

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF  
EDUCATORS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WHO HAVE SELF-DETERMINED  
TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES

by

Melody Corey Steenbergh

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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## ABSTRACT

While the English language learner (ELL) population continues to grow at a rapid rate in the United States, teachers find themselves ill-equipped to meet the needs of these students. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe how teachers experience and overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for meeting the academic needs of English language learners in the general education setting. The central question of this study was: How do classroom teachers experience and overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices to meet the needs of English language learners? The theories guiding this study were Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT) and Krashen's second language acquisition theory (SLA). For this study, self-determination was defined as doing what needs to be done, despite obstacles and challenges. English as a second language (ESL) is defined as the teaching program used to educate non-native English speakers in the school setting. The study was conducted with teachers who have experience with ELLs. Data were collected through questionnaires, efficacy surveys, interviews, and letters of advice. The key findings of this study indicate that teachers are motivated to overcome obstacles to educating ELLs through three avenues: feelings of success in working with the families of ELLs, empathy toward ELLs, and effectively implementing strategies and resources which led to increased self-efficacy. Implications of this study include creating programs for teachers which focus on opportunities for success in meeting student needs. There were indications of a need for intense pre-service training and early professional development experiences for teachers in educating diverse learners to increase feelings of high self-efficacy early in teachers' tenures.

*Key Words:* English language learners, English as a second language, self-determination theory, second language acquisition theory, efficacy, best practices

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Bilingual Education Act (BEA)

English Learner (EL)

English Language Learner (ELL)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

General Education (GE)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Limited English Proficient (LEP)

National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Professional Development (PD)

Self-determination Theory (SDT)

Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy-Short Form (TSES-SF)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

The dramatic increase of English language learners (ELLs) in American schools has brought the need for improvements in their education to light (Haneda & Alexander, 2015). ELLs who enter kindergarten with limited English proficiency remain behind their peers academically throughout their school years and have much lower high school graduation rates than native English speakers (Polat, Zarecky-Hodge & Schreiber, 2016; Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). While the ELL population continues to grow at a rapid rate in the United States, the best practices known to be effective are oftentimes not implemented (Haneda & Alexander, 2015). There is a sizable amount of research available regarding the best practices for ELLs, and yet, oftentimes, barriers seem to be preventing those practices from getting to the learners who need them. Teachers report feeling under-equipped and challenged in meeting the needs of ELLs who are placed in their classrooms (Khong & Saito, 2014). This phenomenological study gathered insight from teachers who have experienced and overcome those barriers to acquire and implement best practices despite the challenges.

Chapter One includes information on the background of English language learners. Information is presented on the issues impacting these learners in school as well as the theories behind this research. It also presents the current problem in light of the historical context. Additionally, information about the researcher is given. The conclusion of the chapter outlines the problem statement and the research questions that drive this research.

### **Background**

After discussing the different terms and acronyms used for the focus population of this study, this section provides an overview of the historical, social, and theoretical contexts for this

study. Each of these aspects contributes to the background for this case study. This background information serves to contextualize the challenges faced by ELLs and those who are educating them in order to identify potential opportunities for further study.

### **Historical Context**

Since the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, public schools have been required to allow all learners to provide educational programs that are meaningful and equitable for all learners (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). In 1974, as part the Equal Educational Opportunities Act, the federal government required that the needs of English language learners (ELLs) be met in public schools (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Aside from the laws being put in place, little else has been mandated (Haneda & Alexander, 2015). Most states have few guidelines and exactly how ELLs are accommodated is left up to individual districts, and even individual schools (Haneda & Alexander, 2015). While the United States has always had students learning English along with academic content, the dramatic population increase has brought new attention to their needs (Haneda & Alexander, 2015).

During the years of 2003 – 2011, interest in ELL education and their success gained even more attention due to mandates from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) (Polat et al., 2016). During this time, schools were beginning to be held accountable for the academic growth of ELLs, and consequently, they began implementing new policies and teaching strategies designed to meet their needs and encourage academic growth (Polat et al., 2016). Because of NCLB, several states enacted policies that mandated programs be put in place to monitor the success of ELLs (A Chronology of Federal Law, 2019). These policies encouraged the partial implementation of some pedagogical shifts that aimed to improve the education of ELLs (Polat et al., 2016).

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). This law was implemented to update and replace NCLB. This act was intended to shift accountability and decision making back to states and local school districts (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). There were several implications for ELLs. One key shift had to do with classifying ELLs. Before this act, there was not a requirement to use a uniform way to classify ELLs across individual states or across the United States (Edgerton, 2019). The ESSA required that at a minimum, states have a consistent classification system for ELLs and encouraged use of a nation-wide classification system. Another important shift was to change testing requirements for ELLs (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017). Under NCLB, all students were required to participate in high-stakes testing. The shift under ESSA was to exempt ELLs during their first two years in ESL programs from testing (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017). Overall, the ESSA strengthened practices that were already in place for ELLs and brought more attention to the unique needs of these learners (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).

Research clearly shows that students need strong and positive experiences in early education in order to establish productive learning habits and optimistic attitudes toward school and learning in general (Coates, 2016; Eun, 2016). These first experiences will shape ELL's years in school. While it is recognized that the needs of ELLs should be met through evidence based best practices, the best practices are not being implemented with fidelity (Allen & Park, 2015).

### **Social Context**

English language learners (ELLs) who enter kindergarten with limited English proficiency will typically remain behind their peers academically throughout their school years (Polat, Zarecky-Hodge & Schreiber, 2016). It is estimated that in the year 2025, one in four

students in the United States will be an ELL (NCES, 2018). In some areas in the country, such as California, that is already a reality (NCES, 2018). Finding ways to foster success is paramount to helping the diverse population of ELLs to succeed (Haneda & Alexander, 2015). These learners are often ostracized due to negative societal ideologies regarding immigrants, and these ideologies are present in school settings (Khong & Saito, 2014). There is a large amount of research available regarding the best practices for ELLs, and yet, those practices are often not being used. The NCES (2018) reported that in the United States, 63% of ELLs graduate from high school, in comparison to the national average of 85% graduation rate.

As there has been a dramatic increase in the population of ELLs in schools, there has been an increase in the advice on ways to teach these students (Allen & Park, 2015). However, with many schools, districts, and states implementing parts of programs, or implementing programs and not completing them, it is difficult to measure success (Polat et al., 2016). In California, for example, where the United States has the largest ELL population, the use of students' native languages is often very restricted in the classroom setting (Khong & Saito, 2014). ELLs are typically only given one year of transitional education, and yet, research shows that English language learners typically require 4-7 years to become fully proficient in English (Khong & Saito, 2004). While the programs are in place for ELL support, they are not being implemented with fidelity (Khong & Saito, 2014). As a result of these issues, general education classroom teachers are left with the majority of the responsibility of educating ELLs, with most ELLs spending 90% of their time in the general education setting (Polat, 2010). While there is a trend in teacher education programs to implement specific training in ESL education, professional development for in-service teachers is not as available (de Jong, Naranjo, Li, & Ouzia, 2018). Further, teachers completing in-service training report finishing the training

because it is mandated, rather than “as a genuine opportunity for professional growth” (de Jong, et al., 2018, p. 179). Although teachers in some places, such as Florida, are receiving professional development through required trainings, there is a lack of implementation fidelity when teachers return to their classrooms (de Jong et al., 2018).

In the typical elementary setting, research points to the need for ELLs to be educated alongside their English-speaking peers, as opposed to being in pull-out programs with other students of similar abilities (Eun, 2016). This model requires that support be in place for ELLs who are in the mainstream setting, but with supports lacking, they are not making the necessary gains (Polat, 2010). With ELLs consistently lagging behind their English proficient peers, having well-equipped highly trained classroom teachers is necessary to ensure their success (Coates, 2016). With research pointing to the need for highly trained and well-equipped teachers, it is surprising to discover that this is not always the case (Khong, & Saito, 2014). Perhaps the largest obstacle facing teachers is the tremendous lack of preservice and in-service training they receive for meeting the needs of ELLs (Khong & Saito, 2014).

### **Theoretical Context**

This phenomenological study was centered on the theoretical contexts of the self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and second language acquisition theory (SLA) (van der Walt, 2013). SDT was developed by Deci and Ryan (2008) and is “an empirically based theory of human motivation, development, and wellness” (p. 182). This theory focuses on the types of motivation and how these motivations impact job performance as well as other areas of life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In this study, autonomous motivation, defined as engaging in a behavior as a result of intrinsic goals and outcomes (Hagger, Hardcastle, Chater, Mallett, Pal, & Chatzisarantis, 2014), is of particular interest. Hagger et al. (2014) explained that when

individuals engage in behaviors of self-determination, they feel “a sense of choice, personal endorsement, interest, and satisfaction and, as a consequence, are likely to persist with the behavior” (p. 566). Deci and Ryan (2016) propose that motivation is on a continuum, and while motivation might begin extrinsically, eventually it takes root as intrinsic. Howard, Gagne, Morin and Van den Broeck (2016) explained that extrinsic motivation occurs when an individual “elects to act because the behavior or the outcome of the behavior is of personal significance” (p. 75). In this instance, a teacher may choose to act initially because of an extrinsic factor, such as pressure for students to perform well on state assessments, but as autonomy and efficacy increases, the teacher will begin to be intrinsically motivated as a sense of competency increases (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In the case of teaching English language learners, general education teachers might begin to meet the needs of an ELL simply because of the need to improve test scores. As teachers become more connected to their ELLs and associate student improvement with their effort, their motivation may shift. This shift may be the result of an intrinsic motivator, such as a deep-seeded desire to see a student achieve success. This self-determination to achieve a goal, despite obstacles, is at the heart of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Krashen’s (1981) second language acquisition theory (SLA) has its roots in several other learning theories (van der Walt, 2013). At the heart of SLA is the idea that humans are designed to acquire new languages (van der Walt, 2013). Allowing students exposure to and interaction with a new language in a supportive environment will maximize their potential for successfully reaching a proficient level in the language (Lantolf, & Beckett, 2009).

### **Situation to Self**

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University and a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher for Department of Defense Education Activity at Fort Bragg Schools. I have been teaching since 1998 and have



never had any formal training on educating ELLs. Although I am quite well-educated with three degrees and have completed countless professional development programs, I have never been taught specific best practices for working with ELLs. All that I have learned has been self-taught and through trial and error.

My interest in educating ELLs was piqued due to the high population of ELLs I have taught in recent years. These children are all military-dependents and tend to move every 2-3 years. I felt a calling to try to find a way to meet their needs as I saw many of them struggling to cope. I decided to take control of the situation and research as much as I could about how to meet their needs. This included seeking out experts in my school and asking for guidance. This shift in mind-set gave me the autonomy I needed in my classroom to fully implement what I knew to be the best teaching strategies for all of my learners, regardless of a lack of training. This self-determination was an act of agency, which is a rising trend in education (Tao & Gao, 2017). Teachers are becoming less likely to wait idly for leadership to enact change; rather, they are becoming more likely to take charge of their situations and seek out the professional development needed to enact the changes they need in their classrooms (Tao & Gao, 2017). Military-dependents are also near to my heart, as my own children are military dependents, and my husband was an active-duty soldier for 22 years. He retired from active-duty service November 1, 2020. While certainly not all ELLs are military dependents, they share a common transient lifestyle, and both must adapt to new settings often.

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that researchers enter a study with their own philosophical assumptions. These assumptions can impact a qualitative study. I have been an elementary school teacher for about 20 years. Over those years, most of my time has been spent working in schools that are predominantly populated by students of a low socioeconomic status.

This has shaped certain views I hold and has given me a desire to intervene for positive change in the lives of these students.

