a world-known philosopher, positions the constructivist theory as a philosophy of science, a philosophy of art, a philosophy of cognition, and as a philosophy of understanding (Bruner, 1986, p. 95). Goodman argues that what we call the world is a product of some mind whose symbolic procedures construct the world (p. 95). Goodman insists that the creating of worlds is an intricate set of activities made not with hands, but with minds, or rather with languages or other symbol systems, and that these worlds have been constructed of other worlds, created by others, “which we have taken as given” (Bruner, 1986, p. 96). Constructionism is another lens through which this study can be conceptualized.

Immanuel Kant first developed the constructivist view that the world we experience is a product of thought (Brosio, 2000; Bruner, 1986). In Kant’s view, we all
have certain knowledge by virtue of having human minds. Goodman used Kant’s view as a starting point and offered a more relativistic view in that we do not begin with something prior to all reasoning, but rather “with the kinds of construction that lead to the creation of worlds and that these constructions have in common certain premises for granted, as stipulations” (Bruner, 1986, p. 97). To rightfully interpret Goodman’s intent, we have to ask the hard but inevitable questions about the mental operations necessary to construct a world like that of the world of middle grade teachers of ELs. Once these teachers’ world becomes a “conventional version, we may ask how it operates within the domain that it has taken as given” (Bruner, 1986, p. 101).

The belief that human reason represents the catalyst for human action that could free the world from ignorance, superstition, and injustice has implications for educators because it connects understanding to the possibility for action and improvement (Brosio, 2000, p. 80). Brosio (2000) suggested that as humans think about their conditions and attempt to change social and physical realities that they find unjust, “they change themselves as a result of their collective struggle” (p. 80). In this constructivist view of epistemology and human action, it is implicit that individuals actively construct their reality as they engage in collective action.

In making sense of the human construction of knowledge, Stake (1995) suggested that we may conceive of three realities:

One is an external reality capable of stimulating us in simple ways, but of which we know nothing other than our interpretations of those stimuli. The second is a reality formed of those interpretations—an experiential reality representing external reality . . . and the third is a universe of integrated representations, our rational reality. (p. 100)
According to Stake, all three realities exist and they each and all have important effects or influences on experience. From Stake’s point of view, none of these realities can be ignored because the aim of research is not to discover, but “to construct a clearer reality and a more sophisticated reality” (p. 101). Following this constructivist view of knowledge, the role of interpreter and gatherer of interpretations is central for the researcher. As such, the researcher does not need to avoid delivering generalizations, “but a constructivist view encourages providing readers with good raw material for their own generalization” (Stake, 1995, p. 102).

The constructivist perspective is helpful in understanding and interpreting the lived experiences, perceived beliefs, and realities of study participants. Interview participants brought their own set of experiences, expertise, attitudes, and professional knowledge that they employed in the education of their middle grade ELs. Across the nation, the capacity and responsibilities of teachers of English learners are continuously challenged by predisposed practices regulated by district, state, and federal policies and by other issues outside of their control. Therefore, teachers of ELs, particularly teachers of middle grade ELs, rely heavily on their own ideas and actions about what and how to teach their students.

In an effort to illuminate how middle grade teachers of ELs prepared for their important role as teachers of these students, utilized their beliefs and knowledge to make instructional decisions that benefited their practice and student learning, engaged in collaboration with others, and sought opportunities for their own professional growth, this study focused on learning from the sample population who completed the survey and participated in the interviews.
Situated primarily within the pragmatic paradigm of research, this study is informed to a great extent by the concepts and assumptions of constructionism. These perspectives help to explain and interpret the nature of the realities reported by the participants in the context of the world in which they operate and influenced by interactions with the people with whom they work and the students they serve. The participants’ thoughts and the interpretation of the thoughts that form them and the ways in which these ideas are enacted, reflected, assessed, and redirected helped make meaning of their lived experiences and constructed realities.

**Research Design**

This mixed-methods study is positioned within the research paradigm of pragmatism that advocates a utilitarian value of ideas and action-oriented approaches to research and, therefore, promotes the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). According to Creswell (2014), the use of this design was based on the premise that the blending of data provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than can be gleaned from individual quantitative or qualitative studies. The complexity of the topics examined in this study warranted the need to draw from different sources of data in an effort to garner a deeper understanding of the preparation, practice, and decision-making approaches that middle grade teachers of ELLs employ in the education of these students.

To conduct this research, an explanatory sequential mixed methods design was used (Creswell, 2014; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). This research method involved a two-phase process in which quantitative data was collected in phase one through an online survey. Survey data were analyzed and interpreted during the administration and
at the completion of the survey. Survey results were then used to inform phase two, the qualitative data collection and analysis process (Creswell, 2014). Through this two-phase process, survey questions and response results were used to tailor the semi-structured interview questions and guide the analysis of the interview data. The findings from both the survey and interview data were connected and interpreted in drawing conclusions. Figure 1 is adapted from Creswell’s (2014) work. It shows the process by which the data collection and analysis from the explanatory sequential mixed methods design was carried out.

![Explanatory Sequential Strategy Diagram](image)

*Figure 1. Explanatory sequential strategy.*

The quantitative results helped assess and describe the frequency and importance of trends identified from the survey data. The general intent of this design was to use the qualitative data to probe in more detail the initial quantitative results. Creswell (2014)
posited that “the idea of explaining the mechanism—how the variables interact—in more depth through the qualitative follow-up is a key strength of this research design” (p. 224).

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted in a large urban school district in a Midwest state. According to the district’s 2014 demographic data, there were approximately 400,000 students in the district. Of these students approximately 65,000, or 16% of the student population, were identified as English learners (ELs). Approximately 46% of the EL population in the district was Spanish speaking. Of the 65,000 ELs, over 7,500 were in grades six through eight and were required by state law and district policies to receive English language supports through participation in bilingual or ESL programs of instruction. Many of these middle grade ELs were not in English language support programs due to parental refusal to receive these services. Also, ELs who had transitioned out of the bilingual and ESL programs per the state’s criteria may have still required additional language and academic supports since academic English may take five to seven years to develop (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Furthermore, per the district’s 2002 bilingual education policy, all ELs, including those in middle grades, still qualified for and were required to receive language supports for two additional years after they reached the state’s proficiency criteria.

In 2013, there were approximately 24,000 teachers in the district, and about 3,500 of them were identified as bilingual and/or ESL teachers. Of these, approximately 2,000 teachers were assigned to teach ELs across grades and content areas. Overall, the majority of the bilingual and/or ESL teachers taught ELs in the primary grades, and a little over 400 were assigned as the bilingual and/or ESL teachers of middle grade ELs.
Middle grade teachers in the district instructed in departmentalized settings, and bilingual and/or ESL teachers were no exception. However, the instructional context in which these teachers taught ELs varied according to program design, the EL population, and each school’s priorities and needs. The bilingual and/or ESL teachers assigned to work with middle grade ELs were not necessarily assigned to teach a specific content area, unless they held the appropriate middle grade and content area endorsements. However, because of the high demand for bilingual educators, some of these teachers may have taught middle grade content without having the appropriate qualifications.

**Sample Selection**

For the purpose of the quantitative phase of the study, a non-probability convenience sampling approach was used to select individuals who volunteered to participate in the research. According to Creswell (2013), a convenience sampling is used when participants are available and willing to be studied. Although it is typically difficult to describe the population from which a sample is drawn and from whom results can be generalized when nonrandom samples are used, a convenience sampling is widely used in educational research because the sample can provide meaningful information for answering research questions and hypotheses (Creswell, 2013). Sampling biases were avoided to the extent possible by not soliciting individuals who might have been interested in participating based on previous working relationships with me or some conflict of interest involving the topic of the study.

With the intent of collecting quantitative and qualitative data from the potential respondents through an online survey and individual semi-structured interviews, the district’s middle grade teachers of ELs were invited to participate in the study through
invitations extended through school principals, flyers, and e-mails. Some of the participants’ e-mail addresses were obtained from a dated list of teachers and from recommendations from other teachers, colleagues, or principals. Although the final group of interview participants was mainly drawn from schools that had a large population of English learners, all available middle grade teachers in the district were invited to participate in the survey process. It was challenging to ascertain the exact number of individuals who were targeted because I relied heavily on the collaboration of principals and their goodwill in disseminating study information to their teachers. Nonetheless, using estimates based on the number of middle grade teachers in schools with large EL populations, approximately 400 candidates were targeted.

The solicitation efforts consisted of the following steps: (a) developing a solicitation flyer with all pertinent information about the study such as the purpose of the research, contact information for me and the degree program institution, and a direct link to the online survey; (b) identifying schools with a substantial population of middle grade ELs from information available online; (c) soliciting permission from school principals via telephone, e-mail, or in person and using contact information available from existing records and on the schools’ and district’s websites to invite potential candidates; (d) distributing flyers in schools with middle grade ELs to encourage middle grade teachers’ participation; and (f) using information from survey responses to invite potential participants to take part in the interview phase of the study. The sample selection or participant recruitment process is illustrated in Figure 2.
As described in Figure 2, a purposeful sampling approach was used to select individuals interested in participating in the interviews. This approach was used with the intention of developing deep understanding of the findings ascertained from the online survey, allowing for varied perspectives, and probing for rich and thick descriptions of the topics that guided the study (Creswell, 2012). By using this approach, a focused selection of individuals who could provide rich insights and descriptions of the study topics took place so as “to learn and understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p. 206). An initial step was to ask the survey respondents to indicate whether they were willing to participate in an interview to help further investigate the topics of the study. Twenty survey participants volunteered to participate in the interviews and provided their contact information.
Via e-mail and telephone contact, all 20 candidates were invited to participate in the interviews, but only 16 of these candidates confirmed their participation. I verified the participation of these individuals based on the specified interview criteria shown in Table 1. Interestingly, all but three individuals met all elements of the interview criteria. One of these three candidates was bilingual and in the process of completing her ESL endorsement; the other two individuals did not have their ESL endorsements either, but were still teaching middle grade ELs. Because of their teaching roles, their desire to obtain the ESL endorsement, and the rich information they provided in the survey, I decided to include these three potential candidates in the interview process. Table 1 shows the criteria used to determine whether candidates qualified for the interview phase of the study.
Table 1

Criteria for Selecting Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Selecting Interview Participants</th>
<th>Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A minimum of three years teaching experience in the district</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A minimum of three years of experience in teaching English learners in bilingual or monolingual settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Currently providing language and literacy instruction to English learners in grades six through eight</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certification and Credentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• K-9, 6-12, or K-12 certification or licensure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bilingual and/or ESL endorsement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Masters in Bilingual or Literacy Education (preferred)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ELA or Social Studies endorsement (preferred)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Completed reading literacy courses or participated in literacy professional development (preferred)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expressed use of the WIDA ELD Standard according to survey responses and/or telephone/e-mail conversation with the researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expressed an informed understanding of the application of the Common Core State Standards through survey responses, or telephone/e-mail conversation with the researcher</td>
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</table>
Potential study participants for the survey and interviews were advised that their participation in this study was strictly voluntary. Volunteer participants received the appropriate consent forms prior to each phase of the data collection process. All individuals who completed the online survey were invited to participate in a drawing for a $50 gift certificate. Individuals who participated in the interviews received a small incentive—a $25 gift certificate—as a token of appreciation for their participation.

**Instrument Design**

**Online Survey**

This study sought to identify and describe trends in attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics of middle grade teachers of English learners in regard to the education of these students in the district and a cross-sectional survey design was a good procedure to use for this purpose (Creswell, 2012). Using a survey (see Appendix A) to collect quantitative data was an economical and efficient approach to gathering large amounts of data from many participants in a short period of time. Thus, the cross-sectional survey was purposely designed to collect data that described trends and characteristics of a large population to aid in the examination of current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and practices of that population. The cross-sectional survey design helped relate the attitudes and beliefs of the participants to their behaviors and actions with respect to the instruction of middle grade English learners. This design also allowed for comparisons among the teaching groups that emerged from the survey findings (Creswell, 2012).

The Survey Monkey software and features were used to create the 41-question survey, monitor data trends, and analyze final results. The web-based survey included the consent form, research title, and a brief introduction with an explanation of the nature
and purpose of the study (Ravid, 2015). Brief information about the intended benefits for the district as well as the participants was included in the survey. Closing instructions and a brief note of appreciation were included at the end of the survey.

The survey questionnaire maintained a consistent focus on the research topic throughout and consisted of various response formats or types of scales for measuring the attitudes, beliefs, self-perceptions, aspirations, and a variety of constructs toward the topic of study (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). Some of the response formats included Likert scales, semantic differentials, checklists, and rank orders. The traditional Likert scales include 5-point scales with a variant of neither agree nor disagree as the midpoint of the scale (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). The Likert scales used in this study provided participants answer options such as never, rarely, sometimes, regularly, and most often, with the variant of sometimes as the midpoint scale.

Another common attitude scale that was used in this study was the semantic differential. For instance, using this scale, respondents were asked to express their opinions about topics such as the use of district-developed resources by rating it on a series of bipolar scales. These scales typically have seven points and have contrasting adjectives at the end points (Ravid, 2015; Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). In this study, for example, respondents were asked to rate answer choices from 6-point scales with the scale of not useful at all at one end point and most useful at the other end point.

Checklists were also included in the survey; this allowed participants to check all appropriate response categories for concepts that were of interest to the study. Another response format was the rank order scales. Using the rank order scales, participants were asked to rank characteristics of topics related to the study in terms of priority of
importance or level of challenge. Survey items also collected data regarding the personal attributes of the participants that might have been related to their sense of efficacy in decision making toward the instruction of their students (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). The survey also included two or three open-ended questions and opportunities for providing comments to illuminate some aspect of the topics or situation—the phenomenon under study (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The variety of survey questions allowed for ample flexibility in identifying and classifying participants’ response patterns and trends (Creswell, 2014; Ravid, 2015). The survey items were organized logically and by categories. Similar items were clustered together from general to more specific to make certain there was consistent meaning for participants and to facilitate the interpretation of emergent themes.

The data collected through Survey Monkey allowed for numerical analysis and interpretation of findings (Ravid, 2015). Question items designed to collect background and demographic data for the purpose of describing the sample and interpreting the data were mostly placed at the end of the survey. This decision was based on the premise that:

Items such as those seeking demographic information are considered more sensitive and objectionable and people are more likely to answer them at the end . . . After they have already completed the survey questions, the respondents can better see the importance, relevancy, and usefulness of providing demographic data. (Ravid, 2015, p. 9)

The content of the survey derived from the questions that informed this study. The question and answer format of the survey described in previous paragraphs was designed to gather critical information about their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors participants demonstrated in regard to the knowledge, preparation, and expertise they employ in the instruction of English learners in middle grades. Survey items also focused
on collecting information about the teaching roles and instructional contexts of the participants as well as questions related to their professional development and professional learning needs. The survey included questions that asked for some background information on the participants, such as level of education, country of origin, languages known other than English, number of years teaching, and certifications.

**Interviews**

Interviews are a powerful strategy for gathering important information and rich details about the perspectives and behaviors of study participants in relation to the topic of study (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). Interviews are important for the reason that they allow for a one-to-one interaction between the researcher and the participants and because they are the main road to multiple realities (Stake, 1995). Qualitative accounts of how things work mostly rely on personal experiences and preconceived or constructed realities. Individual interviews are applied in a number of situations and for various purposes such as obtaining the unique perspectives of the interviewees on information the researcher cannot ascertain otherwise (Stake, 2010). According to the ideas of Stanley Payne, the art of asking questions starts at the fundamental step of forming questions on the basis of what it needs to be known (Stake, 1995, p. 65).

In qualitative research, the use of interviews is most common for gathering personal experiences that aggregate to larger insights that serve as evidence for the researcher’s assertions of what things are and how they work (Stake, 2010). In this study, semi-structured interviews were employed. These consisted of open-ended questions as well as clarifying or elaborating probes that served to obtain diverse perspectives representing complex views on the topics of study (Creswell, 2012). A draft of the
interview guide was developed for probing survey questions critical to the study that I assumed needed additional examination. The semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B) was created once the preliminary analysis of the survey responses was complete.

The open-ended or semi-structured interview questions expanded on the themes that surfaced from the survey data and included additional items that allowed for deep interpretation of the constructed realities of the participants. The interview guide facilitated fluid conversations and flexibility of responses and helped explain the results in more depth (Creswell, 2014). Fontana and Frey (2008) explained that open-ended interviews can provide greater breadth of information and help understand complex ideas and issues without imposing any priorities, categorization of ideas, or preconceived notions that may limit the inquiry.

The semi-structured interview questions designed to expand on the background and demographic data of the participants were placed at the beginning of the interview guide, contrary to their placement in the survey questionnaire. The background questions helped me to obtain raw, vivid, and emotional experiences and feelings from the participants that illuminated the lived experiences of these individuals as teachers of middle grade ELs and as professionals in the field of education. These questions were useful in helping me and the participants feel comfortable with one another from the start of the interview, allowing for meaningful conversations and interactions between them (Creswell, 2012; Fontana & Frey, 2008).
Calibration and Field Test of Survey Instrument

Before administering the survey to the sample participants, a group of six individuals composed of bilingual and/or ESL specialists, literacy specialists, university professors, and a research and evaluation expert in the district reviewed and provided feedback on the survey questionnaire. The feedback received from this group of experts helped ensure the clarity and coherence of the language and terms used in the questions as well as assisted in calibrating the consistency of the research topic throughout the questionnaire. This method of question review from a group of specialists and experts in bilingual education, language and literacy instruction, and research and evaluation allowed me to make revisions in relation to content and word usage as well as adjust items as appropriate to the participants’ roles, the research topic, and the research site (Creswell, 2014).

The survey was field tested by teachers who represented a sample of the targeted population. For this field test, six educators from the schools and the district areas with large EL populations were approached and invited to take the trial survey. Four individuals with bilingual and/or ESL backgrounds completed the trial survey and their feedback helped in further adjusting the length of the survey, improving the questions, and establishing the content validity of the items. It took the trial individuals between 20 and 30 minutes to complete. Though these volunteers also found the survey to be lengthy, they all agreed the number and type of questions included were valuable in gathering information about the topics of study.
Quantitative Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

Data Collection

The quantitative data collection began by inviting potential middle grade teachers of ELs to participate in the study by taking the online survey. The survey consisted of 41 questions that included checklists; differential, rating, and ranking scales; categorical choice questions; and a couple of short open-ended responses. This survey was administered to the sample population over a six-week period and it was estimated to take 20–30 minutes to complete.

The survey was administered in fall 2014 and the process began with the dissemination of information to school principals. A three-phase survey administration procedure was used to encourage high return rates. In the first phase, school principals received an introductory e-mail letter asking them to forward the survey link to the middle grade bilingual/ESL teachers in their building. During the same period, and using the existing information on potential participants, a separate invitation was sent to these individuals encouraging them to participate in the study by taking the online survey.

Two weeks after the original e-mail communications were sent, reminders were e-mailed to the principals requesting they forward the link of the online survey to their middle grade teachers of ELs. Again, separate e-mail requests were resent to potential individuals, inviting them to participate in the study. In the last two weeks of the survey administration period, the final round of reminders was sent to the individuals who had not responded.

During the six-week survey administration period, a total of 116 people accessed the survey. Of these, 111 agreed to participate in the study, four declined to participate,
and one was completely unresponsive to the survey questions. Out of the 111 participants who agreed to participate, 53 individuals completed the survey in its entirety, 23 completed half of the survey, and 25 merely browsed through the survey. Thus, the descriptive analysis of the survey data focused only on the responses obtained from the 53 participants who completed the entire survey. Table 2 details the number of participants who accessed the online survey.

Table 2

Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please indicate whether you agree to participate in this study.</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I agree to participate in this study</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not agree to participate in this study</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answered question</td>
<td>115</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped question</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the survey data collection produced a 30% response return rate, which does not represent the 50% or better response rate many survey studies have reported in leading educational journals (Creswell, 2012). Though the response rate obtained in this study is not atypical of survey research in education, a higher response rate would have created a stronger claim when generalizing results from the sample to the general population under study. As a result, response bias became a larger concern that needed to
be addressed rather than just the return rate. If the returned responses were biased, the
database would be inadequate, regardless of the return rate (Creswell, 2012).

Even though in this study the survey response rate was lower than 50%, the
response return rate was representative of the sample and population. This was
confirmed through a wave analysis procedure that was used to check for response bias
(Creswell, 2012, p. 391). The wave analysis procedure consisted of selecting key
questions in intervals during the data collection period to check whether answers to the
key questions displayed bias. During the second, fourth, and sixth week of the survey
administration, key questions were selected that checked whether responses were
completely different from one another. These questions identified the teaching role of the
participants, the grades and instructional contexts in which they taught, the certification
and educational endorsements they held, and the number of years of teaching experience
they had. Through this wave analysis procedure, it was determined that responses to
these key questions were similar from the first week to the final week of the survey; thus,
the potential for bias was not evident in the survey data.

The efforts to enlist the 400 possible participants to contribute to the study did not
yield the high response rate that was intended. The lower than expected return rate could
be attributed to several factors. Among these factors were the limitations of having direct
access to potential participants, heavy reliance on the support of school principals to get
access to participants, and the respondents’ availability and interest in the study. In
addition, the length of the survey might have been a factor in the low response rate
because there were 23 participants who took it but did not complete the entire survey, and
25 individuals merely perused the survey. Also, the time of the year in which the survey
was administered was not ideal. The survey administration period included the week of parent conferences, a time when all teachers are most concerned with grades and the parent meetings, and it also included the Thanksgiving week, a time when teachers themselves and their students are getting ready for a mini break and family time. Thus, the response rate during those two weeks was close to nonexistent.

**Data Analysis**

Using the Survey Monkey, analysis features results were gathered, organized, analyzed, and reported. Survey results were compiled and summarized in Excel spreadsheets and PDF reports by completion rate and emergent themes such as the teaching role categories. For instance, Excel and PDF reports were generated that identified all of the potential participants who had completed the survey, those who had completed only half of it, and those who provided no responses. Survey Monkey features allowed for the analysis of the data that focused on teaching roles by clustering participants’ responses based on the teacher role they reported. All completed survey answers were tallied, summarized, and translated into a numerical value where appropriate. Open-ended responses were incorporated into the overall survey results to “illustrate certain points” (Ravid, 2015, p. 3) in the findings detailed in the summary and comparison reports. I examined all reports obtained from Survey Monkey in more depth. This process involved the clustering of trends by topics in relation to the research questions and interpreting the emergent themes using graphs, charts, and the participants’ own stories to report the findings.

I interpreted the Survey Monkey reports and described the findings by strands, topics, and emergent themes. Four major strands emerged from the survey data and
within each of the strands, critical components were described. The first strand focused on the participants’ diversity and demographic profiles in terms of gender, country of origin, and language background. The second strand described the respondents’ educational background, years of teaching, teaching roles, grades taught, and the instructional contexts in which they taught. The third strand provided a description of the qualifications, preparation in terms of content knowledge and pedagogy, and the professional development of the participants. The fourth strand explained the participants’ perceived attitudes and beliefs about their professional growth and their decision making aimed at improving the instruction and performance of their students. The prominent themes that emerged from the in-depth analysis of each of these strands are detailed in chapter four.

The Survey Monkey features were also useful in running basic statistical analysis of the trends and categories that surfaced from the survey data. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations of data points were calculated and interpreted using these features (Ravid, 2015). Responses to the open-ended questions in the survey were considered for qualitative analysis and interpretation. For instance, participants’ responses to a short response question regarding the professional development topics that were of interest to them were clustered and interpreted by the participants’ teaching roles. The findings obtained from this open-ended question were used to further inform the interviews.

The themes that surfaced from the survey data were explored in depth in the interviews. The insights gathered from the interviews helped expand, validate, and pose
for further investigation the answers derived from the survey. The complete analysis and interpretation of survey findings is presented in chapter four.

Validity and Reliability

To establish the validity of the results, I weighed all the options for following up on the quantitative results by checking content validity—did the items measure the content that was intended—and by checking concurrent validity—did the results correlate among strands and topics (Creswell, 2014). The reliability of the findings was ascertained by establishing standard procedures for administering the survey and by analyzing the results to determine whether the responses were consistent across concepts (Creswell, 2012).

Qualitative Data Collection and Data Analysis Processes

Data Collection

The qualitative phase of the study began with the recruitment, pre-selection, and the invitation of potential candidates to participate in interviews as presented in the previous section on sample selection. I contacted the 20 potential candidates who, based on their survey responses, showed an interest in participating in the interview process. Of the 20 potential interviewees, 16 actually participated in the interviews. Two of the potential interviewees chose to reassess their interest and declined to participate, and the other two never confirmed the date and time of their interview after several communication attempts on my part. All interviews were conducted in winter 2014 and were completed over a six-week period.

Interview questions were designed to probe and built on the survey findings and were informed by the theoretical assumptions of this study as well as my own lived
experiences as a teacher, district leader, and dual language specialist. Each interview took approximately 60–90 minutes to complete. All interviews were conducted at a location chosen by each contributing individual. Prior to the start of each interview, participants were given the consent form (see Appendix C) they needed to agree to and sign before the interview could take place. The interviewees were informed that this phase of the data collection process was a critical component of this study. Before each interview began, I also explained the intent of the interview, its process, and its expected outcomes. From the start of each interview, I established a good rapport with the respondents and the richness of the experiences shared by the participants demonstrated the trust that was established between each participant and me.

Essential components of conducting meaningful in-depth interviews are active asking and listening that ensure purposeful and respectful interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. A meaningful interview also requires the researcher to consciously listen to the realities and lived experiences shared by the interviewee. This active interaction is defined as a meaning-making endeavor that takes place between the researcher and the participant (Creswell, 2012, p. 94). In this study, my purpose was to understand situations from the participants’ viewpoints, rather than superimpose preconceived notions on their responses, and to maintain neutrality (Creswell, 2012; Fontana & Frey, 2008). Being a novice researcher, with this aim in mind and to the best of my knowledge and ability, I engaged in informal conversations with the participants while remaining close to the research guidelines and the topics of inquiry that guided the study. I worked to avoid getting drawn into conversations with the participants “in which she answers questions asked by the respondent or provides personal opinions on the
matters discussed” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 139) so as to maintain the integrity and quality of the data.

All individual interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and then offered to the participants to verify accuracy. Only one individual requested the transcripts, but did not provide feedback. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the information they provided, each participant was given a pseudonym, and the audiotapes and transcriptions were kept locked and secured.

Analysis and Interpretation

In order to be able to analyze the qualitative information supplied by the participants in the study, the interview data had to be put into print, read, taken apart in codes, summarized, and then interpreted. According to Creswell (2012), analyzing and interpreting data involves “drawing conclusions about it, interpreting in tables and pictures to summarize it, and explaining the conclusions in words to provide answers to your research questions” (p. 10). The interview data analysis for this study occurred in several stages.

With the intent of maintaining close proximity to the data, I personally transcribed 10 out of the 16 interviews. A professional transcriber assisted with transcribing four of the six other interviews, and an administrative assistant helped in transcribing the remaining two. I reviewed each transcript to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed data.

Informed primarily by Saldaña’s (2013) manual for qualitative researchers, and Creswell’s interpretation of the coding of data, the data analysis process began with open coding of the interview transcriptions. According to Creswell (2012),
The object of the coding process is to make sense out of text data, divide into text or image segments, label segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes.” (p. 243)

Thus, the coding process is about narrowing qualitative data into patterns and themes that help explain why that data is there in the first place (Creswell, 2012; Saldaña, 2013, p. 10).

After the interviews were transcribed, each transcript was read several times, each time looking for further understanding of each of the participant’s stories. Reading, highlighting, and writing tentative ideas in the right-hand margin of each participant’s transcribed answers to each question were efforts that led to deepening the understanding of their lived experiences and the essence of their responses. These processes also helped to surface and illustrate the patterns that began to take shape.

Saldaña (2013) explained that coding is a heuristic, Greek for “to discover,” an exploratory technique that does not follow any specific formulas or techniques (p. 9). The process of grouping or codifying data—arranging things in some systematic order—is helpful for categorizing ideas or themes that share some characteristic (p. 10). In preparation for the first cycle coding process, the participants’ answers to the questions were compiled into one document. Some of the answers overlapped so there are some questions that do not have specific answers because they are embedded in answers to other questions. As a result of the initial coding cycle, there was a total of 25 documents corresponding to the number of interview questions compiled.

In codifying the interview transcripts, there were two coding methods used in the first coding cycle: descriptive coding and process coding. Descriptive coding is also recognized as “topic coding” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). Through this method, the basic
topic of a passage of qualitative data is summarized in a word or short phrase, most often as a noun (Saldaña, 2013). Since description is the foundation of qualitative inquiry, this method was used primarily to help the reader hear what I heard in general, rather than to scrutinize the nuances of the participants’ thoughts and actions. In the first coding cycle, the descriptive coding was useful in helping to organize and categorize the data into single topics and statements. Process coding, also known as “action coding” uses “-ing” words and it was useful in the first cycle coding to connote action in the data (Saldaña, 2013, p. 96). By using these two coding methods, 670 unique statements and 72 topics were derived from the interviews in the first coding cycle.

A second coding cycle was needed to reorganize and reanalyze the data coded through first cycle methods. Each cycle required the logical linking of apparently unrelated facts, or fitting categories with one another (Saldaña, 2013). The primary goal during the second cycle, was to develop a sense of “categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 207) from the collection of first cycle codes. This time pattern coding and focused coding were used to further organize and conceptualized the interview data. Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes that identify emergent themes or explanations and help pull together a lot of material into a more meaningful unit of analysis (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). Focused coding was helpful in developing major categories or themes from the data. In condensing the data by rereading, reorganizing, and reanalyzing the 670 statements and comparing these again to the 72 topics obtained in the second cycle, 15 major categories surfaced from this second coding cycle. The top 10 topics that emerged from this cycle were: teachers, English
learners, students, language, needs, standards-based instruction, teaching, learning, bilingual, and content.

The third coding process basically consisted of reanalyzing the 15 categories that were obtained from the second coding cycle to further condense the data into broader themes that encapsulated the most salient themes from the participants’ accounts and the close interpretation of data. For example, concepts that signaled such things as teachers’ interest, motivation, and beliefs were clustered under the theme of teachers’ attitudes and dispositions. Seven salient themes were obtained as a result of the third coding process. Refer to chapter five wherein Table 4 details each of these themes and the major categories that aligned to these themes. Figure 3 describes the coding process for the interview data.

*Figure 3. Interview data coding process.*

**Coding Tools**
Microsoft Word tools such as highlight, italics, and bold functions were used to discern specific statements, key concepts, or ideas. Lists and tables were created to organize categories and themes using the sort function to readily identify common phrases or words. To capture the most commonly used words or concepts, the highlight feature was used to show the frequency with which these appeared in a document. This process is illustrated in Appendix G.

As previously explained, I extracted each word, phrase, or statement directly from each one of the participants’ transcriptions so as to interpret its core meaning. The themes that emerged from the reorganization and reanalysis of the major categories were compared to the participants’ accounts. For example, in the examination of the theme of instructional priorities and the use of the Common Core standards as one of these priorities, Mrs. Petra stated, “I would say that I’m glad that we have the Common Core . . . they [the standards] really support my expectations.”

The quality and richness of the interview data provided essential themes that contributed to the meaningful understanding of the research topics and the lived experiences and constructed realities of the participants. The insights gathered from the semi-structured interviews illuminated from multiple vantage points the personal and professional experiences of the participants. Interview findings and conclusions similar to those discerned from the online survey were connected and used to construct informed and relevant recommendations. The connections between the survey and interview findings along with recommendations are presented in chapter six.
Validation Criteria

Establishing validity in qualitative studies involves checking for the accuracy of findings by employing certain procedures. Some of these procedures include using triangulation of data, member checks, rich and thick descriptions to convey findings, and the clarification of biases the researcher brings to the study (Creswell, 2014).

Angen (2000) proposed that the term validation is used to describe the procedures that help a researcher to arrive at an understanding of the dialogue between the researcher and participants and interpretations located in the particulars of the situation that are always open for reinterpretation. In this study, the coding procedures helped me to arrive at the understanding of the participants’ experiences.

Creswell (2012) presented the idea that triangulation of data consists in using supporting evidence from various participants, documents, and various types of data collection. The triangulation strategy used in this study ensured that I moved as close to reality as possible by triangulating the multiple perspectives of the participants to confirm the emergent findings and by the thorough examination of survey results. To confirm the accuracy of the participants’ accounts, the transcriptions of these data were made accessible to the participants for their review.

The rich and thick descriptions used to convey findings add to understanding the multiple realities of the participants; these realities are then condensed into meaningful themes and attributes for interpretation and reinterpretation. Research emphasizes that using multiple sources of data and engaging in member checks are essential strategies in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Simpson, 1995). It is equally important for me as the researcher to be cautious and keenly aware of my personal and professional
biases, dispositions, and assumptions and these must be disclosed so that the integrity of the investigation is maintained and secured (Creswell, 2012).

**Ethical Considerations**

I requested permission from the appropriate office in the district participating in this study to gain access to the study participants prior to gathering the necessary permissions from the participants themselves and before beginning the data collection process. Per the standards of data collection specified in the research design of this study, I made sure I did not have any vested interests in the schools in which the participants would be solicited. This ensured objectivity in the quantitative aspects of the research and allowed for the full expression of multiple perspectives and experiences in the qualitative phase of the study (Creswell, 2014).

The participants were asked to voluntarily agree to their participation in the study and to sign the appropriate consent form before engaging in the survey and interview activities. The purpose of the study, its duration and procedures, and the description of how the study findings could be used to benefit of the study participants, the district, and the field of education were shared with study participants via the consent form and before the interviews took place. I also disclosed that this study was fully sponsored and supported by both the district stakeholders and by my degree-granting university. Establishing trust and credibility with the participants is an important element of survey research (Creswell, 2012). The informed consent forms in Appendix A and Appendix C included information that acknowledged the protection of human rights as well as the benefits and risks for participants. The identity of all participants in the study was kept
confidential throughout the process of conducting the study and will continue to remain confidential after the study is completed.

**Researcher’s Self**

In research, of all the roles a researcher assumes in the process of data collection and analysis, the roles of interpreter and collector of interpretations are central (Stake, 1995). Through inductive and deductive logic processes, the researcher uses complex reasoning skills and strategies throughout the process of research when establishing and reshaping comprehensive themes that lead to profound understanding of the situation or problem of study (Creswell, 2013). Through exposure of the researcher’s self and by using self-reflective notes that are properly documented and negotiated for potential biases, the researcher protects the authenticity and credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, I explored topics and issues that are meaningful to me professionally and personally and the insights that I gained in the process benefitted me in more ways than I could have planned or expected. I arrived in the U.S. when I was 14 years of age with no knowledge of English and no idea of what life was going to be like in this country, especially in my new city of residence which presented itself to me at the time as cold, unfriendly, and massive. Our family structure was changing; my parents were getting separated, and my siblings were back in Mexico waiting to be brought to this country. Life was more than challenging in those times and there were days when life was unbearable. We were utterly poor; all we had was one another and a strong desire to survive and to better our lives. Even though I belonged in school, I ended up working in restaurants and factories in first, second, or third shifts for several years before I realized
that was not the life I wanted to have. In retrospect, I had no life back then. I existed merely to work two shifts a day for meager pay. Throughout this time, the only English words I knew were the ones I needed to communicate in the work place. Still, with the little English I knew, I often served as the translator for my mom when she needed to take care of housing, medical, or school issues with my brothers.

I had always liked school since I was a little girl; however, I never dreamed of attaining a college degree or pursuing a profession other than probably being a secretary, which was a high position for women back in my native hometown. I had no idea of what going to college was all about, and we did not have the means or at least an idea of how to find out. There were no models to look up to in the family or our closest circle of friends. Eventually, we made it; we not only survived, but we each became successful in our own way. My brothers and I are the first generation of college graduates on both sides of the family. How we, as immigrant children without parental guidance, achieved the American dream is more than a miracle, but not one that occurred without having someone to help us navigate the murky waters in our new world.