For this study, my ontological assumption was that I expected differing views to be gathered from my research. Each participant could possibly have a unique reality, based on personal experiences. The teachers I interviewed come from diverse backgrounds and have had varying experiences educating ELLs. Additionally, my axiological assumptions, such as the high value of children and their right to a high-quality education, may shape my interpretation of findings. I am guided by my belief that children are a gift from God, as is explained in Psalm 127:3 (New Living Translation), “Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him.” Finally, I endeavored in this study under the epistemological assumption that all knowledge will be understood through the experiences of the participants. Social constructivism is the paradigm that shapes this study as it dictates that meaning is constructed and developed through interaction with other people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative study, by nature, is one that requires interaction with others, therefore aligns with social constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

The population of ELLs in the United States is increasing at a rapid rate (Khong & Saito, 2014). Educating this group of students presents unique challenges to mainstream classroom teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2018). By the year 2025, the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) estimates that one in four students in America will be classified as an ELL and by 2030, 40% of all students in American schools will be ELLs. Research shows that ELLs are typically two full years behind their peers academically (Wang, 2014). ELLs are disproportionately represented in special education programs and are at a higher risk of experiencing academic

related challenges due to cultural and language barriers (Rubin, 2016). The needs of ELLs are not being met (Sánchez-Suzuki & Zúñiga, 2018). Many teachers feel ill-equipped and lack training in how to best teach ELLs (Sato & Hodge, 2016). Teachers are not receiving the training needed to have expertise in educating this diverse group of learners (Feiman-Nemser, 2018). The problem is general education classroom teachers are ill-equipped to meet the needs of ELLs and research is needed to gain insight into how teachers self-determine to overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for meeting the academic needs of English language learners in the general education setting.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of teachers who have self-determined to overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for meeting the academic needs of English language learners in the general education setting. Self-determination was generally defined as doing what needs to be done in a situation without influence of external factors. The theories guiding this study were self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and second language acquisition theory (SLA) (van der Walt, 2013). SDT is concerned with what motivates people to make the choices they do, and how people are motivated on a continuum of extrinsic factors to intrinsic factors, leading to autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2006). Krahsen's second language acquisition contests that children have innate ability to acquire a second language and will do so when given opportunities to engage in meaningful activities within authentic settings (van der Walt, 2013). SDT and SLA provide a valuable framework for investigating how teachers have been able to implement best practices despite obstacles.

### **Significance of the Study**

A review of the literature revealed a need for research on overcoming barriers that exist to educating ELLs using the best practices. Although many studies have been done regarding ELL education, there is evidence that best practices are not consistently being implemented (Allen & Park, 2015). The empirical significance of this study was to add to the body of knowledge regarding the education of elementary-aged English language learners. ELLs have unique needs in comparison with their peers (Cunningham & Crawford, 2016). Early intervention in the education of ELLs has been correlated to long-term success (Polat et al., 2016). This early intervention will have a long-term positive impact on the population of ELLs. Practically, success in elementary school has strong correlation to success in secondary school, which in turn leads to success in career (Bakken, Brown, & Downing, 2017). Equipping elementary school teachers with the knowledge needed to foster academic achievement in ELLs will contribute to success. This study has been built on the foundation of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and second language acquisition theory (Krashen, 1981). This research will further educators' understandings of how teachers are motivated to acquire needed skills and knowledge and overcome challenges that they face when educating ELLs.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of teachers who have been able to overcome challenges through self-determination in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for meeting the academic needs of English language learners in the general education setting.

**Central question:** What are the experiences of teachers who self-determine to acquire and implement best practices to meet the needs of English language learners in the general

education setting? Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the central question should be open-ended and able to be evolving throughout the research as insights are gained. From the central question, sub-questions (SQ) were determined that refine the central question.

**SQ1:** What experiences motivate teachers to learn and implement best practices for educating ELLs in the general education classroom?

Classroom teachers are on the front line of educating ELLs and have likely gained insight and experience into what has worked in their classrooms (Polat, 2010). Classroom teachers have the most contact with students and therefore have lived experiences that can add to the understanding of how teachers become motivated to overcome challenges (Siuty, Leko, & Knackstedt, 2018). Insight was gained into how decisions were made that affected their teaching.

**SQ2:** How do teachers develop their self-efficacy in their ability to educate ELLs in the general education classroom?

There is a growing body of research to support the need for further and intense professional development not only at the teacher level, but at school and district levels as well (Tellez & Manthey, 2015). Gathering information on how teachers developed their efficacy with ESL education was needed. Although most teachers do not feel adequately equipped to meet the needs of ELLs, (Télléz, & Manthey, 2015) there are teachers who have developed a stronger sense of efficacy. Exploring their experiences and how they became motivated to improve their practice has provided valuable insight.

**SQ3:** What factors do teachers identify as influencing their self-determination to seek out, acquire, and implement best practices?

ELLs spend the majority of their time in the general education setting (Polat, 2010). Gathering information on the experiences of general education teachers who have been able to overcome obstacles has led to an understanding of their experiences.

### **Definitions**

There are several terms and associated acronyms commonly used when referring to English language learners and their educational programs. ELL is the acronym used throughout this study to refer to an English language learner (Common Acronyms, 2021). This term is the most widely accepted term used today. The term limited English proficient (LEP) is used by the US Department of Education to describe students who do not have enough English proficiency to meet the standards set by states (Fleischer, 2017). Educators have moved away from using this term and instead refer to these learners as ELLs (Fleischer, 2017). This shift emphasizes the notion that these students are learning as opposed to highlighting a deficit (Fleischer, 2017). Another common acronym for the same group of people is EL, which refers to them as English learners, an acronym used in K-12 education, but also used to refer to adult learners (Squire, 2008). Programs in which ELLs are educated are referred to as ESL and ESOL, or English for speakers of other languages (Common Acronyms, 2021). Long-term English language learners (LTELL) are those students who have been in ESL programs for long periods of time, but yet remain in ESL programs as they have yet to meet proficiency levels needed to be reclassified (Fleischer, 2017). The following definitions are provided to add clarity to the key words and concepts in this dissertation.

1. *Agency* – The competence to take the initiative needed to make choices using one’s own judgement based on expertise and experience (Ramrathan & Mzimela, 2016).

2. *Autonomy* – The capacity of a person to act according to what he knows is needed or necessary without being influenced by outside distractions (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010)
3. *Best Practices* – Those teaching strategies and school policies which have the most positive effect on academic growth (Morrison, 2012).
4. *Competence* – the ability to do something effectively (Deci & Ryan, 2008).
5. *English language learner (ELL)* – A student who is learning English along with learning another language, in the context of an English as a second language (ESL) program in a school setting (tesol.org, 2021). This is the term that was used throughout this study.
6. *English as a second language (ESL)* – This term refers to programs in English-speaking schools in which students are learning English as their second language. (tesol.org, 2021)
7. *Limited English Proficient (LEP)* – Not being fluent in English because it is not the native language (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).
8. *Relatedness* – a sense of belonging and connectedness that people have with others (Deci & Ryan, 2008).
9. *Second language acquisition* – The natural ability of children to acquire a second language when given appropriate contexts (Menezes, 2003).
10. *Sociocultural learning* – The social process of learning within a culture (Ariza & Hancock, 2003).
11. *Self-determination* - Ability to do what needs to be done to achieve the desired results, without being hindered by external factors (Deci & Ryan, 2000).
12. *Teacher self-efficacy* - Teachers' judgements of their capabilities to teach a given subject (Musanti, 2017).

## Summary

English language learners are a diverse and rapidly growing population in American schools. This group has varying educational needs. General education teachers are responsible for most of the education of ELLs and therefore, must be equipped to meet the needs of these learners. This phenomenological study was guided by Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (2008) and Krashen's second language acquisition theory (SLA) (1981). SDT focuses on how behaviors can be self-motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2018). SLA focuses on how people acquire a second language (Krashen, 1981). Through research questions focused on gaining insight into how teachers overcome the barriers preventing best practices from being used, this study has discovered what experiences motivate elementary teachers to acquire and implement best practices meeting the needs of the ELLs in their classrooms.



## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences that motivate general education classroom teachers to overcome the obstacles they face when educating English language learners. This literature review presents an analysis of the research related to the characteristics and educational needs of English language learners (ELL). The education of ELLs is a complex undertaking which requires studying various aspects of the issues and challenges associated with their education. This chapter provides the theoretical framework upon which this study was built. It is followed by both empirical and theoretical research in the following categories: (a) defining English language learners; (b) historical context of English as second language education; (c) teacher efficacy and attitude and what role professional development and self-efficacy play in keeping educators on track; (d) characteristics and needs of ELLs; and (e) best practices for educating ELLs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was framed by two theoretical frameworks: self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and second language acquisition theory (SLA) (Menezes, 2013). The fundamental idea of self-determination theory is that human beings have not only physiological needs, but they also have psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These needs are not bound to level of education, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status; rather they seem to be universal (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to Deci and Ryan, people have the need to experience competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Satisfying these psychological needs has been shown to lead to autonomous motivation. Deci and Ryan (2008) explain that these feelings of autonomy are thought to be “essential for optimal functioning” (p. 183) across many cultures and

professions. Ryan and Deci (2000) define motivation as being “moved to do something” (p. 54). Not having any inspiration to act is how Ryan and Deci (2000) define unmotivated. When one is energized to meet an end, they call that behavior or feeling “being motivated.” In all interactions and tasks, people experience some type of motivation, whether it is intrinsic, extrinsic, or some combination of the two. Extrinsic motivation is a force that drives people to behave in certain ways based on some type of external reward. These rewards can include praise, acceptance, money, grading, job evaluations, and so on (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Intrinsic motivation comes from within, and it is driven by one’s own values, beliefs, ethics, and feelings. For people to be functioning at their best, they must achieve a certain level of intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) further explained that motivation is not something one measures quantitatively only, but something that also has different types of motivation. SDT distinguishes between the types of motivation and looks at the reasons behind why people are motivated to act in the way they do. They explain that “the most basic distinction is between intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome” (p. 55). The enjoyment and quality of an experience can greatly improve when a person is motivated to act intrinsically (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

For people to be truly successful at a task they are undertaking, there must be a shift from the extrinsic motivation, such as test scores in the case of teachers, to an intrinsic motivation. This intrinsic motivation is achieved through having a sense of autonomy. This concept is evident in classrooms. Teachers must feel like they have control over the decision-making in their classrooms, a strong relationship to those they are working with and educating, and competence; the teacher must feel like an expert (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Ryan and Deci

(2000) explained that while people often think of extrinsic motivation as a negative aspect, it really is a necessary part of teaching and learning. In many cases, this extrinsic motivation is a starting point that can set a teacher on a path to achieving intrinsic motivation. Rarely, and likely never, is motivation a straightforward and linear process. Deci and Ryan explained that it is a series of various aspects of each type of motivation happening at various stages and to meet various needs, ultimately with an end goal of the individual achieving intrinsic motivation which leads to self-determination.

Having the needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy met will lead to a shift in motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic. The development of autonomy is on a continuum that gradually develops over time (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As the sense of autonomy develops, motivation shifts from amotivation, or, having no motivation at all, to extrinsic motivation, and eventually to intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This shift allows people to develop the sense of autonomy required to achieve a greater well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Because of this internalized motivation developed through autonomy, people begin to feel competent in the jobs they are doing; they then have a strong sense of efficacy. The last necessary component, relatedness, develops with those they are working with, as well as connectedness to their jobs as they feel they are being encouraged to use autonomy in their classrooms (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Teachers feel a connection to their work when they feel like they are making a difference and that they belong in the place in which they are teaching (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Meeting these three needs is the tenet of self-determination theory.

At the heart of SLA is the notion that learners do not acquire a second language through memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary, rather they acquire language through a natural progression of interacting with the culture and people speaking the language (Lantolf, & Beckett,

2009). The basic premise among current research on SLA is that "the human being is programmed to acquire a language, be it a first or a second one, and that this process occurs naturally through a focus on meaning" (van der Walt, 2013, p. 74). As learners interact with a language, meanings for words and aspects of culture are constructed within the learner (Lantolf, & Beckett, 2009). According to second language acquisition theory (SLA), children have the innate ability to learn a new language (van der Walt, 2013). This ability must be fostered, and instruction must be tailored to meet individual needs. Krashen (1981) theorized that there are two aspects of developing a second language—learning and acquisition. He explained that the learning of the language, such as rules, structure, and grammar, is not what is important. What matters is the acquisition of the language. Acquisition happens when learners are immersed in and interacting in a language, whether it is their primary language or a second language (Krashen, 1981). Van der Walt (2013) explained that SLA has roots in other well-known and respected learning theories, including linguistics and behaviorism. Ariza and Hancock (2003) explained that SLA combines theories of language acquisition with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ELLs can learn and process information that is slightly out of their reach in their new language when support is provided. Krashen (1981) also asserted that the longer learners are allowed to interact and be immersed in a language, and included in the culture, the more they will fully function in that language. In other words, they will have truly acquired that language, not simply know the language.

In early research, it was thought that ELLs needed to be taught in isolation and through memorization of lists of vocabulary (van der Walt, 2013). As exploration in teaching ESL began to increase, researchers and educators began to shift their thinking about language acquisition. Van der Walt (2013) explained that viewing language simply as a set of rules and constructs

was far too limiting. Taking the approach of teaching English in isolation ignored the many nuances and purposes for what language is meant to be. Language is such an integral and integrated part of a culture, that it was argued it was a hinderance to acquiring the new language to teach it in isolation. According to Ariza and Hancock (2003), when

“learners are given the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities they are compelled to ‘negotiate for meaning,’ that is, to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts, opinions, etc., in a way which permits them to arrive at a mutual understanding” (para. 7).

Allowing learners to interact with others as they acquire the language considers how students interact and function within an environment and how the culture shapes their learning.

Vygotsky (1978) recognized that culture plays a significant role in learning and that it cannot be excluded from the process. Ultimately, students must be able to engage in a culture successfully; therefore, they must be given all the necessary tools to navigate the culture and be productive both in school and in life beyond school. Using SLA as a guide, insight was sought into how general education teachers meet the needs of their ELLs. By framing the research with these two theories, self-determination theory and second language acquisition theory, insight was gained into how teachers have been able to self-determine to overcome obstacles to teaching their ELLs using practices that are in-line with SLA.

### **Related Literature**

This section provides background information on the many facets of educating English language learners. An extensive overview of the historical background of ELLs is given. Teacher efficacy is explored. Following is an overview of best practices in reading instruction, and specific research for different levels of students. Finally, this section includes background information on identifying ELLs.

## **Historical Background of ESL**

Until the 1960s, the needs of ELLs in American schools were largely unaddressed (“A Chronology of Federal Law,” 2019). The overall attitude in the United States was one of a sink or swim mentality (Escamilla, 2018). Immigrants and their children were expected to learn English, and until they did, children remained in the same grade, or close to it, in which they entered school (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019). This policy was highly ineffective and largely served to widen the achievement gap between native English speakers and ELLs (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2018). This policy also contributed greatly to high drop-out rates in the English language learner population. Most ELLs were set up to fail in the American school system. Then, in 1968, the Bilingual Education Act, Title VII, was passed as part of the larger act, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Escamilla, 2018). This act established policies at the federal level to allocate funds for ELL education (“A Chronology of Federal Law,” 2019). The act was born out of a bill proposed by Texas Senator Yarborough (Escamilla, 2018). This original bill proposed that Spanish speaking students should maintain their native language and advocated for the education and appreciation of the native cultures of English language learners (Escamilla, 2018). This bill was authored in a state where even in 1967, a large part of the population was Spanish speaking (Escamilla, 2018). Although this bill was quite short-sighted in that it left out any ELLs who were not Spanish speaking, it served as a catalyst that led to numerous other bills that eventually fell under the umbrella of Title VII, or the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of the ESEA (Escamilla, 2018). BEA was the first federal recognition of ELLs as having unique educational needs that should be addressed and met. It was also ahead of its time in that the law advocated for the maintaining of native language and

culture in ELLs (Escamilla, 2018). This act began a shift from thinking that being a non-native English speaker was a deficit to recognizing that being bilingual was an asset (Petrzela, 2010).

Of additional significance is that the BEA was born out of the larger civil rights movement. This movement brought to the forefront the needs that minority groups had in all areas of life, including education (Petrzela, 2010). Minority students face an array of challenges in education, and this act began to address that equal education was not the answer. Rather, certain groups of students and certain areas require additional and specialized services (Escamilla, 2018). Leveling the playing field, at times, would require more and specialized funding. This act was a positive first step in establishing the need for specialized funding and schooling for ELLs.

Although a step in the right direction, the BEA left many needs unaddressed (Escamilla, 2018). While this law recognized that providing an education to all students did not necessarily mean all education should be equal, rather it should be tailored to meet the needs of the learners, it left issues such as funding under-addressed (Escamilla, 2018). This act did not take into account any way to measure student success or gains; there were no benchmarks. Participation in the program was voluntary, and funding was often misused. The money that was provided was through federal grants, and these grants were issued to school systems which elected to establish bilingual education programs (Escamilla, 2018). These grants were distributed competitively, therefore there was no guarantee that they would be renewed. Additionally, little oversight was planned to determine if schools were using the money to attain student growth and success (Escamilla, 2018).

In 1974, through a landmark Supreme Court case, *Lau v. Nichols*, it was determined that the needs of English language learners must be met in American public schools (Haneda &

Alexander, 2015). This court decision said that equal education was not sufficient and that the unique needs of ELLs required that practices be put into place to meet those diverse needs (“A Chronology of Federal Law,” 2019). This decision also required that funding be given to address the needs of all ELLs. This was another step in the right direction, but again it left much unaddressed (Haneda & Alexander, 2015). Aside from the mandate that needs be met, little guidance was given. English as a second language programs continued to vary from state to state with little oversight being done to determine effectiveness (Haneda & Alexander, 2015).

Teachers and school districts continued to grapple with the balance of meeting ELL needs while avoiding segregating them from their peers (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016). While there is a necessity for all students, ELLs included, to engage with rigorous academic materials, ELLs are often left out of learning opportunities because their language barriers are seen as a lack of academic ability (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016). ELLs must be able to interact with the subject matter in a rigorous setting and with their peers, while still having their language acquisition needs met. So, while the ESEA addressed this issue, it did not provide the backing needed to make the successful education of ELLs a reality.

In 2001, the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reaffirmed the need for meeting the needs of ELLs and appropriated funding to address those needs (“A Chronology of Federal Law,” 2019). Under Title III of NCLB, all states receiving federal funds were required to show that all students were making adequate yearly progress as measured by state testing (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). As a result, from 2003 – 2011 the progress of ELLs in schools began to be tracked more closely through mandated testing (Polat et al., 2016). Unfortunately, this law also fell short of meeting the needs of ELLs (Abedi, 2004). Although NCLB sought to shrink the achievement gaps that were prevalent in American schools, the act did not account for ELLs



learning subject areas, rather its focus was on English language proficiency (Polat et al., 2016). Proficiency in English is certainly one facet of the education of ELLs, but they must also have access to a high-quality education in all subject areas, such as math, science, and social studies. This led to further actions at the federal level as school leaders across the United States brought the issues with NCLB and ELLs to the forefront of educational reform talks (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was authorized as part of the renewal of NCLB (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Perhaps the largest issue the ESSA addressed was the measure of progress for ELLs. Under NCLB, as ELLs met proficiency levels, they were removed from the ELL subgroups for data purposes (Abedi & Herman, 2010). The result of this was that it was impossible for districts with high populations of ELLs to show growth toward AYP. As soon as students made appropriate gains, they were cycled out of that data set (Abedi & Herman, 2010). This led to the issue of only the newer or struggling ELLs to be counted in the data subgroups for ELLs. In a sense, this group was being left behind. ESSA added further supports and protections for ELLs by expanding the coverage from students who were limited English proficient (LEP) to those learning English, English learners, referred to as ELLs in this paper (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). ESSA redefined ELLs as those with

"difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language, that may be sufficient to deny the individual a) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards; b) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or c) the opportunity to participate fully in society" (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016, p. 160).

This definition expanded the earlier definition often used which was narrower and included students who were simply limited English proficient and applied more to foreign-born students (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Expanding this definition was a pivotal turning point in the process of establishing fair and adequate educational opportunities for ELLs.

ESSA also required states to revamp English proficiency standards for ELLs to ensure the standards encompass all four areas of English language arts: speaking, listening, reading, and writing (English Learner Tool Kit, 2018). Further, ESSA required that the standards for ELLs to be closely aligned with the rigorous academic standards of each state. ESSA encourages schools to develop plans for family involvement, specifically, the families of ELLs (Title III, 2019). Finally, ESSA requires school districts who receive Title III funds to attain growth in both English language proficiency and academic achievement (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).

As a result of these court cases and legislation passed, advances have been made, but “LEAs and instructional leaders [have] considerable latitude in EL program design and implementation” (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016, p. 466). There is still much work left to be done in establishing clear guidelines for ELL education. Today, most states still have few guidelines and exactly how ELLs are accommodated is left up to individual districts, and even individual schools in some cases (Haneda & Alexander, 2015). The guidelines given by ESSA are:

“each State plan shall demonstrate that the State has adopted English language proficiency standards that: (i) are derived from the 4 recognized domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing; (ii) address the different proficiency levels of English learners; and (iii) are aligned with the challenging State academic standards” (ESSA, 2015).

There remains a need for further research and streamlining of programs and funding to meet ELL needs.

### **Identification of English Language Learners**

The population of ELLs is by far the fastest growing population in American schools (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019). ELLs are defined as those students who are learning English along with learning subject areas in a native language, within the context of an ESL program (Webster & Lu, 2012). These learners are not necessarily all immigrants, but many are. Many of these learners were born in the United States, but another language was spoken predominately in their homes (Webster & Lu, 2012). ESSA recognized that ELLs are not a homogenous group of learners (Non-regulatory guidance..., 2016). This is an extremely diverse group of learners with varying needs. This act required that their needs be met and allowed for local education agencies to make decisions regarding what is best for their populations (Non-regulatory guidance..., 2016). So, while the variances of ESL programs could be considered a negative aspect of the act, in reality, it can be a positive one. Allowing for the flexibility needed based on the local population of the specific school district is a benefit to the ELLs in that it allows LEAs to target the needs of their communities and spend the money they are allotted accordingly (Title III..., 2019).

The parameters for identifying an ELL according to ESSA apply to a learner who:

- “1) is aged 3 through 21;
- 2) is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;
- 3) meets one of the following criteria—
  - a) was not born in the United States, or whose native language is a language other than English;

- b) is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency (ELP); or
  - c) is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant—  
and
- 4) has difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language, that may be sufficient to deny the individual
- a) the ability to meet the challenging state academic standards;
  - b) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or
  - c) the opportunity to participate fully in society” (Non-Regulatory Guidance..., 2016, p. 43).

These new guidelines for classifying an ELL are much more encompassing than past definitions and allow educators a more comprehensive way of classifying learners (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). There are many variables that can determine when a student qualifies as an ELL, and these updated guidelines help to identify ELLs who might have been left out of this subgroup in the past (Non-Regulatory Guidance, 2016).

The ELL population in American schools increased in size by 57% between the years of 1995 and 2005 (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019). In 2018, one in five students in America spoke a language other than English at home (Villegas, Saizde-LaMora, Martin, & Mills, 2018). In the 2013-2014 school year, 9.3% of students enrolled in public schools in the United States were

ELLs and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) predicts that this number will soar to 20% in the next decade. In California, one in five students is an ELL, and that number is expected to reach 25% within the next five years. NCES predicts that by 2030, 40% of all students in American schools will be ELLs.

ELLs are a diverse group of learners. They cannot be grouped into a single set of learners. Their backgrounds and educational needs are as diverse as the learners themselves; therefore, specialized programs for their instruction are needed.

### **Challenges of ELLs in School Settings**

There are many unique challenges that ELLs face in American schools. Barrow and Markman-Pithers (2016) put it his way, “Simply put, children with poor English skills are less likely to succeed in school and beyond” (p. 159). This statement is the crux of the issue ELLs are facing. The performance gap between ELLs and their non-ELL peers is often explained in research by factors such as lack of background experiences, lack of parent education, and poverty (Abedi & Herman, 2010). Language barriers are only one aspect of their struggle. By ensuring solid language acquisition, one area of risk for future lack of success is eliminated.