In the first years of my existence in this country as a working teenager, I vividly remember feeling ashamed for not knowing the English language, for not being able to communicate fluently, for not being in school, and not understanding the culture of my new world. Every time I would get on the bus filled with teenagers going to school and me going to work, I would dream of one day going back to school. Deep inside of me, I knew I had to do something to change the life I was living, and the first step I took was to enroll in ESL classes at a public library close to home. It was a blessing to find an ESL teacher of adult English learners who believed people like me could learn, and that we
mattered in this society. He would take his group of adult English learners on tours across the city to learn the culture, be exposed to the language in authentic settings, and to visit community colleges that one day we could attend. This teacher set expectations that we could attain, but also guided the way with thoughtful actions and care. Life continued to improve the moment I enrolled at a community college to learn English and other life skills at night and on the weekends.

Learning academic English along with the knowledge and preparation I acquired at the community college helped me to obtain a job as an administrative assistant and then later as an office manager. The birth of my children and the start of their schooling experiences inspired and urged me to pursue a teaching career. After going to school full time and taking 15–18 credit hour course loads for three years, I obtained my teaching degree at a four-year university. This accomplishment was something I never dreamt about or even imagined could be possible. Fifteen years later, something more amazing occurred along the way. I came across people who were devoted to improving the life and conditions of underserved populations and who inspired me to reach greater heights. With the relentless support of my mentors, I obtained a master’s degree in bilingual/bicultural education, undertook advanced studies in literacy, and gained admittance into a doctoral program.

Professionally, I have grown from being a dual language teacher to being the head of the school district’s department of language and cultural education as well as the department of literacy. These accomplishments could not have been possible without a formal education and without the motivation and perseverance I had to better myself for my own good, for the benefit of my family, and for the betterment of the children and
teachers I serve in the district. Just as important, I could not have accomplished all of this without the guidance of my professors and mentors and the love and support of my family. This is testimony to the fact that people of diverse backgrounds and experiences who are not native speakers of English and members of the dominant culture by birthright have a chance at success when opportunities to learn and grow are available to them.

Even though my academic English has improved tremendously from where it was 20 years ago, I still consider myself an English learner. I have not fully mastered the nuances of the English language; I know I still struggle with language usage in both writing and speaking. My two children, who grew up Spanish monolingual until the age of four, became fully bilingual/biliterate by the time they graduated from elementary public school because they learned in two languages and they also learned the two languages in academic contexts. They are now both bilingual/biliterate college graduates and the eldest has earned a master’s degree. The two of them also tried learning a third language in high school and college. My third child grew up bilingual and biliterate throughout her elementary years and also learned in two languages, Spanish and English. She is now in high school taking Spanish Heritage language classes and will begin learning a third language in her junior year. At home, we speak Spanish and English and we honor both cultures through our behaviors and interactions with the people around us and in the communities in which we live and work.

My personal and professional experiences have helped to illuminate my understanding of the challenges immigrant families face when they arrive in this country, particularly the tribulations young adolescents face like I did when I arrived. Instead of going to school, they end up having to work to help support their family. Moreover, as
an English learner, as a teacher of students in dual language programs, as a parent of 
bilingual/biliterate children, as the leader of the department responsible for ensuring that 
appropriate services and supports are in place for all English learners in the district, and 
as the leader of the department responsible for leading the implementation of the 
Common Core standards, my life experiences have proven to be invaluable in developing 
my deep understanding of the realities ELs in middle grade classrooms live every day as 
well as the perspectives, attitudes, necessities, and constructed realities of the teachers 
who serve them.

My passionate interest in knowing more about what is important, useful, and 
needed for teachers who serve middle grade ELs stems from my experience of having 
been in the place of these students. I have also walked in the familiar shoes of those who 
lack the foundational skills of the English language as I did when I first entered college, 
those who still struggle with the language as I do, those who are a parent of bilingual 
children as I am, and those who teach English language learners as I did. All this has 
prepared me well to work with teachers and the district leaders who are responsible for 
the education of English learners and the professional development of their teachers.

Because achievement in middle school is the stepping stone for success in high 
school, it is crucial that middle grade ELs have access to and learn the academic English 
necessary to navigate complex content and challenging texts with success. As an 
advocate for and teacher in dual language education, I believe ELs should have the 
opportunity to maintain and expand their knowledge of their native or heritage language 
in the process of learning English. In order for middle grade ELs to achieve these goals, 
teachers who work with these students must have the knowledge, experience,
qualifications, motivation, and appropriate tools and resources necessary to help these students achieve their greatest potential.

It is also my belief that teachers of ELs should also have opportunities to learn and grow together with their colleagues based on what they know about their students and do so with the support of their administrators. Through collective ownership of the education of these students and meaningful collaboration, teachers of middle grade ELs will strengthen their practice and commitment to these students, constructively share ideas, and find solutions to issues. This investigation allowed me to strengthen my beliefs about what I think is needed for ELs and their teachers, and to further explore the inquiries that have guided my personal life and professional career. This journey has added a new meaning to my life. Conducting this study was an extraordinary opportunity and one of the most life-changing, challenging, and rewarding events I have experienced.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Introduction

The amount of data collected from the survey and the interviews made it necessary to divide the analysis and interpretation of the findings into two separate chapters. Chapter four presents the analysis of the results from the participants’ responses to the online survey as they relate to the research questions that guided this study. Chapter five describes the coding of the interview data, expands on the themes and categories that emerged from the survey data, and provides rich descriptions of the findings. In chapter six, I make connections between the survey and interview data and insert my own reflections as the researcher of this study, a practitioner, and as an adult English learner myself. Recommendations and the limitations of this study are also presented in chapter six.

This chapter is divided into four major sections. The first section provides a descriptive analysis of the survey data that focuses on the participants’ diversity and demographic profile in terms of gender, country of origin, and language background. The second section describes the respondents’ educational background, years of teaching, teaching roles, grades taught, and the instructional contexts in which they teach. The third section focuses on the description of the qualifications, preparation in terms of content knowledge and pedagogy, and the professional development of the participants. The fourth section explains the participants’ perceived attitudes and beliefs about their professional growth and decision making in improving the instruction and performance
of their students. Finally, a brief summary is provided to highlight the most prominent themes that emerged from the survey data and how these are probed in the interview data.

The Participants’ Profiles

As described in chapter three, a convenience sampling method was used to enlist volunteers to participate in the quantitative phase of the study and as a result, 116 participants accessed the online survey. Of these, 53 completed the survey and 23 completed approximately half of it. Twenty of the participants who completed the survey also agreed to participate in the interview phase of the study. Of those 20, 16 participants were interviewed, 2 did not reply to the interview communications, and two declined to participate in the interview portion of the study because of time constraints.

In order to draw a more profound understanding of middle grade teachers’ beliefs and attitudes as well as their perceived efficacy in teaching middle grade ELs, it is important to know and understand the diversity and the educational and professional experiences of the middle grade teachers who teach these students. I began by first recognizing that a variety of qualitative descriptive studies have shown teachers’ attitudes and beliefs related to language, culture, and achievement do influence teacher practice and student learning (August & Calderon, 2006, pp. 556–557).

Research conducted by Garcia (1993) and Nieto and Rolon (1997) examined the practices of successful teachers of English learners and their findings suggest that teachers of EL students form and maintain connections with them and allow the use of multiple languages while learning the target language. I draw from other research findings that suggest knowing another language and language practices such as code-switching or translanguaging help teachers of ELs use their own language experiences...
and knowledge of language to help ELs acquire the knowledge and skills of the academic content all while they learn and process the use of academic English (Garcia, 2014). Thus, with the intent of building on these understandings and knowing more about how these assumptions look in the teaching experiences of middle grade teachers of ELs, these topics are examined in depth using the survey and interview data. A review of the basic demographics and diversity of the participants provides background information on the teachers of ELs who contributed to this study.

**Demographics and Diversity of Participants**

Just as middle grade English learners are not a homogeneous group of individuals having similar amounts of knowledge and experiencing the same conditions of acquisition of the new language and academic content, teachers of ELs also differ greatly in the backgrounds, learning experiences, skills, education, and teaching experiences they bring to the instruction of EL students. For the purpose of identifying the teachers who are responsible for educating middle grade ELs in the district, participants were asked to identify their place of origin, the languages they speak in addition to English, the teaching roles they have, and the instructional contexts in which they provide instruction. The responses obtained from the survey showed that the middle grade bilingual/ESL teacher population contributing to this study indeed is comprised of individuals who have culturally diverse backgrounds, are from many ethnic groups, serve in varied teaching roles, and are individuals who know more than one language.

The basic demographic data obtained from the survey demonstrated that the gender mix and backgrounds of the study participants were consistent with the general teacher population of the district in which female teachers are by far the majority and are
born in the U.S. Demographic results showed that approximately 88.7% of the survey participants are female and 1% are male. In terms of their place of origin, 70% of the participants indicated they were born in the U.S, 13% were born in Mexico, and approximately 17% were born in various countries including Poland, Germany, Guatemala, Cuba, India, Peru, and Hong Kong.

Because middle grades ELs would benefit from receiving instruction and supports from teachers who know their language or are knowledgeable of second language acquisition processes (Goldenberg, 2008), of particular interest to me was finding the extent to which middle grade teachers are bilingual/biliterate or know a language other than English and determining if their perspectives and dispositions in teaching ELs differed from respondents who were born in countries other than the U.S. and were English learners themselves. Thus, participants were asked to identify whether or not they are bilingual/biliterate and to list the languages they know in addition to English. Approximately 58.5% of the respondents indicated that they are bilingual/biliterate. Of these, over 67% of the bilingual participants are Spanish speaking, approximately 13% are Polish speaking, and the remaining respondents speak a variety of languages such as German, Arabic, Greek, Mandarin, and Ukrainian. In general terms, the ethnic and language background of the study participants reflect the general mix of middle grade teachers of ELs in the district and of the ELs themselves. Table 3 illustrates the demographic data obtained from the 53 survey participants who completed the survey.
Table 3

*Selected Characteristics of Study Participants Who Completed the Demographic Section*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completed Demographics</td>
<td>Gender (n = 53)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47–88.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6–11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Country of Origin (n = 51)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>35–70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>7–13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9–16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bilingual/Biliterate (n = 53)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>31–58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>22–41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native languages (n = 31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>21–67.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Polish/Russian</td>
<td>4–12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>German</td>
<td>2–0.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1–0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>1–0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>1–0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandarin – Cantonese</td>
<td>1–0.03%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participants as Language Learners**

The information exhibited in Table 3 made it necessary to examine in depth the language background of the participants and their language acquisition experiences in order to provide a more accurate representation of teachers’ interpretations of their beliefs and decision making about what is meaningful and effective in the instruction of language and literacy for ELs in bilingual and ESL contexts as well as in departmentalized content settings. To probe further on these topics, interview questions were designed or modified from the semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B) to draw relevant data from interview participants. A presentation of the findings from the
interview data on this topic is found in chapter five. Survey data information about the educational background, teaching experiences and teaching roles, instructional contexts and grades taught, and leadership roles of the participants are presented in the following sections.

**Educational Background and Teaching Experiences of Participants**

**Educational Background and Years Teaching**

At the time of this study, information about the educational background and professional experiences of teachers in the district was not available thorough district data; however, for the purposes of this study, it was vital to collect this information. The gathering of this data was essential in helping understand how the perspectives and dispositions of teachers of middle grade ELs are shaped by their preparation and teaching practices and by their own interpretation of what these are and look like in their classrooms. This information was also necessary in helping understand the impact teachers’ interpretation of their attitudes and professional readiness have on their students and on their roles as teachers of middle grade ELs. Meta-analyses of studies of the EL-specific knowledge and skills in the context of general education and bilingual education settings have concluded that more needs to be known about the preparation and expertise of teachers of ELs (August & Shanahan, 2006). Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) analyzed numerous studies in their attempt to identify the elements and conditions that help best describe what effective teachers of ELs, in particular teachers of middle grade ELs, need to know and be able to do in the instruction of language and literacy for these students. Recent reports tied to teacher preparation programs and teacher evaluation
goals have identified similar needs to know about EL teachers’ preparation and expertise (Harper & de Jong, 2009).

This study aims to make a significant contribution toward filling some of the gaps that exists in the research. Thus, the educational background and professional experiences of the participants were assessed through the survey data and closely examined in the interview data. Responses to questions regarding the participants’ educational and professional background make evident the wealth and depth of the level of education and teaching experiences of the participants as represented in the university degrees they hold, the number of years teaching in the district that ranged from three years to over 20 years, and the number of years teaching middle grade ELs, which also ranged from three years to over 20 years. Over 70% of the participants reported attaining a master’s degree or higher in their education. Approximately 54% indicated they have been teaching middle grade ELs from four to 10 years. Figure 4 exhibits a more complete breakdown of the educational background of the participants. Figure 5 represents the range of years teaching in the district. Figure 6 shows the range of years teaching middle grade ELs. In-depth exploration of the implications regarding the professional knowledge and experience of teachers as these relate to the education of middle grade ELs is done through careful examination of the interview data that details the participants’ teaching roles, their beliefs and attitudes in relation to teaching ELs, and their professional learning experiences.
Figure 4. Participants’ educational background.

- Bachelor Degree (BA/BS): 8%
- BA plus additional university courses: 13%
- Masters Degree (MA/MS): 23%
- MA plus additional university courses: 50%
- Doctorate: 6%

Figure 5. Years teaching in the district.

- 0-3 years: 11%
- 4-6 years: 12%
- 7-10 years: 31%
- 11-15 years: 23%
- 16-20 years: 15%
- Over 20 years: 8%
Figure 6. Years teaching middle grade English learners.

Teaching Roles

The teaching roles and responsibilities of middle grade teachers are many and multifaceted. However, the teaching roles of middle grade teachers of ELs are more complex and even more challenging because they are educating children who might not know the language of instruction and in contexts that are varied and inconsistent. By collecting information about the roles teachers of middle grade ELs have, the intent was to find whether middle grade teachers who teach ELs fully grasp how varied and critical their roles are for their students as well as their own practice, and to determine the extent to which their teaching roles and instructional contexts impact their decision making in teaching their students. The results of this study help to shed light on this complexity and expose the challenges middle grade bilingual and/or ESL teachers and content teachers grapple with in their teaching and learning practices.
In the survey questions, participants were asked to identify their teaching roles from seven choices:

1. Bilingual self-contained
2. Bilingual/ESL departmentalized
3. ESL departmentalized
4. General education English Language Arts (ELA) teacher with bilingual/ESL endorsement
5. General education social science teacher with an ESL endorsement
6. EL Program Teacher
7. Other.

Three of the seven choices emerged with by far the most responses, and for the purpose of making better sense of the participants’ choices, their responses were then clustered into three major groups. Using the Survey Monkey filtering tool for the purpose of identifying common themes, differences and similarities in the educational background, qualification, preparation, leadership roles, training, and dispositions of participants, all responses were filtered into the following three major categories:

1. Bilingual/ESL departmentalized, ESL departmentalized, and EL Program Teacher
2. General education teachers (ELA and social science)
3. Other: middle grade teachers who indicated teaching various contents

Table 4 offers a complete breakdown of the teaching roles reported by the participants.
Table 4

Participants’ Teaching Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual self-contained</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual/ESL departmentalized</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL departmentalized</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education English Language Arts teacher with a bilingual/ESL endorsement</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education Social Science teacher with an ESL endorsement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL Program Teacher (Formerly Bilingual Lead Teacher or EL Liaison)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question 53

Instructional Contexts

As described in chapters one and two, English learners do not populate our schools in a one-size-fits-all package. They enter our schools with varied schooling experiences and language proficiencies. In the middle grades, this represents a challenge for teachers and students because in order to serve the particular academic and language needs of ELs in middle grades, there must be strategic staffing of the teachers assigned to teach these students. Therefore, because middle grade ELs are not all clustered in one group or in one classroom, teachers assigned to teach these students most likely teach them in push-in or pull-out contexts. Other teachers of middle grade ELs likely teach in self-contained bilingual or ESL classrooms if there are ELs who need this model of instruction or if this fits the program model of the school. There are middle grade teachers in general education settings with bilingual and/or ESL endorsements, but these teachers are probably not identified officially as the bilingual and/or ESL teachers of the
ELs in middle grades. However, in settings where every middle grade content teacher has these endorsements, they all might be considered as the bilingual and/or ESL teachers of these students. The aim of this study is to investigate how the participants themselves perceive their roles so as to better understand what middle grade teachers of ELs do and need.

The teaching roles of middle grade teachers of ELs vary more so by the instructional context in which they teach and also by the grade and content they teach. To gain in-depth understanding of the teaching roles of teachers of middle grade ELs and the implication of these roles in the success of ELs, the instructional contexts in which these teachers teach need to be equally examined and understood. In this study, the instructional contexts reported by the participants are seen to be as diverse as their teaching roles. Table 5 details this diversity.

As illustrated in Table 5, survey data revealed that middle grade teachers of ELs typically teach two or more grade clusters. Although this is not atypical of middle grade teachers, survey responses indicate that these teachers also support instruction of ELs in lower grade levels, provide intervention supports to other students as well, and support students and colleagues in many other multiple roles. The implication of these findings is that teachers of ELs who are given multiple teaching roles and grade levels to teach must be able to prepare lessons that are standards based, with content that is grade, age, and program level appropriate, in the language of instruction required by the bilingual and/or ESL program(s) of the school, and by the proficiency levels of the students. Elaboration on the implication of these findings is presented in chapter six. Table 5 illustrates the teaching roles, instructional contexts, and the grades taught as reported by respondents.
These responses are clustered in the three major teaching categories. Other details about these data are discussed in the following section.

Table 5

*Teaching Roles, Instructional Contexts, and Grades Taught by Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Category</th>
<th>Teaching Roles</th>
<th>Instructional Contexts</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual/ESL departmentalized; ESL departmentalized; EL Program Teacher (21 Respondents)</td>
<td>Bilingual/ESL ESL EL Program Teacher</td>
<td>Self-contained bilingual/ESL–14% of the time Push-in 48% of the time Pull-out 38% of the time Departmentalized 57% of the time</td>
<td>Grade 6–50% Grade 7–70% Grade 8–60% Other grades: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education teachers (ELA &amp; Social Science) (20 Respondents)</td>
<td>General ed.–ELA General ed.–Social Science</td>
<td>Departmentalized</td>
<td>Grade 6–39% Grade 7–44% Grade 8–44% Other grades: 3rd and 5th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The information displayed in Table 5 reveals four major characteristics of teachers of ELs:

1. A larger percent of middle grade EL teachers teach in departmentalized settings.
2. Middle grade teachers teach at a minimum of two grade levels, but those identified as bilingual/ESL or as ‘Other’ teachers teach in multiple grades.
3. The bilingual/ESL group of teachers teach in varied instructional contexts and teach other grade levels more than the teachers in the other two groups.
4. Middle grade teachers in the “Other” group category teach various content areas and in a variety of lower grade clusters.

How the diversity in teaching roles and instructional contexts of middle grade teachers of ELs adds to the complexity of how they make decisions on what and how to teach their students is something that needed to be examined in more detail in the interview data. Thus, the data gleaned from survey responses provided opportunities for a close examination of these topics and raised questions about the responsibility and accountability participants have for the ELs they serve in the particular content areas they teach. In-depth insights on these topics were extrapolated from the interview data and are presented in chapter five.

**Leadership Roles**

My experiences as a teacher leader and as a staff developer have led me to believe that teacher participation in leadership roles adds to the knowledge base, teaching practice, dispositions, collaboration, and decision-making capacity of all teachers. Leadership roles are generative roles in which teachers can exercise considerable
influence in school-wide improvement efforts, inspire and support colleagues in the challenging tasks of teaching and learning, and positively influence the academic outcomes of their students (The Education Progress of Education Reform, 2010). These generative roles are ever more critical for teachers of ELs in that they can shape the course of improvement of their diverse group of ELs beyond their classroom or instructional contexts. Thus, it was important to identify the leadership roles study participants held and probe the implications of these roles in their teaching practice and their perceived effectiveness in teaching their students.

Although only 29 of the 53 middle grade teachers of ELs who completed the survey reported they assume leadership roles, their responses demonstrated the myriad of leadership roles in which they participate within and outside of school. Most interesting was the finding that over 60% of the 29 respondents identified the EL Program Teacher (ELPT) role as their leadership role. This finding suggests that participants perceive the ELPT role as more of a leadership role than a teaching role. As the head of the Department of Language and Culture, I tried to make this distinction clear because the EL Program Teachers have a unique role that involves more than teaching students; in fact, some teachers in this role spend more time performing duties other than teaching their students, which is the primary duty they are supposed to perform. Implications of this finding and additional insights on this topic are discussed in chapter six. Figure 7 shows the participants’ reported leadership roles.
Figure 7. Leadership roles identified by participants.

In addition to the leadership roles listed in Table 7, respondents identified other leadership roles such as Bilingual Math Teacher Leader, Instructional Leadership Team Leader, Network Instructional Teacher Leader, Literacy Teacher Leader, Assistant Principal, Dual Language Coordinator, and District Literacy Lead Teacher.

**Qualifications, Preparation, Professional Development, and Perceived Levels of Expertise**

**Qualifications**

This study aimed to identify and examine the qualification, preparation, and knowledge middle grade teachers of ELs typically possess, as well as the professional development activities these teachers engage in or seek so as to better their instruction and the performance of the students they educate. In the district in which this study took place and according to the district’s state and federal guidelines for the education of ELs, middle grade teachers must be certified or licensed in the content of their instruction and
also hold a middle grade teaching endorsement in order to be considered qualified to teach these students. In addition to these requirements, middle grade teachers of ELs must also have the bilingual and/or ESL endorsements in order to be qualified to teach their ELs and be in compliance with state and district mandates.

To explore the reality of what was actually happening in classrooms and schools across the district in regard to the expected preparation and qualifications of teachers of middle grade ELs, through the online survey, study participants were asked to identify the licensure or certifications as well as the endorsements they held. Fifty-three participants responded to the certification or licensure question. Of these, 69.8% indicated they were certified to teach in grades K–9, 22.6% possessed certification to teach in grades 6–12, 7.55% in grades Pre K–2, and 9.4% in grades 9–12. See Appendix D for a detailed breakdown of this data.

Recent attention to the preparation of middle and high school teachers in regard to the content they teach has elevated the need for these teachers to be certified and pass the content test for every content area they teach and to do away with the K–8 licensure (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2014). This call for action has tremendous implications for teachers of ELs, especially for those who teach in push-in and pull-out contexts across content areas. In light of this need, survey questions were designed to gather information on the type of endorsements middle grade teachers in the district have, recognize their qualifications, and better understand the preparation strengths and needs that most likely influence their teaching. The survey data collected around this topic demonstrates the endorsements participants in each of the teaching role categories held at the time of the study. Figure 8, Figure 9, and Figure 10 illustrate these findings.
Figure 8. Endorsements reported by participants in the bilingual/ESL and ELPT teaching roles.

The results noted in Figure 8 indicate that 85.7% of participants in the bilingual/ESL and ELPT teaching category have their bilingual endorsement and 76.1% have their ESL endorsement. In contrast, only 66.7% of these teachers have their middle grade endorsements, 57% have their ELA endorsement, and 52% have their social science endorsement. Only 28% of the teachers in this group have their math and/or science endorsements and less than 25% have their reading endorsement. This information is revealing in that bilingual/ESL teachers appear to not have the content endorsements in the areas in which they are probably teaching. Also, in order to be considered qualified to teach in the middle grades, all teachers of middle grade students must have their middle grade endorsements.
Figure 9. Endorsements reported by participants in general education ELA and social science teaching roles.

As can be seen in Figure 9, the responses from participants in the general education teacher role revealed almost the opposite findings from those that surfaced in the bilingual/ESL teaching category. Of the 20 general education respondents, 85% indicated they have their middle grade endorsement, 75% have their ELA and social science endorsements, 70% have their ESL endorsement, and only 35% have their bilingual endorsement. Thirty-five percent of these respondents reported to have their science endorsement and only 10% have their math endorsement. The last two data points are not atypical of teachers who specialize in teaching language arts and social science contents. Of concern is the issue that for the most part, general education teachers appear to be lacking the fundamentals of bilingual education and ESL pedagogy. This of course has implications for the teaching and learning opportunities available to the middle grade ELs in these classrooms and for the type of training and supports available to these teachers. These findings can also explain why the instruction in the
native language of the ELs in the middle grades is close to non-existent because they spend the majority of their instructional time in their general education classroom with teachers who are mostly monolingual. Further discussion of this finding is provided in chapter five.

Figure 10. Endorsements reported by participants in “other” teaching roles.

Figure 10 shows that of the 12 respondents identified in the “Other” teaching role category, 83% of them indicated they hold both their middle grades and ESL endorsements. Sixty six percent reported to have their bilingual endorsement, 55.5% have their math endorsement, 50% have their ELA endorsement, and 38% have their science and social science endorsements. Only 16% of the 12 participants in the “Other” role indicated having a reading endorsement. These results suggest that participants in the “Other” teaching role category are teachers who have their middle grade and ESL endorsements and probably serve as resource teachers who support ELs in the math and
language arts content areas, according to the reported endorsements that are split between these two contents. The findings in the instructional contexts are consistent with this assumption, which demonstrate participants in this category teach mostly math and writing and do this in various grade level clusters. Chapter six addresses the implications of these findings as they relate to the equity of educational opportunities for middle grade ELs and to the quality and effectiveness of instruction for these students, particularly in regard to language and literacy instruction.

As previously noted in this section, in order to be compliant with district and state regulations and expectations, all middle grade teachers of ELs are expected to have their middle grade endorsement, a bilingual endorsement if they teach students in bilingual programs, an ESL endorsement if they teach ELs in departmentalized content settings, and endorsements in the content area they teach. Over and above being merely compliant with these stipulations, the fact of the matter is that all ELs in middle grades deserve and have the right to receive their education from teachers who are skilled in the basic pedagogy of language acquisition and possess the content knowledge necessary to teach them well. The survey results related to this issue were helpful in further investigating how the endorsement qualifications of middle grade teachers impact their decision making regarding how they teach their ELs and how they help their students succeed. The interview data were beneficial in capturing meaningful insights on this topic and are further examined in chapter five.

**Preparation: Pedagogy and Content**

Several survey questions were designed with the goal of obtaining baseline data on the typical preparation in content and pedagogy middle grade teachers of ELs report
having during their pre-service and in-service years. It was important to gather information on the preparation courses all teachers of middle grade ELs should have, especially when there has been a stronger push in the district since 2012 for having more middle grade content teachers take these courses. Because on-going professional learning also influences the decision making of teachers on what and how they teach, it was essential to collect information on the type of professional development activities these teachers participate in and solicit in an effort to further their profession and to improve their practice, particularly on the implementation of standards-based instruction for ELs.

In response to the survey questions that asked for this course information, 52 out of 53 respondents provided information on the number of courses related to bilingual education, language/linguistics, reading, and the interdisciplinary courses they had taken during their pre-service and in-service years. The distribution of university courses taken during the pre-service years by the 52 respondents who reported this data is shown in Figure 11. Courses taken during their in-service years are displayed in Figure 12.
Basic statistical analysis of the data in Figure 11 shows that between 18 to 21% of the 52 participants took 0 language/linguistic and bilingual education courses respectively, and 44% took 1–3 language/linguistic courses, and approximately 32% took 1–3 bilingual education courses in their pre-service years. Fourteen percent indicated they had taken 4–6 language/linguistics courses, and approximately 27% took 4–6 bilingual education courses. Twenty percent indicated they had taken more than six courses in language/linguistics, and 19% took more than six bilingual education courses. In regard to the reading courses taken during the pre-service years, 6% reported taking 0 courses, 61% reported having taken 1–3 courses, 18% 4–6 courses, and approximately 14% reported taking more than six reading courses.

Overall, these above results indicate that on average, respondents took 1–3 language/linguistic courses and bilingual education courses as well as courses in reading and interdisciplinary literacy during their pre-service years. This finding is evident in the
disaggregation of data that show mean scores of 2.44 for the language/linguistic courses’ category and 2.45 for the bilingual education courses, with a +/- $SD$ of 1.04 and 1.03 respectively. The mean scores for the reading courses are 2.41, with a +/- $SD$ of 0.81 and for the interdisciplinary literacy courses, the mean scores are 2.06, with a +/- $SD$ of 0.84.

![Figure 12. Relevant courses taken by respondents during in-service years.](image)

In regard to the university courses taken during their in-service years, 18% reported having taken 0 courses in language/linguistics and 25% reported having taken 0 courses in bilingual education. Approximately 63% indicated having taken 1–3 language/linguistic courses, and 35% took 1–3 bilingual education courses. Only 6% reported 4–6 language/linguistics, and over 18% indicated having taken 4–6 bilingual education courses. Eleven percent of participants reported to have taken more than six language/linguistic courses, and approximately 21% took more than six bilingual education courses. Regarding the reading courses taken in the in-service years, 29%
reported taking 0 reading courses, and 28% reported taking 0 courses in interdisciplinary literacy. Thirty-one percent took 1–3 reading courses, and 55% took 1–3 interdisciplinary/literacy courses. Seventeen percent indicated having taken 4–6 reading courses, and 7% took interdisciplinary literacy courses. Nearly 22% took more than six reading courses, and 10% took more than six interdisciplinary courses.

The basic statistical analysis of the data detailed in Figure 12 shows that participants reported they had taken an average of 1–3 courses in all four of the coursework categories: language/linguistics, bilingual education, reading, and interdisciplinary literacy courses. The mean scores of these findings are 2.11, 2.35, 2.32, and 2.00, with a +/- SD of 0.83, 1.08, 1.11, and 0.87 respectively. Based on these findings, it appears that more teachers have taken language-linguistic and bilingual education courses during their in-service years. Appendix D provides a complete distribution of this data.

Significant differences were not distinguished among participants in the three teaching categories. However, these findings are meaningful in that according to the state’s guidelines, in order to receive endorsements in bilingual, ESL, and reading/literacy areas of instruction, individuals must complete 6 or more university courses. Therefore, these results suggest that even though a good number of middle grade teachers of ELs in the district have the endorsements required and that some others might be working toward getting these, there are many more teachers in middle grades who need to pursue these endorsements. Also, these findings align to the endorsement information reported by the participants and contribute to the argument that large
percentages of middle grade teachers of ELs need additional and/or ongoing preparation in bilingual education, language acquisition, reading and literacy, and ESL practices.

**Professional Development on Standards-Based Instruction**

The professional development of middle grade teachers of ELs is an important factor to consider when probing what influences the decision making of these teachers in regard to their professional growth and practice, particularly when considering the complex teaching roles they have and the content they teach. It is important that all teachers, but middle grade teachers of ELs in particular, stay current with district initiatives and expectations as well as with what is current in teaching and learning. Effective implementation of standards-based instruction, specifically Common Core State Standards (CCSS), World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), and English Language Development (ELD) standards, is an expectation that both the district and the state have for all teachers.

In the district in which the study takes place, there has been a strong roll out of the Common Core in the past three years. Thousands of teachers have been exposed to these new standards and have been trained on their use, especially in literacy and math. In this study, it was important to determine the extent to which teachers of middle grade ELs have engaged in the learning and use of the Common Core and the WIDA/ELD standards and also to identify what other professional learning needs these teachers have. The survey and interview data gathered from the respondents was examined with the understanding that knowledge about and the use of these standards supported by ongoing professional development would help teachers make more informed decisions on what and how to teach ELs and also promote advanced levels of student learning.
Responses from the study participants contributed to the understanding of the level of training middle grade teachers of ELs received on the implementation of the CCSS and the WIDA/ELD standards in the 16 months prior to administering the study survey in November 2014 and provided a glimpse of their professional learning needs. Evidence obtained from the Likert scale questions that probed the professional development of CCSS and ELD standards indicates that approximately 42% of study participants received less than 10 hours of training on the use of the CCSS for English language arts/interdisciplinary literacy in this sixteen month period, while 50% received 10 to 49 hours of professional development on the use of these standards. Approximately 60% of the participants noted they had participated in less than 10 hours of training on the use of WIDA/ELD standards. Figure 13 displays these findings.

Figure 13. Participant training on the use of the CCSS/ELA and WIDA/EDL standards.
In looking more carefully at this training data alongside the three teaching roles’
categories, the results showed that approximately 60% of participants in the
bilingual/ESL, ELPT, and general education roles received between 10 to 49 hours of
training on the use of the CCSS for ELA. However, between the general education and
the bilingual/ESL, ELPT, teacher groups, over 57% of the participants in the
bilingual/ESL roles received training on the use of the WIDA/ELD standards versus 31%
of the participants in the general education roles. In the “Other” teaching role category,
the findings indicate that 39% participated in training on the use of the CCSS and only
22% participated in training on the use of the WIDA/ELD standards.

A possible explanation for this finding might be that, because participants were
asked to identify the amount of training they received in CCSS/ELA, participants who
were teaching math and other content areas may not have responded to this question.
Overall, these results suggest that only about a third of the participants received training
on the use of the WIDA/ELD standards, and approximately 50 to 60% received training
on the use of the CCSS/ELA. The utility of the ELD standards and the levels of success
with the CCSS are explored in the presentation of the interview data in chapter five.

Professional Learning Needs

In general, the successful implementation of standards-based instruction has been
a strong need of the district and a strong professional learning need for thousands of
teachers across district schools. However, in addition to building capacity in using the
CCSS and ELD standards with efficiency and success across contexts and contents,
teachers of ELs have other learning needs that are crucial for the teaching roles that they
have and for the students they are responsible for educating. When asked to identify
professional development opportunities that would help them build/expand their knowledge and practice in teaching middle grade ELs, the participants provided an array of professional development topics that suggest there is a wide variety of professional learning needs and professional learning commonalities among them. Responses were categorized by participant teaching roles. Table 6 illustrates all the open-ended responses from the participants who completed the survey regarding their learning needs.
Table 6

Professional Learning Needs of Participants by Teaching Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Learning Needs by Teaching Roles’ Groups</th>
<th>Bilingual/ESL, ESL Departmentalized, ELPT</th>
<th>General Education Departmentalized – English Language Arts and Social Studies</th>
<th>Other (Math, Writing, Spanish, Reading, Interventions, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native language instruction</td>
<td>Successful instruction for ELs in the content areas</td>
<td>“Have someone come to my class and model”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational text</td>
<td>“I would like to learn more about ways in which I can help students with ESL and yet have problems writing and reading in their home language”</td>
<td>“I would like to have more concrete workshops/courses in language and literacy development during the flex days”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-teaching</td>
<td>“Supporting recent immigrants within the general education setting when pull-out services cannot be provided. A ‘where to begin’ course”</td>
<td>“A training on how to motivate middle school students that are struggling with reading”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There are so many different components that are now required to develop one lesson that at times I wish they would be scripted”</td>
<td>“Close Reading would be helpful to EL students”</td>
<td>Integrating and aligning CCSS and WIDA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The integration of an ESL curriculum emphasizing the explicit teaching of academic vocabulary and language functions; adhering to the SIOP model”</td>
<td>“Using WIDA standards and language objectives in the context of social science”</td>
<td>Differentiation with ELs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing techniques for beginners</td>
<td>Rigorous 8th grade nonfiction text and writing but written two years above the 8th grade</td>
<td>PD on math vocabulary differences and similarities between languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle grade writing curriculum training</td>
<td>“I would like to go back to graduate school and enroll in more EL coursework”</td>
<td>“I am not a literacy teacher so in order for me to expand my knowledge, I feel I would need the entire coursework”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Training on how to motivate middle grade students that are struggling with reading”</td>
<td>“Strategies that can be used in general academic settings where no pull-out services are needed”</td>
<td>PD regarding push-in practices/strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective strategies to meet the needs of ELs</td>
<td>“Using WIDA standards and language objectives in the content”</td>
<td>“How to differentiate the content and the language objectives according to different EL grade levels in the classroom”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Writing PD for reluctant EL students”</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Using WIDA standards and language objectives in the content”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Using a descriptive coding process to analyze the survey open-ended responses listed in Table 6, key professional learning topics emerged from the participants among the three teaching roles’ groups. Among these are: (a) training on the integration of WIDA and the CCSS; (b) professional development on writing curriculum, writing in the content areas, and writing in response to reading for ELs; (c) training on approaches and strategies for differentiation of instruction for ELs; and (d) professional development on how to motivate and engage middle grade ELs. This information is helpful in understanding the awareness and attitudes teachers of middle grade ELs have about their professional needs. It is also useful in recognizing the type of learning opportunities middle grade teachers of ELs deem important in strengthening their profession and for
improving their practice and students’ achievement. The professional learning needs of teachers are explored in depth in the chapter five discussion of the interview data.

**Perceived Levels of Expertise in the Implementation of Key CCSS Focus Areas and WIDA/ELD Components**

Probing the preparation and ascertaining the levels of expertise in standards-based instruction that middle grade teachers of ELs bring to the teaching and learning experiences of middle grade ELs were key components in determining the language and literacy practices that are important and useful to them in regard to the education of ELs. Equally important was gathering information on the beliefs and attitudes middle grade teachers of ELs bring forth in reflecting on their perceived levels of expertise, deciding whether their practice is meaningful to their students, and identifying the instructional approaches that are most useful to their students. The following section examines the participants’ beliefs on topics that influence their decision making on their instructional and professional practice and are based on the results of survey questions that were designed for this purpose.

**CCSS literacy focus areas.** The study participants were asked to indicate their level of expertise in implementing the CCSS/ELA and Literacy focus areas specifically in regard to the instruction of middle grade ELs. From the Likert scale questions that asked participants to indicate their levels of expertise from the choices of emerging, developing, proficient, advanced, and don’t know, the basic statistics on this data indicated that on average, participants in the bilingual/ESL, ELPT, and “Other” teaching groups were in the developing stages across the implementation of the CCSS focus areas in literacy. Table 7 details the results obtained from this question.
Table 7

*Perceived Level of Expertise in Implementing CCSS Literacy Focus Areas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Teaching Roles</th>
<th>Text Complexity Dimensions</th>
<th>Close Reading of Complex Text</th>
<th>Collaborative Conversations</th>
<th>Argumentative Writing</th>
<th>Academic Language</th>
<th>Informational Text Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual/ESL Departmentalized ESL Departmentalized EL Program Teacher</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education ELA and Social Science with a Bilingual/ESL Endorsement</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Content Teachers</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 7, the participants’ responses regarding their levels of expertise in implementing the CCSS focus areas in literacy were further categorized by their teaching roles. This analysis was necessary to determine the participants’ perceived level of confidence in implementing these focus areas in their instruction. The findings in Table 7 correspond to a great extent to the answers concerning the amount of training participants had received in the implementation of the Common Core standards, which
indicated that about half of the participants received somewhere between 10 to 49 hours of CCSS training, but also over 40% received less than 10 hours training on the CCSS.

Participants in the general education in ELA and social science teaching roles indicated they felt proficient in implementing close reading of complex text, collaborative conversations, academic language, and informational text reading. These findings also suggest that general education teachers may have benefited from the CCSS training they received in the 16 months prior to the administration of the survey as indicated by their responses to the question focusing on the level of training they received on the implementation of these standards. What precisely accounted for the stronger than anticipated response from general education teachers is an issue that was further probed in the analysis of the interview data presented in chapter five.

**WIDA/ELD components.** Table 8 shows that with respect to the perceived levels of expertise in the implementation of the WIDA components, no major differences were distinguished among the three teaching roles’ groups. These findings are important in that they imply that based on the limited training participants reported having on the use of the CCSS and WIDA standards, their expertise in these areas is still in development.
Table 8

Perceived Level of Expertise in Implementing Components of the WIDA/ELD Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Teaching Roles</th>
<th>Can Do Descriptors</th>
<th>Model Performance Indicators</th>
<th>Features of Academic Language</th>
<th>Socio-Cultural Contexts for Language Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual/ESL Departmentalized ESL Departmentalized EL Program Teacher</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education ELA with a Bilingual/ESL Endorsement General Education Social Science with an ESL Endorsement</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Content Teachers</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The levels of expertise in the use of the CCSS and WIDA standards, their utility, and the usefulness of the instructional approaches that are employed in the implementation of the standards are further examined in the chapter five discussion of the interview data.

**Perceived Usefulness of Instructional Approaches in Teaching ELs**

A successful implementation of standards-based instruction in the teaching of language and literacy cannot be accomplished without the instructional approaches that are known to be useful in the instruction of middle grade students and what teachers of middle grade ELs need to have in their repertoire or skill set (Council of the Great City...
Schools [CGCS], 2014 Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). To ascertain what instructional approaches middle grade teachers in the district typically use and perceive as valuable in the teaching of language and literacy, participants were asked to indicate the level of usefulness of the instructional approaches in supporting the language and literacy development of their middle grade ELs from a list of choices that ranged from not useful at all, slightly useful, moderately useful, considerably useful, and most useful.

Figure 11 shows that of the 53 respondents who completed the survey, 43 responded to this particular question. Not atypical of a survey question of this type, their responses indicated that on average, all instructional approaches were considerably useful for the instruction of ELs. In this case, basic statistic data of these findings show that only three respondents indicated explicit instruction of academic language for Spanish language arts and social science in Spanish was most useful for both the language and literacy development of ELS. These basic statistics also show the instructional approaches of teaching for transfer, collaborative conversations, content specific vocabulary instruction, partnering for content literacy (PRC2), and explicit instruction of academic language obtained higher mean scores than all other approaches in the language development category, ranging from means scores of 4.30 to 4.40. Question 16 in Appendix D shows the complete breakdown of percentages and basic statistics of these data.
Figure 14. Reported usefulness of the instructional approaches that support the language development of middle grade ELs.

For the literacy development category, the instructional approaches of teaching reading of informational text, close reading of complex text, writing and reading workshop, and partnering for content literacy (PRC2) also received higher mean scores than the rest of the categories. The mean scores range from 4.23 to 4.40. Figure 14 demonstrates the overall distribution of the participants’ responses. See question 16 in Appendix D for a complete breakdown of this data.
Although information on the usefulness of instructional approaches in supporting the learning of ELs does not show significant results, valuable trends that emerged from this data provided rich information and distinctive differences on the participants’ perceived beliefs of what is useful in teaching both language and literacy to their students. To what level the use of these instructional approaches account for the success of middle grade ELs and the effectiveness of the teachers’ instruction as interpreted by the teachers’ own beliefs and dispositions in teaching these students was something that needed additional probing. Thus, questions on the instruction of these focus areas and the ways in which teachers engage their students in learning and using these skills were purposely analyzed in the participant interviews.
Perceived Effectiveness in Teaching ELs

All teachers want to know and feel they are effective in teaching their students. Whole societies want to know teachers are effective in their teaching. Typically, teacher effectiveness is measured by or correlated with their student performance, through observations, and through self-reported data (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2013). Multiple researchers (Adger, Snow, & Christian, 2002; DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera, 2014; Garcia & Godina, 2004) have consistently shown that in the world of bilingual education and instruction of English as a second language improving the language and literacy skills of English learners will vastly depend on exploring ways to deepen all teachers’ knowledge of language and literacy development. At the core of this study was the need to identify what middle grade teachers know and are able to do in working with their ELs and to explore ways that make the ESL and bilingual teachers’ language and literacy instructional practices effective. In addition, it was important to find how the attitudes and beliefs of these teachers influence their decisions when teaching middle grade ELs. The sections that follow explore these issues.

To get at an idea of their perceived beliefs in teaching ELs, participants were asked to rate their level of effectiveness in advancing the achievement of their ELs by choosing responses that ranged from not effective at all, slightly effective, neutral, considerably effective, to most effective. In response to this question, approximately 67% of the participants in the bilingual/ESL and ELPT teaching roles’ indicated they were considerably effective and 14% indicated they were most effective. Fifty percent of the respondents in the general education teaching roles reported themselves to be considerably effective, and 25% reported themselves to be most effective. Forty four
percent of the participants in the “Other” teaching category indicated they were considerably effective and 22% indicated they were most effective. See Appendix D for a breakdown of this data.

These effectiveness findings yield significant results in that they suggest that middle grade teachers in the bilingual/ESL teaching roles perceive themselves as considerably effective in promoting the achievement of ELs, more than the teachers in the other two teaching categories by over 15%. However, 25% of the individuals in the general education category and 22% in the “Other” category reported they believe they are most effective in teaching ELs versus only 14% of the respondents in the bilingual/ESL and ELPT roles. To distinguish more precisely the perceived beliefs of middle grade teachers of ELs with respect to the achievement of ELs, the interview data examined in depth the circumstances or conditions that may contribute to the participants’ assertiveness regarding this topic as this finding suggests.

**Perceived Effectiveness of Content Nonfiction Texts**

In addition to strong knowledge, preparation, curriculum, and standards, teachers need quality materials and resources to teach their students more effectively. Since 2011, the district has widely promoted the use of high-quality, high-interest, and content-specific nonfiction texts due to the absence of core curriculum materials for literacy instruction. Supplementary curriculum resources for the language and literacy instruction of bilingual and ESL students in the middle grades are even more difficult to find. In the absence of core curriculum, the use of supplemental materials like nonfiction text sets has become an alternative for district teachers across classroom settings.
It was important to determine the extent to which middle grade teachers of ELs employ these nonfiction texts as useful resources in the instruction of ELs. Therefore, using a Likert question with choices that ranged from *not useful at all, slightly useful, considerably useful, and most useful*, the study participants were asked to indicate the level of usefulness of these resources for each of the 12 focus areas of language and literacy the district has promoted through professional development and that research has shown to be effective in teaching ELs. These 12 focus areas listed in the question included: (a) increase content knowledge, (b) access culturally-relevant content, (c) practice oral reading in pairs or small groups, (d) develop comprehension strategies, (e) improve vocabulary learning, (f) practice close reading of complex text, (g) learn and use academic language, (h) learn and use structures and features of text, (i) increase nonfiction reading, (j) use text features to support understanding and use of the English language, (k) increase the knowledge and use of the native language, and (l) practice informational text reading.

Analysis of the results that surfaced from this question indicated that, based on the mean scores obtained from this data, on average, participants in the bilingual/ESL and ELPT teaching roles found the use of high-quality, high-interest nonfiction texts to be considerably effective mainly to improve vocabulary learning, practice informational text reading, learn and use academic language, and increase nonfiction reading. The mean scores also indicated participants in the general education and “Other” teaching roles found the use of nonfiction texts considerably effective in accessing culturally-relevant content, increasing content knowledge, practicing close reading of text, increasing nonfiction reading, and using text features to support understanding and use of the English
language. The most salient area among the three teaching groups in regard to the effectiveness of nonfiction text sets was to increase nonfiction reading. This finding and the differences in the results between the three teaching groups are interesting and they are explored in the interview data and discussed in the recommendations chapter.

Perceived Challenges

Previously in this chapter, the multifaceted teaching roles and instructional contexts of the participants were identified. To better understand the complexity of the work middle grade teachers of ELs engage in and to determine their effectiveness in teaching these students, it is essential to probe the factors that influence the practice and decision making of these teachers based on their perceived beliefs. Some of the factors that play a key role in the teaching and learning practices of middle grade teachers are the challenges these teachers face in educating these students. In determining what these challenges are, the study participants were asked to identify the biggest challenge they encounter in educating their middle grade ELs by ranking their responses from a list of choices that ranged from not challenging at all, slightly challenging, moderately challenging, considerably challenging, to most challenging.

The responses to this question showed that nearly 43% of the participants in the bilingual/ESL and ELPT roles reported limited planning and collaboration with content teachers as being most challenging. In contrast, 33% of the respondents in the general education chose limited professional learning opportunities for middle grade bilingual/ESL teachers as being the most challenging. Thirty-six percent of the participant in the “Other” teaching roles’ category chose the range of languages and English proficiency levels of their students as being the most challenging. Overall, a
large percentage of the participants in each of the three teaching groups revealed they encounter different challenges in the instruction of their students. Explanations and implications of these findings are discussed in chapter five and chapter six.

**Instructional and Professional Attitudes/Priorities That Influence Teachers' Decision Making in Teaching ELs**

Investigating the instructional priorities middle grade teachers of ELs employ in the teaching of middle grade ELs was another main aspect of this study. In order to accomplish this, the attitudes and dispositions teachers exhibited in how they make decisions about their particular areas of instruction that impact the learning of their ELs needed to be examined in more depth. Several key questions were designed and asked so as to collect data on this topic. These included questions on: (a) the use of the students’ native language in the instruction of language arts and social science contents; (b) their commitment to their professional growth; (c) the importance of discussing with other professionals their decision making and professional practice with respect to the instruction of their ELs; (d) the efforts they make to collaborate with other content teachers in their school to plan instructional activities for their students; (e) the use of others’ expertise to improve the instruction of middle grade ELs; (f) opportunities they seek to enhance their knowledge and practice about the development of language and literacy skills of their students; (g) the frequency with which they use diagnostic and progress monitoring data in designing instruction for their middle grade ELs; and (h) the frequency with which they use district-developed content frameworks and other resources such as textbooks and online materials with the purpose of designing and providing meaningful instruction for their students.
Responses to questions that investigated these topics showed major significances, and results to some of the questions are worth noting because they provide information that was examined in more depth in the data that surfaced from the interviews. In the following sections, brief explanations are provided about the participants’ beliefs and attitudes concerning the key questions previously noted.

**Teaching in the Native Language of ELs**

Research has shown that instruction in the native language of English learners, particularly of Spanish-speaking ELs, supports their learning of English, second language literacy, and helps transfer content knowledge from the first to second language, especially when there is a strong foundation in the first language (Dressler & Kamil, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008). The extent to which the native language and literacy proficiency in the first language of middle grade ELs is used to boost their knowledge of English language and literacy and promote their overall achievement is not clearly known. Obtaining this information from teachers who educate these students is of particular importance for these reasons and also because according to state regulations, ELs in bilingual programs must receive instruction in both English and their native language until they reach proficiency in English. It was important to collect this information in this study in order to determine how much of instruction in English and a student’s native language is actually occurring in middle grade EL classrooms.

In response to the question about how frequently they teach language arts and social science in the native language of their middle grade ELs, the participants’ responses were: individuals in the bilingual/ESL and ELPT teaching roles demonstrated they provide instruction in the native language of the students on average for one to two
hours per week in the language arts content, and 30–60 minutes per week in social science. The mean scores of these findings are 3.12 and 2.14 respectively. The responses from individuals in the general education and the “Other” teaching roles were similar. Participants in both of these teaching groups indicated that on average they teach in the native language of their students 30–60 minutes per week in language arts and mostly never in the social science content. The mean scores of these data are 2.57 and 1.77 respectively.

These results suggest that middle grade ELs do not receive significant instruction in their native language and such findings present major implications since English learners are required to receive instruction in the native language until they reach proficiency in English per the state’s guidelines and as expected of the program of instruction in which the ELs are placed. What influence the decisions of teachers on when and how to provide instruction in the first language of the students is a topic that is probed in depth in the interview data analyzed in chapter five.

**Showing Commitment to Professional Growth**

What influences the decision making of middle grade EL teachers in the instruction of the students was a central question in this study. Survey questions were designed to identify key factors that influence the decisions teachers make in prioritizing what is important to them with respect to their professional growth and for the success of their students. Study participants were asked to provide information on how they show they have a strong commitment to their professional growth, how they make efforts to collaborate with English language arts (ELA) and social science content teachers, how they utilize the expertise of others with the goals of improving the language and literacy
instruction and achievement of their students, and how they seek opportunities to enhance their professional knowledge and practice about the development of language and literacy for their students. Table 9, Table 10, Table 11, and Table 12 exhibit the top three choices that surfaced regarding factors that influence decision making that were gleaned from all of the participants’ responses in each of the three teaching categories.

Table 9

**Participants’ Attitudes/Priorities on Professional Growth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Participants’ Teaching Roles by Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe I have a strong personal commitment to my professional growth and development that I demonstrate by:</td>
<td>Bilingual/ESL Departmentalized; English Learner Program Teacher (ELPT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reflecting on my own practice based on my students’ performance</td>
<td>1. Engaging in collaborative work with my colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Engaging in collaborative work with my colleagues</td>
<td>2. Reflecting on my own practice based on my students’ performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Seeing out professional support when I need it</td>
<td>3. Seeking out professional support when I need it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (Math, Writing, Reading, Spanish, Computer, Science)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Reflecting on my own practice based on my students’ performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Engaging in collaborative work with my colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Taking on various leadership roles and responsibilities in my school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants’ attitudes/dispositions on professional growth were enlightening.

The responses to the professional growth question resulted from a list of seven choices that in addition to the top 3 choices listed in Table 9, included the following responses: attending workshops and conferences at my own time and expense, reading
research/professional journals and online resources to improve practice, and I don’t know. The top three categories were chosen by over 80% of the participants in each of the teaching roles’ groups. These responses reflect that for participants in all the three teaching categories, their top priorities are reflection on their own practice based on their students’ performance and engaging in collaborative work with their colleagues.

**Collaborating with ELA and Social Science Content Teachers**

Teacher collaboration can be a factor that influences teachers’ priorities and instructional decisions for the betterment of their students. To gather information about the efforts study participants make in collaborating with the middle grade ELA and social science teachers in their school to plan instructional activities for their ELs, a Likert scale question was administered for this purpose. Table 10 explains the distribution of the participants’ responses to this question on collaboration.
Table 10

*Participants’ Attitudes on Collaboration with ELA and Social Science Content Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question/Statement: I make efforts to collaborate with the middle grade ELA and Social Science teachers in my school to plan instructional activities for my middle grade ELs</th>
<th>Participants’ Teaching Roles by Category</th>
<th>Other (Math, Writing, Reading, Spanish, Computer, Science)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bilingual/ESL Departmentalized; English Learner Program Teacher (ELPT)</td>
<td>General Education Departmentalized – English Language Arts and Social Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts Teachers</td>
<td>Never – 4.76% Rarely – 14.29% Sometimes – 19.05% Regularly – 23.81% Most Often – 38.10%</td>
<td>Never – 0.00% Rarely – 0.00% Sometimes – 26.32% Regularly – 42.11% Most Often – 31.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Teachers</td>
<td>Never – 10% Rarely – 25% Sometimes – 30% Regularly – 20% Most Often – 15%</td>
<td>Never – 5.56% Rarely – 38.89% Sometimes – 27.78% Regularly – 5.56% Most Often – 22.22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings that surfaced from the above data imply that more participants in the teaching roles of bilingual/ESL, ELPT and general education teachers collaborate with their colleagues in the ELA regularly and most often, according to the higher percentages obtained in these two categories. In regard to collaboration with the social science teachers, the responses from the participants in the bilingual/ESL, ELPT and general education teaching groups suggest there is less collaboration with social science teachers from participants in both of these teaching groups. Responses from the participants’ in the “Other” teaching roles’ group are more spread apart and suggest that more individuals in this group collaborate much less with both the ELA and social science content teachers.

**Using the Expertise of Others to Improve Instruction and Performance of ELs**

Studies of the teaching profession have noted that teaching has been viewed as an isolated profession until recent times when more emphasis has been given to teacher
quality and the quality of teaching (Danielson, 2007). New evaluation methods of teachers have made it clear that teachers can no longer afford to work in isolation and have highlighted the need for teachers to be mindful of their professional growth and continuous improvement (Darling-Hammond, 2013). The central question that guided this study sought to understand factors that make the middle grade teachers’ instructional practices effective and how they make instructional decisions in teaching their middle grade ELs. With the assumption that all teachers, particularly teachers of ELs, need ongoing supports from experts and others who are more knowledgeable, study participants were asked to identify the extent to which they utilize the expertise of others for improving the instruction and performance of their students. Table 11 displays responses to this request.
Table 11

**Attitudes/Priorities on Using the Expertise of Others to Improve the Instruction of ELs**

Survey Question/Statement: I utilize the expertise of others (listed below) to improve the instruction and performance of middle grade ELs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expert Individuals</th>
<th>Bilingual/ESL Departmentalized; English Learner Program Teacher (ELPT) <em>(n=21)</em></th>
<th>General Education Departmentalized—English Language Arts and Social Science <em>(n=20)</em></th>
<th>Other (Math, Writing, Reading, Spanish, Computer, Science) <em>(n=12)</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>Never – 0.00%</td>
<td>Never – 0.00%</td>
<td>Never – 11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely – 4.76%</td>
<td>Rarely – 10.53%</td>
<td>Rarely – 5.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes – 19.05%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 15.79%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 22.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Regularly – 47.62</strong></td>
<td><strong>Regularly – 42.11%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Regularly – 44.44%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 28.57%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 31.58%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 16.67%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-School Instructional Leaders</td>
<td>Never – 4.76%</td>
<td>Never – 0.00%</td>
<td>Never – 11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely – 9.52%</td>
<td>Rarely – 26.32%</td>
<td>Rarely – 16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes – 19.05%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 10.53%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 27.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regularly – 38.10%</td>
<td>Regularly – 36.84%</td>
<td>Regularly – 27.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 28.75%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 26.32%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 16.67%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual Education Experts</td>
<td>Never – 4.76%</td>
<td>Never – 0.00%</td>
<td>Never – 11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely – 9.52%</td>
<td>Rarely – 26.32%</td>
<td>Rarely – 11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes – 33.33%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 26.32%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 44.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regularly – 33.33%</td>
<td>Regularly – 26.32%</td>
<td>Regularly – 16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 19.05%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 21.05%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 16.67%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Experts</td>
<td>Never – 5.00%</td>
<td>Never – 0.00%</td>
<td>Never – 16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely – 10.00%</td>
<td>Rarely – 15.79%</td>
<td>Rarely – 16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes – 35.00%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 31.58%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regularly – 30.00%</td>
<td>Regularly – 26.32%</td>
<td>Regularly – 22.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 20.00%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 26.32%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 11.11%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual/ESL Teachers in Other Schools</td>
<td>Never – 9.52%</td>
<td>Never – 0.00%</td>
<td>Never – 22.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rarely – 19.05%</td>
<td>Rarely – 52.63%</td>
<td>Rarely – 16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes – 38.10%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 21.05%</td>
<td>Sometimes – 11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regularly – 14.29%</td>
<td>Regularly – 10.53%</td>
<td>Regularly – 33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 19.05%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 15.79%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Most Often – 16.67%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though the responses related to this question are not significantly different among participants in each of the teaching groups, the results are worth examining. The most valuable findings from these data are that participants in the three teaching roles’ groups reported utilizing the expertise of their colleagues more than using the expertise of individuals outside of their school. Approximately 48% of participants in the bilingual/ESL, ELPT teaching group indicated they utilize the support of their colleagues...
regularly, and nearly 29% showed they most often do. Forty-two percent of the participants in the general education teacher group demonstrated they utilize the expertise of their colleagues regularly and about 32% most often. In the “Other” teaching roles’ category, 44% of the participants showed they utilize the expertise of their colleagues regularly and nearly 17% most often. To ascertain the ways in which participants utilize the expertise of their colleagues and how these influence the instruction and performance of their students, interview questions were analyzed to surface this data.

Decision Making on the Use of Diagnostic Tools and Instructional Materials

Many issues influence the decision making of middle grade teachers of ELs on what and how to teach their students, but the availability and use of diagnostic and progress monitoring tools and quality instructional materials are factors that greatly influence the instruction and performance of ELs, especially of those students in middle grades (Biancarosa, 2004; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). It was important to discern if and how these factors influence the attitudes and decision making of the participants about what and how they teach their students. Survey Likert questions were designed and administered to gather this information.

Through choices that ranged from weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually, and never, participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used diagnostic information, progress monitoring tools, district content frameworks, textbooks, and online materials in designing instruction for their middle grade ELs. The data obtained from responses to these questions from the participants in the three teaching groups were meaningful, but not significantly different. Thus, rather than reporting these data by teaching groups, all the results were summarized and disaggregated by mean scores and
standard deviations. Table 12 shows the summary of these data. Complete distributions of these data can be found in Appendix D, Appendix E, Appendix F, and Appendix G.
### Table 12

**Frequency of Use of Diagnostic and Progress Monitoring Tools and Instructional Materials**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Use of:</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Annually</th>
<th>Quarterly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diagnostic Information</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Progress Monitoring Data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Framework for Teaching</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts Instruction in the Native Language – 2.95 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Instruction in the Native Language – 2.38 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts Instruction – 3.74 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Instruction – 3.06 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy Framework</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts Instruction in the Native Language – 2.80 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Instruction in English – 2.97 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Instruction in the Native Language – 2.06 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts Instruction – 3.95 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Science Content Framework</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Instruction in the Native Language – 1.97 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts Instruction – 2.81 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts Instruction in the Native Language – 2.03 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Instruction in English – 2.76 Mean Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Textbooks/Basals</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The information shown in Table 12 indicates that in regard to the planning for instruction for middle grade ELs, the content frameworks on average are used for this purpose on an annual basis. The data also indicates that with respect to designing instruction for ELs, on average, diagnostic tools are used annually and progress monitoring tools quarterly. The mean scores of these results also show that the Social Science Content Framework is never used for the instruction of ELs. On average, scores demonstrate that study participants monthly use online materials for the instruction of English language arts, quarterly for language arts instruction in the native language of the students, and annually for social science instruction in English. This summary data makes evident that on average, diagnostic and progress monitoring tools, content frameworks, and instructional materials are not used on a weekly basis in planning the instruction of middle grade ELs. These findings suggest that there is lack of coherence and alignment in the curriculum resources available to middle grade ELs across district schools. This situation was explored further in the interview setting.
The trends revealed in the response of 50 of the 53 participants who completed the survey are valuable in that they suggest critical implications for the instruction of ELs in terms of the formative assessment tools and the materials middle grade teachers of ELs make available for their students. These trends also offer insightful information about the frequency of teachers using these materials for the instruction of language and literacy in the language arts and social science contents and for the instruction of language arts and social science in the native language of their students. This is interesting information that necessitates further examination.

**Summary of the Quantitative Data Analysis**

The data collected from the online survey are vast and multilayered, but the issues that underlie the study and the population of interest are just as complex and diverse as the number of questions and topics that were included in the survey. It was challenging to break apart in meaningful pieces the information obtained from all the participants who accessed the survey. Therefore, only the responses of the 53 participants who completed the survey in its entirety were examined. The information provided by these respondents was summarized as a collective and further analyzed in the three major teaching categories that surfaced from the data.

The reality of the participants as interpreted by their survey responses indicates progress in the way teachers are thinking about and targeting the instruction of middle grade ELs and also display the complexity of their work and the areas in need of improvement that continue to exist. The survey findings are significant in that study participants provided a clear picture of the conditions in which teachers of middle grade ELs function, the attitudes and dispositions these teachers bring to the instruction of ELs,
the preparation and qualifications that are necessary to educate middle grade ELs with efficacy, and the type of professional development middle grade teachers of ELs have been exposed to or are in need of receiving. The survey findings also bring to light other factors that influence the work participants do, such as the level of collaboration or its absence with their colleagues and the types of resources that are available to their students.

In order to make better sense of the large amount of information obtained from the 41 survey questions, trends that emerged from these data were clustered into four major sections. First, the diversity and demographic profile of the participants represent the EL population of the district, and even the country, in that the majority of the participants are of Spanish-speaking background and U.S. born. Second, even though most individuals reported holding a master’s degree or higher and have taught somewhere between seven to more than 20 years, the data implied there are many middle grade teachers who still do not have the appropriate endorsements required to qualify as teachers of middle grade ELs. Third, results about the participants’ preparation suggested the need for teachers of ELs to take more bilingual, language/linguistic, culturally relevant, and literacy courses in the pre-service or in in-service years. Also, the type of professional development participants received or reported as useful implied that more training on the use of the Common Core and the WIDA/ELD standards and the accompanying strategies and approaches that are specific to the content, context, and the students they teach are essential for teachers of middle grade ELs. Fourth, the information obtained from the survey is meaningful in that it suggests more needs to be known about the attitudes and dispositions of teachers about how and why they decide to
use particular approaches in their instruction, when and how they teach in the students’ native language, what instructional resources they use or need, and what other issues should be considered to ensure the instruction and supports they provide their students are effective.

The rich and powerful results obtained from the survey data helped me to understand more clearly the depth of the issues and topics that guided this study and highlighted additional probing that needs to be done on the key themes that surfaced from this data. The meaningful themes that were obtained from the survey responses in reference to the four sections that have been discussed in this chapter, specifically sections three and four, are explored in depth in chapter five.
CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the findings from the participants’ interview data related to the research questions and in response to the interview questions that informed this study and expanded the survey results. This chapter is structured into four principal sections. First, a brief description is given of the purpose and value of the interview data for this study. The second section presents a profile of the teacher population of interest with its requirements, qualifications, and responsibilities per the policies of the district participating in this study; this is then followed by a background and demographic profile of the interview participants. The third section introduces the categories and significant themes that surfaced in the coding process applied to the data gleaned from the semi-structured interviews. The fourth and main section of this chapter provides rich and broad descriptions of the analysis and interpretation of the most salient themes that emerged from the interview data and their connection to the survey results. A brief summary of the findings is also included in this last section.

Consistent with the qualitative research and using semi-structured interviews as the qualitative data collection method, this study aimed at acquiring a deeper understanding of the study participants’ experiences, perspectives, and the actions they have taken in shaping or reshaping their realities as professionals and as educators of English learners (Chase, 2008). Through these interviews, the study participants shared their personal stories situated in their actions and formed by their ways of thinking about
who they are, what they do and why, and by doing so, helped me to interpret their perceived realities in more meaningful ways. As a qualitative researcher, I view the participants as the ones who know and tell about the meaningful practices middle grade teachers of English Learners (ELs) use to make a difference in the education experiences of their students. The attitudes, preparation, and supports teachers reported using or needing for enhancing their practice and student outcomes were carefully examined and interpreted as well.

According to the constructivist view, humans construct their understanding of the world—their reality—by using their thoughts and through the individual and collective actions that result from the individuals’ ideas. These actions and constructed realities, however, are shaped by external and internal stimuli and by the individual and collective interpretations of these realities (Stake, 1995). In addition to understanding the constructed realities of the study participants, it was essential to determine and interpret the external and internal factors that influence who these individuals are as teachers of middle grade ELs, how they function in their teaching roles, as well as how they act on their professional and instructional decisions. The analysis and interpretations of these realities and the issues that influence them are provided in section four’s analysis and interpretation of salient themes and section five’s discussion of the critical components of teaching middle grade EL students in connection to survey findings.

**The Participants’ Profiles Revisited**

In general terms, all teachers who teach middle grade students in schools with an EL population, regardless of the number of ELs in their classrooms and the content they teach, feel they are responsible for the education of all students, including ELs.
However, because of compliance issues, middle grade content teachers who do not hold the necessary bilingual and/or ESL endorsements are not identified on paper and in practice as teachers of ELs, even though they have English learners in their classrooms. As a result, these teachers may not see themselves as totally responsible for the instruction and success of ELs, especially if there are bilingual and/or ESL resource teachers in the building, and others may not see them as having this responsibility either. Another assumption that can be made is that even when general education teachers in the middle grades try to do their best to make instruction meaningful for the ELs in their classroom, without knowing the fundamentals of bilingual education and ESL pedagogy, their good intentions and efforts might not be enough to meet the unique needs of their middle grade English learners.

The state mandates that all school administrators hire and assign teachers with bilingual and/or ESL endorsements to teach the ELs in their building. As discussed in chapter four, state regulations also stipulate that all middle grade teachers have a middle grade endorsement as well as an endorsement in the content area they teach. The survey data of this study indicated these requirements are not fully met. As determined by survey data, the teachers who are assigned the role of middle grade bilingual and/or ESL teacher are typically given multiple grade levels and content areas to teach and/or support. Under these conditions, these teachers end up providing some level of bilingual and/or ESL instruction and supports to middle grade ELs, but only for a few hours a week at best. The survey data also indicated that although general education teachers in departmentalized, content-specific settings hold their bilingual and/or ESL endorsements, their teaching assignments do not reflect the typical bilingual and/or ESL teacher
assignment. Consequently, these teachers do not identify themselves as bilingual and/or ESL teachers and, therefore, the district and state teacher data reports would not identify them as such either.

In the past two to three years, there has been a strong push from the district and individual schools to motivate and help more middle grade and high school teachers get at least their ESL endorsement if they are not bilingual so they would be qualified to teach ELs. Having more content teachers with bilingual and/or ESL endorsements will help schools comply with state mandates and will help teachers to better assist students so that if supports from resource teachers are not available, the content teachers will be able to provide the scaffolds necessary for ELs to improve their English and content knowledge. In an effort to understand the extent to which this urgency has played out in middle grade classrooms in the district, this study attempted to illuminate the realities that exist for both middle grade teachers and their students through rich and thick descriptions of the lived experiences of study participants and through their perceived realities and actions.

The survey instrument was useful in gathering data from the study participants who are representative of the population of interest and helped address the research questions for the study. Survey results provided an overview of the various teaching roles middle grade teachers assume as well as their attitudes, preparation, and the professional characteristics that influence their decision making in regard to the instruction of middle grade ELs. The survey information provided by the study participants suggested there was a need to probe further into these issues in the qualitative phase of the study. Based on survey data and using selection criteria, 16 participants
were chosen to engage in the semi-structured interview process. The profile of these participants follows.

Table 13 displays the selected characteristics of the interview participants as informed by survey data.
### Table 13

**Selected Characteristics of Interview Participants That Emerged From Survey Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Teaching Role</th>
<th>Instructional Contexts</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Orozco</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Push-in, Pull-out; Self-contained bilingual and ESL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Castro</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Push-in, Pull-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Self-contained ESL, Pull-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Push-in, Pull-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. C</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ English Language Arts</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristy</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ English Language Arts</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raiza</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ English Language Arts</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ Social Science</td>
<td>Self-contained Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lupita</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ Social Science</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ Social Science</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ Social Science</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Petra</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Push-in, Pull-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susana</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Push-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ Reading Teacher</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Q.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ Spanish Language Arts in Dual Language Program</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Participants’ Teaching Roles**
The information provided in Table 13 shows that five out of 16 participants reported to be in a bilingual/ESL departmentalized teaching role. Of these five participants, three indicated they have an EL Program Teacher Leader (ELPT) role which, according to the information gleaned from the interview data, is a role that is both a teaching role and an administrative/leadership role. Three of the 16 participants specified they are departmentalized English language arts (ELA) teachers, and four reported they are departmentalized social science teachers. Only two participants indicated they are employed in a ELPT teaching role, though their interview information revealed their primary role is that of bilingual/ESL teachers working in push-in and pull-out settings with the added responsibility of administering the EL programs. Two interview participants are in the category labeled “Other,” one as a reading teacher and the other as a Spanish language arts teacher in a dual language program. Seven out of the 16 teacher participants reported they are teaching one grade only; nine revealed they are teaching two grades; and one is teaching two different grade clusters, one in primary and the other in middle grades.

**Basic Demographic and Background Data of Interview Participants**

In addition to gathering teaching role information, it was important to distinguish the education and language experiences, preparation, and basic demographic background of the interview participants for the purpose of drawing a more complete understanding of their collective experiences and arriving at rich and broad interpretations of the perceived realities of these participants in relation to the research questions that guided this study. Table 14 demonstrates the basic demographic and background data of the 16 interview participants that was obtained from the survey data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Role</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest University Degree</th>
<th>Endorsements</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Bilingual/ Biliterate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual/ESL</td>
<td>2 male</td>
<td>2 – MA+</td>
<td>1 – Bilingual, ESL, S/S, Middle Grades, ELA, Reading</td>
<td>2 – Over 20 years</td>
<td>4 Yes /Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departmentalized/EL</td>
<td>3 female</td>
<td>1 – BA</td>
<td>1 – Provisional Bilingual, Reading</td>
<td>1 – 4-6 years</td>
<td>1 Yes /Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 – Doctorate</td>
<td>1 – Bilingual, ESL, ELA, Reading</td>
<td>2 – 11-15 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 – Provisional Bilingual, ESL, Science, ELA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 – Bilingual, ESL, Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 – Bilingual, S/S, ELA, Middle Grades</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S/S, ELA, Reading Specialist, Middle Grades</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Ed./ELA (3)</td>
<td>3 female</td>
<td>2 – MA+</td>
<td>1 – Bilingual, ESL, S/S, ELA Middle Grades, Type 75</td>
<td>2 – 11-15 years</td>
<td>2 Yes/ Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 - MA</td>
<td>1 – ELA, S/S, Middle Grades</td>
<td>1 – 7-10 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 – Provisional Bilingual, ESL, S/S, ELA, Reading Specialist, Middle Grades</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Grades</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Ed./Social Science (S/S) (4)</td>
<td>4 female</td>
<td>2 – MA</td>
<td>1 – Bilingual, ESL, S/S, Middle Grades</td>
<td>1 – 7-10 years</td>
<td>2 Yes/ Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 – MA+</td>
<td>1 – ELA, S/S, Middle Grades</td>
<td>1 – Over 20 years</td>
<td>1 Yes/ Polish,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 – ELA, ESL, S/S, Science, Middle Grades</td>
<td>2 – 11-15 years</td>
<td>German, French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 – School Library</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 – No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL Program Teacher (2)</td>
<td>2 female</td>
<td>2 – MA+</td>
<td>1 – Bilingual, ESL, S/S, Science, Middle Grades, Mathematics</td>
<td>1 – Over 20 years</td>
<td>1 Yes/ Polish,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 – Bilingual, ELA, ESL, Middle Grades, Reading Teacher</td>
<td>1 – 16-20 years</td>
<td>Russian, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Yes/ Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (2)</td>
<td>2 female</td>
<td>1 – MA+</td>
<td>1 – ELA, S/S, Middle Grades</td>
<td>1 – 7-10 years</td>
<td>1 – No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 – BA+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Education background and teaching experience.** The data in Table 2 show that four of the five interview participants in the bilingual/ESL group have a master’s degree or higher as well as bilingual, ESL, and middle grade endorsements and a variety of content endorsements. Also, four of these five respondents had accumulated from 11 to over 20 years of teaching experience. All five of the respondents in this group identified themselves as being bilingual/biliterate, four in Spanish and one in Greek. Only two male interview participants are found in this group. In the English language arts and the social science groups, there are a total of seven interview participants. All of these seven participants had earned a master’s degree or higher, all are female, and their years of teaching experience range from seven to 10 years, to over 20 years. Only two of the seven participants in this group have a bilingual endorsement, even though five of them declared to be bilingual/biliterate. Six of the seven participants had obtained ESL, middle grades, and content endorsements. One individual possessed only a school library endorsement. Two individuals in this group were not bilingual/biliterate.