One issue is that ELLs are unrepresented in advanced placement and gifted education programs when compared with their native English-speaking peers (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2017). There are many reasons proposed for this gap, and the consensus is that educators have deep held beliefs that ELLs are inferior in intellect due to the language barrier (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2017). These deep held, often subconscious prejudices have a profoundly negative impact on ELLs. ELLs are more likely than non-ELLs to come from families of a low socio-economic status (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Students who come from poorer families are less likely to have exposure to a variety of experiences. This puts them at an academic disadvantage

(Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). They explain that not only do ELLs have the disadvantage of being an English learner to overcome, but they also often have the disadvantage of poverty to overcome. These disadvantages often mask academic or intellectual potential as they also do in other marginalized populations (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).

Similarly, ELLs are misrepresented in special education programs when compared with non-ELL peers in both over-representation and under-representation depending on the school level being analyzed (August, et al., 2016). While there appears to be an over-representation in special education programs in the later years of school, at the elementary age, learning differences of ELLs are often attributed to only language acquisition delays; therefore, special education services are not given until later years and during the pivotal, developing years of early childhood education, these children are not being given what they need to be successful (Kangas, 2014). When students enter American schools in later years as ELLs, they are often placed in special education programs for learning disabilities simply because of language barriers (Kangas, 2014). Without thorough evaluation and in-depth analysis of previous school experiences, learning differences and disabilities in ELLs are likely to be missed (Kangas, 2014). This trend of misrepresenting ELLs in special programs is concerning because being more proficient in English and having a more rigorous education is closely correlated with earning higher wages as an adult. In fact, “researchers have estimated that a person who speaks English poorly earns roughly 33 percent less than one who speaks English well” (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016, p. 165). Educators need to ensure that ELLs are being allowed to meet their full academic potential.

Another issue plaguing ELLs is the lack of credentialed educators available to teach them (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). From 2011 to 2014, the number of ESL educators remained

virtually unchanged, at 345,000 (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). This is alarming in that the number of ELLs increased dramatically in that time span. Barrow and Markman-Pithers explained that short-term projections show a need for a 24% increase of ESL educators to meet the growing demand. This demand is not expected to be met.

### **Testing**

Each year American students in grades four and eight take the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Tellez and Manthey, 2015). In 2009, the overall scores of all students increased. Unfortunately, the scores of Hispanic students did not. In 2009, 44% of white students achieved scores at or above the proficiency level, and only 17% of Hispanic students did the same. While certainly not all of the ELLs in the United States are of Hispanic descent, 80-85% of them are (Tellez & Manthey, 2015). Because they are such a large majority of the ELL population, looking at their test data is beneficial (Tellez & Manthey, 2015). This population of learners is large, and their test scores are clearly indicating that our educational system is not doing enough to meet their learning needs.

With the enactment of NCLB, yearly testing of ELLs was mandated. The intention of this requirement was noble, to ensure that the ELL population was making progress, but it fell short in helping this population of learners. As part of ESSA, some of the testing was overhauled to better meet the needs of ELLs (Non-regulatory guidance..., 2016). Testing was shifted to focus on the standards for ELLs and began to become more uniform. Under NCLB, 95% of all students were required to be included in testing (Non-regulatory guidance..., 2016). This was a positive step, in that it forced schools to address the needs of their ELL populations, but it was also restricting. The parameters established made it impossible to attain the goal (Non-regulatory guidance..., 2016). Under the testing guidelines for ESSA, all ELLs must be assessed yearly, but

they are measured based on growth as opposed to a specific number or level of achievement (Non-regulatory guidance..., 2016). This positive step further encouraged educators to address their needs early on so that growth can be measured. Unfortunately, with all of the advancements, the ESSA still has negative issues.

The ESSA requires that ELLs receive rigorous instruction in all subject areas, but the standards are still not attainable in many cases (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Additional interventions and more specialized teaching are needed in many cases. Despite all of the improvements in accountability and standards, ELLs consistently perform two grade levels behind their peers on state standardized testing (Villegas et al., 2018). Many interventions are already in place, yet it seems more specialized instruction needs to be implemented (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016). The gap in achievement on testing is particularly blaring in literacy (Villegas et al., 2018.) The Common Core initiative that many states have adopted comes with increasing demands for vocabulary acquisition, both in content areas and literacy (August et al., 2016). This is a further disadvantage for ELLs.

The recent shift to the Common Core standards brought with it a much greater emphasis on academic vocabulary (Roskos & Neuman, 2014). Students in elementary school are now expected to read nonfiction texts with complex sentence structures in addition to stories and other fiction texts (Roskos & Neuman, 2014). Allen and Park (2015) explained that learning English in academic settings can be even further complicated because terms in conversational English take on different meanings in academic contexts. Vocabulary is a foundation for learning to read, and yet, the vocabulary of an ELL typically shows a significant deficit when compared to native English-speaking peers (Roskos & Neuman, 2014). While an ELL's vocabulary is increasing rapidly, the content area terms needed for academic success are not building up as



quickly as necessary. There is a two to three-year gap between conversational proficiency in English and academic vocabulary proficiency (Allen & Park, 2015). Teaching academic vocabulary in isolation might help to shrink that gap, but with the lack of pull-out services for ELLs, vocabulary is not being taught in isolation in most school settings. According to SLA, however, language is best developed through interaction and engagement in a natural setting, such as with peers in a general education classroom (van der Walt, 2013).

There is substantial research that shows the size of a child's vocabulary is solidly linked to success in reading proficiency (Roskos & Neuman, 2014). There is research that points to a need for earlier intervention in vocabulary instruction for ELLs (Alharbi, 2015; Sato & Hodge, 2016). Second Language Acquisition Theory (SLA) (van der Walt, 2013) asserted that language is acquired along the way, not in isolated settings. Research suggests that students must be given opportunities to interact and engage in the culture while at the same time be taught content vocabulary (Sato & Hodge, 2016). In recent years, vocabulary learning has come to the forefront in ESL and is beginning to be recognized as a needed, if not crucial, component of language acquisition (Hazrat & Hessamy, 2013). Vocabulary teaching should be even more explicit than other areas of reading instruction. Hazrat and Hessamy (2013) argued that having a solid knowledge of vocabulary leads to success in reading, writing, speaking, and listening; therefore, it should be an integral part of ESL instruction. Because vocabulary is such a dominant part of the Common Core standards, ELLs will require additional support in meeting the heavily academic vocabulary demands on standardized tests (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016). It would seem that vocabulary instruction needs to become an integral part of the teaching of all content areas in classrooms (Sato & Hodge, 2016). This would both meet the demands of the rigorous Common Core Standards and foster language development in ELLs.

### **Social versus Academic Language**

While a student may appear proficient in areas such as conversation, he or she is most likely not proficient academically for quite a length of time (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016).

Teachers must build an atmosphere of acceptance and one where risk-taking is encouraged (Pereira, & Gentry, 2013). Students must be allowed to feel comfortable, yet be challenged to attempt new tasks so that students continue to strive for success in their new language.

### **Graduation Rates**

Perhaps the most alarming data shows that ELLs in the United States have only a 63% high school graduation rate. This is compared to an 85% graduation rate for native English speakers in the United States (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). High school graduation is an indicator of later financial independence and success; therefore, it is an issue that needs addressing in ELL education (Academic Performance and Outcomes for English Learners, 2021). There have been some advances in studies, but further work is needed, particularly at the elementary level, as early intervention is a key factor in ELL success (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2017). Research shows that when interventions are put in place in the early years of education, results tend to be better (Eun, 2016). One strategy of improving the graduation rate of ELLs is to foster an environment of success from the beginning (Eun, 2016). Students should feel welcome and connected to their classes.

There exists a noticeable gap in academic success between ELLs and their peers at the high school level (Haneda, & Alexander, 2015). Closing this gap earlier by targeting the specific educational needs of ELLs in the elementary years could help to shrink this gap, but that is not enough. Many ELLs enter American schools in the later years of their education. High school-aged ELLs often feel isolated in classroom settings because of language and culture barriers.

This isolation is one factor that contributes to ELLs dropping out of school (Solari, Petscher, & Folsom, 2014). Students who do not feel a connection to the school, will leave more freely (Solari, Petscher, & Folsom, 2014). There have been some advances in studies, but further work is needed particularly at the elementary level, as early intervention is a key factor in ELL success (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2017).

### **General Model of English as a Second Language Instruction**

In the United States, there is no standard service delivery model for ESL instruction, although there are loose guidelines (Allen & Park, 2015). The ESSA provided oversight for how ELLs are to be taught, but purposely left specific programming decisions up to the LEAs (Non-Regulatory Guidance, 2016). Schools in a rural or agricultural setting oftentimes have different needs than those in urban settings. For example, one-third of America's ELLs are in the state of California (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Of those, most are in urban settings. In more rural settings, like Nebraska, which has a rapidly growing ELL population, the educational needs might look very different. Leaving the decisions for the specifics up to the schools makes sense, however, it can lead to inconsistencies. It is widely accepted that ELLs should spend the majority of their time in the general education setting, and they should receive push-in support from an ESL instructor (Eun, 2016). As opposed to pull-out programs, the trend is to include ELLs in the general classroom and have push-in ESL services. A push-in model is not necessarily an unjustified approach because research has shown that students learn better through socialization and experience (Eun, 2016). However, mainstreaming ELLs places the burden of educating them entirely on the classroom teacher (Song, 2016).

The law requires that students be tested in order to receive placement in ESL programs as well as to exit these programs and that their progress is continually monitored (King & Bigelow,

2018). A key aspect of NCLB was that a suspected ELL must be tested within 30 days of entering a school to determine eligibility for ESL programs. Following placement, ELLs must be tested yearly to measure progress. In the United States, 35 states as well as Washington D.C. and Department of Defense Education Activity schools use the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) to determine English proficiency levels in reading, writing, speaking and listening (WIDA Consortium, 2020). ACCESS for ELLs is a proficiency test given to ELLs in grades K-12 (WIDA Consortium, 2020). Its intended purpose is to monitor progress of ELLs toward ELP by assessing each student yearly (King & Bigelow, 2018). There are 6 levels of proficiency on the ACCESS: Level 1: Entering; Level 2: Emerging; Level 3: Developing; Level 4: Expanding; Level 5: Bridging; and Level 6: Reaching (WIDA Consortium, 2020.) When students reach level 5, they are considered able to participate fully in all academic areas of school without support (WIDA Consortium, 2020). It is generally at this level that students exit the formal ESL program and are placed on monitor status.

The average time requirement for an ELL to achieve proficiency in English is five to seven years (Alexander, 2017). Some research even points to ELLs needing as much as nine – eleven years (Alexander, 2017). Guidelines laid out from the NCLB legislation suggest that students be moved out of ESL programs within three years (Alexander, 2017). This rush to move them out leads to perpetuating the problem of them remaining behind their peers (Alexander, 2017). In some ways, this model seems appropriate. Eun (2016) explains that ELLs learn best when they are learning alongside their peers. They develop a better understanding of the culture and language needed to effectively interact with their peers and in an academic environment (Eun 2016). Unfortunately, many are not yet ready for this move and they fall farther behind

(Polat et al., 2016). Another issue with this timeline is the shift in some states to require all students to be on grade level in reading by the end of third grade to avoid retentions (Winke & Zhang, 2019). For example, in Michigan special exemptions remain for students in special education or ESL programs, but with stipulations (Winke & Zhang, 2019). In Michigan, all students who have been in ESL programs for more than three years must meet the grade level proficiency requirements (Winke & Zhang, 2019). This new timeline is at odds with what research has shown is needed for ELLs to develop proficiency.

### **Teacher Efficacy and Attitude**

With the prevalence of ELLs in American schools, it is alarming that most general education teachers feel ill-equipped to meet the diverse needs of the ELL students (Télliez, & Manthey, 2015). ELLs are more likely than their peers to be taught by teachers who do not have the proper credentials or certifications to teach them (Abedi & Herman, 2010). It is believed that teacher efficacy has a strong influence on teacher performance, which affects student outcomes (Duffin & French, 2012). Further, teachers who have feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy will be more intrinsically motivated to work at meeting the needs of their ELLs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci explained that when teachers are more intrinsically motivated in their teaching, their students show more growth. These student outcomes include both motivation and achievement. Most classroom teachers see meeting the needs of ELLs as a frustrating and peripheral task (Song, 2016). Many feel this task should be left to the ESL teachers. This is profoundly concerning as ELLs spend an overwhelming majority of their time with classroom teachers (Song, 2016). To function productively in a general education setting, ELLs must navigate an environment that is complex and multi-layered (Jang, 2016). ELLs are not only attempting to master the content area of the classroom, but they are also working to master this

content in a new language. Decisions must be made by the teacher to implement lessons that are appropriate from a sociocultural standpoint and address the academic and language needs of the ELLs, and yet, most classroom teachers do not feel that they have been adequately prepared and trained to make the decisions necessary to meet the complex needs (Sato & Hodge, 2016). Abedi and Herman (2010) argued that not only are these teachers feeling that are not well-equipped, but that they genuinely are not well-equipped. Although the ESSA requires that teachers in ESL teaching positions are certified in that area, sadly, that is not always possible (Abedi & Herman, 2010). These feelings of incompetence can lead to a lack of motivation toward improving pedagogy of education for ELLs (Ryan & Deci, 2016).

Research shows that teacher attitudes toward teaching ESL have a profound impact, whether negative or positive, on success (Musanti, 2017). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) explain that there is a direct relationship between a teacher's sense of efficacy and student achievement. When teachers' efficacy is stronger, student achievement is stronger, behavior is better, and the students' sense of efficacy increases (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). While there has been an increase in preservice teacher training in ESL strategies, on-going professional development is sorely lacking (Pereira, & Gentry, 2013). Polat (2010) explains that 90% of an ELL's time is spent with general education teachers who are either not adequately trained or who hold devastating beliefs about the abilities of ELLs, or in some cases both. Many classroom teachers hold deep beliefs that ELLs are not as capable academically as their English-native peers (Pereira & Gentry, 2013). That issue is compounded by the issue of teachers not feeling equipped (Song, 2016).

Research also suggests that teachers who have a strong sense of efficacy are more willing to attempt new teaching strategies and can adapt and move forward, even when things do not go

as planned (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). When efficacy beliefs are strong, it is likely that teachers will attempt to implement new strategies to meet the needs of all learners, ELLs included. To shift negative attitudes to positive attitudes, teachers must have adequate training to meet the needs of all students. This requires extensive professional development (PD) in meeting the needs of students acquiring English. Musanti (2017) explains that “there is significant consensus in the literature that effective PD should be situated in schools and grounded in teachers’ practice to create relevant opportunities for teacher learning” (p. 294). Classroom teachers are responsible for almost all the education of ELLs, and they remain grossly undertrained in the best ways to meet their needs.

Highly effective teaching practices are necessary for the academic success of all students (Hall et al., 2017). Because students come to school from varied backgrounds, with different experiences, different interests, and different strengths and weaknesses, a one size fits all approach is not suitable (Adesope et al., 2011). Although interest and debate among researchers and policy makers has steadily increased regarding the most effective teaching practices for ELLs, the debate continues, and the results are conflicting (Adesope, et al., 2011).

Without support and professional development, teachers may not feel that they can meet the needs of their ELLs (Musanti, 2017). Access to professional development and support can increase teacher efficacy toward ESL instruction (Coates, 2016). Song (2016) argued that professional development should be given, and then coaching should take place in the teacher’s classroom. This feedback and support will allow the teachers to gain the confidence they need in a supportive atmosphere (Song, 2016). Schools and teacher-preparatory programs providing sound, research-based strategies, and methods for teachers will lead to higher achievement for

ELLs. The higher achievement will lead to increased proficiency and more acceptance within their new setting (Coates, 2016). A positive chain reaction will be set in motion.

### **Early Educational Experiences for ELLs**

Early Educational Experiences Research clearly establishes that students need strong and positive experiences in early education in order to establish productive learning habits and optimistic attitudes toward school and learning in general (Coates, 2016; Eun, 2016; Lumbrears & Rupley, 2017). These first experiences will shape the remainder of their years in school.

Latino children, which make up approximately 80% - 85% of ELLs in the United States, enter schools far less ready than their native English-speaking counterparts (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019). This population of learners as a whole, enters school at a disadvantage due to socio-economic factors as well as language barriers (Gottfried, 2017). ELLs often come from backgrounds of poverty and have a lack of exposure when compared to their peers (Gottfried, 2017). Children who have much exposure to high-quality literature and experiences in their early years are introduced to a richer vocabulary before entering school (Roskos & Neuman, 2014). Children build up a substantial “storehouse of knowledge through interaction with books” (Roskos & Neuman, 2014, p. 508) even before learning to read. The exposure that ELLs might have will likely have been in their native language, therefore, might not be readily available for use in classroom situations (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019).

The lack of exposure to literature and experiences contribute to the inability to build a substantial academic vocabulary. This is further compounded by the notion that many immigrant parents wish for their children to retain some of their native culture; thus, they speak very limited English at home (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019). Retaining their native language and culture is not a detriment to their education. There is much evidence that points to advantages in the long-term



for retaining their primary culture as well as being bilingual, and yet being bilingual is not encouraged or fostered in most American schools (Singh et al., 2018). Some of these advantages include long-term economic and social opportunities, higher levels of executive functioning, and a correlation between bilingualism and academic success (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). While all of these advantages sound appealing, there has been little to no consistency and implementation of programs to support bilingualism in schools (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Being bilingual opens up opportunities for employment and social interactions that may not be otherwise available (Petrzela, 2010). People with a bilingual background may be quicker to understand and appreciate differences in cultures and better understand various social situations (Petrzela, 2010). These perceived advantages require additional research to determine if they are indeed playing a part in the long-term success of ELLs.

### **Meeting the Academic Needs of ELLs**

The needs of learners are becoming more diverse each year, and teachers are often left unaware of how to reach the students (Eun, 2016). While it is recognized that the needs of ELLs should be met, determining the best ways to accomplish that is still a work in progress (Allen & Park, 2015). As there has been a dramatic increase in the population of ELLs in schools, it seems there has been an increase in the advice on ways to teach these students with little consensus of what is best (Allen & Park, 2015). Minimal pre-service education is given to teachers in educating ELLs, and even less is given as professional development to in-service teachers (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019). A recent increase in pre-service teacher training in ESL has been noted, however, it has been isolated to those areas in which there are concentrated populations of ELLs (Gottfried, 2014). As recent data suggests, the population of ELLs is no longer only

growing in limited areas, rather, the trends are showing that the population is increasing in all areas, while still heavily concentrated in places such as California (Gottfried, 2014).

### **Research for Elementary-Aged ELLs**

Despite teachers feeling ill-equipped, there is a significant amount of research on teaching ELLs (Moore, Hammond, & Fetherston, 2014). The issue is not that the information is not available to teachers, it is more of an issue of finding the support needed to explore and implement the best practices that are laid out in research (Abedi & Herman, 2010). Research demonstrates that success at the elementary age is a critical factor in determining long-term success of all students (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2017). These early years are laying the groundwork for all the learning that will happen over the course of students' education. Early success in school has strong correlations to long-term success of ELLs (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2017). The education of elementary-aged ELLs then seems of the utmost importance. In a sense, the early years must be capitalized upon (Daniel & Pray, 2017).

Research consistently shows a strong correlation between vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension gains in ELLs and yet, this component is often neglected in their education (Wang, 2014). In order to comprehend what is being read, a student must extract and then construct meaning from the text and then interact with the text and activity while being immersed in a sociocultural environment (Garcia & Godina, 2017). ELLs do not typically have the vocabulary knowledge to meet this demand (Wang, 2014). Almost all reading instruction and learning about reading happens in elementary school (Moore et al., 2014). As students progress through school, reading shifts from being something that is learned, to a way students acquire knowledge. In other words, in elementary school, students learn to read, and in later years, they

read to learn. Clearly the elementary years are when the bulk of ESL instruction should happen, whenever possible (Wang, 2014). This notion warrants additional research.

There are five essential components of literacy according to Read Naturally ("Essential Components of Reading," 2021). The components are phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency as the first four, and then the four parts are encompassed with reading comprehension, the fifth component. The recommended approach to teaching is to integrate these components into a balanced literacy approach (Douglas, V., 2016). Because of the shift away from vocabulary being taught as a distinct skill of literacy, it has been given little attention in research. Research into the need for educators to swing back to teaching vocabulary, in particular to ELLs, is warranted.

### **Unique Academic Needs of ELLs**

ELLs are not only trying to navigate the academic environment, but they are also doing so while learning a new culture and language (Eun, 2016). These learners face unique challenges, and often strategies that work successfully for native English speakers are not adequate for ELLs. At other times, however, the same strategies are effective. In the past, teachers were taught to look at language acquisition as a linear process in which step A leads directly to step B (van der Walt, 2013). There is no support in research for the method of teaching "step-by-step, from one grammatical building block to another - each block carefully and precisely placed, once and for all" (van der Wait, 2013, p. 72). This concept holds for both primary language acquisition as well as second language acquisition. In both processes, learners must navigate and learn through socializing and interacting within an environment (Eun, 2016). Much like in Vygotsky's (1981) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), differentiated instruction allows students to reach success just outside of their abilities (Danish, Saleh, Andrade, & Bryan,

2017; Thompson, 2013). Given the support they need, ELLs can acquire the needed vocabulary to navigate their new language (Eun, 2016). Thompson (2013) argued that through social interaction and teacher support, ELLs have the potential to read and write above their independent levels, in line with Vygotsky's ZPD. Thompson explained, however, the specific support needed is left up for debate. Support can include picture cues for vocabulary, audio texts, graphic organizers, peer helpers, and ESL support teachers (Ariza & Hancock, 2003). These strategies are considered effective for all learners, but particularly so for ELLs. The needed supports for ELLs show the need for teachers to be well-trained and armed with as many resources as possible to meet the academic demands of teaching ELLs.

Additional supports such as ESL teachers who push-in to the classroom and co-teach have been shown to benefit ELLs (Eun, 2016). It can take an ELL many years to become proficient in the English language; most research points to a period of four to seven years needed (Moore et al., 2014), and yet schools are encouraged to move students out of the ESL program within three years under current guidance (Alexander, 2019). Many ELLs have been culturally deprived and need additional time to navigate a new culture successfully (Eun, 2016). Having specific ESL teachers in the general education classrooms to co-teach provides a much-needed bridge for the language gap that is present. Unfortunately, funding is not readily available to support co-teaching (Eun, 2016). Rather than using a co-teach model, most schools are forced to use a pull-out program in order to have contact with more students at one time. In this model, students in several classes can be pulled together at one time and brought to an alternate location for specific language lessons. While there is support for this being an effective piece to the ESL puzzle, it is not considered the best practice if it is the only service the ELLs are receiving. Teaching and learning are very social experiences (Télez & Manthey, 2015). Taking the natural

social aspects out of the learning process would run counter to what is known about how students learn.

### **Teacher Efficacy, Self-Determination, and Second Language Acquisition Theory**

Teachers must have confidence in their abilities to meet the needs of the ELLs in their classrooms as well as in the programs they are being asked to implement (Deci & Ryan, 2008). There is a direct correlation to teacher efficacy and student success (Reeve, 2006). Hansen-Thomas and Grosso (2013) proposed an insightful issue with teacher professional development. They explained that while pre-service teacher training is a balance of theory and methods, in-service professional development is almost always methods. Further, the methods presented are most often practically based ideas that can be implemented quickly without much time for study. They argued that rather than giving teachers surface level professional development that is limited to a specific district initiative, teachers should be provided with professional development that allows for collaboration with other teachers who are experienced in the same teaching areas, as well as with cross-curricular professionals (Hansen-Thomas & Grosso, 2016). Teachers must be provided with sound professional development that digs deep into both methods and theory, so that teachers can meet the needs of their diverse learners. By improving the professional development in which teachers participate, teacher efficacy can increase.