The two female individuals in the ELPT group had earned a master’s degree or higher in education and have bilingual, ESL, middle grades, and at least two content endorsements. These two participants also had accumulated 16 to over 20 years of teaching experience and identified themselves as being bilingual/biliterate, one in Spanish and the other in Polish, Russian, and Spanish. The two participants in the “Other” category are both female. One had earned a master’s degree plus and middle
grade and content endorsements, but not an ESL endorsement. This person also reported not being bilingual/biliterate and having seven to 10 years of teaching experience. The other participant in this group had a bachelor’s degree plus, is bilingual/biliterate in Spanish, had been teaching from 11 to 15 years, and possessed bilingual, ESL, middle grades, ELA, and Spanish endorsements. These findings suggest that the group of interview participants was highly educated and experienced.

**Ethnic backgrounds.** An additional finding drawn from the survey data was that of the 16 interview participants, 10 were born in the United States (U.S.). Of these 10, four are of Mexican background, one Greek, and five American born. Of the six participants who revealed they were not born in the U.S., four were born in Mexico, one in Guatemala, and one in Poland. It was significant to highlight this information because the language and cultural background as well as the language learning and immigrant experiences of the study participants play an important role in understanding the identity and realities the participants have constructed through their lived experiences, reflections, and actions as learners and as teachers of students who may or may not reflect their own backgrounds and experiences. Also, understanding the ethnic background and language learning experiences of the participants aided me in drawing meaningful interpretations of the participants’ reactions and conversations.

**Description of Coding Processes, Emergent Themes, and Categories**

**First and Second Coding Processes**

Chapter three provided a detailed explanation of the transcription of interviews and the coding cycles used in this study. After each interview was transcribed, each transcript was read several times in search of an expanded understanding of the
participants’ lived experiences. Reading, highlighting, and writing tentative ideas in the right-hand margin next to the participants’ answers to each question assisted in deepening the understanding of the essence of the interviewee’s responses. This process illuminated the themes that began to surface.

This particular section presents brief accounts of the coding processes that took place in analyzing the interview data. The first coding cycle consisted of descriptive and coding processes by which interview data were examined with the goal of capturing the essential ideas, feelings, emotions, and actions of individual participants. Through this first coding activity, approximately 670 statements were captured that revealed the sentiments of individuals regarding the work they do, the students they teach, their motivation and preparation to teach, the challenges they face, and the barriers they have overcome as professionals and as teachers of ELs. Repeated statements were noted, but not included in the final list of statements.

In the second coding cycle, each of the 670 statements was examined in more detail in an effort to surface topics that would help address the research questions and expand the understanding of the participants’ reported views, reflections, and actions. As a result, 72 topics or concepts were identified and the frequency of these codes across the 670 statements totaled approximately 1,913. Of the 72 topics, the top 10 topics that emerged from this coding process in order of priority were: teachers, English learners, language, students, needs, instruction, teaching, learning, bilingual, and content.

**Third Coding Process**

In the third coding cycle, the 670 statements were once again carefully examined against the 72 topics that emerged from the second coding. In reorganizing and
condensing these statements and topics, 15 categories were obtained from this initial third coding process. With the intention of generating a better understanding of what these 15 categories meant for this study and for the participants involved, it was necessary to further probe these categories. Additional examination of the 15 categories was also needed in order to arrive at more concrete themes in which these categories would fit best. More importantly, there was the need to arrive at the relevant themes that best described the participants’ notions about what they do, how, and why with respect to teaching middle grade ELs. This third coding cycle of studying the 15 categories once more helped yield seven major themes that, in the my view, best captured the reported realities of the participants. Figure 16 exhibits the seven salient interview themes.
In deepening the understanding of the participants’ responses from the lens of the researcher as the interpreter of their ideas, the 15 categories shown in Table 15 were further classified and matched to the overarching themes that are illustrated in Figure 16. To ascertain what these salient themes meant for this study and how they reflected the knowledge, beliefs, and lived experiences of the participants based on their responses to the interview questions, and according to my interpretation, each of the themes is described in the sections that follow. Although the seven themes are described as

*Figure 16. Salient interview themes.*
distinct, the interpretations of them are multifaceted and in some cases, there is a significant overlap among them. In many instances, the participants’ responses to the interview questions addressed more than one topic or issue that is relevant to this study. Consequently, the participants’ accounts are explained in the theme(s) that appears to be more appropriate. Table 15 shows the classification and matching of these categories.
Table 15

Classification of Categories and Connection with the Salient Interview Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Categories (Second Coding)</th>
<th>Salient Interview Themes (Third Coding)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers’ interest and motivation in teaching middle grade ELs and ensuring their success</td>
<td>Attitudes and Dispositions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding whom middle grade ELs are, how they learn, and what they need to learn</td>
<td>Knowledge and Understanding of Middle Grade ELs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Know how to recognize and address the specific academic and socio-emotional needs of middle grade ELs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use and value of Spanish native language by teachers and students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Varied roles and responsibilities in departmentalized, push-in and pull-out contexts</td>
<td>Teaching Roles and Contexts of Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication and collaboration between content and bilingual and/or ESL resource teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of standards-based instruction</td>
<td>Instructional Goals and Priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explicit approaches and strategies for effective language and literacy instruction for middle grade ELs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use native language (mainly Spanish) as a scaffold for learning English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers’ background, preparation, and experience</td>
<td>Preparation and Expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to provide effective language and literacy standards’-based instruction for middle grade ELs</td>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How to effectively collaborate and communicate with colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Factors that Impact the Decisions and Effectiveness of Teachers and the Success of Middle Grade ELs

• District and state policies and mandates
• Limited or lack of resources for middle grade ELs
• Limited or lack of parent/family engagement
• Limited professional development opportunities for teachers of ELs

Analysis and Interpretation of Interview Themes

Bransford, Darling-Hammond, and Le Page (2005) concluded that it is critical for effective teachers to fully understand how children develop and learn in the social contexts of school. Central to the examination of the interview data was the need to understand what the participants’ knew about their students and how they applied this
understanding in their practice so as to expand the survey findings about the levels of preparation and expertise the survey participants’ reported in regard to the instruction of middle grade ELs. At the same time, it was necessary to deepen the understanding of the attitudes and dispositions, or perceived beliefs middle grade teachers of ELs exhibited in the survey data so as to make better sense of their decision making in teaching their students. It was also critical to examine, from the perspective of the interview participants, the instructional goals and priorities middle grade teachers have of their ELs, as reported in the survey data, and learn how these are influenced by different conditions such as the teaching roles, contexts of instruction, and other issues that ultimately impact what and how English learners learn.

Practically, all of the aforementioned topics overlap because they are centered on teaching and learning practices that are related to the instruction of ELs and the teachers who teach them. Thus, even though each of these topics is discussed separately in the sections that follow, there are instances in which the ideas and reactions of participants connect across themes.

**Attitudes and Dispositions: Teachers’ Interest and Motivation in Teaching**

To ascertain the attitudes and dispositions teachers of middle grade ELs bring to their practice and how these influence their thoughts and actions about how they work with these students, it was important to characterize the participants’ interest and motivation in teaching and their inclination to teach middle grade ELs specifically. I welcomed the enthusiasm of the participants to share their personal and professional stories, and in particular, to share their experiences of how and why they became teachers. In an effort to ensure confidentiality, all participants were given pseudonyms
and the participating district and its schools’ names are disguised by using XXX. From my perspective, listening and reacting to this particular interview question was a humbling and uplifting experience for the interviewees and the interviewer.

The responses obtained from the interview participants about what motivated them to choose a teaching career were overwhelmingly illuminating and meaningful and they evolved around three main characteristics: (a) changes in professional career by desire or need, (b) a natural inclination to teaching since childhood years, and (c) a deep aspiration to make a difference in the lives of English learners. The participants’ interviews illuminated their personal viewpoints about pursuing a teaching career and about teaching middle grade ELs. Figure 17 depicts these characteristics.

![Diagram showing the relationship between interest and motivation in teaching](image)

*Figure 17. Participants’ interest and motivation in teaching.*

**Examples of career changes.** In her interview, Mrs. Petra spoke about how, as a new immigrant to this country, she began teaching as a necessity. Her husband had
become ill back in their native country. They came to the U.S. so that he could receive medical treatment. He needed surgery and she needed to work. Mrs. Petra had earned a master’s degree and was an engineer back home, but she could not exercise her profession in this country because, at that time, she did not know English. She went into teaching because a friend encouraged her to do so. There was a high demand in the district back then for bilingual and multilingual teachers and because she was multilingual, the bilingual teacher position was a perfect fit for her. She also thought that as a bilingual teacher, she could be a good example for the immigrant children in her class. Mrs. Petra explained her career shift:

By my profession in Poland, I have a master’s in engineering. I was the CEO of a company building water reclamation plant, water purification plants. When I came here for my husband’s surgery, so we came as a family, two boys and myself, and I didn’t speak any English so I couldn’t go into engineering. I had a friend who took me to school, to her school to teach in Polish. It was XXX High School and that’s how I started. And so I taught in during the day in Polish and the afternoon; at nights, I went to school to learn English and to get my educational . . . Actually, I had some education courses because I taught at the university level, but I taught just one subject back at home, back in Poland, just one subject. By the way, I, I was clinical. So, it took me about two and a half years. I needed to learn English anyway. And then I thought since I speak five languages, that I’d be a good example for the kids that are coming; my sons also did not know English.

Mr. Orozco changed his career from business and administration to teaching because he was not satisfied with what he was doing and he also was encouraged by his experiences as a part-time tutor at a local school. Mr. Orozco described how much he enjoyed working with people and helping those in most need:

Well, I became motivated in searching for a teaching career. I was just not satisfied with what I was doing at the time. I attended XXX University, four years with a soccer scholarship. At the time, I was working towards a BA in business administration, finished, completed my bachelors, worked about two years in the business area, banking and delivering information systems with UPS and I didn’t see any fulfillment. I just, it wasn’t my calling. Since a child, even
through high school, I wanted to work with others. At the time, they were my peers, my classmates. Then afterwards, when I participated in the tutoring program as a part-time position at a school, that’s when I worked with middle school students, as a matter of fact, and I liked the ambiance, the work that they were doing, the environment.

Mr. Orozco further explained his motivation to teach the middle grades and ELs in particular, highlighting issues of identity, equity, social status, and opportunities. His ideas and feelings came from his own experiences as a member of a minority and low socioeconomic group. Mr. Orozco pondered over where his experiences would fit best:

Well, my motivation was to help those students specifically in those areas because I felt that my experience, I was trying to find myself. My identity was changing. I didn’t know if I fit with the students that were newcomers or recent arrivals, and then social status play a role as well. Did I fit in with a group of students that were more affluent or less privileged, and I was like in between? My parents were hard workers. They worked at a factory, Broxe Candy at the time, and I wanted to do my best. I wanted to be at a point when I felt I could relate with both types of students, and then when I was tutoring, I saw that same difference. I saw students that genuinely needed the academic assistance, whereas other students felt privileged.

Susana became interested in teaching as a result of working as a school clerk. She described how she arrived at changing her educational goals and career. Susana related how she was able to pursue a teaching certification while teaching as a bilingual teacher with a provisional certificate:

Actually, I was seven classes away from getting my marketing degree from XXX University and I stopped, and I continued working in the district. It was an opportunity for me to go to the schools and . . . I was working with the therapeutic XXX School. Then I said as a clerk, I started getting interested in that and I looked at how would the teaching be and how long would it take me, and if it was really something that I wanted. I really thought about it and I talked to my husband and my husband said, “Well, if you are going back to school to do that, than you need to change positions,” and since I already had almost graduated from marketing, I decided to look for another position. Because I looked and it was two years for me to get my BA and then during that time, you could still teach and get your certificate; remember it used to be provisional.
Maria was a passionate English language arts teacher who worked at a school located in a Mexican-dominant community. Maria’s interest in joining the teaching profession was the result of turning point events in her life:

It was by accident. My goal was to go to XXX University to be a lawyer, to study law. And at that time, I was living in Florida and I stayed longer than I should have. I was hit by hurricane Andrew, so I ended up staying a bit longer. During the process, my mother became sick and so she was also a teacher in the district and so I made the decision that I was coming back home. When I came back home, she said, “Well you’re not going to start at XXX for a while, so why don’t you come and volunteer at my school?” And at that time, she was a teacher at XXX and so I went to volunteer and that was it. I changed my career. I went to XXX and switched careers.

Mrs. Q’s motivation to teach was sparked after becoming involved in the schooling experiences of her daughter as a parent volunteer. She experienced the importance a parent has in the education of their children and also how teachers’ dedication and attention to children are influential in the life of a child. According to Mrs. Q, pursuing a teaching career was extra challenging for her due to her language limitations and other obstacles, but that did not stop her from achieving her dream:

Oh, oh my God, I love that part. The biggest motivation for me is when I started as a parent volunteer. I remember when my daughter started pre-school and basically, when I observed the teachers and how . . . the dedication to be involved with the students and things like that, that made me realize how important first is a parent, then as a professional. And previous to that, because my education in Mexico was on psychology, and basically, those two areas are connected. And after that I started working as a teacher assistant, instructional assistant, reading tutor, and I continued my studies . . . It took me a lot of time basically, because my first language is Spanish. My primary education was in Mexico and it was a big challenge basically—challenge to learn the new language, challenge to be in the university, and being a minority, that was another big challenge. But now, oh my God, I really enjoy it!

Sandy’s experiences of becoming a teacher were somewhat similar to those of Mrs. Q. The main difference was that Sandy was already a teacher back in her country. She immigrated to the United States as a result of a civil war that was being fought in her
homeland. She wanted to continue teaching when she arrived in this country. Even though not knowing the language was a big impediment for her, it did not represent the end of her teaching career. She first had to learn English and then take all the coursework necessary to obtain teaching certification. Sandy detailed how her passion for teaching helped her through the process of learning English and becoming a bilingual teacher, which she described as arduous and painful:

I came to the U.S. in 1980 as a result of the civil way that was happening there. I was already a teacher, a 23-year-old teacher, coming to the U.S. with no English, with the desire of continuing my career of being a teacher; but obviously, the language, the barrier of not having certification in the U.S. would not allow me to do it. So I went back to the university and I started learning English. That was my first step. I went to XXX College that today is XXX University. So I attended there for three years to learn English, and after those three years, I transferred to the University of XXX. I went back to repeat my whole career as a teacher. So I went back and take all the coursework that was needed or required to become a bilingual teacher, and I completed it. It was very painful, lots of tears, a lot of work because it was difficult not knowing the language. I think I’m still in the process of learning the language. Every day I learn something new when I prepare for my classes. But, I always had the desire to be a teacher back in my country, so that didn’t stop; it continued here, even though it took me triple the time than for any other person. But, it didn’t discourage me. I just wanted to be a teacher, and that’s what I did. Not knowing the language, it didn’t stop me.

Jen felt she always wanted to be a teacher, but did not pursue a teaching degree at first. It took her a few years to realize that teaching was what she really wanted to do. After working in a law firm, she decided to go back to school and get her teaching degree. She was now a reading teacher in a school that was located in the heart of the Mexican community. Jen traced her educational journey toward her teaching goal:

I think I always wanted to be a teacher, but I grew up in a small town. And then I went to Michigan State for undergrad and I got my degree in English. So I didn’t have a teaching degree, so I moved to the city and I began working at a law firm as a paralegal. And I did that for about I think five or six years, and then I went back to grad school because I just felt like I was ready to go into teaching.
Examples of natural inclination to teaching. Jody knew she wanted to be a teacher ever since she was a young child. She was one of those individuals who devote their life to that. She began teaching in Sunday school at a young age and teaching was all that she had done professionally. Jody had the unique experience of teaching abroad in a completely different language, a language she did not know but had to learn. This was a life-changing event that helped her comprehend what is like being in a classroom where you do not understand what is being said. Jody recounted her story:

I was one of those people who always wanted to be a teacher. Even when I was a kid, I used to babysit and do little lessons. I always wanted to be a teacher; and my dad was a pastor, and I was teaching Sunday school when I was maybe a couple of years older than the kids I was teaching. I just always wanted to be a teacher and I went to school for that purpose, and my first teaching job was in Japan. I went to XXX University and I graduated and immediately went to Japan. I was there for six years and came to this district after that. I haven’t done anything else, and I’ve been doing this for eight years. I had two really different experiences. In Japan, I taught at a small private school. I think the biggest class I had was 12 kids. I was teaching social studies, language arts, just like I do here.

In reminiscing on her experiences as a learner of a language other than English and how these experiences kind of prepared her to work with English learners, Jody confided:

It was hard, but I was 22. I think when I first went and I had that idea, “I’m just going to learn Japanese,” I didn’t. I struggled more with reading and writing. I didn’t get as far with reading and writing. But conversations, is a very different language. Even Japanese children cannot read the newspaper until they’re in eighth grade because there’s thousands of characters they have to learn, so they kind of gradually learn . . . So I’m more like a second grader . . . I think that it helped a lot. I obviously, I don’t speak Spanish. I don’t have that but I’m really, I know what it feels like to be sitting in a room where you absolutely do not understand a word. And I also know how I got through those situations.

Michael loved languages, and working with people of different cultures and backgrounds is what drew him to becoming a teacher. His own experiences as a child growing up in an immigrant bilingual family helped spark the interest in becoming a
bilingual teacher and serving others who are in similar situations. Michael reflected on his experiences:

My parents were from Greece and they still don’t speak English very well so I was always the one that had to try to teach them and try to fill out forms and the instructions. Just growing up, I realized I loved languages and I started studying Spanish in high school. And I went to college and I studied my bachelors in English secondary education and minored in linguistics. . . . I could just, I really, I was an EL myself so when I went to school so I was . . . There was a Greek bilingual ed. pull-out program at school; that was at XXX Elementary. So I really had that experience. I really thought that I could relate to the experience of ELs and I love the culture; I love languages and it was I guess my way of serving those communities.

Nadia’s interest in teaching went back to her childhood years. Her love for teaching and for the children she educates was what kept her in this profession. Although she was not Spanish bilingual, she worked in the Latino, mainly Mexican community for most of her teaching career. Nadia’s eagerness and dedication to teaching and working with ELs was evident in her own words:

Well, that goes back to when I was a child. So I had kids in the neighborhood learn skits and plays, and I created plays and we put them on for our parents. And I had them memorize lines, so I was always teaching kids; so when I got to college, I knew that I wanted to do that. I love teaching; I love being with children. So that was my motivation for going into education. It was the love of children. It was not about a financial thing. I didn’t even think about that. Now as you get older, you think about that, but it was purely because I love children; I love to see them learn.

Nadia described how she became interested in teaching middle grade ELs:

So you know, I had a scholarship to go to XXX University, and I always thought I wanted to teach little children. And then as I had more and more experience, I really loved working with the older children. And, I just wanted to get endorsed in ESL, in English as a Second Language, because I felt such a need at that time. And I took a class, and I was so inspired by the class. I have chills to this date. It was probably the most motivating class I ever had to make me want to teach children how to speak English, all children, you know from many kind of backgrounds. I remember she was teaching the whole class in Spanish and it was about making chocolate pudding. And I’ll never forget it because you have
experiences like that and they have such a profound impact on your life and she did it all in Spanish.

**Examples of aspirations in making a difference for ELs.** Jen was not interested in teaching middle grades when she first began teaching, but it was where she was placed. She ended up loving it. Jen’s motivation to work in the Mexican community teaching middle grade ELs was grounded in what she wanted for her students:

I think because they’re at such an impressionable age and being able to expose them to things outside of their neighborhood because a lot of my kids, they don't know much more than their neighborhood. So just being able to kind of expose them to the rest of the city, the rest of the world, like it's really cool, I love it! I've always been in middle school so it wasn't where I wanted to be, but I ended up being there and now I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else, maybe high school. But I do love middle school because of the content, the kind of literature I’m able to read with them and the units we do are really engaging and interesting.

Laura had different career interests when she was going to college. Her love for learning and being of service to Spanish-speaking English learners is what moved her to stay in the teaching profession. Laura articulated her rationale:

I don’t think I went into college thinking . . . I was more of a business major. I think what lured me into education was the idea of constantly learning. As I saw how the university level and with the idea of eventually teaching at a university level, what I could do to get there kind of led me into the teaching field. It kind of field felt comfortable when I started taking the classes.

Laura also connected her own experiences as an English learner to those of her students. Laura shared her passion for making it possible for her Latino students to learn and read books in their native language:

I think is the feeling, being an EL myself, you kind of know the needs or have an idea of what it means to be read in Spanish. That was one thing that I think whenever I look for books for the children, when I purchase books I wanted to make sure that what I got for them, if I could read it, was something that they would enjoy listening to. Our children need so much in literature. And is a beauty to have them be able to read a book and that they can actually sit down and read themselves. That was my purpose, helping them out. Reaching, not only having the English, I wanted to fill that sort of gap that we had, that we have still.
Lupe was adamant about pursuing a teaching profession even when her father strongly encouraged her to choose a different path; he wanted her to have a more prestigious career. Lupe’s disposition to make a difference for the children in her community and her willingness to change the stereotypes of the Mexican community, especially in relation to the educational and professional experiences and successes of Mexicans in the city, is what drove her and kept her in teaching:

I became a teacher because I remember working at my local church in the summer. So I was like a summer camp person, and I really enjoyed working with the kids. And even after I was done, I remember a lot of kids would always come by my house and visit and the priest would always say, “Hey Lupe, they’re asking about you. Are you going to do that again in the summer?” And that was kind of my way of seeing, hey I’m making an impact on these kids, is not only, you know, I know my dad did not want me to be a teacher. He was like anyone can be a teacher because a lot of his family and my mom’s side are educators. So I think he had the view that in Mexico, it was very easy to be a teacher and it was kind of like, you need to be more than that.

Kristy’s path to teaching became more apparent to her as a result of illness in the family, although her mom believed Kristy was bound to be a teacher ever since she was little. Kristy wanted to work with little kids and never thought she would be working with upper grade students. Kristy’s student teaching provided her with the experience of working with multicultural and multilingual seventh graders and she fell in love with teaching in those grades and with those types of students:

Ever since I was a little kid, I always played school with my sister and my mom tells me that she thought that I always wanted to become a teacher. And after high school, I ended up having to stay at home so I had to go to a community college to take care of my dad that was ill. . . . Well, I went away to XXX and then I came back because my dad had passed, so I went to XXX, which was close. And when I was set to do my student teaching, I said, oh, I would like to be with new little ones and stuff and I was placed at XXX Multicultural Academy in a seventh grade math and science classroom, completely opposite than anything I ever thought that I would do. . . . I realized that from that moment on, I’d be working; I liked the idea of multi-cultures. I always tell my principal that my
heart brought me back to the north part of the city because I like the idea of a room that is totally multi-cultural and that kids are teaching me while I'm teaching them because every day I'm learning something new.

The collective stories of the participants demonstrated that generally speaking, all teachers, regardless of how they arrive to the education field, have a love for teaching and are enthusiastic about working in instructional settings outside of their comfort zone. The respondents showed a keen motivation for teaching middle grade students and English learners in particular. Some of the participants used their lived experiences as immigrants and English learners themselves to connect with these students and serve as role models for them. Others used their experiences as professionals and as caring human beings to provide meaningful learning opportunities for their students so as to make a difference in their lives. Having an altruistic attitude for teaching is an important trait to have, especially when working with students who are foreign to the school system and the dominant language of this country. Additional essential teacher characteristics merit further discussion.

**Critical Components of Teaching Middle Grade ELs**

**Knowledge and Understanding of Their Middle Grade ELs**

The participants’ accounts concerning knowing and understanding middle grade English learners are rich and varied. A common theme that surfaced from the conversations regarding this topic was that generally, middle grade ELs are eager to learn, want to be successful, and want to be helped in learning English and content in order to learn and succeed. Some of the participants recognized that middle grade ELs need to feel comfortable in their environment in order for them to participate in learning activities, and part of creating that comfortable environment involves making it possible
for them to use of their native language as an aid in learning. For instance, Laura mentioned that middle grade ELs are typically shy and afraid to show they need to learn the English language. In Laura’s view, these students often remain quiet; they want to be missing in action:

I noticed that they hate to be singled out. They’re the ones that still wanted those Spanish books in the library, but they would come and ask if I could get some books for them in Spanish. They do have that; but now because of the pressure of you don’t speak the language yet, that becomes something that puts pressure on them.

Lupe reminisced about how she was a shy student all through high school and how she, at the time, wished her teachers would have paid a little more attention to her academic and socio-emotional needs and those of her peers as well. She grew up in a Spanish-speaking family where relationships and high expectations were at the core of her upbringing, but these things were not reflected in her schooling experiences. Lupe’s memories of school as an English learner and as a minority group student informed her understanding of the importance of having a conducive learning environment as well as high expectations and supports for students of diverse backgrounds and cultures, especially for those who do not know the English language when they enter school. By setting clear expectations and providing a safe learning environment for her middle grade ELs, Lupe felt confident that these students would have a chance to succeed:

I know that they, they need to feel comfortable. I think as a teacher, one of my priorities is to make sure my students feel comfortable in their environment because I tell them, this is not my environment; [this] is your environment. . . . I think once they become comfortable with each other, they’re able to share and express, and I tell them we’re here to learn from each other. I think once I set those expectations, everyone feels kind of comfortable and, especially learning the new language, and even some of them, I think sometimes they don’t think they’re still second language learners.
Other participants’ perceptions of middle grade ELs were influenced by their preconceived ideas of what these students should know and be able to do when they enter school as new arrivals, or when they transition out of bilingual programs into mainstream classrooms. For instance, Mrs. Petra revealed that students who come with strong language and academic skills learned in their native countries do well in school even when they have little knowledge of English. She also spoke about how the new population of immigrant English learners is very different from the population she worked with when she first began her teaching career 20 years ago. Mrs. Petra explained that, in her view, current immigrant ELs do not have the high work ethic, basic schooling, and eagerness to learn that past generations of ELs had when they entered school:

Seventh grade[r] is from Mongolia, no work ethics at all. His Russian, he’s pretty good; that was instructional. He also has English. No expectations; Honduras, the same. I have a boy in seventh grade from Mexico. You can tell the difference, from Mexico City, from well-educated parents, fantastic, fantastic. They’re independent, very high functioning, even though they’re low English. There’s a wide variety. I can tell you only I can compare what I used to have, like 20 years ago when I started, and now. It’s a huge difference . . . and the kids were, maybe they did not know English, but they . . . they were well educated. Even if they came from rural areas, and here I got a boy not from rural area in Mexico and one boy from rural area in Ukraine, no difference; both of them, their first languages are very poor.

Jen also made the strong point that ELs who have a solid background and language knowledge in their native language do better in school. She also pointed out that ELs who are born in this country do not have the knowledge and skills in their native language and, therefore, struggle with English. Jen shared her thoughts in this regard:

I know that my students are first generation. Their parents came here from Mexico, brought them, and then they were born here. So, at home, they speak Spanish. I have one student who's visiting from Mexico. She's here just for a year to learn English and she's doing amazing. I know that a lot of my students, they can speak Spanish, but they can't entirely read or write in Spanish so I think
because of that they struggle with English and if we were dual language, it would be a lot easier for them I think.

Raiza offered an interesting perspective that expanded on Jen’s ideas and presented the need to do a deep analysis of the type of instruction ELs receive in what is considered their primary language according to state and district policies. Raiza made the following observation:

I don’t know very much about how the elementary and the primary program work; I know how it works in the middle school. In the middle school, you’re a hundred percent academic; English is the academic language. When they’re in primary, I know they teach the content in Spanish, some of it, and some of them don’t, and there’s a shift, and then I know I noticed a lot of confusion from them. So I don’t know what their primary grades were for them. I don’t really know much about their background, whether they were born here or not, what their history is with bilingual education or with ESL. But I tend to treat all of them as if they were ESL because I know that unless their parents were born here, they grew up listening to Spanish, and you know, I kind of just treat it like that.

Michael and other interviewees thought that a way to know, understand, and respond to the academic and socio-emotional needs of English learners is by validating their background and experiences as the multicultural, multilingual beings they are. Michael stressed the significance of uncovering students’ backgrounds:

Well, I always try to make a connection with their background to gather what they have. There’s the assumption by many that these students have come in with nothing and that's not true. They have experience; you just need to uncover that, discover that, and build upon that. And it's fun and interesting to me as well uncovering those specific background experiences. Even though socially and linguistically there's a certain core of norms, there are still differences and sometimes I feel I learn more from them than them from me. So that’s what I find so meaningful to do this.

Some participants were more specific about the knowledge and skills middle grade ELs need to develop and the educational activities these students should engage in so that they advance in school and expand their horizons. For example, Mr. Orozco remarked:
Well, I know that they need a lot more vocabulary than other students that speak English only and they also need more experiences outside of the classroom where they are kind of sheltered in a more local area, so by providing those outside experiences such as museums, such as walking around their neighborhood, like going out to the library. In our school, we have a forest preserve that is maybe like five blocks away; they haven’t even been there, even though it is five blocks away. So sometimes those are experiences that connect to their background knowledge and they didn’t even realize it. So that builds on vocabulary instruction which then they can see the similarities using connections that might be in vocabulary terms, cognates, or other metacognitive connections, where they can write either in their native, in this case Spanish language, or try to write in English.

Other perspectives offered by the participants on what they know and understand about middle grade ELs focused on how middle grade ELs learn best and on the challenges they face in teaching these students, including the lack of bilingual and ESL resources and the limited supports they receive from parents who do not know the language and do not have the appropriate resources to best support their children. These challenges are discussed in detail in the section that describes other factors that influence teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. The discussion addressing how participants believe ELs learn best is provided within the explanations about the instructional goals and priorities they reported having for their students. The participants’ views on how their teaching roles and the contexts of instruction influence their instructional decisions and priorities in teaching these students are presented in the following section.

**Teaching Roles and Instructional Contexts**

The need to delve deeper into the issues of teaching roles and the contexts of instruction was presented through the survey data in which participants’ reported having diverse teaching roles within various contexts. Of importance was the need to distinguish how middle grade teachers of ELs and students function in the diverse settings participants reported and how under these conditions, they meet the instructional needs of
their students. By analyzing how the context of instruction impact the roles and responsibilities of teachers of middle grade ELs, a more concrete understanding of the thoughts and actions of the study participants’ regarding these issues was examined. With the understanding that all participants are teachers of middle grade ELs in one way or another, for the purpose of this analysis, the respondents’ perspectives were sectioned in two major categories:

1. The aspect that was found in common among all participants was that they all reported having a great sense of responsibility for the success of these students, particularly those teaching grades six and eight, which are benchmark years in the district.

2. In demonstrating their knowledge about ELs in the middle grades, all respondents recognized the diversity of the EL population they serve in terms of program years, language proficiency, academic readiness, and their students’ motivation in learning across grades and settings.

**Participants in departmentalized settings.** The study participants in departmentalized settings reported teaching either one subject, or a combination of English language arts, social science, and reading, but only one individual reported teaching Spanish language arts. They also reported having a good understanding of the ELs who were in their classrooms and stated that some of these students remained in the EL program, some had exited the program, and some who were never in the program were considered to be ELs because they had not reached English proficiency. Addressing the varied English proficiencies of middle grade English learners is a reality that has huge implications for delivering meaningful content and ensuring all students learn and are
prepared for high school. For example, Jen explained the challenges her students encounter when working with idiomatic expressions in English: “It’s hard, especially the figurative language because it doesn't translate. You know, it's like we've done idioms before.”

A shared practice among these departmentalized teachers was that they all tried to build connections and relationships with their students so as to better ascertain their learning styles and address their language and academic learning needs. This, however, was difficult for the teachers who had ELs in their classrooms who were new to the language and schooling demands, did not know the language of their students, or had little understanding of how language is learned. More critical was the issue that, according to the participants’ accounts, ELs in middle grades typically did not receive the types of language and academic instruction they needed because of the lack of congruity in the content they were taught. Even when ELs did receive some supports from a bilingual and/or resource teacher, the participants spoke about the reality that because of loss of instructional time and conflicting priorities such a scheduling, these pull-out supports were not the appropriate instructional contexts for their students. Maria offered her opinions on this issue:

When I first started at XXX, the kids were being pulled out, and when they’d come back, they’d be completely lost. Even though the teacher knew what we were talking about, and she would have to switch whatever is that I was talking about to address whatever was being addressed or asked in her class. I personally, I would love for the students to have a teacher who also spoke their language in the classroom . . . it takes away from transitioning from one class to another, . . . you’re able to nip it right there. Everything is timed. Timed, timed. I would prefer, instead of pull out or push in, I would prefer a teacher who also speaks the language teaching the students in their regular classroom.
Another common thread among departmentalized teachers was that in general, they were not sure what the bilingual and/or ESL teachers who pulled out their ELs for services did with these students. In other words, they were not clear about what students were taught or how they were taught when they were out of the regular classroom. They assumed that their ELs received language supports in English and their native language when applicable, but they were not clear about to what extent these students were learning or advancing, or if any content related activities were included in their instruction. Most content teachers indicated they preferred having resource teachers provide push-in services in their classrooms; this benefits the students more because they are with their peers and learning the content they need. However, the participants also mentioned that even when this happened, these services were not consistent.

The following are some examples of the departmentalized participants’ perspectives around this topic. According to Jen,

I don't have the support I need. Last year I had an aide in the classroom who came in during the period where I had the most students in the bilingual program, but not all of them, and basically he sat at a table with them during my lesson and clarified anything that needed clarifying and then when it came for independent practice, he would sometimes take students with him to another room and apply whatever. Our bilingual coordinator came in I think two times this year. And at the beginning of the year, I asked for some dual language books for my classroom library because I don't even have those resources. And she gave me the catalog to mark off and so I went crazy and I marked off all these books. And I spoke with her before we left for winter break and asked her the status because I still haven't received them and she said she was going to be getting some more over the winter break. It's hard.

Jody offered her perspective about the instructional contexts that are best suited for middle grade ELs, particularly for those in need of instruction in their native language:

It’s hard in the district because nothing is ever done the way that it should be done. So there be this theory, and it’s a great theory, but the reality of how it actually gets played out is sometimes absurd. To be blunt, our bilingual specialist
Nadia shared an interesting perspective on the issue of inconsistency of support:

You know what would be ideal is if you had a teacher who’s working with them in the language come to the two rooms in social studies and follow them to science . . . Yeah, a push-in model. That would work. I can’t stop my class and just do a full-time ESL class. I can’t stop my class, and do a special ed. class when the kids are reading at first and second grade level. So you do the best you can, so then you have other kids, you need to serve their needs because they’re reading at third and fourth grade level. So this is a challenge.

Raiza addressed the reality that even when pull-out or push-in services exist, it is hard for teachers in those roles to be in every classroom at every grade level where ELs are present:

That and the logistics of it, and the collaboration time, like you said, because there’s only one pull-out teacher and there’s so many teachers that you have to collaborate with. And mind you like, you’re not only pulling the students from eighth grade, but you might also have a seventh grade, or sixth grade at the same time.

**Participants teaching in push-in and/or pull-out contexts.** For no other group are the teaching roles and contexts of instruction so tightly interconnected than for middle grade teachers assigned as the bilingual and/or ESL teachers for these grades. Teachers in these roles typically provide services for ELs in pull-out or push-in contexts across grades and contents. Study participants in this group explained how and when they provide pull-out services to small groups of students from various grades and in other instances, to larger groups. In their words, it all depends on the EL program the school is implementing, the variety of ELs in these grades, the proficiency levels of the students,
and whether the departmentalized content teachers have bilingual and/or ESL endorsements.

The study participants who taught in push-in and/or pull-out contexts provided examples from their experiences of what these services looked like across settings. Ms. Castro for instance, explained that she usually prepared to work with her students by translating from English to Spanish the material content teachers were using so that her students, especially those with low English proficiency, could better understand what was happening in their regular classrooms. She acknowledged that her students and teachers wanted and needed her supports, but being the only one bilingual/ESL resource teacher supporting three grades and multiple levels of ELs, it was not realistic for her to be everywhere. Ms. Castro described the challenges she faced:

I push in. So I pull out in the morning for RIT. I have all the grades, all the levels, ACCESS levels one through four. I have about 23 students in there and I pull them out at the end of the day for language arts. So during the day, I’m doing push in; I go in the classroom. You know is hard to be in all the classrooms since I have the three grades, six, seven, and eight. So how do I do it, to go to the three math classrooms? How do I do it? So the challenge is not being able to support them.

When bilingual/ESL resource teachers support content teachers who have these same credentials, even district personnel question the decision of the resource teachers for doing so, bringing to the forefront the issue of implementing supports for ELs for compliance reasons or based on what is best for the ELs in the school. For example, Mr. Orozco explained his decision making:

Team teaching is done three times a day. I’ll team teach with the 6th grade teacher. I’ll team teach with the 2nd grade teacher, but in the 2nd grade setting, I am pulling out as well. One of the things that is always brought to question is when XXX [the district] does their audit they’ll ask, Why are you servicing or team teaching with bilingual endorsed ESL teacher? One, she has 33 students; out of the 33 students, there are 19 ELs.
Mr. Orozco’s experiences demonstrate a common characteristic found among the bilingual/ESL group of respondents; they highly value the opportunity to team teach with the content teachers with whom they work. However, this valued teaching approach is not consistently implemented because, according to the respondents’ accounts, other programs’ needs must be fulfilled. Mr. Orozco’s additional thoughts regarding this issue fully described the collective sentiment of the participants:

The team teaching push-in format works ideal; unfortunately, because of other responsibilities that I have to adhere to and scheduling difficulties, there are times when I do need to pull out my students, whether it’ll be targeted instruction for diagnostic assessment as well as instruction. So I might be doing four different things in a pull-out setting that may not be as conducive for learning inside the classroom just focusing on that instruction, that lesson with my colleague.

Michael further explained the value of team teaching and how time for planning and collaboration is an issue:

It’s varied throughout the last few years. This year I co-teach with two teachers, specifically in reading and language arts. I’m going to start doing some push in into a science class with another teacher. We try to plan things together obviously. Many times we’ll switch off duties and we’ll write the assessments of that year and one teacher will do more of the daily lesson plans, but we try to work as collaboratively as possible. When it’s not possible, many times you don’t have common planning times, so we would either have to stay early or late, or just work at home online with a document.

Participants in the push-in, pull-out groups concurred that scheduling of students, teacher assignments, and time for planning and collaboration are conditions that impact teacher effectiveness and the advancement of ELs in middle grades. These participants also agreed that critical services to their ELs are hindered when resource teachers are assigned to fulfill additional duties in their schools. For teachers who share the responsibility of educating ELs, opportunities for planning and reflection about the instruction and progress of these students are paramount. Thoughtful scheduling of ELs
requires skillful staffing decisions on the part of school administrators. They must know the academic and language strengths of the students in order to schedule them into the appropriate program and supports and be cognizant of the direct involvement of the teachers assigned to work with these students.

Both the departmentalized participants and those who taught in push-in and pull-out settings highlighted the need to address the lack of or limited collaboration that exists among content and bilingual/ESL resource teachers, and the need to provide meaningful instruction for middle grade ELs whether this happens with push-in services in the regular classroom or through pull-out supports. These issues have critical implications for the success of teachers and the ELs they serve. Relevant considerations are briefly elaborated on further in this section and in chapter six.

In addition to understanding the contexts in which teachers of ELs provide instruction, illuminating the instructional goals and priorities these teachers have for their students was a need that also surfaced from the survey data. The following section expands from the survey results and deepens understanding of the instructional aspects that influence teachers’ decisions, reflections, and actions. It also provides additional insights obtained from the interview participants about what these instructional goals and priorities are and how they look in action with respect to the language and literacy instruction of ELs in middle grades.

**Instructional Goals and Priorities**

In the analysis and interpretation of interview data, it is important to focus on describing the instructional goals and priorities the interview participants identified for the instruction of ELs in regard to the language and literacy development of these
students because this information was not ascertained from the survey data in great detail.

For the purpose of characterizing how individuals’ responses align or differ from one another, the respondents’ accounts are analyzed, first from the lens of the teachers in departmentalized settings, and then from the point of view of the participants who reported working primarily in push-in and pull-out contexts.

**Goals and priorities of departmentalized content teachers.** The main goals and priorities departmentalized content teacher participants reported having were tapping the ELs’ fullest potential and working towards ensuring their success by having high expectations and providing the type of instruction and supports that equip students to reach these goals. The ideas shared by participants suggested content teachers play a central role in the success of these students. A common agreement among participants is that content teachers can help ELs achieve their goals by being reflective of what they teach and how. They also highlighted the importance of: (a) having cultural awareness, (b) knowing what ELs are capable of achieving and believing they can be taught, (c) allowing ample opportunities for students to work together and use their native language, and (d) monitoring their learning. Jody reflected on her goals for the ELs in her classroom:

My goals for my students, that through their participations in class, they’re going to be picking up as much as they can. I’m going to be monitoring how much they pick up when they write, and say in Spanish. I think a lot of my goals for the students who are new comers are social-emotional. I wanted them to feel comfortable. I want them to feel that their ideas are valued. I want them to see that even though this isn’t Spanish, and I don’t’ speak Spanish, your idea is valued and praised in front of the classroom. Trying to find those moments where I can do that, in which they are willing to take risks and really be part of the community. . . . I’m really interested in looking at the kind of historical thinking that they’re doing, and I don’t care if it’s in English or Spanish.

Raiza’s passionate views on the role of content teachers were evident in her words:
Like I said, you [teachers] have to be the spark. They’re not going to come up to you. They’re not going to say challenge me. They’re not going to say, “I can do more than this.” [It] is up to you to reach them wherever they are. You have to find out . . . Stop it; get to know your students. And you can’t just take one point of data; you have to take multiple points of data. I’m not just talking about the textbook; I’m talking about sitting with the student yourself . . . be reflective, what worked, what didn’t.

Raiza taught English language arts for a diverse group of students who were of Spanish-speaking background in a middle school that served students in grades six, seven, and eight. She did not know much about these students as ELs, but she knew, based on standardized test and classroom assessments, that most of her students lacked proficiency and knowledge of academic English. Raiza was not sure who of these students were or still are in bilingual programs within the system. She identified new arrivals as ELs and she knew these students were pulled out for some type of native language support for a few hours a week. She was not sure what these students learned or did when they were not in her classroom. She knew for sure, however, that she had high expectations for all the students in her class regardless of their language proficiency or program placement, and she made sure they understood she was there to make learning happen for them. In elaborating on the goals and priorities she had for her diverse group of Spanish-speaking students in her classroom, Raiza explained:

I want them to reach their potential; whatever that might be is up to me to negotiate with them and see where I can take them. So my goal is to use their language as another tool that they’re going to use throughout their whole life. I want them to be critical readers. I want them to be critical thinkers; I don’t want them to just take whatever they see or hear at face value. My goal is for them to be independent learners, not just have me as the crutch for them . . . [I tell them] “I’ll give you the tools, but I need you to be able to manipulate any situation. So, what I’m telling you to do for this article, you need to use for all the other articles, here, in science, or in math, social studies, wherever you go, and even when you read outside of school.”
Lupe and Nadia taught social science to middle grade students who they identified as ELs because they were still learning the language even when they had been exited from the EL program. These teachers thought of themselves as reflective teachers who designed and adjusted instruction based on what they knew about their students and best practices. Lupe described her role as being a reflective guide:

I think as a teacher, I have to model, do a modeling first. Little by little, do that shifting, that scaffolding of their learning, teaching them the key strategies, and guiding them so they can work on their own. And as a teacher, obviously be reflective, did they get it? And if the students are not getting it, I’d have to go back.

Nadia’s practice focused on pacing and processing:

I think slowing down the amount of content they’re getting is really important, to know your group of students and where they’re at. I need to slow it down. [It] is the pacing, the processing. So you need to make sure your students are processing the information. And then you can do by assessments. You assess them and you see that 95% of your class is getting there, who’s not getting it, and why they’re not getting it. Then I have to go back as a teacher and say so why did these kids not get it? So, I’m constantly, as a teacher, you need to constantly reflect.

Interview participants in departmentalized settings acknowledged the use of key strategies and resources for getting to know the learning styles of their students and addressing the specific needs of their English learners, such as the use of interactive activities, visual and auditory tools, multiple intelligence surveys, and commercial and/or classroom-based progress monitoring tools. They also recognized a few key language and literacy strategies they had experienced as being effective in teaching middle grade ELs. The most salient strategies from their reports and in no order of importance are: (a) making content accessible through close reading of text; (b) having collaborative conversations between students and among teachers and students; (c) making strategic and purposeful use of the students’ native language for learning content and transitioning
to English; (d) reading and thinking aloud; (e) writing for argumentation and citing evidence from the text; (f) providing strategic vocabulary instruction; (g) reading for comprehension and reading aloud, especially nonfiction texts; (h) teaching explicitly the Common Core speaking and listening standards; and (i) teaching explicitly the foundational skills in English.

The study interviews surfaced a few examples of how some of these strategies were put in action or envisioned by the interviewees. Mrs. Q, who taught in a dual language setting, asserted the importance of reading:

One of the main things for me definitely is reading. Reading is one the things students don’t really enjoy because they’re not really exposed to it. They need it on a daily basis. These students are very visual. They love the interaction, and I’d say reading aloud, make the discussion for listening and comprehension.

Jen also taught reading in grades seven and eight to students in a predominantly Mexican community school and shared her thoughts on what was fulfilling and challenging in teaching reading:

I think what's most fulfilling is when I get them engaged in reading and I can see that they are enjoying it. They're talking about it. They're coming to me and they're asking for titles. That's I think most fulfilling because for me, I don't care, I mean I shouldn't say I don't care. It's not so important to me how they test, or what their, you know what I mean, like the standardized, all that pressure. For me, I want them to leave my classroom like wanting to read on their own, you know, like not feeling like it's such a task or a chore. So, that's my goal. And that can be challenging because if you're not surrounded in an environment of literacy or good literature that's engaging for them, it can be really hard to hook them.

Kristy, who taught ELs in grade eight in a very multicultural and multilingual setting on the opposite side of the city from Jen and Mrs. Q, elaborated on the importance of teaching students how to close read the text and how effective this strategy was with her students:
I think close reading it's very beneficial when the kids know why they're doing it because as an adult, no one ever taught me how to break down a paragraph so that when I got to college and I had to read 20 pages and I had to remember what was on those pages, I had to learn to star and highlight and write things in the margin, and stuff like that. And, for a middle schooler to learn that right now, like my kids that are going to like XXX and XXX high schools, they’ve all come back and shared, “You have no idea what our teachers tell us. They are so excited that we are good at close reading.”

In explaining the strategies she used in developing the language and literacy skills of her students, Lupe offered her thoughts on collaborative conversations and the hesitations she first experienced:

I know with the language development, I have students do a lot of sharing, and I have to remember to pause and give them the time because I know some of them would take longer. And I think as a teacher, at the beginning, I was kind of afraid to do it because I thought, “Nah, they’re not going to do it; they’re going to go off task.” And I kind of use some of the . . . structure, stand up, pair up, and share, and just giving time to allow them to verbalize their idea, and then sometimes coming back, because even though those that didn’t have any idea, now have and are able to write something down.

Jen affirmed the use of visuals in strategic vocabulary instruction and detailed her ideas of how this can be done during reading instruction:

I know that like as a language learner and a second language learner, I mean, for me, I need the visuals. So like we do vocabulary every day and I have it set up in a PowerPoint so they have the word; they have the phonetic spelling of the word, the definition. I give them a link word, which is like a mnemonic that rhymes with the vocabulary word but relates to the meaning so they can have sort of a ringsong connection, and then there's always an example of the word in use, and then an image that goes with the word in the sentence as well.

Goals and priorities of participants in push-in and/or pull out contexts. The interviewees who functioned in push-in and/or pull-out contexts also agreed that having high expectations along with the appropriate instructional supports and resources is critical for the achievement of ELs in middle grades. The need for all teachers of middle grade ELs to have cultural dispositions in teaching ELs was pointed out as well as the
need for these teachers to have, at a minimum, an understanding of the fundamentals of bilingual education and the ESL pedagogy if they do not have the appropriate endorsements. This group of participants also indicated that it is necessary for middle grade ELs to be taught the fundamental skills of the English language and in the case of ELs in Spanish bilingual programs, to be exposed to both systems of language. For example, Claudia, who learned English as a second language, truly believed that ELs should be taught by, or exposed to English speaking teachers because it helps them to listen to how the language flows correctly. Even though she knows and speaks English fluently, she is aware that her English sounds different from her colleague who is a native speaker of the language. Ms. C. declared her strong belief in the importance of exposing EL students to native English speakers:

    Yes. I think it's important. I really, truly believe that it is important that students get exposure to both systems of language because I believe that because I am . . . I speak Spanish; my English does sound differently then, for example, the teacher next door who has never spoken a word of Spanish and has spoken English all her life, or the way she expresses, and even her tone is really different.

Other interviewees agreed that ELs in middle grades should be explicitly taught the idiomatic expressions of the English language because these are not acquired in casual conversations. The idea behind this sentiment is that ELs need to be more exposed to the culture of the American society in order to better understand the nuances of the English language. Susana offered some examples of this need:

    There [are] some kids who don’t know what a gingerbread man is. They’ve seen it but they don’t know the story behind it; they don’t understand it. Today I went to a classroom and I told the students, “Be there or be square,” and they looked at me; they did not know what it is.
Mr. Orozco expressed his thoughts on why it is important for content teachers to have the appropriate content, bilingual and/or ESL endorsements in order to more effectively address the developmental language and literacy needs of middle grade ELs:

In our school, . . . we only have ESL endorsed teachers. In 6th grade, she’s almost finishing her endorsement for English language arts. Seventh grade, she is almost finishing her English language arts. Eighth grade, we have a bilingual certified ESL endorsed teacher in reading and language arts. So those key people with the knowledge of English Language Learners in ESL instruction do play a role when they have their grade meetings. They share their experiences, “Okay, these group of kids are learning pretty good when we have them in groups.” Although they might be aware of it, like the 7th grade teacher knows it, sometimes I feel like she forgets or finds it a lot easier to give the same type of instruction to all students. However, the 8th grade teacher does an excellent job of providing equitable opportunities to English Language Learners.

Maria’s perspective posited the role teachers have in helping ELs achieve their academic goals:

From my perspective, you have a teacher who understands supports and not necessarily speaks the language, but is culturally aware and maybe has tried to learn their own language, understands and actually puts themselves in their shoes to see what it feels like. I think that if you have a teacher who is compassionate, understanding, and very patient, and does everything to try and find the necessary help for that student, than I think the students will feel receptive and will feel more comfortable learning the language, making mistakes, and learning as they go.

These accounts from the interviewees add richer explanations to the findings obtained from the survey data. The survey results showed that though a good number of participants indicated they have the required content and bilingual and/or ESL endorsements, there were still many that did not. These findings then give a snapshot of the reality that exists in middle grade classrooms across the district. Even though having these content endorsements or credentials does not necessarily guarantee teacher effectiveness and higher student performance, they do add credibility to the preparation and expertise of the teachers who teach ELs in middle grades. In addition to these
endorsements being required by state law, they also ensure that at a minimum, teachers responsible for the achievement of bilingual and/or ESL students have a basic understanding of the most fundamental language, socio-cultural, socio-emotional, and academic needs of English learners.

The higher accountability measures set for these students dictated by state and district policies and school mandates were of concern to the study participants. Specifically, the participants in the bilingual/ESL and ELPT group expressed concern over the urgency to transition ELs out of language supports once they reach a certain score criteria on the language development test, leaving these students with weak development of English and their native language. Sandy reflected on the continuing need for language support:

I don’t service many of those sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students who are still struggling with the language because they exited them themselves. They became 3.5 and we know that after that, we want to keep them in the classroom to continue . . . What I wanted to say, maybe advocate more for those kids that are not being pulled out any more that are not being serviced anymore. To make sure those teachers understand [the] need to continue showing . . . I know a lot of times they get Ds. I thought to myself: “Is it D because they’re still struggling with the language?” That’s the part that I think they still need, especially with the middle grades.

Even though the bilingual/ESL and ELPT interviewees mostly agreed that the Common Core State Standards are beneficial for their ELs, this group of participants shared the concern that the new assessments, such Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), are not good for their students. There were some who truly championed the CCSS and felt confident using them. However, others felt these standards are not necessarily appropriate for teaching ELs and expressed that there needs to be an aligned approach to teach the content standards in companion with
the English language development standards. For example, Mrs. Petra offered the following comments on the use of the Common Core and assessing ELs:

I would say that I’m glad that we have Common Core. I know many people complain, but I think that with Common Core standards. It requires lots of work to find materials, but the standards really support my expectations. Now, we do mini lessons with the end we expect, and we have our kids to infer, as other kids do, so I like Common Core. I disagree with testing bilingual kids. I disagree completely . . . The kids are intimidated; they are stressed out; this [is] unacceptable. And now, we’re talking about PARCC, even math, first year. Okay, we have eighteen languages. Do you have all languages, if the child comes from Mongolia? What is he going to do? So this is absolutely insane, the testing; it is too much stress for the students and teachers.

In regard to this same issue, Ms. Castro presented a different perspective, including her thoughts on the use of the WIDA/ELD standards:

In a way, I feel that Common Core is demanding . . . and is hard for ELs. If they do them in the native language, of course, they can accomplish it; but I feel that the ELs need more of the WIDA standards support to help them succeed with the Common Core. I feel that probably teachers need that training too, of the WIDA standards, not only us, the bilingual teachers or the ESL teachers. They can . . . I think there’s not a lot of support, or teachers need that more support or training because teachers need to think that [it] is not only the EL teacher, the one that is responsible for these students.

On the other hand, Michael enthusiastically discussed the hidden benefits of the Common Core for ELs:

The great thing about the Common Core is it gathers things that we’re not good about and has been criticized. But what I love about the Common Core standards and what we need to do as a school and as a district is to acknowledge that there’s all sorts of speaking and listening standards there that we many times just ignore. There are the language standards that we ignore.

**The use and instruction of the native language of the students.** All interview participants reported working primarily with Spanish-speaking ELs and wanting their students to understand and learn English and Spanish. However, based on the interview findings, the reality is that instruction in and of the native language rarely occurs. Based
on the interview data, it appears the participants who function in push-in and pull-out settings are best positioned to teach or use the native language of the students to support learning English. However, because they only support these students a few hours a week at best, the instruction and use of the native language of the students is sporadic. Thus, ELs are gradually learning English, but their native language is not growing—is abandoned, unless they are in heritage or dual language programs. Even in heritage or dual language settings, the quality of instruction in the native language is unclear.

The ideal of bilingual/biliterate education promotes the advancement of more than one language. This is the ideal and it is a goal shared by many in the school district participating in this study, including me, and it is one that is probably being actualized for students across grades in some high-functioning school settings. Nonetheless, across the district and based on state requirements, preparation of teachers, current staffing practices, and program policies, the goals of supporting English learners are only for them to acquire English as best and fast as they can and to achieve academically.

Overall, with respect to the goals and priorities for middle grade ELs, there was a general understanding among the interviewees that they planned on teaching or already were teaching ELs key language and content strategies, and they will continue reinforcing the language development of these students so that they can work on their own successfully. There was also a common view among them about the need for teachers to consistently monitor whether these students are learning or not so that their instruction can be adjusted accordingly. All the study interviewees, in one way or another, articulated the desire to develop ELs who are independent learners and critical
thinkers and hopefully, ELs who are able to master the English language while they also learn and/or maintain their native language with success.

Furthermore, the revealing accounts of interview participants suggest there is an urgent need for more collaboration between content and bilingual and/or ESL resource teachers so that the learning opportunities for ELs are more structured and purposeful across contents and instructional settings. Engaging in collaborative relationships with their colleagues was one of the professional learning needs distinguished by study participants. The preparation, expertise, and professional learning needs as perceived by the interview respondents are presented in the following sections.

**Preparation and Expertise**

The professional characteristics obtained from the survey data, such as the certifications and endorsements of the study participants, were described in detail previously in this chapter. This section provides a brief extension of that information and in general, presents the participants’ perspectives and lived experiences regarding their universities’ curriculum and preparation of teachers of English learners.

**Additional probing about the preparation and expertise of participants.**

According to the reported information in the survey and the interview contributions, all participants who were in the bilingual/ESL/ELPT teacher role were licensed teachers who had the endorsements required for teaching ELs and had at least one content area endorsement. There was one participant in this group who only had a provisional bilingual endorsement, but in the interview, she explained she was working on getting her ESL endorsement. This participant also had the least years of teaching experience in this group. Six of the seven participants in this group were Spanish bilingual. Three of these
participants were native Spanish speakers who immigrated to the U.S. as teens, or as adults with professional careers. These three participants made it clear that their Spanish language and literacy skills were stronger than their English language skills. The Spanish biliteracy skills of the four other participants in this group were not clearly determined.

In the departmentalized and “Other” teacher groups, all nine participants had the appropriate endorsements for the content and grades they taught, and only two of these nine reported not having the ESL endorsement. The two participants without the ESL endorsement reported they were passionate about teaching ELs, used cultural sensitive practices, were cognizant of and work toward improving the language and academic needs of their students, and felt they used best practices in teaching content to EL students. Even though they would like to pursue their ESL endorsement, they felt ambivalent about current ESL programs that would take them to a higher level of learning and expertise than what they have already experienced by actually doing the work. Kristy confided her frustration:

The hard part is that you’re labeled as this person that doesn't know anything about it. But I know because I have friends that live in the suburbs. They have an influx of English learners that are coming, you know, to certain suburbs and they're totally clueless as to what to do. And after 12 years, obviously, I don't have a paper that says, “You know what to do with them.” The state needs to say, she can have English learners in her classroom. I wish there is a way that you could just be like, “Can’t I just prove it? Come in; I’ll do some videos.”

Five of the nine participants in the departmentalized group were Spanish bilingual and one was bilingual in Polish and German. Again, the biliteracy skills of these participants were not probed, although there were a few participants who mentioned they have never learned academic Spanish throughout their schooling years, and they also expressed the need to be supported in teaching language and literacy skills in Spanish.
One participant in this group was a native Spanish speaker who immigrated to the U.S. as a professional adult. This participant had a strong command of the Spanish language, but felt her English skills, especially her speaking skills, needed improvement.

In this segment, it was important to highlight the bilingual and biliteracy skills of the study participants because having this knowledge and these skills is essential for the betterment of the English learners they were responsible for educating, particularly in settings where bilingual teachers are expected to instruct in English and in the native language of the students. From my interpretive lens, this data was revealing. It indicates that teachers of ELs need better preparation to teach in the language they are certified or endorsed in as bilingual. Just as true, teachers who are native speakers of the language of the students and are second language learners of English themselves also need additional preparation and ongoing supports so they can improve their English speaking and writing skills—the productive skills of all languages.

Participants’ perspectives about the preparation of teachers of ELs. When asked whether they felt universities prepared them well for the instruction of ELs, 12 of the 16 interview participants indicated they were not prepared well. Most agreed that learning the theories of bilingual education and ESL pedagogy was useful and influential, but not enough for what they actually needed to function efficiently in classrooms packed with multilingual, multicultural students who had varied schooling experiences. A common view was that there needed to be more practice of various teaching methods, more hands-on activities in which they could apply what they learned in theory. The following participants’ provided some examples and their views regarding the university preparation they received.
I think, I learn by experience. I think [I] had some good courses, but since I was on secondary ed., I think a lot of my focus was more on content. So it wasn’t a lot about the methods, and the teaching. Yes, it was included somewhere in there, but I don’t think it was a lot. (Lupe)

I don't know if it’s easily possible, but like the people who are teaching the courses should have been working with students that are English learners, in some capacity, because I can read about all day long about strategies that I should do with them, but the reality is that when people ask . . . I hate the word strategies because people always ask me about like what strategy? I don't know. Like it's not really a name. It starts out with a name or it's a strategy or a task or whatnot, but it changes like from first period to third period, to what each of them need. (Kristy)

Well, I think the things that are missing are the things that can't be taught, you know, like how to motivate kids, how to build confidence, how to create an environment for reading and learning. You know? Like that's just something that comes with your practice and knowing your kids. (Jen)

Mrs. Petra came right to the point when she shared her thoughts about the preparation of teachers of ELs:

I would say, practice. Because I was lucky teaching and going to school, so whatever I was taught at XXX, I would practice. I have to tell you, I have student teachers, every single year, twice or once a year. I have student teacher for clinical, or to sit in, every single year. . . . So I see what’s going on; they have no clue what practice is. It should be intertwined, practice and studies. See my student teacher was doing the endorsement, the ESL endorsement, but she was English native speaker, never exposed to any second language. The way I had to stop her so many times, “Slow down, slow down, don’t do babyish, but slow down,” I would tell her.

Others interviewees added to these comments. Courses on the fundamentals of bilingual education and ESL pedagogy should be required for all teachers who plan on working in urban settings so that they are better prepared to work with the culturally and linguistically diverse groups of students they will have in their classrooms. They concurred that this should not be a requirement solely for the teachers who are assigned to teach English learners, but required of all teachers. According to Raiza, “Everyone, even if they’re not going to specifically want to be a bilingual teacher or an ESL teacher, everyone needs to learn how to address the needs of diverse learners.”
Thus, from the perspectives of the interviewees and my interpretation of these views, there is common agreement that obtaining bilingual and/or ESL endorsements is a professional learning need for all middle grade teachers to consider or be required to pursue. In addition to this learning need, there were other areas the participants identified as areas in need of improvement for their personal and professional gain and to better their practice and improve their students’ outcomes.

**Professional Learning Needs**

The professional learning needs of study participants that surfaced from the survey data are extensively discussed in chapter four. The survey data provided a broad sense of what these needs were and the interview data gave deeper insights into how these needs materialized in middle grade teachers’ practice. With the exception of one or two interviewees, the participants who contributed to the interviews were fairly well advanced in their professional careers. Most of them had taken university courses beyond a master’s degree, and they had a variety of endorsements and multiple years of teaching experience that enhanced their expertise and qualifications. In spite of all of their professional accomplishments, the interview participants demonstrated a relentless desire for learning. They all expressed a variety of learning needs such as: learning a new language; mastering the Spanish and/or English languages; immersing themselves in new cultures; strengthening their knowledge and use of the Common Core and WIDA standards; honing in on explicit instruction of English vocabulary; deepening their understanding of academic language, and the teaching of collaborative conversations, or accountable talk; and improving their collaboration and communication with their colleagues.
The participants’ perspectives on the purpose and use of the Common Core and WIDA standards clearly illuminated a high need for additional knowledge and supports in using these standards. With the purpose of determining the specific professional learning needs related to the instruction of language and literacy development for ELs, the 72 topics and 15 categories derived from the third coding cycle were re-read and carefully examined once more. Through this process, the most immediate instructional needs identified by the interviewees were: (a) the need to strengthen their understanding and use of the Common Core and WIDA standards and effectively use the strategies that go along with the implementation of these standards with respect to the needs of ELs, (b) the need for an improved collaboration between colleagues, and (c) the need to use and teach the Spanish language with efficacy. The participants’ interview accounts provided more explicit details about these most immediate professional needs and these are categorized in Figure 18 and explained in the subsequent paragraphs.
Figure 18. Most immediate professional learning needs.

Understanding and using the Common Core and WIDA/ELD standards. The professional learning needs in regard to the use of the CCSS and WIDA/ELD standards align to the perceived level of expertise in implementing the CCSS literacy focus areas and the level of training the participants reported in the survey data on the use of the CCSS and WIDA standards. In chapter four, survey results showed that over 40%, or approximately 22 participants received less than 10 hours of training on the use of the CCSS and over 60% of the respondents reported receiving less than 10 hours of training on the use of the WIDA standards.

Given the above findings, it was no surprise that the participants’ level of expertise in using the CCSS literacy focus area and the WIDA/ELD’s essential components in their instruction were still in the developmental stages. Only the individuals in the general education ELA and social science roles reported levels of
proficiency in the implementation of close reading of complex text, collaborative conversations, academic language, and informational text reading. In an effort to deepen the understanding and implication of these outcomes, interview data was examined to distinguish how the use of these focus areas look in the interviewees’ instruction of their middle grade ELs. The close examination of the interviewees’ accounts suggested that even though the implementation of standards-based instruction is gradually improving, there is a need for further development in these areas of instruction. This close examination also revealed there was even a greater need to build content teachers’ expertise on the use of the WIDA/ELD standards. For instance, Michael elaborated on some of the Common Core techniques he used in the service of his students and the supports he provided his colleagues on the use of these standards through professional development workshops:

For our newcomers, we obviously target Spanish-language standards as well. I make sure. I’m always harping on my teachers; make sure your lesson plans represent that and show that you’re not targeted in language arts. But I did push my principal to give me some time so I could do a PD. Basically, I called it Access + Prep = Language Domain Development because what I feel we ignore, at least in the school, is . . . The great thing about the Common Core is it gathers things that we’re not good about and has been criticized; but what I love about the Common Core standards and what we need to do as a school and as a district is to acknowledge that there’s all sorts of speaking and listening standards there that we many times just ignore. There are the language standards that we ignore. I did a PD to specifically target more speaking and listening and it’s a bit more on student comprehension activities that are more representative of the tasks that they need to fulfill and the listening portion of the ACCESS test.

Michael further expressed his views on his colleagues’ attitudes regarding using the WIDA/English language development standards for the benefit of their English learners:

I believe the majority of the teachers, at least at my school, do feel that it’s something extra that they just have to tag on. And whenever I’m working with them, I try to make things as apparent and make them more and more aware and say, hey, this is the standard, but let’s see what this really means. And let’s look
at the content area and actually look at what is it that these students, these ELs, need to know and look at what they don’t have in their backgrounds and how to make these . . . I give them terms more expressive to them; I happen to use that. And I know that for a lot of monolingual teachers, there’s just this expectation and then there’s not this clear understanding between a tier 1, 2, and tier 3 word vocabulary, that a lot of these students come, that they take a different path.

On the application of the WIDA/ELD standards, Jen revealed her unfamiliarity with these standards and her apprehension in using them in connection with the Common Core and the needs of her students:

The Can Do descriptors, yeah, those are out and I use those when planning my lessons to think about, okay, how is this going to look for, you know; I have students from like level II to level VI. So I have the descriptors printed out and they have my students marked where they fall in each area, so I try to just think about that when I’m planning my lessons. But other than that, I'm not that familiar with them. And I struggle with them too because I feel like the level of the Common Core standards because at first when I started working with them I thought it's got to connect to my Common Core standards, but that's not necessarily the case. It's more about, you know, what's the skill or the strategy that we’re focusing on and how’s it going to look for the language?

Maria recognized the purpose of the Common Core with respect to the instruction of her middle grade students and also confided her deficiencies in knowing the appropriate terminology and ensuring an effective use of these standards in the instruction of her ELs:

I think that that is what is expected of them in college and it needs to be addressed in the primary grades. However, when you are an EL, especially if you are a teacher who feels that she needs a little more support in writing, I feel like I’m at a disadvantage, especially when it comes to the terminology. I have to go back to the computer and I have to make a sense. So how do I explain to them their transitional words are off, or that their thesis statement is not correctly done? So that students understand because at the same time, they’re still trying to dominate the language. They’re still having, verb tenses that are off. How am I going to do that? And I take it day by day. And I try to chunk it as much as I can, so that they know the basics and from there I try to take . . . So yes, I like the CCSS and then I don’t because it doesn’t take into account the special ed. kids as well as the ELs.

**Improving collaboration among bilingual/ESL resource and content teachers.** Regarding the need to improve the collaboration among teachers, interview
participants shared a common belief that consistent and purposeful collaboration and communication between middle grade teachers is absolutely necessary for the benefit of the ELs in the middle grades. Mr. Orozco, for instance, shared how strong collaboration among resource and content teachers builds a trusting relationship that takes time to develop, but affirmed it is necessary to support one another:

What is working is that now that I have seven years, actually this December makes eight years of working with my colleagues, my teacher colleagues, there is a trust established so they know that my intentions are to promote academic achievement regardless of the status of our English language learners. But mainly for them, to advocate for their needs, to remind them that I’m there to help, facilitate if they require me to do a lesson. I’m open to that and they’re open to that.

From the perspective of most of the bilingual/ESL and EL Program Teachers, the type of collaboration that Mr. Orozco had experienced needs to happen more consistently and strategically. This type of collaboration was found meaningful for ensuring that all middle grade teachers who work with ELs understand the expectations content teachers and bilingual/ESL resource teachers have of their ELs and know what is being taught and learned in their respective instructional contexts. The bilingual/ESL/ELPT teachers expressed the need for content teachers to be aware of the type of instruction and supports ELs receive from them so the content teachers can better address these students’ needs and monitor their progress more effectively. For example, Susana expressed her ideas about why it would be beneficial for English language arts teachers to provide students multiple exposures to proper oral and written use of the academic English.

A lot of the teachers forget that these students are second language learners because they speak English good and because they speak the slang English they think they are just gang banging or whatever. No, it’s not that; that’s how they learn because they learn from their peers.
Additionally, the bilingual/ESL/ELPT teachers voiced their need to know the content that is being taught and the strategies that are being used so they can better plan and execute their push-in and pull-out services more strategically and efficiently. When explaining her viewpoints on the services she provided to her students and on how she tried to collaborate with the content teachers to ensure her ELs learned the content taught in the regular classroom, Ms. Castro asserted:

I would like to have something more set up. I tried as much to collaborate with the ELA teachers in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Sometimes my students can do what they’re [mainstream students] doing. We try to do the same as much. It satisfies me. I see my students tell me, when I have to sub and they go to their classroom: “Oh, they were doing the point of view and we already did that.” And we already did that so I tell them: “You see how we’re doing just the same as them, just because is in Spanish, but we’re learning the same thing.”

The idea of team teaching and having team leaders surfaced in the reactions of some participants as a promising practice used for building each other’s capacity and for planning and delivering efficient and effective instruction for ELs, but strategic collaboration and communication need to also exist between the teachers and administrators who are involved in these decisions. Raiza confided the frustration she experienced in trying to support her colleagues beyond expectations when she described how her spirits were crushed by the lack of acknowledgement and encouragement from her school’s leaders who showed little interest in promoting and supporting this practice.

I still want the work without the title sort of speak because the climate here is not so supportive, administration, they’re kind of, is weird. Anyway, I’m here to help whoever needs help and I was really breaking my back in the beginning of the year to kind of distribute things for them and get myself available and go the extra mile, but nothing gets done. I don’t get an appreciation for it. I don’t get a thank you. I don’t get an encouragement. I don’t get, yes, we need to see more of that. And it really, it does kill your spirit in a sort of way.
In order to address the teachers’ professional learning needs and supports that were surfaced by the participants, there has to be quality and sustained professional development opportunities for all middle grade teachers, content as well as resource teachers. More importantly, survey and interview participants identified collaboration among teachers as the most valued type of professional development and as the most needed. However, because opportunities for teacher collaboration were reported to be limited, and/or in some cases completely absent, this situation was identified as a challenging issue, along with other professional development issues for teachers of ELs. The following is a brief review of these issues and challenges and these will also be further examined in chapter six.