General education teachers must be well-equipped with the skills needed to meet the very special needs of the ELLs who are placed in their classrooms (Hansen-Thomas & Grosso, 2013). While there is still a great amount of conflicting information on the best ways to teach ELLS, most experts agree that at a minimum, a teacher must understand “the processes of second language (L2) and literacy learning “(Hansen-Thomas & Grosso, 2013, p. 2). This process of acquiring a second language is encompassed in SLA. Hansen-Thomas and Grosso argued that

while certain best practices of teaching are instinct-based, or picked up along the way, understanding SLA and how to teach ELLs is not one of those things. These are deep theoretical concepts that when understood early in teaching careers, and reinforced throughout, can help teachers to incorporate successfully the concepts at the heart of SLA (Hansen-Thomas & Grosso, 2013). Teachers need sound and explicit professional development in SLA and how to apply its principles in the general education classroom.

The engagement and success of students can be dependent upon the conditions of the classroom, such as a supportive teacher who has a sense of relatedness to the students (Pedota, 2015). Deci and Ryan (2008) also espouse that teachers are going to perform at their best when they have the need of relatedness met. It is generally accepted that students, particularly ELLs, learn through interaction with peers within the culture of their schools such as is outlined in SLA (Eun, 2016). This acceptance led to a shift away from pulling ELLs out of the classroom for any prolonged amount of time.

With the limiting of pull-out ESL services, the work of educating ELLs was overwhelmingly placed on the classroom teacher (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019). These are often the same teachers who have expressed the need for more training and equipping in meeting the needs of the ELLs (Sato & Hodge, 2016). Many researchers are pointing to the need to get back to co-teaching for ELLs. In the co-teach model, an ESL teacher would come into the general education classroom, this is referred to as push-in support. This model has benefits for the ELLs, the rest of the students in the classroom, and both teachers. ELLs are given what they need in that they are learning while immersed in the culture of their new language (Krashen, 1981) while the teacher is given what is needed in support with meeting the various needs of the students in the classroom (Lumbrears & Rupley, 2019). Ideally, the ESL support would be used to facilitate

smaller group teaching opportunities. ELLs would benefit from the additional support in language acquisition, while also learning the content area alongside their peers (Eun, 2016). The general education teacher would have the benefit of teaching alongside an ESL expert, thus improving her pedagogy of education for ELLs. When teaching ELLs in the context of SLA, teachers must be given support and professional development in order to have the competence they need to achieve student success. In this scenario, the teacher's needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy are all being met, (Deci & Ryan, 2000) while the needs of the ELL to learn alongside peers in the natural classroom setting are also being met (Eun, 2016).

### **Summary**

ELLs are a rapidly growing population in American schools. NCES estimates that by the year 2025, one out of four students in American schools will be an ELL. Educating English language learners is a complex undertaking. Research indicates that teachers feel a strong sense of being ill-prepared to meet the needs of the ELLs who are placed in their general education classrooms. This population has a very large representation in American schools, and the needs of these learners are quite diverse and ever-changing. While there is much research in the field of ESL education, work remains to be done. Research establishes that early intervention is a key to success in literacy, and yet, teachers are not given clear guidance as to what those early interventions should be. Employing teachers who have been able to overcome challenges to meeting the needs of ELLs is paramount to their success in becoming proficient in English and successful in their new culture. Through this phenomenological study, guided by the framework of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and second language acquisition theory (Krashen, 1981), a description was revealed of how teachers experience and overcome

challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for meeting the academic needs of English language learners in the general education setting.



## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

According to data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), by the year 2025, one in four students in American schools will be an English language learner (ELL). As a group, these learners perform below their peers in academic areas, particularly in reading (Polat, Zarecky-Hodge, & Schreiber, 2016). Further, the achievement gap between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers is progressively widening (Polat et al., 2016). It is alarming that a rapidly growing population in American schools is falling further behind, and yet, teachers are not consistently equipped and supported in their efforts to educate these learners (Sato & Hodge, 2016).

The focus of this chapter is the methods used for this phenomenological study examining the experiences of teachers who have faced and overcome the challenges associated with educating ELLs. This chapter contains a description of the role of this researcher, the research design, the participants, the setting for the research, the research question and sub-questions, and methods used to collect data. Data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are also addressed.

### **Design**

For this study, a transcendental phenomenological qualitative design was employed because the information that was being sought was not quantitative in nature: rather, insight was hoped to be gained regarding teachers' motivation and self-determination to overcome the challenges they experience when educating ELLs in order to provide evidence-based interventions and supports. A qualitative approach is appropriate when a researcher seeks to interpret phenomena that occur in real-life settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology is a

research method that seeks to understand a phenomenon as it is experienced by the individuals being studied (Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, a transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994) was selected for this study. Moustakas (1994) provides a systematic method for researchers to provide a rich description of the experiences of individuals. This study sought to describe the experiences of teachers who have self-determined to overcome barriers to implementing best practices for educating ELLs. In this method, “the aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts” (Groenwald, 2004, p. 44). Moustakas (1994) explained this as *epoché*, or a researcher setting aside beliefs, thoughts, and preconceived notions in order to, as objectively as possible, describe the experiences of those being studied. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological design was the appropriate choice for this study because it allowed this researcher to gain rich and deep descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants (Cypress, 2018). This method can be described as “entering the world” of the participant (Cypress, 2018, p. 304). For this study, ELLs refers specifically to students who are learning English along with learning in another language, in the context of an English as a Second Language (ESL) program in a school setting (“Common Acronyms,” 2021.).

### **Research Questions**

**Central Research Question:** What are the experiences of teachers who self-determine to acquire and implement best practices to meet the needs of English language learners in the general education setting??

**Sub-Question 1:** What are the experiences that motivate teachers to acquire and implement best practices for educating ELLs in the general education classroom?

**Sub-Question 2:** How do teachers develop their self-efficacy in educating ELLs in the general education classroom?

**Sub-Question 3:** What factors do teachers identify as having an impact on their self-determination to seek out and implement best practices?

### **Setting**

This study took place in virtual settings with a base in a county in the southeastern United States. Virtual methods included emails, Facebook, and shared Google files. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted via Google Meet. The main location of the research was a county in southeastern North Carolina. The county has a total population of approximately 332,000 people (“Quick Facts”, 2018). The county school district has approximately 50,000 students in grades pre-Kindergarten through twelfth. It is the fifth largest district in North Carolina out of 115 total school districts (Quick Facts, 2018). This district includes 87 schools in total; 52 of these are elementary schools, 18 are middle schools, and 17 are high schools (Quick Facts, 2018). The school district has a population that is approximately 51% male and 49% female (Quick Facts, 2018). The district has a Hispanic population of 12%, African American Population of 45%, and Caucasian population of 30% and the remaining students fall into other categories (Quick Facts, 2018). The county has an ELL population of approximately 14% and overall, is known to have a high rate of poverty with approximately 19% of its total population living below the poverty level (Quick Facts, 2018). This school district has a heavy military dependent population which tends to bring much transience (Quick Facts, 2018). The largest employer in this county is the military and a close second is the county school system (Quick Facts, 2018).

This setting was chosen due to its population of ELLs as well as its size (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was expected that there would be many classroom teachers who have experience in educating ELLs in this district due to its large size. The district employs 3,046 certified teachers in grades Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth (Quick Facts, 2018). It was also chosen due to its proximity to this researcher's home and relationship with some of the administration.

### **Participants**

For this study, participants who are general classroom teachers were purposefully selected based on the criteria of having taught at least five ELLs in a school setting, having two or more years of experience teaching ELL students, and having perceptions of high efficacy in educating students. A pool of 10 teachers was secured and thematic saturation was reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were sought from several schools in the county as well as through social media, emails, and snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A questionnaire and self-efficacy scale (see Appendix C) were sent to teachers to solicit participation and participants were selected based upon questionnaire responses, ensuring each meets the study criteria stated above. In total, 19 teachers consented to participate in the research. In the end, this researcher was able to secure ten complete data sets from participants. Participants varied in age, years of experience, and race in order to gain a broader understanding of the experiences; however, all participants were female, simply due to disproportionate number of female teachers in the elementary setting ("Quick Facts," 2018). The mean number of years teaching for the participants was 20.3 years. By carefully selecting participants who met the above criteria, it was ensured they had information and experience to add to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). See Table 1 for participant demographics.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Race	Age Range	Gender	Years' Experience	Grade Level Teaching	Location
<i>Beverly</i>	Black	55-59	Female	25	2	NC
<i>Evelyn</i>	White	50-54	Female	29	3	GA
<i>Kate</i>	White	40-44	Female	20	6	M
<i>Laura</i>	White	50-54	Female	18	K	NC
<i>Lindsey</i>	Hispanic	45-49	Female	9	3	TX
<i>Maryn</i>	White	45-49	Female	25	K	NC
<i>Melissa</i>	Black	55-59	Female	28	K	NC
<i>Natalie</i>	White	50-54	Female	22	2	NC
<i>Nora</i>	White	40-44	Female	16	5	NC
<i>Wendy</i>	White	30-34	Female	11	K	SK

Note: NC – North Carolina GA – Georgia MI – Michigan TX – Texas SK – South Korea

### Procedures

To conduct this study, the guidelines provided by Moustakas (1994) as well as the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures were followed. Conducting a thorough and detailed study is necessary to truly gain insight into the experiences of the participants (Neubauer et al., 2019). Before research began, IRB approval was secured (see Appendix A). Table 2 outlines the timeline for completion of this research (see Appendix G).

Data was collected via three formats: questionnaires, interviews, and letters of advice. Having three data sources allowed for triangulation of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to find participants that met the purposeful sampling requirements, questionnaires were sent out to teachers through personal email and Facebook using a Google Form on which participants recorded responses (see appendix C). The purpose of the above-mentioned questionnaire and

efficacy scale was to determine that potential participants met the criteria of being an elementary school teacher who had experience with teaching ELLs in a general education setting and to determine levels of efficacy held by teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Those with high efficacy scores, scores that were at least 75 out of 108, were selected and asked to participate in interviews.

Following the selection of participants, informed consent was obtained from willing participants (see Appendix B). Included in consent forms was information about the researcher, the study, an approximate timeline, and a clear explanation that participation is voluntary, and participants may leave the study at any time without penalty. Due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not an option. Interviews were set up to be conducted through Google Meet at convenient times for the participants. The interviews followed the interview protocol (see Appendix D). Open-ended questions to solicit frank responses were used throughout the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These interviews were audio and video recorded and lasted between 27 minutes and 63 minutes. A transcript from one interview is included in Appendix H. Following the interviews, teachers were asked to write letters of advice to novice teachers who might be grappling with educating ELLs (see Appendix I). These letters were used to gain a deeper understanding of the responses to the interview questions as well as to allow participants to provide deeper and richer descriptions of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The letters were written and submitted by Google Documents to allow for ease of delivery. One participant's letter is included in Appendix I. All data was securely stored on this researcher's password protected computer and in a locked drawer when in paper form. Pseudonyms for participants were used to protect their identity.

### **The Researcher's Role**

My role as the human instrument in this transcendental phenomenological study was to gather data through interacting with participants, analyze that data, and report it in such a way as to add to the body of literature on educating ELLs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an educator, I continually seek to advance the practice of teaching to allow for the most learning to take place. I have been an educator for 22 years. My experience has been varied and includes a suburban middle-class school, three Title I schools, a Christian school, and three federal schools. My classroom experience has all been in elementary schools. I graduated from Michigan State University with a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education. My master's degree is from Walden University and is in elementary reading and literacy. Most recently, I graduated from Liberty University with an education specialist degree in curriculum and instruction and I am working on my Doctor of Education (Ed. D) in curriculum and instruction at this time.