**Professional development opportunities for teachers of ELs.** The professional learning needs of the participants were previously highlighted in this section. Along with these needs, there was a shared understanding that more professional development opportunities needed to be available for content and bilingual and/or ESL resource teachers of middle grade ELs. Interview participants vehemently shared their views on this issue. The collective view was that professional development for teachers of ELs needs to be tailored based on what these teachers need to better their practice and what is to the benefit of their students. Sandy elaborated on the problem of professional development for teachers of ELs and emphasized local realities:

You know, in the 90s, or maybe at the beginning of 2000, a lot of teachers will come with upset faces. And they’d go to a staff development and they’d say, “All this is irrelevant; this is something that it will not help me” because I think having that area connection with the teachers and with the schools, the district would plan globally, whatever was the need, whatever was in their mind, thinking this is going to help. But staff development has to be connected with the reality, with whatever is happening with the school.
Other perspectives emerged from conversations about this topic. Some contributors spoke about the need for more opportunities for teachers to work together, to learn from one another by sharing their practice, their ideas, and expertise. The interviewee’s views about this issue suggested a type of professional learning communities that happens within schools informed by the students’ achievement goals and outcomes and by the teachers’ own expertise and needs. For instance, Raiza’s spoke about teachers in her school as being great, untapped resources:

I’m so tired of going to PDs and hearing, “But we don’t have this; we don’t have that.” I’m like. “Look around; if you don’t think like the people in this room are your greatest resources, then something is wrong.” But I think the culture doesn’t, it’s not a culture of . . . you’re not necessarily . . . I’m not afraid, but it is not encouraged. It may be encouraged, but there’s no support to really say, “Okay you want to go observe so and so, we’ll cover you, or you want to go talk to so and so, they have a free period at this time.”

Another common understanding that surfaced from this topic was the need for the professional development occurring in schools to be more efficient, less lecturing, less administrative topics, and more hands-on activities in the areas in need of improvement.

Mrs. Q’s ideas reflected this sentiment:

I would like to continue with opportunities to grow more as a professional and the way I can acquire knowledge, especially participating in more PDs. I feel very competent to be a leader, as a grade level leader, be in the committees. Also, now thinking about reading, I would like to know more about text complexity. Even though this year I use text complexity a lot, I need to get more structure in those areas, have more strategies for what I expect. If I have high expectations of my students, how can demand more, if I feel that I don’t have the tools to help them? And also because the PDs that I mentioned, in my opinion, [they] have to be more productive, be less discussion, less business, less demands . . . I’d like to have more on instruction, quality instruction, and about the preparation that we need to have.

Even though most of the interview participants reported having advanced degrees in education and had multiple years of teaching experience, the survey and interview
findings suggested participants recognized the need to continue building their professional expertise so as to keep up with higher teacher expectations and to better serve their students. Thus, they demonstrated a strong desire for accessing professional learning opportunities that expanded their knowledge and expertise for teaching middle grade ELs in the context of more rigorous demands and accountability measures. Further discussion on professional learning opportunities for educators of ELs is presented in chapter six as a factor that impact the decision making and effectiveness of teachers of middle grade ELs. Other issues that impact the teaching and learning practices related to middle grade ELs are explored next.

**Additional Factors Influencing Decisions, Teacher Effectiveness, and Student Success**

**Alignment and coherence of district and state policies and requirements.**

Participants expressed strong opinions about the role of the district and state in helping teachers of ELs be successful teaching and supporting middle grade EL students. Their collective views demonstrated that the participants in this study understood the state’s expectation that ELs be taught by licensed teachers with the appropriate content and bilingual and/or ESL endorsements. They embraced the understanding that ELs in bilingual programs should be taught in the language of the students. However, the interviewees also wanted to see: (a) more required preparation for all teachers, such as linguistic and cultural awareness coursework; (b) ongoing supports for teachers who teach ELs, such as an aligned curriculum for ELs; (c) models of strong ESL programs; (d) modeling of how the CCSS and WIDA standards can be efficiently implemented in the instruction of ELs, and (e) resources and assessments in the native languages of the
students, in Spanish for example. Michael contributed his opinion on the requirement of linguistics coursework:

I would push for state requirements to integrate more linguistics coursework for teacher preparation programs. I’m a big proponent of that stuff and I see a lot of value in that discipline and that there isn’t enough of that I think is taking place as far as teacher preparation programs. And that’s not to say that every monolingual teacher should know another language, but they should at least have an understanding of how language acquisition works, and I would say that regardless of . . . We live in a multicultural society, especially in urban settings that we’re in; you have multiple languages. Look at what’s happening here. I would push for that, especially for principals.

Regarding the district’s expectations, the common perception drawn from the participants’ views was that even though there had been progress in how programs for ELs were implemented and supported in the district, there was still more to be done in terms of the supports provided to the teachers responsible for the instruction of middle grade ELs, and the resources and tools available to teach these students well. More importantly, there was the belief that the education of ELs and building the capacity of EL teachers to do their job well was still not given the same value; they were still not a priority, even though the high expectations and the accountability measures were there for EL’s and their teachers. Susana put forth these thoughts:

You expect students to do as the same level as other monolingual students; no, because we have not been given the training. Just like the students need to be shown, we need to be shown how to do that. They expect us just to, it’s not a complaint; it’s a reality. . . . I don’t know if it’s the district’s point that they’re not preparing us too; I know they try to but if there is . . . And I know you would try to do that; there is not enough, or they do not make it a priority. You know that they don’t give it the same value; they don’t give it the same.

Another issue that surfaced from the participants’ conversations in regard to the district’s expectations of English learners and their teachers was the accountability assessments by which teachers and students are measured. Jennifer questioned these assessments:
Really, in a lot of ways what I’m being held accountable to it’s such a mismatch for what is actually appropriate and necessary for the students that are in front of me. Like it’s absurd that I should be thinking how a student is going to do on the NWEA, when I should just be thinking about how I can help them get through this first year and what’s actually appropriate for a student when they’re learning the language in the first year. Those things don’t really go together. It’s not an appropriate assessment tool for what you’re actually doing for those students. That’s the world we’re all living in, so you’re always kind of one foot in both worlds.

Generally, district policies and initiatives are developed and launched with the best intentions of building the capacity of teachers and principals as well as advancing student learning. However, most often than not, district led initiatives such as the implementation of the Common Core standards and the launching of professional development partnerships and modules that are designed to aid in the use of these standards do not necessarily reach every teacher and school leader in the district as intended. Study participants highlighted their experiences in this regard. They pointed out the inequities they have felt in accessing professional learning opportunities that support their use of the new standards and the instruction of their English learners. Based on the participants’ accounts, it appears the district’s leadership needs to do more to ensure that high expectations and accountability measures for teachers of ELs and their students are accompanied by quality and consistent supports as well as the appropriate resources and tools needed to perform with success.

**Lack of or limited curriculum resources for middle grade ELs.** The district has pushed hard for the implementation of the Common Core and for the development of the resources that assist in using these standards in English language arts and social science classes. Thus, teachers have become more acquainted with these standards and the companion resources available in the district. However, the absence of a coherent
and cohesive curriculum that is based on the new standards is something that has been missing in the district. All teachers have felt this need, but no other teachers are more in need of curriculum resources than the teachers who are instructing English learners in bilingual and multilingual settings.

Study participants acknowledged the existence and value of district-developed resources such as the content frameworks for literacy and social science. Per their narrations, they used these resources to the extent they could and knew how to, and from their vantage point, these were not enough for meeting the linguistic, socio-emotional, and academic needs of the diverse groups of middle grade ELs they served in their classrooms. Teachers across the district have become quite resourceful in overcoming this challenge. For instance, they have developed their own units of study, continue using outdated texts, and depend a great deal on the online resources available for their use. Although these online resources are helpful, they are not enough to meet the instructional needs teachers have and the learning needs of their students. The following are some examples of the participants’ reactions to this challenge of limited or nonexistent resources for the work they do as teachers of ELs. Michael described his situation:

Honestly, I think it’s more of a hodge-podge at this point. We looked at . . . We have a bunch of probably outdated material that’s been used for special ed. and for ELL for language expression; it’s quite a few years old. I try to use a lot of resources from the district’s website; I’m always on there, so kind of a bridge between the present, the future, and the past with what we have.

Lupe presented this issue as a real challenge, but also shared ways that she has gone about solving this problem for her and her colleagues:

I don’t think that as a teacher, I have all the resources. I think that as a teacher, I have to seek all of the resources. I think because I’m an experienced teacher,
there’s resources that I know work already, and there are some new resources that I’m like, “Oh, okay, I should try these.” And I think just communicating with other teachers and collaborating, that has helped me with okay, now we’re doing text evidence, and what are you doing, you know, sharing PowerPoints amongst each other. . . . That’s what has worked for me as a teacher.

In addition to curriculum resources, there are other types of resources ELs need that are necessary for meeting their basic social and emotional needs. This lack of resources, according to some of the respondents, was an urgency that should not be ignored. Ms. Q underscored this urgency when she shared a story about a student:

In general, for me, I think is the lack of resources. As teachers, we need more resources outside the classroom. For example, as I mentioned before, I have a very challenging year. I have one of the students who came from Honduras as part of Niños de la Frontera, and basically she doesn’t speak anything in English. She lived in a little town, and the situation was very rough for her and family. She almost, she reached the U.S. in almost five months, and the experience that she went through . . . and now she is really attached to me. And the thing is this girl needs more support in this situation, social, emotional . . . and that’s one of the things, because this student has to go to another four teachers, two of them speak only English. There’s no support for her.

Overall, the participants agreed that as of 2012, there were more district-developed resource options and flexibility for teachers to use and that they find meaningful for the instruction of their students. They appreciated what the district had developed, but they would like to see more alignment and equity of these resources with respect to the learning needs of ELs. To that end, they would like to see and have access to more resources developed with the ELs in mind, access to Spanish bilingual and ESL resources for ELs in multilingual settings.

Lack of or limited parent engagement. Although this study did not specifically probe the role of parents in supporting the advancement of middle grade English learners, some of the participants’ reactions illuminated the need to acknowledge and validate the parents’ presence and the influence they have on the schooling experiences of their
children. When determining the additional supports she needed to provide her English learners, Maria explained how she distinguished the cultural and linguistic assets of her English learners and the role their parents had in their upbringing.

I have, and this is where [it] goes back to being culturally aware as a Mexican and predominantly the children here are “Mexicanos.” I know which kids’ parents come from the big city in Mexico and which come from the small cities, the ranches, farms, and you can tell the difference. And so that kids that are sitting in my classroom, they’re the shy ones; they’re the ones who come from small ranches, who are taught the old way. The teacher is always right; you don’t talk back, you respect.

Jen explained the efforts that she made in building a supportive learning environment for her students with the assumption that they probably had little parental support at home.

So, it's really hard. I spend a lot of time developing a community in the classroom of support, and a safe environment. I also focus a lot on the growth mindset, and making sure that they know that if they’re not going to get it right the first time, that’s okay… then I also know that they don’t necessarily have the resources or support at home, or even just somebody even like… Their parents might ask them if they have something to do, you know, if they have something to work on and they’ll say, no, I already did it at school or whatever and that can be difficult too because they need more practice and parental support.

Mrs. Petra recognized that the absence of parental engagement at home has influenced the motivation of the immigrant ELs in her classroom to learn and achieve more in life. She stated, “Motivation I believe comes from families. And those families have low paying jobs, so they work long hours, and so they don’t have that drive from parents.”

Ms. Castro explained how she struggled making parents of ELs understand that placing their children in the bilingual program was to their benefit. Her comments also imply there is a need for stronger communication between parents and teachers and perhaps administration so that parents of ELs are able understand the programs of instruction available to their children—the benefits, outcomes, and consequences. Ms. Castro remarked on how sometimes her beliefs are not always understood by parents:
I feel they also need to learn in the native language. I believe in that they have to be strong in the native language, to be able to learn the English. Even though that I have some problems with parents that think that their child has to learn English. You know, “What is the problem?” Parents don’t understand their children need to be strong in their native language to be able to learn English.

Mrs. Q’s experiences with parents exemplified how building trust and relationships with parents is essential in strengthening the home and school connection.

It is extremely important that we create that bridge in communication with parents for simple or very difficult things. I know that the parents feel very…they trust in me. I have the confidence to make calls about anything and they respond.

Finding meaningful ways to involve parents in the educational experiences of middle grade students and of English learners in particular is indeed a challenging task. It is generally known that parental involvement diminishes in middle school for several reasons. The students’ dispositions for having their parents more present in school or for communicating school matters with parents are chief among these issues. In the case of English learners, language and cultural differences between home and school can be perceived as barriers rather than as tools that can help bridge communication between parents, teachers, and students. The interviewees’ perspectives in this study highlighted examples of the discrepancies and opportunities that prevent or assist in establishing stronger relationships and communication between parents and teachers. Such discrepancies need to be understood and resolved in order to help middle grade ELs overcome the cultural, motivational, and linguistic obstacles they encounter in school. Opportunities need to be seized so as to improve the relationship and communication among parents, students, and teachers.
Summary

The participant data collected through the interviews are rich and meaningful. This information is full of passion for the work the participants do for and with the students they serve. It demonstrates the richness and diversity of individuals as teachers and as human beings. It reveals the vulnerability of the participants, the strengths and shortcomings they exhibit in teaching middle grade ELs, how they reflect upon their practice, the way they collaborate or want to work with their colleagues, how they maximize the limited resources and tools available to them, and how they yearn for more. Much was learned from the reactions of the participants’ in response to the research questions that informed this study and specifically, to the interview questions that were used to gather their perspectives and lived realities related to the focus of this study.

The information obtained from the interview participants helped illuminate the fact that middle grade teachers of ELs have great dispositions for teaching ELs because they believe these students can achieve their highest potential given the appropriate access to instruction, qualified teachers, and resources. The interview findings substantiated that teachers of middle grade ELs are highly educated and have years of experience in teaching this population of students. Interview results helped in understanding the instructional goals and priorities the participants had for their students and how these were enacted in the content they taught and in the particular context in which they provided instruction. The instructional goals and priorities of general education (ELA and social science) emphasized the development of explicit academic and literacy skills, whereas the bilingual/ESL teachers focused on the cultural and
linguistic developmental needs of their students. The implications of these findings are discussed in chapter six.

The contributions from interview participants showed that even though this group of teachers held master’s or higher degrees and had seven to 20 or more years of teaching experience, they still demonstrated a high need for additional professional development on the use of the CCSS and WIDA/ELD standards and on the implementation of key language and literacy strategies that support the use of these standards. The need for more teacher collaboration emerged as a valuable yet scarce professional learning opportunity for middle grade teachers of ELs. Other issues that impact the decision making of the participants and the effectiveness of their instruction were evident in their responses, which were interpreted by me in ways that best portrayed their realities and feelings. Among these issues are the district priorities and mandates, availability of meaningful resources, and the lack or limited engagement of parents.

Even though I was conscientious about trying to avoid biases in the interpretation of these findings, at times it was difficult to deny emerging personal feelings about the topics discussed and negate my experiences of being an adult English learner herself, a teacher of middle grade dual language learners, a district leader, and an advocate for what is right for these students and the teachers who work with them. However, in the face of these challenges and because of them, I was also extremely aware of and sensitive to the fact that as a qualitative researcher, my subjectivity and self-reflexive practices are critical elements of this study and enhance my ability to surface new insights and thereby reach deeper understanding.
I found the interview results to be profound and uplifting. The participants’ convictions about their students and their views on their own practice, preparation, and professional needs were real, raw, and thought provoking and advance a goal of this study, to leave the readers of this research wanting to learn more about teachers of English learners and the students they serve. The recommendations that flow from the study survey and the interview findings as well as the limitations of the study are presented in chapter six.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Revisiting the Purposes of the Study

Education unlocks the potential of all individuals regardless of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, language, and cultural background. Academic and experiential knowledge tied to a relentless disposition for learning and helping others enable greater opportunities for growth and success. This has been my experience. As the eldest of seven children who was responsible for helping raise my younger siblings and providing financial supports, I began my life in this country as an adolescent immigrant English learner who had no knowledge of the language and culture of American society. Had it not been for my passion for learning and desire for improving my life and the lives of others, I would not be the accomplished individual that I am now. It is this passion for learning and inquiry that led me to undertake this journey of exploring what teachers of English learners know, believe, and do for the improvement of the students they serve.

In reexamining my experiences as an English learner and as a teacher of these students, I am fully aware that not all adolescent immigrant English learners encounter at this prime age helpful educational opportunities or have the intrinsic motivation to improve their living conditions due to various circumstances. Countless times I have seen that for many of these students, such opportunities do not easily present themselves, or are overlooked due to the lack of familiarity with the education and support systems in their environment. Therefore, all English learners, but middle grade ELs in particular, need the steady vision and unwavering dedication of the adults who have been charged
with educating and advocating for them so as to help them achieve their full academic potential and a life of success.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and Department of Justice (DOJ) released joint guidance reminding districts and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that all English learners have access to quality education and equity in opportunities that ensure their academic success (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This reminder might help address the questions that remain regarding the pedagogical knowledge, preparation, attitudes, and expertise middle grade teachers employ in the instruction of English learners and also provide renewed focus on the type of sustained professional development and resources these teachers require to teach their ELs more effectively in settings where change and unpredictability are constant.

Undeniably, finding ways to improve the learning conditions of English learners and best support the teachers responsible for their instruction and achievement has not only been a personal endeavor, but also a moral and civic responsibility that I have assumed in my work as a teacher, a bilingual and literacy specialist, and as a director of the language and literary departments, endeavors and responsibilities that motivated me to pursue this study. Therefore, as I stated throughout this study and as I have found to be typical in education research, it is not possible for me to treat the focus of my inquiries with complete objectivity because of my personal and professional investment in the subject. Hence, my passion may be detected when considering my conclusions.

In this chapter, I connect the findings of the survey and interview data and explain insightful contributions that answer my research questions and add to the discussion that prominent teacher development and bilingual researchers have brought to the forefront
regarding the preparation teachers who serve ELs need so as to develop the content knowledge and language proficiency of these students. First, I explore the frameworks through which the findings were analyzed and the conclusions are framed and revisit the perspectives and elements that guided the conceptualization of this study and the interpretation of its findings. Second, I address each of the research questions and synthesize the answers obtained from the participants by highlighting the emergent themes that best fit under each question as well as discuss implications from what is learned or missing from the data. Third, I discuss my recommendations and the limitations of this study, and conclude with a personal reflection.

**Conceptualizing the Framework**

The Framework for Advancing the Teaching of Middle Grade ELs as conceptualized by Short and Fitzsimmons (2007), Echevarria et al. (2008), and the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS, 2014) along with the Framework for Teacher Learning (Hammerness et al., 2005) contain the fundamental structures and tools essential for the successful education of middle grade English learners. The work of these theorists and researchers not only provide the pathways on how to do the complex work of teaching ELs and building the capacity and supports of their teachers, but also offer ways through which we can compare our progress along the way.

**Teacher Learning and Development Combined With a Framework for Advancing the Teaching of Middle Grade ELs.**

In the process of analyzing and interpreting the data, I used Hammerness et al.’s (2005) framework for teacher learning as one approach to help determine the type of preparation, practices, and dispositions I sought to illuminate in the contributions of the study participants so as to gain a deep understanding of the practice and decision making
of teachers of middle grade ELs. As discussed in chapter two, Hammerness et al. (2005) suggested new teachers learn to teach in a community that:

- enables them to develop a *vision* for their practice; a set of *understandings* about teacher, learning, and children; *dispositions* about how to use this knowledge; *practices* that allow them to act on their intentions and beliefs; and *tools* that support their efforts. (p. 385)

I found this framework to be applicable to the development of all teachers and to align perfectly with the topic of my investigation. The key elements of this framework, as shown in Figure 1, helped me to highlight what teachers know and do, their beliefs and priorities, and how, from the perspectives of the participants and as compared with research-based practices, they are going to get their ELs where they should be.

When exploring how to best synthesize my conclusions about the unique needs of teachers of ELs in regard to the instruction of middle grade ELs and do justice to the participants’ survey responses and personal experiences, I researched the work of Jimenez et al. (2015) in which they illustrated their understanding of a three-pronged framework developed by researchers and theorists in teacher education and multicultural education to guide the professional development of teachers of ELs (p. 406). Jimenez et al. (2015) examined the pedagogical knowledge, practical teaching skills, and dispositions of teachers, which are the main essence of the three-pronged framework that definitely parallels the work in my study. Their insights and recommendations were useful in shaping the interpretations and conclusions of my findings and were combined in the adaptation of Hammerness et al.’s (2005) framework shown in Figure 19.
Figure 19. Learning to teach in community. Adapted from Hammerness et al’s (2005) Framework for Teaching Learning.
A Framework for Advancing the Teaching of Middle Grade ELs and the Preparation of Their Teachers

The issues that drive and impact the teaching and learning of English learners transcend federal, state, and local mandates. Accordingly, the exploration of the attitudes, preparation, expertise, and professional learning aspirations employed by teachers who work with middle grade ELs is necessary to ascertain effective teaching practices that lead to successful outcomes for these students. The findings and conclusions drawn from the research subjects’ responses are interpreted and compared with the theories and practices that were developed for the purpose of improving the instruction and achievement of ELs and the preparation of their teachers (CGCS, 2014; Echevarria et al., 2008; Hammerness et al., 2005; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

Additionally, the findings of this mix method study illuminate the underlying purposes of Pragmatic Inquiry of exploring solutions to critical problems or issues (Lukenchuk, 2013). Through the application of constructivist perspectives, the lived experiences and realities of the participants were learned and understood in the context of this study (Gutek, 2004; Kramp, 2004). In the quantitative phase of the study, the survey questions invited participants to share their experiences by selecting answers that closely mirrored the thoughts and actions they employed in teaching ELs. I drew meaningful interpretations of these findings by clustering the participants’ survey responses into four major categories:

1. Diversity and demographic profiles of the study participants
2. Educational background and teaching experiences of participants
3. Qualifications, preparation, professional development, and perceived levels of
degree of expertise

4. Instructional and professional attitudes/priorities that influence teachers’
decision making in teaching ELs

Each of these categories had subcomponents that helped described the survey
contributions in more detail. Full description of each of these categories and their
subcomponents are provided in chapter four. The category connections to interview
findings are examined in later sections in this chapter.

For the qualitative data collection method, the semi-structured interviews were
then crafted so as to expand the survey results and engage the participants in contributing
their experiences in a way that gave relevance and authenticity to their individual
perspectives, behaviors, and actions. The interview data findings were carefully
examined in correspondence with the survey results so as to ascertain more precisely the
elements that influence the teaching of middle grade ELs and the decision making of their
teachers. In the analysis and interpretation of the interview transcripts, seven major
themes were extrapolated from the statements and categories that emerged from the three
coding processes described in chapter five. The following are the seven salient themes or
from here on, termed as components, that surfaced from the interview data.

1. Attitudes and dispositions: Teachers’ interest and motivation in teaching
   middle grade ELs

2. Knowledge and understanding of middle grade ELs

3. Preparation and expertise

4. Instructional goals and priorities
5. Participants’ perceptions about their teaching roles and effectiveness of instructional contexts

6. Professional learning

7. Additional factors influencing decisions, teacher effectiveness, and student success

These seven components obtained from interview data are associated with the corresponding survey results and connected to the research questions of this study, as will be discussed in the following sections.

**Research Questions, Response Components, and Implications to Consider**

As mentioned in previous chapters, this study sought to deepen the understanding of the attitudes, preparation, and skills middle grade teachers apply in teaching middle grade ELs. The research questions that were used to guide this investigation explored issues that impact the instructional practice and decision making of middle grade teachers of ELs and ways to help address the learning needs of these teachers and their students. The seven components obtained from the connections made between survey and interview results helped addressed the research questions as evidenced in the discussion and interpretation of the study findings in chapters four and five.

It is important to keep in mind that because these components emerged from large sets of quantitative and qualitative data and as result of a detailed analyses and interpretation of the data, all seven components interconnect when addressing the dispositions, priorities, and instructional priorities of middle grade teachers in regard to the instruction of middle grade ELs. These seven components were fundamental in addressing the research questions. Again, for the purpose of illuminating what these
components mean to the study, I addressed the research questions with the components deemed most fitting. For instance, the following components were found to be most helpful in addressing the central research question: *What makes the middle grade teachers of ELs instructional practices effective, and what influences their instructional decisions?*

- Attitudes and dispositions: Teachers’ interest and motivation in teaching middle grade ELs
- Knowledge and understanding of middle grade ELs
- Preparation and expertise
- Instructional goals and priorities

Additionally, I found the professional learning component and its subcomponents were a good fit for addressing the first additional research question: *What are the middle grade teachers of ELs’ dispositions on effective language and literacy instruction in the context of the Common Core Standards?*

- Professional learning
  - Understanding and use of the CCSS and WIDA/ELD standards
  - More professional development opportunities for teachers of ELs
  - Improving collaboration between content and bilingual/ESL resource teachers

As previously described in this section, the key seven components and their subcomponents surfaced from the coding of interview transcripts and were examined in connection to the survey findings. This close examination assisted in understanding the attitudes and practices employed by the research subjects as well as their perceived
realities as educators of middle grade ELs. The associations between the research questions and some of the key components warrant detailed discussion.

**Effective Instructional Practices and Influences on Instructional Decisions**

The participants’ responses that addressed this central research question were divided into four distinct components: (a) attitudes and dispositions, (b) knowledge and understanding about middle grade ELs, (c) preparation and expertise, and (d) instructional goals and priorities for the instruction of middle grade ELs.

**Component 1: Attitudes and dispositions.** According to Hammerness et al. (2005), teachers must have dispositions—the habits of thinking and action—about teaching, their students, and the role of teacher (p. 387). Teaching middle grade ELs is complex and multifaceted work that necessitates knowledgeable and skilled teachers and teachers who also have the dispositions, the determination to continue to seek new approaches to teaching that will allow their ELs to reach greater levels of achievement. Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) situated the teaching of middle and high school ELs as an endeavor that requires teachers to do “double the work” because they need to teach what all students need to learn plus include the explicit strategies that ensure ELs get access to the core content material while they develop proficiency in English. Jimenez et al.’s (2015) position clearly indicated that teachers of ELs need specialized courses that build the pedagogy knowledge and the skills necessary to teach this population of students, and they also need to have the disposition to learn and teach in more than one language.

The participants’ contributions in this study, particularly those who participated in the interviews, demonstrated they had the right habits of thinking and action in teaching ELs in several ways. The dispositions the survey participants showed about their
teaching and about the students they teach were evident in their responses to questions that asked about their commitment to their own professional growth, the efforts they made in collaborating with their colleagues, and the use of the expertise of others to improve their practice in connection to the instruction of their ELs. In regard to their professional growth, respondents indicated they were reflective of their practice based on their students’ performance. They also reported they engaged in collaborative work with their colleagues and sought out the professional support of others when needed. Survey participants indicated as well that they sought opportunities to enhance their own knowledge and skills in teaching language and literacy to this group of students. Interestingly, the respondents indicated they used the expertise of their colleagues more than the expertise of experts, teachers, and bilingual specialists outside of their school.

The interview responses provided vivid examples of the natural and passionate dispositions interviewees had about their work and about the students they taught. Their personal accounts of how they became motivated to teach and particularly to instructing English learners and multicultural students were inspiring and real. Full details of these accounts are given in chapter five, and some additional examples are presented later in this section.

Contrary to what Jimenez et al. (2015) found in their review of research regarding teachers’ attitudes toward teaching ELs, that teachers showed lower expectations for ELs, the interviewee participants in this study demonstrated an utter respect and appreciation for their ELs. As explained previously, this disposition was evident in the survey responses that indicated commitment to their professional growth and to the success of their students. The interview data allowed for deeper interpretations of these findings.
The interviewees’ responses provided meaningful descriptions about the high expectations they had for their ELs and how they supported these expectations. Interviewees also spoke of how they believed all ELs could achieve their highest potential and shared ways in which they supported their students and made them feel comfortable in their environment. For example, Laura explained how she recognized her ELs’ strengths by showing respect for their cultural background and language:

I wouldn’t judge them if they could not say something the right way, or if they asked too many times if the same assignment could be done in Spanish—their native language. I allowed it because I thought that as long as all of the expectations were fulfilled in their native language, I was fine.

However, Laura, who was a bilingual/ESL teacher, also mentioned how her ELs were not as comfortable in other classrooms where monolingual teachers worked with these students. She explained, “Many times in the homeroom class . . . there was a monolingual teacher that influenced a lot how they would get comfort, the level of being able to express themselves, the level of even asking without being judged.” Laura’s statement indicates she is aware of the learning conditions of her students and is willing to do something about it by speaking up and by doing what she can to improve the learning environment for her students. Her statement suggests there are content teachers who are not aware and knowledgeable about how to recognize and use the cultural and linguistic assets of the ELs in their classroom. Laura’s statement also supports the recommendations given by Jimenez et al. (2015); that in addition to having the pedagogical knowledge and skills, all teachers who work with ELs should be required to learn another language or at least take a foreign language course so that they learn to appreciate the supports ELs require in developing their language and content skills.
There were other interviewees who shared Laura’s views about the need to further support content teachers who work with ELs. For instance, Ms. Castro commented on what the content teachers should do in order to embrace the collective ownership that is needed for meeting the educational needs of ELs. Ms. Castro underscored the importance of teachers “even getting training, or even classes, courses, making all the teachers have their ESL endorsements . . . or at least a few classes that they have so they can know how to support their students.”

Nadia, who is a social science teacher, earned her ESL endorsement because she was inspired by her experiences of working with children in a predominantly Latino community. She also shared how she came from a family of immigrants and how she wished she had learned the native language of her family. Her attitude and dispositions about her teaching practices exemplified the need for students to feel comfortable. In sharing what she knows about her students, Nadia explained:

So the most important point is to have them be comfortable. If you can have them be comfortable in the classroom and not feel that they’re always being challenged, but they can have fun with the language and give them moments where they can feel confident.

The implications of the previously discussed findings suggest that perhaps there is an abundance of middle grade content teachers who are already doing great work with English learners, and that there are others who can learn from the work and experiences of colleagues who have such experiences. Additionally, these findings suggest that there might be many more content teachers in need of additional preparation and professional development on how to improve the dispositions they exhibit toward teaching ELs and have about the students themselves. Thus, the ideal is to work toward ensuring all middle grade teachers, regardless of the academic content or language they teach and in which
they teach, are prepared in providing a welcoming and conducive learning environment for their middle grade ELs.

Component 2: Knowledge and understanding about middle grade ELs. The attitudes and dispositions teachers of ELs demonstrate in the instruction of ELs are interconnected with the knowledge and understanding they have about these students. Through the quantitative and qualitative responses described previously and at length in chapters four and five, the study participants demonstrated they have the basic knowledge and understanding of what it takes to educate ELs in middle grades and the supports they should solicit and provide in order to actualize the full potential of these students. However, the survey data did not precisely provide the kind of information that specifically illuminated the type of knowledge and understanding the study participants possessed or were in need of acquiring about their middle grade ELs. Therefore, interview data were used to distinguish and extrapolate deep understanding of how this knowledge and understanding of ELs looked and how this was enacted in the classrooms of bilingual/ESL and content teachers.

In the examination of the participants’ stories, interesting differences were detected between the respondents who had bilingual/ESL and ELPT roles and those who taught language arts and social science in general education classrooms. Contributors in the bilingual/ESL/ELPT roles leaned toward paying more attention to the cultural, linguistic, and socio-emotional aspects of teaching and learning, whereas the general education teachers stressed the need for these students to feel comfortable in their environment and with the use of the English language.
Perhaps the linguistic and ethnic backgrounds of the bilingual/ESL/ELPT teachers influenced the perceptions and attitudes they had toward their students. Because all of the participants in this group learned English as young children or as professional adults, perhaps their own experiences as ELs and as members of a minority population influenced their thoughts and actions in teaching and meeting the needs of their ELs. It could also be assumed that because individuals in this group were bilingual and from families that struggled with language, culture, and identity issues they understood the struggles of their students from different vantage points. For instance, Sandy, who was a teacher in her native land and learned English as an adult, explained what she does in getting to know and addressing the immediate needs of her students: “So the very first thing for me is to analyze what they have. Depending on what they bring to the class, I need to plan and depart from there.” Other contributors in this group shared their experiences:

Well, I know that they need a lot more vocabulary than other students that speak English only. They also need more experiences outside of the classroom where they are kind of sheltered in a more local area such as visiting museums, walking around their neighborhood, or going out to the library. (Mr. Orozco)

I want their experiences and their being to perceive themselves as equals to their mainstream counterparts, that their difference and backgrounds doesn't mean that they're bad or less capable. It's just different and they bring a lot of richness, a lot of experiences to the forefront; but at the same time, I want to challenge them to apply their English academically and use those tools to succeed. (Michael)

The information gained from content teachers who have their ESL endorsement and have worked with ELs for many years showed that these teachers were not only empathetic of the challenges middle grade ELs experience, but also sensitive to how they tailored their instruction to accommodate the needs of these students. Some of these individuals spoke about how they tried to learn another language, in particular the
language of their students so as to experience what it takes to learn a second language and more importantly, so that they could use the language of their students in their instruction as they deemed necessary. They also shared how they immersed themselves or would like more immersion into the culture of the students so that they could know how to work better with them. Kristy, Jody, and Nadia shared their experiences and aspirations in this regard.

So do I think I’m going to speak Spanish later on? Possibly not, but that experience of taking a language and understanding words separate versus words put in a sentence, and having to switch that word’s ending like we do in the English language, adding “ing.” (Kristy)

It was hard, but I was 22 I think when I first went and I had that idea: “I’m just going to learn Japanese.” I didn’t, I struggled more with reading and writing. I didn’t get as far with reading and writing, but conversations, I think that it helped a lot. I obviously, I don’t speak Spanish. I don’t have that, but I’m really, I know what it feels like to be sitting in a room where you absolutely do not understand a word. (Jody)

I teach pre-history here, so now, my next desire, as a teacher of social studies would be to go down to the Yucatan Peninsula and immerse myself in the Mayan civilization. So I want to go to the source of it. (Nadia)

In addition to describing how they know and understand the immediate needs of their middle grade ELs based on their own experiences and on the knowledge that has helped them understand the challenges middle grade ELs have, all interview participants acknowledged that their middle grade ELs wanted to do well, that they wanted to succeed and that it was up to them, the teachers, to help them reach these goals. The following are examples that illustrate these assumptions.

They’re like everybody else. Everybody has aspirations; everyone wants to make it. Everyone has goals and objectives and it is up for us to gear them into the right way of getting them. They may not have a clear understanding of how to get there but that’s our job. They know that they want to be successful in life. (Susana)
Well, I think that what I do know is that regardless of what they put on the outside, they all do want to succeed. You know, in middle school you usually have a few that are just like, well, I just want to get to high school and I just want to get to that date where I can no longer go to school. But the vast majority of them really, truly want to be successful, and they're really afraid because they always think that they’re not going to have the correct answer. (Kristy)

These types of responses were obtained from even the interview participants who were not bilingual as well as from the two individuals who did not have their ESL endorsement. Why they all shared similar views in regard to what they know and understand about their ELs perhaps could be attributed to the fact that they had seven to 20 years of experience in teaching diverse, multilingual students in urban settings and they all, with the exception of one individual, had advanced degrees in education.

The non-bilingual, non-ESL-endorsed participants shared in common that they had vast background in reading, literacy, and curriculum development. They admitted to not having the theoretical and fundamental bilingual and ESL pedagogy, but explained that they recognized the struggles their ELs experienced learning difficult material when they did not understand the language and tried to find ways to help their students work through these obstacles.

All interview participants recognized that even though they are qualified and think they are effective in working with these students, they had areas in need of improvement with respect to the instruction of ELs. These areas in need of improvement are discussed in the professional learning needs sections of chapters four and five.

Although the findings concerning the interview participants’ knowledge and understanding of middle grade ELs cannot be generalized to the population of study, the implications of these findings are forthright. The interpretation of the participants’ stories indicated that middle grade teachers with ample years of experience, higher
educational degrees, and the appropriate content and language endorsements demonstrate they have ample knowledge and qualifications to understand the academic and linguistic needs of middle grade ELs and can act on these needs accordingly. The interview data indicated that teachers with these qualifications are able to apply their knowledge and skills in the instruction of their students by being cognizant of the developmental stages of these students in learning the new language, dealing with identity issues, and learning challenging content while developing their English language skills.