My interest in educating English language learners was developed as I saw a need for more specialized instruction for these learners. I found myself struggling to obtain the needed support for ELLs who were placed in my classroom and thought perhaps others experienced this situation and could offer insight through sharing their experiences. These experiences and insights led me to this investigation. Through the process of *epoché* mentioned below, I made a careful effort to set aside any biases that I had and view the phenomenon through a fresh lens. I had no authority over any participants in this study.

### **Data Collection**

In this section, the data collection methods for this study are addressed. Initially, after permission was secured from IRB, a demographic questionnaire and a self-efficacy scale was sent out to find participants. Following the collection and scoring of the questionnaires,

interviews were conducted. Interviews were transcribed and coded to determine themes. During the interview process, participants were asked to write letters to teachers who are novices at educating ELLs (see Appendix F). These letters shared advice and tried and true practices. All documents were stored securely, and participant information was kept confidential.

The data from the self-efficacy scale, interviews, and letters of advice was triangulated to ensure validity and capture multiple dimensions of the teachers' experiences. Having multiple sources of data increased the reliability of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection sources can include interviews, surveys, focus groups, archival records, physical artifacts, such as photographs and letters, and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, interviews, letters, and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scales were used. These multiple sources of data were integrated and used to determine patterns and allowed the researcher to gain a bigger picture understanding of the data (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

### **Questionnaire**

To determine the sense of self-efficacy that teachers have, the Teachers Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale – Short Form (TSES-SF) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) was used. The TSES-SF is a 12-item questionnaire that is self-reported (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). This questionnaire uses a 9-point Likert scale where a rating of 1 equates to “none” and a rating of 9 equates to “a great deal” (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Scores can range from 9 to 108, where a higher score equates to a higher sense of efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The TSES-SF, a copy of which is in Appendix C, was created as a way to measure efficacy in three areas of teaching that can generate sub-scores: “efficacy for managing the classroom, for engaging students, and for using different instructional strategies” (p. 827). These three factors can also be condensed into one result of teacher efficacy in general



(Nie et al., 2012). Higher scores in each area indicate a higher level of efficacy in the area (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). This instrument has its roots in the work of RAND researchers Gibson and Dembo (1984) and is framed by Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory.

While the scale was implemented to provide descriptive rather than statistical data, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) provided information on the content validity of the TSES-SF. It has been reported as having high content validity, especially when compared with other instruments designed to measure teacher efficacy (see Table 3). Cerit (2013) explained, "in research exploring the validity of TSES in five countries it was found that the TSES showed convincing evidence of reliability and validity across the five countries" (p. 259). This instrument has been rigorously evaluated and found to have high content validity and reliability (see Appendix F) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Table 3 outlines the reliability of the TSES-SF.

Table 3

*Reliability of TSES-SF*

	Long Form			Short Form		
	Mean	SD	Alpha	Mean	SD	Alpha
TSES	7.1	.94	.94	7.1	.98	.90
Engagement	7.3	1.1	.87	7.2	1.2	.81
Instruction	7.3	1.1	.91	7.3	1.2	.86
Management	6.7	1.1	.90	6.7	1.2	.86

### Interviews

In qualitative research, candid interviews are conducted in order to gain insight into the phenomenon being studied from the interviewee's perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After determining appropriate participants and obtaining their consent to participate, interviews were

conducted in a distraction-free location that was comfortable and convenient for the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These interviews lasted in the range of 27 to 63 minutes. Although there are various forms an interview can take, for this study, all interviews were conducted via Google Meet due to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that by conducting interviews, knowledge can be constructed through the personal interactions. These interviews provided opportunities for a more conversational feel and encouraged participants to share freely. Interviews were recorded with dual devices, and then following the interviews, they were transcribed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were made fully aware of the recording. Recordings did not substitute for active listening on the part of the researcher. Careful attention was given to using open-ended questions that avoided leading the participants and encouraged the conversational feel. These interviews were expected to last approximately 30 - 60 minutes, and they did fall into that approximate range.

Following the interviews and transcriptions, member checking, or participant feedback was used to ensure trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In using this technique, the data, data analyses, and interpretations were given back to the participants and they were allowed an opportunity for feedback (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking improves accuracy and validity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This technique is considered by some to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). All interviewees were asked the following questions.

### **Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions**

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. What motivated you to become a teacher?
3. What experiences have you had as a teacher? Can you describe them?

4. What experiences have you had educating diverse learners?
5. Please tell me about the first ELL you had in your class. What are your experiences specifically working with English language learners? Can you describe a specific experience with a particular student? Have you had any powerful experiences? Please describe.
6. Tell me about your most recent experience with an ELL.
7. What challenges have you faced in your experience with ELLs? Will you describe them to me?
8. What support were you provided?
9. How did you overcome the challenges you met? Or how are you overcoming them now?
10. What do you see as challenges to working with ELLs?
11. When and how have you seen success with teaching ELLs?
12. What did or does that success look like?
13. What experiences have you had working with the parents of ELLs?
14. What are the supports the families of ELLs provide?
15. What are some supports you provide to the families of ELLs?
16. What do you see as challenges to working with the families of ELLs?
17. What do you see as advantages or benefits of working with the families of ELLs?
18. What have you seen the school do to support ELLs and their families?
19. What do the administrators of your school do to encourage the inclusion of diverse learners?
20. Describe what that looks like for ELLs.

21. Please describe or tell about how the school incorporates the cultures of ELLs into the school culture.
22. What have you done to incorporate students' cultures into your own classroom?
23. Describe what your school system could do to support educators who work with ELLs.
24. What benefits would this have on ELLs?
25. Thank you for sharing all of that honest information with me. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about working with ELLs?

Questions one and two were designed to gather background information about the participant as well as to encourage open conversation to begin taking place (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following questions one and two, the remainder of the questions were designed to gather information from participants about their perceptions and experiences working with English language learners and to see what they found to be best practices. Questions three through twelve were designed to answer sub-question two, to gain insight into what techniques have helped ELLs gain success in the classroom, specifically looking at possible social support. English language learners must have opportunities for learning through socialization and exposure to culture; these questions will seek out information as to whether those opportunities are present in the classrooms of the participants (Eun, 2016).

Questions thirteen through twenty were designed to garner information about sub-question three, making connections between home and school for ELL families. There is evidence that when families are involved in the education of their students, academic achievement increases (Haneda & Alexander, 2015). This can be problematic, however, for families with language and cultural barriers (Haneda & Alexander, 2015).

Questions 21-22 sought to gather information about the inclusion of culture as a necessary aspect of learning. The research was guided by the sociocultural learning theory which asserts that culture plays an important role in learning (Eun, 2016; Ariza & Hancock, 2003). This line of questioning will investigate what teachers have found on that subject. The researcher worked under the assumption that professional development in educating ELLs is needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions 23-24 were asked to gather information about professional development and support for educators. Finally, question 25 was asked to seek any additional information that the participant might want to share. Probing questions were used as needed to elicit further responses. Yin (2018) recommends being adaptive during interviews in order to gain the most from the interaction while at the same time having a protocol and plan in place for the interview.

### **Letters of Advice**

Another data collection source for this study was letters of advice (see Appendix F). Following their interviews, participants were asked to address the following questions in a letter: What advice can you share with an educator who is a novice at educating ELLs? Are there any specific programs or resources you have found to be particularly helpful? How can teachers effectively advocate for their ELLs alongside fellow educators and administrators? What advice do you have for partnering with and incorporating the families of ELLs in the education process?

These letters were written by participants and directed to novice teachers who will be responsible for educating ELLs. This method of data collection encourages participants to share thoughts and experiences they might not share during an interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Prompts were sent via a Google Document and the letters were completed and sent to the

researcher electronically in the same format. After the letters were collected, they were analyzed for additional understandings and triangulated with interview and self-efficacy scale data.

### **Data Analysis**

This study was conducted using Moustakas' (1994) process for phenomenological research. Neubauer et al. (2019) provide this concise definition of phenomenology: "phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it" (p. 93). By carefully following the steps of this approach, a researcher can have success in discovering the experiences of the participants (Neubauer et al., 2019). The steps as outlined by Moustakas (1994) are (a) *epoché*, (b) open coding, (c) horizontalization, (d) clustering into themes, (e) textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon, (f) imaginative variation, and (g) synthesis.

### **Scoring the TSES-SF**

One data collection method of this study was the Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy – Short Form (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). This instrument gathers responses on efficacy in student engagement, efficacy in instructional practices, and efficacy in classroom management (Chang & Engelhard, 2016). The scale uses a nine-point Likert scale where a score of one equates to "none at all" and a score of nine represents "a great deal." For this study, a score that is a seven or higher represented a strong sense of efficacy. An overall score of 75 out of 108 indicated that a teacher has a high sense of self-efficacy across all three areas. In this study, the TSES-SF was used to identify teachers who have a strong sense of efficacy in the areas of student engagement and instructional strategies. Of particular interest were the responses to items nine through twelve. These items have to do with the subscales for student engagement

and instructional strategies. They were analyzed alongside the need to focus on alternative strategies to meet the needs of learners and supporting the families of learners (Chang & Engelhard, 2016). Teachers who were identified as having strong efficacy were asked to participate in interviews and to write letters of advice. Teachers' responses to individual items on the TSES-SF were analyzed and triangulated with the significant statements that were revealed from the interviews and letters of advice.

### **Epoché**

Moustakas (1994) defined *epoché* as refraining “from judgement, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary ways of perceiving things” (p. 33). In order to accomplish this, this researcher suspended personal ideas and experiences as an educator and sought to analyze the responses of the participants apart from personal judgements. This researcher found a quiet place and time to focus on only the phenomenon and while doing this through journaling “set aside biases and prejudgments and return[ed] with a readiness to look again into my life” (p. 89). This practice of “reflective meditation” (p. 89) was repeated as needed, as recommended by Moustakas (1994). The practice can be seen in Appendix M. After each step in this process, as well as after each interview, there was time given to ponder the information read and responses of the participants. The information and responses were read and reread carefully to avoid taking understanding for granted. Careful attention was paid to the meaning of what was being read and personal assumptions were pushed aside (see Appendix M).

### **Open Coding**

The next step in the data analysis process is open coding. To complete this process, all statements from the participants were organized into groups and analyzed. By reading the transcripts multiple times, significant statements were identified (Moustakas, 1994). Katsirikou

and Lin (2017) explained that through the process of open coding, a researcher identifies key ideas and categories and assigns labels to them based on their properties. To complete this step in the research, survey responses and significant statements from interviews and advice letters were analyzed for meaningful categories. With an open mind, data was read repeatedly, with attention to common words, phrases, and ideas. These smaller units were assigned labels. Through this process, themes were identified (Moustakas, 1994). To assist in open coding as a tool for storing, organizing, and categorizing information, Atlas.ti software was used. This software assisted in organizing and visually identifying themes and was a helpful tool to aid the process of triangulation.

### **Horizontalization**

Moustakas (1994) explained that in phenomenology, all data must be received by the researcher with equal value. This process of treating all data equally is referred to as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). To complete horizontalization, the data was reduced by replacing similar vocabulary and terms with common language. To start, all coded data was grouped according to the significant statements and codes applied during open coding as they were identified (see Appendix K). Each participant's data were analyzed both individually and among the various themes. This grouping assisted with finding commonalities amongst the data. Following preliminary groupings, irrelevant data that was not a part of the lived experience of the participant was eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). This process was the earliest part of the theme development.

### **Textural Descriptions**

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the textural description provides a description of *what* was experienced, and the structural description describes, using some imagination, *how* it



was experienced. From the emerging themes that were discovered in the data, a description was constructed of the actual experiences of the participants. These experiences were included word-for-word and each were considered equally among all the others, as they each contributed to building an understanding of the participants' experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). These textural descriptions painted a picture of what the participants experienced (Moustakas, 1994) (see Appendix L).