This study did not examine how precisely these teachers applied their knowledge of teaching, content, and language instruction in their work with middle grade ELs. Therefore, additional research is needed to understand fully how teachers of ELs apply this knowledge and how they determine the effectiveness of their practices. Also, more needs to be known about what makes knowledgeable and skilled general education teachers believe and report they are successful in the instruction of middle grade ELs even though they do not know a language other than English and do not have their ESL endorsement.

Component 3: Teacher preparation and expertise. The Framework for Teaching Learning outlines the type of preparation teachers in general should receive in their pre-service and possibly in their in-service years so they can be ready to work with diverse student populations (Hammerness, et al., 2005). Harper and de Jong (2009) concluded that pre-service teacher preparation should include high-quality field experiences and practicum teaching opportunities that allow teachers to experience and build the ELs’ specific strengths as well as address their unique needs (p. 147). Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) recognized the inadequate educator capacity for improving literacy
in ELs as one of the major six challenges they identified in their report (p.14). Other theorists and researchers have recognized the value of the linguistic assets ELs bring with them and have argued that more research and theoretical development is required for educators to build on this linguistic knowledge (Jimenez et al., 2015, p. 408).

In this study, the level of preparation and expertise of the study participants were gauged through using both the survey and the interview methods. The survey results showed that of the 53 participants who contributed this information, 37 held a K–9 certificate, 12 were certified in teaching grades K–12, and the remaining participants were certified in either PreK–2 and 9–12 grades. Most contributors reported having their middle grade and ESL endorsements, followed by bilingual, English language arts, and social science endorsements. Only 10 of the 53 participants had an endorsement in reading, and about a third of the participants had endorsements in math or science. The survey participants also reported taking language/linguistics, bilingual education, and literacy courses in their pre-service and in-service years, and receiving professional development in the use of the Common Core and WIDA/ELD standards. A full description of these data is presented in chapter four and is segmented by the three identifies teacher groups that emerged from the data: (a) bilingual/ESL/ELPT, (b) general education (ELA and social science), and (c) other—content teachers that included teachers of writing, math, science, computers, and Spanish language arts.

The conclusions drawn from the examination of the survey findings suggest there were a good number of participants with advanced levels of education and teaching experience. They also indicated that even with high levels of degrees and years teaching, participants still had areas in which they need additional supports in order to advance
their practice and the performance of their students. This area of interest was thoroughly examined in the interviews so as to ascertain with more precision the qualifications and preparation and the knowledge gaps of the participants.

As discussed in chapter five, except for one individual, all interview participants who were in the bilingual/ESL/ELPT teacher role were licensed teachers who had the endorsements required for teaching ELs and had at least one content area endorsement. In the general education teacher group (ELA, social science, and “Other”), all nine participants had the appropriate endorsements for the content and grades they taught, and only two of these nine reported not having the ESL endorsement. The two participants without the ESL endorsement showed great passion for teaching ELs. They reported using cultural-sensitive practices and spoke about how they worked toward improving the language and academic needs of their students. They also felt they used best practices in teaching content to EL students. They would like to pursue their ESL endorsement, but they felt ambivalent about current ESL programs that would take them to a higher level of learning and expertise than what they have already experienced by actually doing the work.

Interesting facts about the bilingual and biliteracy skills of the interview participants were distinguished in the analysis and interpretation of their personal stories. Six of the seven participants in the bilingual/ESL/ELPT group were Spanish bilingual. Three of these participants were native Spanish speakers who immigrated to the U.S. as teens, or as adults with professional careers; they made it clear that their Spanish language and literacy skills were stronger than their English language skills. The Spanish biliteracy skills of the four other participants in this group were not clearly determined;
however, they reported learning and using Spanish at home, but never in school as they were growing up.

Five of the nine participants in the departmentalized group were Spanish bilingual and one was bilingual in Polish and German. Again, the biliteracy skills of these participants were not probed. Here again, there were a few participants who mentioned they never learned academic Spanish throughout their schooling years, and they also expressed the need to be supported in teaching language and literacy skills in Spanish. One participant in this group was a native Spanish speaker who immigrated to the U.S. as a professional adult. This participant had a strong command of the Spanish language, but felt her English skills, especially her speaking skills, needed improvement.

In order to delve in more depth into the participants’ own perceptions about the knowledge and skills they acquired in their teacher programs, their perspectives on how well they felt their teacher programs prepared them in educating middle grade ELs were ascertained from both the survey and interview findings. Survey responses indicated that out of the 53 contributors, approximately 22% felt their teacher programs prepared them a little bit academically (i.e., theoretically) and experientially. Only 9%, or five respondents, reported their teacher programs prepared them very well both academically and experientially. About 42% reported they were prepared fairly well academically, and approximately 24% indicated they were prepared fairly well experientially.

University preparation of teachers was probed in more detail in the interviews in an effort to expand my understanding of the survey findings. As a result, the reports obtained from the interviewees definitely expanded the survey contributions and supported Harper and de Jong’s (2009) idea that teachers need more practice in real life
situations. All participants agreed that teacher preparation programs must include more experiential opportunities with teaching methods and strategies. The following quotations exemplify these findings:

With the ESL endorsement, there was a lot of linguistics and I loved it; but it was mainly like grammar, and grammar trees, and we learned the differences between how men and women speak. But it didn’t really have to do a lot with how children learn and what ways to motivate them. The real honest to goodness education was at (XXX) and being in the classroom. (Raiza)

I mean you talk about it in the general sense, that you're going to have students with IEPs, you’re going to have students who are not native English speakers; but until you're in it and really seeing what your kids need, you don't know. (Jen)

I think they [teacher candidates] have to be in the classroom more. More time should be in the classroom, more volunteering to really get a feel for the students because I feel that’s when you learn the most, or maybe having those classes. I know before I used to take one or two classes on differentiation of instruction, which included ELs and the sped students. So maybe having another course that focuses just on that. (Lupe).

Other interviewees asserted that their best preparation was when they engaged in the bilingual and ESL courses.

I’m sure back at XXX, back in 2000, that’s when I graduated, that I took classes and stuff to help me prepare, but yeah. Well, really my gen education classes didn’t as much as the . . . I decided to get the ESL endorsement, and those classes were probably the ones that prepared me the most. (Jody)

I feel fortunate to have had a good preparation in the university, especially in XXX, with Dr. XXX, with the XXX program. In that program, we as students started with the courses, experiences in observing other teachers, other schools, and always had opportunities to be reflective when we were in front of the class. (Mrs. Q)

The participants’ experiences in regard to teacher preparation programs indeed highlighted the need for teachers to have more experiential practice and also demonstrated how such experiences work well for both teachers and students. In addition to expanding the experiential learning of teachers of ELs, some participants indicated that
teachers who are non-native speakers of the language of the students need additional preparation in teaching in the language of instruction. Teachers who are not native speakers of English also admitted the need to further advance their English language skills. The following response from one of the interviewees explained these sentiments:

I’m very fluent in Spanish, but speaking in English, it still is challenging for me. I have the tools to teach in the native language (Spanish) of the students. Even though I feel know that I can do it [speak English with fluency and confidence], I’m always afraid to express in front of the public. When I’m with my students, I’m okay; but when I’m with adults, is different. (Mrs. Q.)

The assumptions and conclusions made in this study in regard to the preparation of teachers who work with English learners align with the arguments prominent researchers and theorists have posited over the years and more recently. From my perspective as this study’s researcher, the implications of these findings are extremely significant. In a time when more educators are taking online courses to further advance their knowledge and practice, knowing what we know about the value of hands-on experiences and how these practical experiences are critical for English learners, what does the teaching and learning future look like for these practitioners and their students? Additionally, these findings merit further research and development so as to identify the specific on-the-job practices that are more useful in the instruction of ELs. Furthermore, it would be good to investigate recent graduates to see if their preparation experiences mirror those of the participants in this study.

Component 4: Instructional goals and priorities. As referenced in chapter two, Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) identified the inadequate use of research-based instructional practices as one of the six major challenges in improving the literacy skills of adolescent English learners. In targeting this need, teacher preparation researchers
have argued for teachers to deepen their understanding of content and language
development so as to better assist ELs in attaining the goals of more rigorous standards
(Santos et al., 2012). The insights pulled from the connection and interpretation of the
survey and interview findings in this study were meaningful in illustrating how
participating middle grade teachers of ELs made decisions about the specific instructional
goals and priorities they had for their students. The information collected for this study
was useful in learning about the participants’ approaches to language and literacy
instruction, which led to considerations for local and systemic supports for teachers and
future research.

In the interpretation of the survey results about the perceived usefulness of key
Common Core and WIDA/ELD standards’ aligned approaches for language and literacy
instruction, distinct differences about the usefulness of these approaches were
distinguished. For example, the instructional approaches identified as being considerably
useful or most useful for the language development category were: teaching for transfer,
collaborative conversations, content specific vocabulary instruction, partnering for
content literacy (PRC2), and explicit instruction of academic language. These
approaches received higher mean scores than all of the other approaches in the choice
list. The instructional approaches deemed considerably useful and most useful and also
received higher mean scores for the literacy development category were: teaching
reading for informational text, close reading of complex text, writing, and reading
workshop, and partnering for content literacy (PRC2). Interestingly, partnering for
content literacy (PRC2) was the instructional approach identified as considerably useful
for both the language and literacy development skills of ELs, but the use of this
instructional tool did not emerge in the interactions with interview participants. This finding suggests that even when teachers are aware of practices that work for their students, the consistent use of these routines is not necessarily there.

The Survey Monkey features I used to aid analysis did not have the capability to distinguish differences in findings regarding the instructional goals and priorities between the bilingual/ESL/ELPT and the general education (ELA, social science, and Other) teacher groups. Consequently, the interview data were used to draw in-depth interpretations of the survey findings so as to determine whether there were unique characteristics related to the instructional goals and priorities the participants in the various teacher groups had for their students and to gain insights into how these were enacted in their particular roles and instructional settings. It was important to determine the extent to which the instructional approaches previously described were actually in practice and how these were put into practice by content teachers, and by bilingual/ESL/ELPT teachers who taught middle grade ELS in push-in and pull-out contexts. To that end and through the interpretation of responses from the interview participants’, vivid instances were drawn of the key standards-based instructional approaches that exemplified the instructional goals and priorities they reported having for their students. Detailed descriptions of these accounts are provided in chapter five; however, the following participant comments provide a glimpse of such interpretations from individuals in the content areas and then from the push-in and pull-out bilingual/ESL/and EL Program Teachers. Lupe, a bilingual, departmentalized social science teacher reflected on the hesitations she experienced when she first introduced this approach in her teaching:
I know with the language development, I have students do a lot of sharing, and I have to remember to pause and give them the time because I know some of them would take longer. And I think as a teacher, at the beginning, I was kind of afraid to do it because I thought, “Nah, they’re not going to do it; they’re going to go off task.” And I kind of use some of the . . . structure, stand up, pair up, and share, and just giving time to allow them to verbalize their idea…

Jen, who taught reading to ELs in grades six through eight, affirmed the use of visuals in strategic vocabulary instruction and detailed her ideas of how this can be done during reading instruction:

So like we do vocabulary every day and I have it set up in a PowerPoint so they have the word; they have the phonetic spelling of the word, the definition. I give them a link word, which is like a mnemonic that rhymes with the vocabulary word but relates to the meaning so they can have sort of a singsong connection, and then there's always an example of the word in use, and then an image that goes with the word in the sentence as well.

In general terms, all interview participants had high expectations for their middle grade ELs and worked toward ensuring that their students understood and met these expectations. For the most part, interviewees in departmentalized contexts recognized using key approaches and strategies for addressing the specific needs of their English learners, such as the use of interactive activities, visual and auditory tools, multiple intelligence surveys, and commercial and/or classroom-based progress monitoring tools.

More precisely, general education (ELA, social science, and reading) teachers referenced a few key language and literacy strategies they had experienced as being effective in teaching middle grade ELs. The most salient strategies from their reports that corresponded to some extent to the survey findings were: (a) making content accessible through close reading of text, (b) having collaborative conversations between students and among teachers and students, (c) writing for argumentation and citing evidence from the text, (d) providing strategic vocabulary instruction, and (e) reading non-fiction texts
for comprehension in partners or in small groups. Additionally, they also identified important strategies in building the academic skills or their students as the following: (a) teaching explicitly the Common Core speaking and listening standards; (b) reading aloud and thinking aloud, (c) teaching explicitly the foundational skills in English and (d) making strategic and purposeful use of the students’ native language for learning content and transitioning to English. In their interview conversations, participants did not differentiate the use of these strategies in developing the language or literacy skills of their ELs. Mrs. Q, shared thoughts that help illustrate some of these findings.

One of the main things for me definitely is reading. Reading is one the things students don’t really enjoy because they’re not really exposed to it. They need it on a daily basis. These students are very visual. They love the interaction, and I’d say reading aloud, make the discussion for listening and comprehension.

Conversely, interview participants in the bilingual/ESL/ELPT teacher group offered different perspectives about the goals and priorities they held for the instruction of their middle grade ELs. This group of teachers, in addition to having high expectations of their students, identified goals and priorities focused more on the need for all teachers of middle grade ELs to have cultural dispositions in teaching ELs as well as the need to possess at a minimum, a basic understanding of bilingual education and ESL pedagogy. This group of participants also indicated that it is necessary for middle grade ELs to be taught the fundamental skills of the English language and in the case of ELs in Spanish bilingual programs, to be exposed to both systems of language. Ms. C. offered her viewpoint of strong support for this idea:

Yes. I think it's important. I really, truly believe that it is important that students get exposure to both systems of language because I believe that because I am . . . I speak Spanish; my English does sound differently then, for example, the teacher who has never spoken a word of Spanish and has spoken English all her life.
As detailed in chapter five, participants in the bilingual/ESL/ELPT group emphasized their instructional priorities were centered in the linguistics, cultural, and socio-emotional needs of their students. These interviewees also agreed that ELs in middle grades should be explicitly taught the idiomatic expressions of the English language because these are not acquired in casual conversations and that these students should receive explicit, scaffolded English instruction that is designed for their specific language and academic needs. This group of participants was adamant that it is crucially important for content teachers to have the appropriate content, bilingual and/or ESL endorsements in order to more effectively address the developmental language and literacy needs of middle grade ELs. Mr. Orozco articulated this perspective:

Those key people with the knowledge of English Language Learners in ESL instruction do play a role when they have their grade meetings. They share their experiences, “Okay, these group of kids are learning pretty good when we have them in groups.

Other participants in the bilingual/ESL and ELPT group expressed concern over the limited to non-existent instruction in the native language of the students. Inconsistencies in the use of the students’ native language to support their academic and language instruction leave these students with weak development of English and their native language. Sandy reflected on the continuing need for language support:

What I wanted to say, maybe advocate more for those kids that are not being pulled out any more, that are not being serviced anymore. To make sure those teachers understand [the] need to continue showing . . . I know a lot of times they get Ds. I would think to myself, “Is it D because they’re still struggling with the language?” That’s the part that I think they still need, especially with the middle grades.

Survey and interview data helped determine that all study participants worked primarily with Spanish-speaking ELs. This finding is not a surprise since Spanish-
speaking ELs are the largest EL population in the district. However, the use of the students’ native language to support the acquisition of English and/or to advance their bilingual/biliterate skills was reported as being close to non-existent in middle grade classrooms. Survey findings indicated that on average, middle grade ELs received one to two hours a week of instruction in their native language in the language arts content, but hardly ever during social science. Even though all interview participants indicated a desire for their ELs to understand and learn English and Spanish, the interview findings corroborated survey data that instruction in and of the native language (Spanish) of the students rarely occurred.

As explained in chapter four, the interpretation of survey data led to the conclusion that participants who functioned in push-in and pull-out settings were the best positioned to teach or use the native language of the students to support learning English and content. However, because they only support these students a few hours a week at best, the instruction and use of the native language of the students is sporadic. The implications of this finding is that ELs are gradually learning English, but most likely with knowledge gaps in language and content because the tool that can help bridge these gaps is not being used with consistency, or is not being used at all. Another critical implication generated from this study is that the ELs’ native language is not growing—is abandoned, unless they are in heritage or dual language programs. Even in these programs, the quality of instruction in the native language is an area that merits further research.

The findings, conclusions, and implications discussed in this component four section suggest that in addition to all participants having high expectations for their ELs,
the instructional goals and priorities between the general education and the bilingual/ESL/ELPT teacher groups had distinct differences. The general education teacher group was more explicit about wanting their students to learn and use very concrete language and literacy strategies, perhaps because they feel responsible for ensuring all students, including ELs, learn grade level content and meet the rigorous expectations of the new standards. In terms of standardized testing, grades six and eight are benchmark grades in the district and the pressure general education teachers feel about their students’ performance could be attributed to that as well.

On the other hand, the bilingual/ESL/ and EL program teacher group was more concerned about the linguistic, cultural, and socio-emotional aspects that influence teaching and learning and have an effect on this vulnerable group of students. A reason that could explain why the goals and priorities of these teachers differ from the general education teachers could be that they are more in tune with the linguistic and cultural challenges ELs encounter when learning a new language and difficult content simultaneously. Another reason that could explain the differences in the instructional goals and priorities between these two groups of teachers is that according to the survey and interview results, the bilingual/ESL/ teacher group had not been trained as much as the general education teachers on the use of the CCSS literacy focus areas. Therefore, they might not have been aware of the instructional approaches and strategies the content teachers prioritize in the instruction of their middle grade ELs.

**Effective Instructional Dispositions and Common Core Standards**

The participants’ survey and interview contributions shed light on the underlying issues that influenced the teachers of middle grade ELs’ dispositions on effective
standards-based language and literacy practices. One of the most salient issues to emerge from the study data was the professional learning activities the participants engaged in so as they could expand their professional growth and meet their professional learning needs.

Component four of the central study question explored the instructional goals and priorities of the study participants. These goals and priorities are closely tied to the dispositions participants demonstrated about using effective language and literacy instructional practices that are standards-based. The survey and interview findings that corresponded to this topic indicated that such dispositions were shaped by the level of training the study interviewees had been exposed to in regard to the use of the CCSS and WIDA/ELD standards, the content they taught, and the consistency in which they used the instructional routines they found useful. As described in chapter four as well as in component four of the previous section, only the participants in the general education teacher role (ELA and social science) indicated they were proficient in some of the CCSS literacy focus areas. All other participants indicated they were still in the developing stages. Therefore, this finding identifies this lack of proficiency as a high-need area, especially for the bilingual/ESL teachers who work to support the language and literacy development skills of their ELs.

All of the participants agreed that understanding and effectively using the Common Core Standards and the instructional approaches that assist in implementing these standards are paramount for the instruction of their middle grade ELs and for ensuring rigor and consistency in their teaching routines. Findings from the general education teacher group indicated they had received more training and supports in
learning and using the CCSS than the bilingual/ESL group, but also suggested they needed more support in implementing the writing and the speaking and listening standards. The analysis of this group’s responses about the use of the WIDA/ELD standards indicated that general education teachers were ambivalent about using these standards primarily because they had received very little training and modeling on how to connect the language standards with the CCSS. Some general education interviewees suggested the WIDA/ELD standards were not necessarily useful in their instruction because they did not connect to other standards and to the expectations of their students. Examples of the interviewees’ anecdotes that illustrate these views are found in chapter five.

Additionally, the array of professional development topics that survey and interview participants suggested would be useful in teaching their ELs as well as for addressing their professional needs ranged from receiving more training on the use of the CCSS and WIDA standards to having more opportunities for teacher collaboration. Among these topics were: (a) training on the integration of WIDA and the CCSS; (b) professional development on writing curriculum, writing in the content areas, and writing in response to reading for ELs; (c) training on approaches and strategies for differentiation of instruction for ELs; and (d) professional development on how to motivate and engage middle grade ELs.

Regarding the specific skill-based training research subjects identified as useful, findings from both survey and interview data indicated that there was a high need for participants to enhance their knowledge and skills in teaching writing, classroom conversations, and informational text reading. Survey participants identified Partner
Reading and Content Too (PRC2) as a useful instructional approach for developing the language and literacy skills of their students. Interestingly, none of the interview participants talked about the use of this approach. This finding implies that teachers are aware of or have tried using effective approaches and strategies in language and literacy instruction, but they have not yet internalized them so as to make them essential in their instructional routines. Another important finding was that interviewees expressed the need for teachers to receive training through workshops or coursework on how to effectively teach language and literacy skills in the native language of the students, Spanish in particular. An in-depth presentation of these findings is provided in chapter five.

The survey and interview findings suggested that the dispositions of the bilingual/ESL/ELPT teacher group in regard to effective language and literacy instruction were shaped in great part by the type of teaching role they had and by the limited training they had been exposed to in the use of the Common Core Standards. Only the participants in the ELPT role reported having received training in the use of these standards comparable to the teachers in the general education group. This could be attributed to the access EL program teachers had to district level professional development as teacher leaders and EL program administrators. On the other hand, because bilingual/ESL teachers are basically resource teachers, these teachers do not necessarily have access to the professional development opportunities that general education teachers and teacher leaders have. This is an issue that presents critical implications for the development of these teachers and the instruction of ELs in the middle grades. The bilingual/ESL/ELPT teacher group reported having a basic
understanding of the use of the WIDA/ELD standards, but suggested they needed supports in connecting the language standards to the array of all other standards they need to use in teaching their ELs.

These findings on the dispositions middle grade teachers of ELs demonstrated in regard to an effective language and literacy instruction for ELs were meaningful in understanding the awareness and attitudes these teachers have about their practice and skills. They were also useful in recognizing the type of learning opportunities middle grade teachers of ELs deem important for strengthening their profession or professionalism, improving their teaching, and accelerating students’ achievement.

**Recommendations and Considerations for Future Research**

The ultimate goal of educators of English learners is the successful education of these children. For educators and administrators favoring bilingual/biliterate education, the ideal is that all students have an opportunity to learn and develop a language other than English, particularly those students who already enter school with strong native language skills. Because middle grade schooling is the turning point that positions middle grade ELs on a pathway to achievement in high school and higher education, it is critical that middle grade ELs develop the language and literacy skills that are needed to navigate with success the complex content and language of high school and college.

Without equitable opportunities for quality instruction, and without highly developed and supported bilingual and/or ESL and content teachers, middle grade English learners will not be able to attain the knowledge and skills in content, language, and literacy that will place them in a path to success. If the ideal is to develop bilingual,
biliterate citizens, then the problem of not having enough teachers who are bilingual and biliterate will continue to block the attainment of this important goal.

This study aimed to uncover and better understand the dispositions, preparation, and instructional goals and priorities of teachers of middle grade ELs in the instruction of ELs in middle grades. Much was learned about the preparation, experience, and dispositions of the study participants. Almost all of the study participants had attained higher degrees in education, had years of experience that ranged from seven to over 20 years, and exhibited great dispositions for teaching ELs. The information gleaned from their responses provided meaningful information that illuminated what middle grade teachers know about their ELs and the type of instructional approaches and resources that are most useful in the instruction of these students.

Gaps in teacher preparation and the need for ongoing supports for teachers of middle grade ELs surfaced as well. Study participants identified instructional approaches and strategies that were valuable for the language and literacy development of their students, but these were not incorporated into real practice. Overall, the survey and interview data obtained in this study showed there are many excellent things happening in the instruction of ELs. However, these data also showed inconsistencies in the (a) implementation of useful strategies for teaching ELs, (b) gaps in collaboration between bilingual/ESL resource teachers and content teachers, (c) limited access to meaningful professional learning opportunities for bilingual/ESL teachers, (d) limited access to bilingual and ESL resources for English learners and their teachers (e) and a variety of language and literacy topics study participants still needed to know and practice.
The collected data showed as well that although teachers have high-level college degrees and years in teaching experience, they still have professional learning needs that would further enhance their practice and advance the teaching of middle grade ELs.

**District Level Recommendations**

The following recommendations that flowed from this study and the literature in the field and are directed toward district level leaders:

- Collectively, design a comprehensive professional development (PD) framework that explicitly includes ways to address the particular professional learning needs of bilingual/ESL/ELPT and content middle grade teachers of ELs. This comprehensive PD must be developed in collaboration with these teachers and their principals.

- Components of this PD plan should expand the middle grade teachers’ of ELs understanding and use of the Common Core and WIDA standards—the literacy focus areas of instruction, the approaches, and the strategies that go along with these standards.

- Along with clear goals and expectations, this comprehensive PD plan should include a plan for how the professional development of these teachers will be funded and the processes by which the necessary tools and resources will be provided.

- This district PD plan should describe ways in which the appropriate district staff will work together with higher education institutions in designing teacher preparation programs that facilitate more practice with middle grade English learners in real life situations as well as more opportunities for monolingual,
non-ESL teachers to learn how to work with culturally and linguistically diverse populations of students.

• In general, the district should facilitate, require, and fund Spanish language classes and/or workshops for teachers teaching in bilingual, developmental, and dual language programs.

School Level Recommendations

The following recommendations flowed from this study and the literature in the field and are directed toward school level administrators and teacher leaders:

• Work with district-level staff in developing and/or reviewing the comprehensive PD plan to ensure that the needs of the school’s teachers of ELs and their students are concretely addressed in the plan.

• Allow, encourage, facilitate, and if necessary, require bilingual/ESL/ELPT resource and content teachers to have more time for planning and collaboration with one another.

• Encourage and fund opportunities for teachers to visit and exchange ideas with other teachers who are within and/or outside of their school.

• Facilitate after school or Saturday workshops for teachers to learn more about team-teaching and ways to maximize the push-in and/or pull-out services provided to middle grade ELs.

• Leverage teachers’ own expertise and allow for more opportunities to learn from one another.

• Facilitate opportunities for self-reflection, evaluation, and redirection of practices.
• Work with teachers in aligning district and school priorities with the goal of focusing on the instructional priorities most beneficial to ELs and their teachers.

• Work with experts, teacher leaders, and middle grade teachers of ELs themselves to continue to build capacity in the use of key approaches and strategies for the instruction of ELs and to find ways they enact and sustain the use of such practices until they become routines.

Some of the essential approaches and strategies that surfaced in this study are:

• Reading of informational text
• Writing for argumentation
• Narrative writing
• Partner Reading and Content Too (PRC2)
• Collaborative conversations (academic talk)
• Use of native language as a tool for learning and of learning

**Teacher Level Recommendations**

The following recommendations flowed from this study and the literature in the field and are directed toward teachers of EL students:

• Continue to use the expertise of colleagues and seek out the supports of other experts for improving the teaching and learning experiences of middle grade ELs.
• Leverage ELs’ linguistic and cultural capacities as tools for learning.
• Obtain the language and content endorsements necessary to be better prepared for teaching middle grade ELs.
• Practice and reflect on the results of using key language and literacy approaches and strategies that are useful for the instruction of middle grade ELs.

Additional recommendations regarding these key instructional strategies are:

• Use these strategies until they become routine and an essential component of the instructional goals and priorities for teaching ELs.
• Share with colleagues the benefits and challenges encountered in using these approaches and strategies.
• Use student work and assessment data to strengthen or redirect the instructional approaches used in advancing the language and literacy of middle grade ELs.

Considerations for Further Research

• Conduct a follow-up study with classroom observations of content area classrooms and bilingual/ESL push-in and pull-out settings so the actual practices and routines of middle grade content and bilingual/ESL teachers could be identified.
• Research school teacher teams so as to investigate how teachers in various teaching roles can develop the same language and routines with respect to the instruction of middle grade ELs.
• Survey, interview, and observe novice teachers so as to develop different perspectives of what needs to be done over time in regard to the preparation and ongoing supports of all middle grade teachers who work with English learners.
• Shadow bilingual/ESL resource teachers to observe their use of time and the practices they use in advancing the language and literacy skills of middle grade ELs.

• Work with schools in studying or developing exemplar collaborative models between bilingual/ESL and content teacher teams that complement and support each other’s practices and routines in advancing the achievement of middle grade ELs.

These recommendations and consideration for future research are not exhaustive, nor are they exclusive. The intent of these recommendations is to provide research-based ideas and options to key stakeholders on how to best develop or continue building the capacity of teachers of ELs as well as awareness of the essential supports these teachers need for effectively teaching middle grade ELs. These recommendations are informed by an extensive review of research on teacher preparation, instruction of adolescent ELs, language and literacy education, and the renewed emphasis by the U.S. Department of Education on prioritizing the education of English learners in the nation. More importantly, these recommendations are informed by the passion and commitment of the middle grade teachers who participated in this study, the insightfulness and expertise of the dissertation’s chair and committee members, and by my own experiences as an English learner, as a teacher of ELs and dual language learners, and my dedication to finding ways to best support these students and their teachers.

This study collected rich and meaningful information about the dispositions, priorities, and expertise of middle grade teachers of ELs and about the strengths and
needs of their students. As with all studies, this study has its limitations and how I confronted these merit consideration.

**Limitations**

The timing of the survey administration was a limitation because parent conferences and holidays occurred in the middle of the administration period and, therefore, required the additional attention of potential participants. Also, the number of questions in the survey may have prevented more individuals from participating in or from fully completing the study. Therefore, the small number of survey participants was in itself a limitation. Another limitation of this study is that the respondents were for the most part seasoned and highly educated professionals. It would have been valuable to learn the perspectives of middle grade bilingual/ESL and content teachers who were just beginning their teaching career. The volume and time constraints for conducting a mixed-methods research could be challenging in general.

Despite the challenges and limitations of the study, I believe its purpose and goals were achieved, resulting in a harvest of significant data that will benefit the district participating in the study, other comparable school districts that may want to learn from it, and teachers of EL students around the nation who deeply desire to enhance their practice.

**Final Reflection**

Engaging in and completing this dissertation work has been a labor of love and appreciation for education and for those responsible for imparting it. I am forever indebted to the students and teachers I represent who contributed to my research by giving me the opportunity to study them. Completing a doctoral degree was never in my
wildest imagination, until it became a possibility as a result of my dissertation’s chair vision and commitment to advancing the education of underserved populations. Completing this work was also possible due to the dedication of the professors and advisors who worked to ensure this vision became a reality. Although it took almost eight years to complete my doctoral program, I have enjoyed every moment of it. In the process, I have grown as a student, as an educator, as a parent, as a wife and friend, and as a human being. I know I am a better person and a more knowledgeable educator because of the theoretical and practical learning experiences I was afforded throughout these years.

This study rendered rich information that helped me to understand in deeper ways what teachers of middle grade ELs know, do, and think about with regard to the instruction of EL students in these critical grades. One of the most encouraging findings or affirmations that surfaced from this study is the insight that the instruction of ELs is not the sole responsibility of the bilingual/ESL resource teachers, but a collective endeavor between these teachers and the content teachers they work with, or better yet, with whom they are supposed to work with collaboratively. The important work of teachers, however, cannot happen or be sustained without a clear vision, expectations, and supports from the district and school administrators. We all have to work together to make certain we reach the goals we have set for our English learners. The results of this study helped in strengthening this belief.

During the process of completing this dissertation, a renewed commitment to the education of English learners was launched by the U.S. Department of Education. This was welcomed news that completely aligned with the focus of my study. Encouraged by
this renewed commitment in support of ELs and their teachers, there are promising
directions in which the findings and recommendations of this study as well as
considerations for future research could be taken. I look forward to fresh opportunities to
continue working toward improving the preparation and supports of all teachers of ELs
so that they in turn can advance the achievement of English learners in meaningful and
sustained ways.
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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM AND ONLINE SURVEY
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background information

1. Describe how and why you became a teacher and a teacher of middle grade English learners in particular.

2. Tell me about your English learners. What do you know about these students and what are your academic goals for them?

3. What is most challenging in teaching these students and why? What is most fulfilling?

4. Please describe your current teaching role. What is working? What is challenging?

5. If English is not your native language, how, when and where did you learn English? Probe: What was it like growing up learning English as a second language? or What was it like starting your professional career as an adult English learner? What would you do differently learning English if you were to start all over again?

6. If English is your native language, have you learned another language? What was it like? What did you look forward to, and/or, what did you dread in the process of learning the new language?

Strand I: Dispositions, priorities, perspectives, and sociocultural contexts that influence your practice

1. Tell me about your instructional priorities in teaching ELs. Probe: what is important for you and for your students?
2. From your experience and perspective, how do you think ELs learn and achieve best?

3. What is your understanding of the students’ dispositions that are most supportive of their learning? **Probes:** Do they use their native language as a tool for learning? Do they self-monitor their learning of English and content?

4. What is your perception of the relevance of the sociocultural contexts in which middle grade ELs learn in school? **Probes:** Do you find your students learn best when they’re in peer-like groups, and how do you know? Is it better for your students to be pulled out during ELA and/or Social Classes so they can receive your services? Why, or why not? Do you engage your students in collaborative conversations and collaborative work in class with stronger users of English, or do you group them by English proficiency levels?

5. From your perspective and experience, describe the best case-scenario that demonstrates collective ownership, responsibility, and accountability in the instruction and success of ELs?

6. As an adult learner, how do you learn best?

**Strand II: Priorities that are most important for you on how you make decisions regarding what and how to teach middle grade ELs**

7. Describe the typical literacy instructional activities that you utilize on a regular basis to develop the academic language of your ELs in the content areas. What do these look like for your students? **Probe:** Which do you think are most effective and supportive of your students? In what content area do you typically use literacy or language development strategies?
8. If you are in the role of a bilingual teacher, tell me how you use the native language of your students to advance their learning of critical content and to teach language transfer skills.

9. Describe the typical standards-based (Common Core and ELD) language instructional activities that you utilize on a regular basis to help your ELs access challenging content. What do these look like for your students? **Probe:** Which do you think are more effective and supportive of your students’ linguistic and academic needs?

10. Describe the curriculum, resources and materials you use in the instruction of your ELs. How are these different from the curriculum, resources and materials used for students who are native speakers of English?

**Strand III: Making decisions on what and how to teach**

11. What determines your decisions in teaching challenging content to your students in their native language? **Probe:** if you don’t engage in this practice, why not?

12. From your experience and perspective, what are the best approaches of engaging teachers in meaningful collaboration to design instructional and assessment activities for your ELs?

13. Describe ways in which you collaborate with your content area colleagues to design and deliver language instruction for your ELs.

14. In your opinion, what are the practices that effective bilingual and/or ESL teachers use to promote the biliterate and bilingual skills of their students?

15. What teaching strategies do you find effective in teaching academic language to your ELs as expected of the Common Core?
Strand IV: Knowledge, Experience (Content/Pedagogical), and Training

16. Describe how your knowledge and experience in working with ELs can be helpful to the middle grade content teachers who also work with your ELs.

17. What do you think are your greatest professional learning needs? Describe why and tell me what, if anything, you are doing to address these needs.

18. Describe a meaningful standards-based teaching strategy that you are currently implementing from a professional learning activity you recently attended.

19. What research-based practices are you most familiar for teaching academic language and literacy to middle grade ELs?

20. What types of professional development activities are most helpful to you as a learner and as a teacher? Probe: Please elaborate why and how you bring these activities to your instruction

21. Of all the initiatives and programs the district has launched to support the language and literacy practices of teachers, which have you found more effective in your instruction? Probe: What does the application of these programs/initiatives look like in the instruction of middle grade ELs?

22. What is your ideal professional development activity? What topics/concepts would you like to learn or practice? How would you incorporate the new learning in the instruction of ELs?

Additional questions

1. Imagine the best-case scenario for addressing the achievement gap of middle grade ELs in your school and in the district. **Probe:** What does it look like? Who is involved and what are their roles?
2. Is there something I did not ask that you would like me to know more about you as a professional, the collaboration with your colleagues, the instruction of ELs in the time of the Common Core, your professional needs or strengths?
Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Elizabeth Cardenas-Lopez, a student and Doctoral Candidate at National-Louis University, Chicago Illinois. The purpose of the study is to seek insights and explanations to the question: What makes the ESL and bilingual teachers’ instructional practices effective and what influences their instructional decisions when teaching middle-grade English learners?

A survey has been administered to volunteer bilingual/ESL teachers who work with middle grade English learners and the interviews will provide a way to gain additional insights about the experiences, dispositions, professional needs and challenges these teachers of ELs demonstrate and encounter in teaching their students.

With your consent, you will be interviewed for about 60 to 90 minutes with a possible second, follow-up interview lasting about 30 minutes at a location that is convenient to you. The interview will be audio-recorded (pending your consent) and transcribed. The transcription of the interview will be presented to you for verification of accuracy, upon your request. There are no risks associated with this research and your participation is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. All information you provide, including personal demographic data, will be kept confidential in a secure location. Though you are likely to not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute to our better understanding of the instructional practices that are effective for ELs and about the preparation and professional learning opportunities teachers of ELs need to access for their professional growth and that of their students. While the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific bodies, your identity will in no way be revealed. You will also receive a twenty-five dollar gift certificate as a token of appreciation for your participation in the interview phase of the study.
In the event you have questions or require additional information you may contact the researcher: Elizabeth Cardenas-Lopez, at National-Louis University, North Shore Campus, 5202 Old Orchard Road, Skokie, IL. 60077.

If you have any concerns, or questions, before, or during your participation in the study, that you feel have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Donna Ogle, student’s Dissertation Chair, at National-Louis University, North Shore Campus, 5202 Old Orchard Road, Skokie, IL. 60077.

Please indicate if you agree to be audio recorded.

[ ] I agree to be audio recorded  [ ] I do not agree to be audio recorded

_________________________________________
Participant Name (Print)

__________________________________________  _____________
Participant Signature  Date
APPENDIX D: SURVEY DATA SUMMARY
APPENDIX E: CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Selected characteristics that emerged from survey data of interviewed participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Teaching Role</th>
<th>Instructional Contexts</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Orozco</td>
<td>✔ Bilingual/ESL Departmentalized</td>
<td>✔ General Education (Gen. Ed.) Bilingual/ESL Endorsed</td>
<td>Push-in, Pull-out; Self-contained bilingual and ESL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Castro</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Push-in, Pull-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ EL Prog. Teacher Leader</td>
<td>Self-contained ESL, Pull-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>Push-in, Pull-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. C.</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ English Language Arts</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristy</td>
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<td>✔ English Language Arts</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raiza</td>
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<td>Laura</td>
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<td>Self-contained Bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lupita</td>
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<td>✔ Social Science</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
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<td>Jennifer</td>
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<td>Mrs. Petra</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Push-in, Pull-out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susana</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>Push-in</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔ Reading</td>
<td>Gen. Ed. Departmentalized</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish Language Arts in Dual Language Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Q.</td>
<td></td>
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APPENDIX F: FIRST CODING CYCLE—INTERVIEW THEMES

First Cycle Coding: Themes and Statements Surfaced from Interview Data
(Recurring Themes Included Once Only)

1. Academic conversations as a PD Focus Area
2. Academic expectations for ELs
3. Academic Spanish vs. conversational Spanish
4. Academic talk that builds student confidence in academic and language learning
5. Accessing the students’ funds of knowledge
6. Acknowledging prior schooling experiences
7. Acknowledging their assets and contributions to the learning process
8. Actual experience of working with ELs is what makes the difference. – Classes and theory help, but practice means all the world of difference.
9. Additional supports for students: tutoring in smaller environments.
10. Addressing socio-emotional needs of students
11. Addressing the students needs beyond the academics
12. Administrative support
13. Administrative support and expectations
14. Administrative work assigned to EL program teachers (otherwise known as bilingual coordinators, bilingual coaches, bilingual lead teachers, dual language coordinators, bilingual/ESL resource teachers
15. Administrator support in guiding teacher practice
16. Adult learning
17. Advances in bilingual education
18. Advocacy for ELs
19. Advocacy for teachers of ELs
20. Affective filter
21. Affective filter of middle grade ELs
22. Affective priorities
23. All about Vocabulary
24. Ambivalence about professional growth goals
25. Application of professional learning activities
26. Appreciation of teachers
27. Appropriate monitoring of student learning: language and academic
28. Appropriate resources for English language instruction
29. Appropriate resources for Spanish language instruction
30. Appropriate time and setting for pull out services
31. Articulate broader vision of collective responsibility for the instruction and achievement of ELs
32. Aspects that influence teachers’ approaches in teaching
33. Attitude towards the CCSS
34. Availability and quality of resources for ELs
35. Availability of resources is at teacher expense
36. Being able to make linguistic and cultural connections with their students
37. Being intentional about what is displayed in the classroom
38. Beliefs and misconceptions about the use of the native language and the amount of English exposure needed in order to succeed in school
39. Benefits of teachers knowing the language of the students
40. Bilingual endorsement/certification must be more than provisional
41. Bilingual students with special needs choose not to speak in their native language in school – perhaps because the language has not been formally taught to them.
    Teachers of ELs are visual learners
42. Bilingual teacher/coordinator as community representative
43. Bilingual teachers are needed in the middle grades, especially in the content areas
44. Bilingual/ESL supports are truncated when there’s inconsistency in the push-in or pull out services they receive
45. Bilingual/ESL teaches as resource teachers, core teachers, content teachers, bilingual coordinators, bilingual lead teachers, EL program teachers
46. Blending content and literacy instruction is a helpful strategy for content teachers with ELs
47. Building on background knowledge of ELs
48. Certification and endorsements of teachers of ELs
49. Challenge in keeping first language alive past the fifth grade
50. Challenges in teaching ELs
51. Challenges in teaching middle grade ELs who are different levels of EL proficiency and reading levels in English
52. Challenges with differentiation of instruction
53. Challenging to focus on one thing, on one strategy in the instruction of ELs
54. Change the culture of the school and help teachers of ELs teach these students more effectively
55. Changing stereotypes –
56. Classroom discourse
57. Classroom discussion
58. Classroom-level focus and vision
59. Close reading of text in the content areas
60. Close Reading works for ELs
61. Co-teaching – bilingual model
62. Code switching
63. Code-switching/Translanguaging
64. Collaboration amongst bilingual resource teachers and content teachers is weak
65. Collaboration with colleagues
66. Collaborative conversations
67. Collaborative conversations as a key instructional strategy in the content areas
68. Collaborative conversations for ELs with video examples
69. Collaborative work and with opportunities to make connections
70. Collective ownership and responsibility for the achievement of ELs
71. Collective ownership and supports for teachers –
72. Collective ownership for the instruction and performance of ELs starts at the school level
73. Collective ownership in the instruction of ELs
74. Collective ownership means strategic planning, strong leadership, and coherent goals and practices
75. Collective ownership of ELs
76. Collegial and congenial environment for teachers and students
77. Communication amongst teachers
78. Communication and collaboration amongst content teachers and bilingual resource teachers
79. Communication between family, teachers, and students.
80. Communication with parents
81. Compliance practices VS best practice in teaching
82. Compliance requirements
83. Compliance vs. effective practice;
84. Confidence building as a strategy to build students’ dispositions in learning.
85. Conflicting priorities at the classroom, school, network, and district levels
86. Confusing expectations about what the students can or cannot do in their native language.
87. Connecting school with family and real life experiences, the community and its surroundings
88. Connections and relationships make students and teachers feel comfortable with one another
89. Connections with students
90. Connections with students
91. Consistency of PD opportunities
92. Consistency of with instruction of native language (L1)
93. Consistency with the PD topics need to be sustained
94. Consistency, quality, and purpose of in-school professional learning opportunities
95. Content conversations
96. Content teachers with limited experience in teaching ELs
97. Content teachers’ understanding of the unique needs of ELs and the roles of bilingual resource (push-in) or pull out teachers.
98. Creating learning environments for all is essential – knowing your students – All students do not have to pay for the mistakes of others
99. Cultural and linguistic immersion of students
100. Cultural Awareness
101. Cultural pride
102. Cultural traditions
103. Cultural value
104. Curriculum alignment and consistency
105. Curriculum designed or the instruction of middle grade ELs
106. Definition of ELs
107. Design Writing PD focused on ELs- bilingual learners.
108. Develop effective use of the standards: CCSS and ELD
109. Diagnosing ELs’ strengths and needs
110. Differences and similarities of Dual Language and Bilingual Education programs
111. Differences between newcomers and U.S. born ELs
Differences between teaching key concepts that are content related vs. teaching the language of the discipline.

Different set of expectations between immigrant families vs. Latinos/ELs who were born here.

Differentiated PD is necessary so that we can model how we want teachers to teach.

Differentiation as an instructional approach that helps ELs learn best.

Differentiation of instruction for ELs.

Differentiation of supports for teachers.

Differentiation, frequency and accessibility of PD.

Distinguishing between academic and language proficiencies/needs.

District led initiatives that have a lasting impression on teachers.

District resources that have worked well for ELs and then were abandoned.

Dual language learners vs. bilingual learners.

Effective instructional approaches.

Effective PD models – teachers are involved and critical thinkers and owners of their own learning; teachers collaborate with each other; they walk away with concrete examples and work that can be easily implemented in their classroom.

Effective practice as perceived by teachers.

Effective strategies, techniques for teaching ELs.

Effective use of teacher leaders and bilingual resource teachers.

EL diversity in the grades 6-8.

EL Program alignment.

EL supports in the content areas.

ELD standards are not widely known and use because teachers have not been exposed to these.

Elements that shot down collaboration amongst teachers.

ELs above the 3.5 cut score are immersed in English only instruction.

ELs and Latino students in general need to be exposed to a lot more – to what is out there in this society –

ELs are visual learners and they learn in social settings – read aloud, discussion-

ELs as Auditory learners.

ELs as independent learners.

ELs as Visual learners.

ELs attention to task as a disposition for learning.

ELs below the 3.5 cut score criteria are serviced.

ELs identified by definition, not by needs--but the students in the middle grades are still learning the academic English, the culture of schooling and the expectations of rigorous curriculum and standards.

ELs in the middle grades reject their heritage language – they do not want to use it or learn it.

ELs need access to foundational skills in English and in their native language.

ELs need to learn critical content while still acquiring the language.

ELs perceptions about their knowledge of English - Teachers’ approaches to push it further.

ELs with strong academic foundation in their native language transfer her language skills and knowledge of content to English—BUT not all students come from good quality language background.
147. ELs’ schooling experiences
148. Teaching with empathy
149. Empathy for the needs of their peers
150. Empathy for the struggles students experience as ELs
151. Engaging students in ways that are visual and interactive
152. English language rules
153. English proficiency level as defined by ACCESS test results
154. English proficiency level for testing
155. English proficiency to access and navigate rigorous content and standards
156. English proficiency to transferred out of the EL program
157. Ensuring a collective ownership and responsibility for meeting the academic and social needs of their students, as well as physical
158. ESL curriculum
159. ESL endorsements do make a difference
160. ESL pedagogy and experiences in teaching English as a second language are transformational in the practices of teachers of ELs
161. ESL Pedagogy: Differences of instruction when teachers have the basic understanding of ESL pedagogy and bilingual education. Instruction looks different and feels different for the students.
162. ESL Resources
163. ESL supports are needed for students in dual language programs
164. Establishing a level of trust between teachers and students
165. Establishing communication and collaboration with parents of ELs
166. Establishing communication with other teachers
167. Establishing connections and relationships with students is what’s working
168. Establishing connections between language and literacy –
169. Evolution of bilingual education at district and state levels
170. Example of what happens when they don’t, when content teachers do not understand their students and their needs as language learners
171. Expectations for using the new language
172. Expectations of self as collaborative colleagues
173. Expectations of self as teachers and adult learners
174. Experience in teaching in Spanish and Spanish language arts as a content
175. Experiences of teachers as adult learners of English
176. Explicit and direct supports for students from teachers VS computer based programs
177. Explicit instruction of language functions
178. Explicit instruction of vocabulary
179. Explicit teaching and supports – scaffolding of instruction
180. Explicit teaching grammar, use, and functions of English language
182. Exposing students to different worlds and opportunities —
183. Factors that influence ELs motivation to succeed in school: affective filter
184. Factors that influence ELs’ dispositions in learning in aiming high
185. Family background of students
186. Family connections
187. Family perceptions of schooling
Family structure – expectations –
Focus on English vocabulary
Formal education of and in Spanish for Spanish speaking ELs
Formal teacher preparation for the instruction of the Spanish native language
Fundamentals of bilingual/ESL education
Gaps in learning
General education teachers with none or limited knowledge of ESL pedagogy and the fundamentals of bilingual education
Getting to know middle grade ELs within the context of the content they’re learning
Goals of bilingual programs
Grading policies
Grading practices
Guiding students on how to chunk text;
  a. Held accountable for what is not appropriate and necessary in teaching ELs
Helping students with analytical questioning
Helping students connect what they hear with what they see and read.
Hired to do one job and end up doing something else
History learning logs as tools for learning history and other content
Home language not something that you learn academically, but something that you learn and use at home with your family
How bilingual education has evolved in the district
How middle grade ELs learn best
How PDs’ needs are met through school PD needs further probing
How policies impact teachers’ job – and opportunities for growth –
How teacher preparation and resources, expectations have evolved
How teachers learn is how they teach
How the bad reputation of bilingual education began at the district and state levels—national level??-
How to differentiate lessons and instruction is paramount of our ELs
How to ensure quality and maximize time?
How to maximize students learning –
Ideal professional development – professional opportunities that work for teachers who want to learn or validate what they know; to collaborate with other teachers. Knowing the needs of bilingual students / ELs are more than academic
Identity of teachers as bilingual educators
Immersion in the culture of the ELs in the school as a professional learning need
Immersion in the new language and culture
Immigrant ELs vs. U.S. born ELs
Immigrant experience of teachers
Improving writing instruction is a professional learning need
Inconsistency of instruction of critical content and language
Initiatives need more time and effort to see whether they’re actually effective – some last because more time and commitment are given to these
Instruction and use of language skills

Instruction vs. supports in the native language of students—mainly Spanish

Instructional approaches of bilingual self contained vs. general education classrooms

Instructional contexts of students matter

Instructional priorities

Instructional strategies that are perceived to be effective for ELs: Modeling and Responsive, reflective teaching

Integration of language and literacy in the content areas

Integration of the Common Core and WIDA/ELD standards

Interactive learning is needed so that teachers can try and learn from one another –

Intervention supports

Intrinsic motivation in teaching

Is it about exiting the students from their transitional bilingual program, or about making sure students learn both English and content? – SEE THE EL PROGRAM TEACHER GUIDE – The goals of bilingual education is to ensure students acquire proficiency. – How about knowledge? How do we measure that?

Issues that affect middle grade ELs’ dispositions and motivation in learning

Issues that impact ELs’ dispositions in learning: affective, emotional, social, family, language knowledge, schooling experiences, immigrant experiences, cultural identity

Keeping visuals records of students’ thinking

Key strategies for helping students understand social science in English

KIM a new vocabulary strategy – key word, information, and memory clue –

Knowing and getting at the specific needs of students, especially the linguistic needs of ELs

Knowing how to do better group discussions;

Knowing the differences between struggles with content knowledge and language proficiency

Knowing the experiences of ELs –

Knowing the needs of students

Knowing who your ELs are is important for their success and your effectiveness in teaching them

Knowledge of bilingual and ESL pedagogy

Knowledge of how students learn and develop

Knowledge of the English language development (ELD) standards

Lack of appropriate materials and resources for middle grade ELs represent a huge problem

Lack of coherent curriculum is a challenging - follow through with teacher collaboration and instructional expectations is a challenge

Lack of resources

Lack of resources, or appropriate resources, and materials for the instruction of ELs

Lack of understanding of ELs needs
Lack of understanding of the knowledge and skills ELs need to acquire and use
Lack/Limited resources in the native language (Spanish)
Language acquisition
Language and academic learning has a purpose and middle ELs are accountable for it
Language and Literacy in the Content Areas
Language arts as a content area
Language as the whole component in bringing together both language and literacy in how they are used in our daily teaching and learning
Language arts as a content area
Language and Literacy in the Content Areas
Language as the whole component in bringing together both language and literacy in how they are used in our daily teaching and learning
Language practices
Leadership roles of teachers
Leadership support at school, Network, and district levels
Leadership understanding of the needs of ELs.
Learning centers for students
Learning environment
Learning expectations for ELs
Learning experiences of ELs in push-in and pull out instructional contexts
Learning experiences of ELs in the content areas
Learning in both languages is the best case scenario – how do we do it and how do we prepare teachers to do it is not clear
Learning the methods in teaching and through experience is most helpful to teachers thank just learning the content
Limited academic and experiential preparation of bilingual/ESL resource teachers
Limited academic and experiential preparation of general education content teachers
Limited exposure to literacy experts or to research in literacy instruction
Limited PD opportunities
Limited resources for native language and sheltered English instruction
Limited time for meaningful instruction and use of two languages.
Limited time for teaching collaboration
Limited time in teaching two contents. ELA and Writing as two separate contents?? High expectations for students; Belief that English proficiency is the key to success; Code Switching is useful practice;
Limited training and knowledge on the purpose and benefit of using ELD standards
Literacy practices
Long term ELs
Making connections with content and real life experiences and things
Making content accessible through structures and teaching routine
Making teachers feel valued, secured, respected
Mastery of English
Mentoring and/or Modeling from experts in the field
Middle grade ELs are let go from the bilingual coordinator – how do the Gen Ed teachers can build on this work? What exactly was the support from the bilingual coordinator?
Middle grade students in general struggle with academic, persuasive, and argumentative writing.
Middle grade students, ELs in particular are not fully prepared for the rigorous demands of middle school.

Misconceptions about ELs in bilingual and/or ESL programs

Modeling

Modeling as a key strategy

Modeling techniques

Models of real life application teaching strategies for ELs

Monitoring student talk

More PD and supports on the implementation of the CCSS

More technology integration- instructional technology as a professional learning need

Motivation

Multifaceted language and academic needs

Multifaceted responsibilities of bilingual/ESL teachers

Multiple and conflicting roles of bilingual/ESL departmentalized or resource teachers

Multiple languages in the classroom

Multiple roles and assignments

Multiple roles and responsibilities of teachers of ELs

Native language as a resource for learning. Teacher acknowledges its value by allowing students to communicate in their language. However, the instruction of and in the native language seems to be missing.

Native language as heritage language for Spanish speaking ELs

Native language not seen as a language of prestige

Need for explicit instruction and use of the native language to strengthen the knowledge and use of the target—English language

Need for real life samples and application of effective strategies for middle grade ELs, for bilingual students

Need for support in teaching writing

Need for Writing PD in both English and Spanish.

Need to determine what teachers really need – Differentiate the learning topics – District and school expectations need to match and more with less

New requirements, more assessments

New teachers focus on classroom management

New teachers vs. experienced teachers

Non-bilingual teachers need training and supports in teaching ELs,

Not enough time to build literacy and language skills when you only see your students two or three times during a week for language arts

Not knowing the language

On-site PD supports for teachers

Online – program based resources

Opportunities to use students’ native language; Believe that code switch is a form of maintaining the language

Options for differentiated PD that meets teachers’ needs.

Oral discourse

Parent empowerment
Parent involvement with school
Parent support and strong connections with school helps students succeed
Parents do not their children in bilingual programs because of the bad reputation of bilingual education
Parent talks
PD and supports for content teachers of ELs, especially for those who are not bilingual, or have taken ESL courses.
PD focused on vocabulary
PD needs: modeling, targeted support in writing, strategies
PD on helping teachers change their mindset that ELs can learn and not water down the curriculum for them –
PD on Vocabulary instruction
PD recommendations and why
PD that boosts the morale of teachers –
PD that focuses on differentiated instruction –
PD that shows how to do more hands on with students
PD works when is consistent, provided in a series of sessions in which people are accountable for what they learn—given opportunities to try out things in the classroom and come back and share with their colleagues
Pedagogical beliefs on what rigorous means
Peer observation as a professional learning opportunity
Percentage of ELs whose U.S. born, the rules and laws need to change to embrace this reality. Students enter school somewhat with social language skills in both English and native language, because the majority of ELs are of Latino descent, they enter with some understanding of Spanish and English Experiences
Perception of how the standards can be combined- CCSS says here is where they need to be at each grade level – WIDA on the other hand determines the minimum proficiency levels in which students are capable of handling the academic English
Perception of parent involvement
Perception of teachers that ELs who are motivated to learn the language make great gains.
Perceptions of a bilingual/ESL teacher about thoughtful and meaningful instruction for ELs looks like and should be –
Perceptions of program models for middle grade ELs
Perceptions of the district and state’s relationships with teachers.
Perceptions of what academic language is – Tier 3 words?? Tier 3 vocabulary discussions?
Perceptions on the use and value of the ELD standards;
Performance evaluations of teachers
Perspective on the usefulness of the WIDA/ELD standards
Philosophical/Pedagogical beliefs about use of native language as a resource – evident through Code Switching
Plan instruction based on NWEA scores
Policy implications – is this required? I think the state is on to this, but people do not know about it.
Policy implications for state and federal regulations
360. Policy Recommendations – Teacher preparation on ESL and bilingual education
361. Principal role / support
362. Prioritizing students’ needs
363. Private schools – less crowded, more demanding – but low socio-economic families cannot afford –
364. Productive talk as a key instructional strategy in the content areas
365. Productive talk as topics for an ideal PD for teachers of ELs
366. Professional learning groups for teachers
367. Professional learning needs of teachers
368. Professional needs of teachers who do not have the ESL pedagogy and strategies
369. Profiles of middle grade ELs
370. Providing opportunities for students to participate, grow and express themselves
371. Purpose of instruction
372. Push-in vs. pull out services
373. Push-in and pull out are useful, depending on the purpose and focus of instruction
374. Qualifications of teachers
375. Rapport with students
376. Read aloud as a key strategy for teaching in two languages
377. Reading and writing in the native language
378. Reading as an instructional priority because the middle grade students do not enjoy it
379. Realities of how middle grade ELs who are new comers receive supports in the classroom. Most likely these students graduate from eighth grade without the content knowledge and skills to succeed in high school. Who monitors these students in H.S.? Do they make it, do they graduate?
380. Receptive of students’ needs.
381. Reciprocal teaching
382. Reflective teaching
383. Reflective teaching as a professional learning need
384. Relationships among the community, parents, and teachers
385. Relevance of PD opportunities
386. Research might say one thing, but the reality is that theories about the development of our students might play different for some or a good number of our students
387. Resources in the native language
388. Revamping university coursework – teacher preparation
389. Risk free environment for students
390. Role of bilingual and/or ESL departmentalized classroom teachers
391. Role of bilingual and/or ESL resource teachers
392. Role of bilingual resource teachers; bilingual coordinators; EL liaisons, multiple roles ESL supports in math
393. Role of native language – use as a resource and a tool for learning
Role of native language in the instruction of bilingual ed students with special needs

Role of native language in the instruction of ELs in dual language programs

Role of native language in the instruction of ELs in transitional bilingual programs

Role of PD: Training strategies that transfer back into the classroom.

Role of principal as a leader of teacher leaders

Role of Spanish academic language in learning English

Role of teachers as teacher leaders

Role of universities/college in the preparation of teachers for the instruction of middle grade ELs

Routines – well established

Scaffolding instruction

Scheduling in the middle grades is challenging

Scheduling of push-in pull out services for teachers and students

School activities important for families of EL that connect school with home.

School and home connections

School culture that reflects distance from collective ownership in the instruction of ELs

Shared responsibilities for the instruction of ELs

Shared teaching responsibilities

Sharing practices is important for the growth of teachers

Sheltered ESL language arts class for middle grade ELs

Sheltered instruction in English

Sheltered instruction in the content areas

Silent stage of ELs

Social and emotional needs of ELs need to be met –

Social issues that impact the schooling experience and success of middle grade ELs

Socio-economic status

Socio-emotional needs of ELs

Sociocultural aspects of growing up as a first generation vs. immigrants

Spanish language arts class for Spanish language speakers and Spanish language learners

Spanish language instruction or instruction in Spanish does not happen – it is provided in the form of supports – as a resource

Spanish learned as the language of home – heritage and cultural value

Spanish not learned in academic contexts or for academic purposes –

Special classes or PD for non-bilingual/ESL teachers that address the particular needs of middle grade ELs

SPLIT TIME in teaching key content areas

Strategic vocabulary instruction in the content areas

Strategies for vocabulary teaching

Strategies that general education teachers perceive effective in the instruction of ELs vs. strategies that really work for these students

Strategies/techniques that are effective in teaching ELs

Strong ESL programs are needed for middle grade ELs
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432. Strong teacher collaboration
433. Stronger communication between, state, district and schools to ensure there are clear expectations and goals are shared and met.
434. Structures and scaffolds for new comers
435. Structures and supports for students
436. Student advocacy
437. Student engagement and motivation
438. Student identity
439. Student readiness
440. Students afraid of taking risks in using their new language
441. Students drawing from own experiences
442. Students eager to learn; students need structure, goals, and expectations
443. Students from minority groups need to be exposed to the society – the environment they are expected to succeed - need to know what is out there – the options they have – the opportunities
444. Students in dual language programs need SSL and ESL supports
445. Students lost in the shuffle of multiple priorities and mandates
446. Students monitor their own learning
447. Students support each other’s learning
448. Students who are ELs but are not assigned in bilingual /ESL programs –
449. Students’ attitudes
450. Students’ attitudes’ towards use of the new language and home language
451. Students’ understanding of their own progress by looking at their test results, classroom work, and performance.
452. Students’ willingness to learn; extended opportunities for learning; teachers’ dispositions / extra effort
453. Support services vs. instruction in the core contents
454. Supports for ELs
455. Supports for ELs are inconsistent – infrequent and many times incoherent
456. Supports for teachers of ELs
457. Target standards vs. supportive standards
458. Teacher advocacy
459. Teacher appreciation
460. Teacher attitudes in teaching ELs: academic, socio-emotional, linguistic, cultural
461. Teacher collaboration
462. Teacher collaboration, attitudes, and dispositions in doing better for their ELs
463. Teacher decision-making: elements that influence it
464. Teacher differences in learning as adult learners
465. Teacher dispositions for teaching ELs;
466. Teacher experiences as a student have influenced the type of teachers they are –
467. Teacher experiences as ELs
468. Teacher experiences as learners of a language other than English
469. Teacher expertise in the use of Spanish academic language
470. Teacher innate interest in teaching middle grade bilingual students
471. Teacher investment in their ongoing learning
472. Teacher knowledge and teachers’ disposition for learning
473. Teacher knowledge and understanding of the ELs learning needs
474. Teacher knowledge of language acquisition process
475. Teacher knowledge of language learning – Teacher experiences as learners and users of languages other than English – How these experiences influence their work as teachers of ELs
476. Teacher knowledge of middle grade ELs
477. Teacher knowledge of the fundamentals of bilingual education
478. Teacher morale
479. Teacher morale is down – Teachers of ELs feel intimidated and so the students also feel intimidated
480. Teacher motivation
481. Teacher perceived beliefs of their students and parents’ attitudes toward school. How teachers value educational goals VS the socio-cultural and emotional needs of students and their families
482. Teacher perceptions’ of ELs’ supports at home
483. Teacher planning and collaboration time
484. Teacher preparation
485. Teacher preparation and knowledge in the instruction of ELs
486. Teacher preparation for teaching ELs
487. Teacher preparation on standards’ based instruction
488. Teacher preparation, experiences, and background make a difference in the goals they have for their ELs and in their approaches to instruction
489. Teacher preparation, knowledge and expertise
490. Teacher preparation: how to work with students; how to teach in Spanish; use of ELD standards,
491. Teacher support from Central Office and Network
492. Teacher-student connections
493. Teacher’s belief that she is an experienced teacher and knows the resources she needs –
494. Teacher’s experience as someone who grew up in their community, but not as an EL?
495. Teachers as adult English as a Second Language Learners
496. Teachers as adult learners
497. Teachers as advocates for what is best for her students
498. Teachers as English learners and connections of their experiences with that as teachers of ELs.
499. Teachers as immigrants
500. Teachers as language learners - Second generation of immigrants
501. Teachers as leaders
502. Teachers as learners of another language
503. Teachers as models for students and colleagues
504. Teachers as readers
505. Teachers as reflective practitioners
506. Teachers attitudes towards the ELs in their classroom
507. Teachers do what they do because they care about their students
Teachers enjoy working with children –

Teachers entering the teaching profession as adult ELs

Teachers entering the teaching profession as native speakers of Spanish (U.S. born)

Teachers feel more productive and effective when they are in an environment of respect, collaboration, and with a lot of support – need to feel appreciated for the kind of work they do.

Teachers feel the new evaluation system is biased – it depends on how you stand with administration

Teachers in the middle grades do not represent the population of middle grade ELs– why are there not more diverse teachers in the middle grades?

Teachers knowing how to assess ELs’ English proficiency levels

Teachers knowing they have an impact on students –

Teachers knowledge and understanding of the instructional practices and resources that are effective in the instruction of these students

Teachers look for and embrace opportunities to improve their practice in regards to the instruction of ELs

Teachers need background knowledge in teaching ELs. Hard to know what they’re missing or not doing well, when the basic pedagogy and understanding of language acquisition is not there.

Teachers need more resources outside of the classroom

Teachers need to be fluent in the language they teach – It is only fair for the students –

Teachers need to model what they want students to learn and do

Teachers need to seek all the resource they need for teaching –

Teachers of ELs are creative and visual learners

Teachers of ELs are frustrated and overwhelmed

Teachers of ELs who know their learning needs and styles and are able to connect with them, have lasting impression on these students

Teachers perceptions of what is valuable/effective in teaching middle grade ELs

Teachers placed in bilingual classrooms without knowing the fundamentals of bilingual education and/or ESL pedagogy.

Teachers sharing experiences as adult learners with students

Teachers supporting each others’ teaching and learning experiences –

Teachers who speak the languages of the students and understand the struggles students face in learning a new language

Teachers’ ability to distinguish between the socio-emotional and language learning needs of their ELs

Teachers’ academic background

Teachers’ articulation of student needs

 Teachers’ background knowledge

Teachers’ belief that ELs in the middle grades and all grades must be taught the foundational language skills in English

Teachers’ dispositions in helping meet the socio-emotional needs of their ELs
Teachers’ dispositions on doing what is best for their students vs. what is required from administrators for compliance and evaluation purposes

Teachers’ experiences as English learners themselves – Teachers’ disposition to serve their multilingual, multicultural community

Teachers’ experiences as immigrant, adult ELs influence their attitudes toward teaching ELs

Teachers’ experiences in teaching ELs in different schools vastly vary from one another

Teachers’ intrinsic motivation in teaching

Teachers’ lasting impressions on the students

Teachers’ love for languages

Teachers’ love reflecting on and sharing there experiences of why they show teaching as their profession

Teachers’ perception of what is important for their ELs

Teachers’ perception that maintaining the native language is not a problem

The belief that everything in the community is in Spanish, the restaurants, the TV, the radio, etc. There’s not enough English in their life.

Teachers’ perceptions about challenging issues in the instruction of EL

Teachers’ perceptions about parents’ participation with and in school

Teachers’ perceptions of effective practice in teaching ELs

Teachers’ perceptions of middle grade ELs’ needs

Teachers’ perceptions of student readiness

Teachers’ Perceptions of what rigorous instruction should be

Teachers’ perceptions of when ELs are ready to be immersed in English only instruction

Teachers’ perceptions on what ELs can do and accomplish

Teachers’ perceptions that ELs in the middle grades are already years behind

Teachers’ recognition that students know their place in school

Teachers’ understanding of academic language

Teachers’ understanding of how language and literacy look in action – the relationship that exists between the two.

Teachers’ understanding of how languages are learned and the influence of cultures and cultural backgrounds in the teaching and learning experiences of ELs

Teachers’ understanding of students’ cultural assets

Teachers’ own initiative to want to know more and do more for their students – Intrinsic motivation

Teaching Academic Language is hard

Teaching and learning has changed from project based to more thinking, reading, and writing – explanations

Teaching approaches

Teaching continues to be an isolated practice in some settings—maybe in more settings that we would like to think

Teaching ELs and Latino kids what going to a university is like, what it looks – the work that needs to be done – and encouraging them to dream big.
Teaching ELs is more than the academics. Teaching ELs that is okay to question and modeling questioning techniques – Developing trusting relationships with ELs is key. Teaching is a natural thing – Teaching is fulfilling. Teaching of content in the native language. Teaching practices and student responses are good way to assess whether they’re getting it, whether the content needs to be revisited – retaught or approached differently. Teaching priorities.

TEACHING ROLES – MAKING CONTENT ACCESSIBLE TO ELs
Teaching roles in a range of grades in push-in and pull out contexts. Teaching roles that are varied and complex. Teaching the book, rather than focusing on the knowledge and skills students need. Teaching thematic units for students who never leave their neighborhood – Teaching with empathy. Teaching work ethics to students – Need to learn ESL strategies – Ways to help students understand the importance of effort and hard work and the significance of these in their lives. Team collaboration. Team teaching. Team-teaching as an ideal instructional context. Testing system is challenging in teaching ELs. The challenges of learning in another language while learning that particular language. The creative performance arts are effective ways to engage students in learning. The expectations and the environment make a difference in the academic experiences and success of students. The importance of reading – The instruction in the native language (Spanish) is basically the opportunity to engage and allow students use their native language to communicate, to clarify their understanding. The need to teach students how to monitor their own learning. The role of native language in making them feel confident in and have access to what they’re learning. Think Aloud and Read Alouds are effective strategies to engage and teach middle grade ELs. Think aloud as a key strategy. Time. Time and instructional priorities in what is important to teach ELs: English. Time and preparation of multiple teachers. Time to provide instruction language arts instruction in two languages. Training in teaching writing in both English and Spanish.
Training needs of bilingual/ESL teachers
Training needs of content area teachers
Transfer of language and content
Transformational practices
Translinguaging
Trusting relationship amongst students
Trusting relationship amongst teachers
U.S. born ELs with strong language and cultural heritage
Understanding children/students growing up in two cultures and in mixed languages – the social and academic English and the language used at home
Understanding connections between English and Spanish languages
Understanding EL diversity
Understanding ELs’ needs: knowing their culture, traditions, and costumes.
Understanding how ELs develop
Understanding implementation of the WIDA/ELD standards
Understanding of language development
Understanding of literacy development
Understanding of the implementation of the CCSS
Understanding student dispositions in learning
Understanding student needs
Understanding the elements/ issues that affect student learning
Understanding the needs of students and the particular ways in which they learn.
Understands connections with immigrant families. –
Unit planning is a form of professional development
University professors need to be in schools working with students to stay close to reality – to the reality teachers live daily – classes on how to differentiate instruction with their students are needed
Use and value of Spanish and English cognates
Use and value of Spanish native language
Use of assessments and assessment data for instruction
Use of available RESOURCES-MATERIALS
Use of collaborative groups for more effective instruction
Use of district developed resources
Use of ELs’ native language for supports and to build relationships
Use of native language as a tool for learning
Use of native language for communication with parents;
Use of Spanish as a resource for bridging into English
Use of strategies and techniques
Use of the CCSS
Use of WIDA/ELD standards
Use students’ work as diagnostic assessment
Using running records to monitor student learning
Using students’ performance to modify instruction
Using writing to learn the language and content (English)
640. Using writing to use and learn Spanish language and content
641. Validation of students’ experiences
642. Validation of students’ identity and culture
643. Validation of teachers’ knowledge and professional experience
644. Value of first (native) language
645. Value of linguistic and cultural assets of middle grade ELs.
646. Value of native language
647. Variation of teaching strategies in push-in, pull out and departmentalized contexts
648. Visual supports in learning
649. Vocabulary for English learners, like the idea of being able to do vocabulary every single day in some capacity of like five, 10 minutes is the ultimate goal of teachers
650. Vocabulary instruction – teacher as a visual learner and how that influences her teaching style, especially in the instruction of vocabulary
651. Vocabulary instruction is a professional learning need of teachers
652. Want students to become better writers – bad experiences with writing as a student – teachers did not teach writing so teachers as teachers of writing need improvement
653. We need to find ways to connect the CCSS with the language standards
654. Who are our middle grade ELs?
655. Writing across the curriculum.
656. Writing as a professional learning need
657. Writing as a subject/content
658. Writing as a tool for learning
659. Writing as a tool for learning both language and content
660. Writing curriculum
661. Writing in response to reading
    Writing instruction for Spanish
## APPENDIX G: SECOND CODING CYCLE

Frequency of Codes and Emergent Categories from Interview Statements

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes/Topics</th>
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<th>Emergent Categories</th>
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<td>Teachers</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>1. Attitudes and Dispositions of Middle Grade Teachers of ELs</td>
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<td>English Learners</td>
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<td>2. Knowledge and Understanding of Middle Grade ELs</td>
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| Frequency of Codes | 1913 |
| Total Number of Topics | 72 |
| Emergent Categories | 15 |

9. Professional Learning Opportunities

10. Communication and Collaboration Among Teachers

11. Leadership Supports

12. District and State Policies and Mandates

13. Parent/family engagement and supports

14. Perceptions About Bilingual Education

15. Lack or Limited Curriculum Resources for Middle Grade ELs