### **Structural Description and Imaginative Variation**

Following the textural descriptions, the data was looked at in terms of *how* the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this stage of data analysis, the data was analyzed for possible meanings. This was done by changing the researcher's frames of reference by looking at it through the lens of classroom teacher, through the lenses of self-determination theory and second language acquisition theory, and according to what research says about English language learners (Moustakas, 1994). All possible meaning was sought, and differing perspectives considered because, as Moustakas explained, the researcher must play with the data and approach it from different perspectives. By reading and rereading the data through different lenses, it was reduced to what was then considered its essence (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation of data is a process of analyzing data across forms of data collected to determine if there is a convergence of themes across variants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Triangulation is effective because "multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill" (Patton, 1999, p. 1192). To achieve triangulation in this study, scores from the TSES-SF, interview transcripts, and letters of advice were analyzed for

consistent themes. The scores from TSES-SF were used to identify teachers who have a strong sense of efficacy in any or all of three areas: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. This data was looked at and compared with the significant statements from interviews and letters to determine if patterns are consistent across the three pieces of data collected from each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consistency was seen in that areas of high efficacy were related to areas where teachers self-determined to overcome obstacles and saw success.

### **Synthesis**

This final step in data analysis is intended to convey what the participants experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Data from the TSES-SF, interviews, and the letters of advice were synthesized to uncover the experiences of the participants. Through this synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions, a clear understanding of the participants' experiences was provided as the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Trustworthiness**

Researchers have an obligation to ensure all data is represented as accurately as possible (Ary et al., 2018). Ary et al. (2018) suggested that researchers must provide assurances that this obligation was met. Careful consideration was made to meet this obligation. This study employed trusted methods for phenomenological research including those recommended by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth (2018). The following subsections address steps this researcher took to increase the credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability of findings from this transcendental phenomenological study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility was ensured by following known data collection protocol for phenomenological research. Time was given to conduct a thorough study. This study was framed by two known theoretical frameworks; self-determination theory and second language acquisition theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Results were analyzed in light of what current research says about the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation was achieved by looking at multiple points of data that included interviews, self-efficacy surveys, and written responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking was used to ensure accuracy in reporting the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final transcribed interview responses and analyses were shared with participants. No feedback was given, other than expressions of interest and praise.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the aspect of research that ensures the methods used are in line with accepted procedures for a particular design and that they were used consistently (Korstjens, & Moser, 2018). Focusing on dependability ensures that although changes might have occurred throughout the research process, careful steps were taken to produce reliable results (Connelly, 2016). Several steps were taken to ensure dependability. Member checking, or participant feedback was employed as one method to attain dependability. In this technique, the researcher took the data, analyses, and interpretations back to the participants and allowed opportunity for feedback (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking improved accuracy and validity of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This researcher solicited the views of the participants and offered them the chance to provide feedback and needed changes to the transcripts of the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This technique is considered by some to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Creswell, & Poth, 2018, p. 261). Additionally, an audit trail helped

to establish confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An audit trail was maintained for all documents, to include surveys, efficacy surveys, and letters. All documentation was maintained in an orderly fashion to ensure the findings match the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability has to do with the findings of the research being based on the experiences of the participants, rather than the biases of the researcher (Connelly, 2016). The data presented was that of the participants' experiences. Member checking took place to allow participants to share feedback on the accuracy of the data (Connelly, 2016). Per Creswell and Poth (2018), careful records were kept, including an audit trail (see Appendices G through M). Additionally, peers reviewed this researcher's data, although no suggestions were offered (Connelly, 2016). These steps helped to establish confirmability.

### **Transferability**

Transferability has to do with the readers of a research report being able to take the information presented and transfer it to a similar situation or population (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that rich and thick descriptions be given whenever possible to allow the findings to be transferable. Maximum variation in participant selection was used to ensure representation of a heterogeneous group of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although all teacher participants were females, there were teachers of various ages, teachers in a variety of grade levels, and teachers who were teaching in different areas. Male teachers are disproportionately represented in elementary schools as classroom teachers ("Quick Facts," 2018). These descriptions offered insight into similar situations, such as in other schools with ELL populations. This transferability allowed the research to be applicable to the other settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were made when planning and conducting this phenomenological study. The first being, before any data was collected, IRB approval was secured (see Appendix A). After securing IRB approval, informed consent was gained from participants ensuring they were participating freely and voluntarily. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms for participants and settings. All digital information was kept password protected and any paper documentation was secured with a lock and key. Every attempt was made to keep researcher biases from interfering with the research.

### **Summary**

This phenomenological study investigated experiences that motivate elementary teachers to acquire and implement best practices meeting the needs of the ELLs in their classrooms. This chapter provided a description of the methods that were used to conduct this transcendental phenomenological investigation. The researcher's role, data collection procedures, trustworthiness considerations, and ethical considerations were discussed. Each of these areas was supported with research. The procedures outlined are based on known experts in the field of phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of teachers who have self-determined to overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for meeting the academic needs of English language learners (ELLs) in the general education (GE) setting. The next section of this chapter is a description of the sample and the individual participants. This chapter then continues with the presentation of results, which are organized by research question. A summary concludes this chapter.

### **Participants**

In phenomenological research, participants must have experienced the phenomenon to be included in the study (Moustakas, 1994). With that guidance in mind, after securing IRB approval (see Appendix A), teachers were contacted who this researcher knew from various parts of the country and were asked to fill out the screening questionnaires to determine eligibility. They were contacted through email, social media, and phone calls. After they agreed to be screened, the questionnaire and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale – Short Form (TSES-SF) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) were sent to them via Google Forms. The first part, a screening questionnaire, was used to determine that the participant met the criteria of being an elementary classroom teacher who had taught at least five English language learners and had more than 2 years of teaching experience (see Appendix C). Part two was the TSES-SF. Upon the return of the questionnaires and TSES-SF, it was first determined that those who filled out the questionnaires did meet the criteria to be a participant. After determining eligibility, the scoring methods outlined in the TSES-SF were used to determine which teachers had a high sense of efficacy. Those teachers were given consent documents (see Appendix B). Results from

the TSES-SF indicated that all 10 participants had high self-efficacy (see table 1). Thus, the findings in this study are grounded in the perspectives of teachers with high self-efficacy.

To ensure maximum saturation was reached (Moustakas, 1994), a pool of 19 participants was secured. Of those 19, eleven were interviewed (see Appendix D) and of those eleven, ten completed letters of advice (see Appendix E). Because of receiving partial data sets from some, only participants who had full data sets were included in the study. All of the ten participants were female elementary school teachers. They range in age from 32 to 58. Seven participants were Caucasian, two participants were Black, and one participant was Hispanic. The participants live in different areas of the country. Of the teachers who participated, six of them live in North Carolina and teach in three different school systems. One participant lives in Texas and one participant lives in Michigan. The final participant lives in South Korea and teaches on a U.S. military installation. Having a diverse population achieved maximum variation of the sample (Moustakas, 1994). All participant names were removed, and they were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, names of schools and counties were removed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, alternate forms of face-to-face interviews had to be conducted. All interviews were conducted via Google Meet. The interviews were recorded using Google Meet's recording technology as well as with a phone for back-up. Following each interview, this researcher transcribed it verbatim and used the speaker's grammatical errors and dialects. Following the transcriptions, member checking was completed. The transcriptions were offered to each participant to ensure accuracy (Moustakas, 1994). This was done by copying the transcription into a Google form that was shared with each participant. Table 1 indicates participants' individual demographic information. Following are descriptions of each participant.

**Beverly**

Beverly is a 2nd grade teacher who has been teaching for 25 years in grade levels K-3. She has been married for 37 years, and she and her husband have two grown daughters and one grandson. Beverly also has five brothers and two sisters. She considers teaching her calling, and she remembers wanting to become a teacher since she was a young child. Her younger daughter is also a teacher. Her overall self-efficacy score was 95. Her highest sub-category score was in engaging students.

**Evelyn**

Evelyn is a 3rd grade science teacher in her first year teaching science in a compartmentalized elementary model. However, she has taught 3rd grade for 15 years, and she has been teaching for 30 years. Evelyn stated that she first wanted to become a teacher when she “fell in love with” her own 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers as a child. She began her career as an ELA teacher for 3rd-graders, a position in which she taught many ELLs. During her career, she also taught 1st grade and 4th grade before returning to 3rd. She is married and has two sons, one of whom is in high school and the other of whom is in college. Her overall self-efficacy score was 87. Her highest sub-category scores were in engaging students and classroom management.

**Kate**

Kate identifies herself first and foremost as “a wife and a mom.” She and her husband have two young daughters. Kate always wanted to become a teacher, at least in part because she is “good with kids and just like[s] being around them.” She shared “There's something so great about showing a child something new and they catch on, it's just so cool.” She currently teaches in the school district where she went to school as a child. Her overall self-efficacy score was 79. Her highest sub-category score was in using instructional strategies.



**Laura**

Laura is a kindergarten teacher with four children of her own, two of whom are grown and two of whom are still at home. She and her husband are both veterans of the U.S. Marine Corps. She shared that she was motivated to become a teacher because, “I always liked working with kids, being around kids so much, teaching them what they're supposed to know and doing fun things, teaching, making it fun.” She began her teaching career student-teaching 1st grade, and then she taught 2nd grade, which became her favorite grade to teach. She has spent most of her career since then teaching kindergarten, although she mentioned that she would “love to go back to second grade at some point.” Her overall self-efficacy score was 102. Her highest sub-category score was in engaging students and was a 36, the highest possible score. Her enthusiasm in this area was evident in her interview.

**Lindsey**

Lindsey is the mother of three children and her husband is active-duty military. She always wanted to be a teacher, in part because of the teachers she had as a child. Her teaching career began with teaching U.S. curriculum to the ELL children of foreign diplomats, and she later taught middle school. After moving on to teach 3rd and 4th grade in a private middle school, she suspended her teaching career for more than a decade to raise her children. After she returned to teaching, she taught preschool for several years before taking her position teaching 3rd grade. Her overall self-efficacy score was 98. Her highest sub-category score was in using instructional strategies.

**Maryn**

Maryn has taught in one county for 25 years, 24 of those years as a kindergarten teacher. She teaches in the district where she went to school as a child, having returned after earning her undergraduate and master's degrees. She has two children, one of whom is grown and the other

of whom is in high school. Maryn's love of teaching comes from her love of children, and she regards it as a family trait: "I have always loved children and I knew that I wanted to make an impact in their lives. The love of teaching also runs in my family." Maryn's overall self-efficacy score was 98. Her highest sub-category score was in engaging students.

### **Melissa**

Melissa was born and raised in a rural community. The example of her 2nd grade teacher first caused Melissa to consider a teaching career herself; she said: "My 2nd grade teacher left an indelible imprint that influenced and guided my principles of teaching. She simply cared about me and my academic progress. Her positive energies ignited a spark in me that I want to inflame in others." Melissa went on to earn an undergraduate and three graduate degrees in education. She is a (retired) commissioned officer in the military as well as a minister, and she lives with her two adult children. Melissa's overall self-efficacy score was 104. Her highest sub-category score was 36, which she had in two categories, classroom management and using instructional strategies.

### **Natalie**

Natalie has been teaching for 23 years and has experience in kindergarten, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, and preschool. She has also taught preschool music classes. All of her experience has been as a GE classroom teacher, except for the preschool music classes. Natalie wanted to be a teacher for as long as she can remember, so much so that her kindergarten teacher told her mother that she fully expected Natalie to become a teacher. Natalie has extensive experience in educating ELLs. She spent several years teaching primarily children of migrant workers, during which time she was motivated by empathy and compassion to help the children feel welcome and safe.

Natalie's overall self-efficacy score was 98. Her highest sub-category score was 34, which she had in two categories: classroom management and engaging students.

### **Nora**

Nora always wanted to be a teacher because, "I've always enjoyed working with children and I wanted to help them and make a difference in their life." She has taught for the last 15 years on a military post, and all of her students have been military-connected. She enjoys the diversity of her students, who she said, "come from everywhere." She has experience teaching 1st grade and 2nd grade and is teaching 5th grade. Nora's overall self-efficacy score was 89. Her highest sub-category score was in classroom management.

### **Wendy**

Wendy wanted to be a teacher since her early childhood, when the aspect of the profession that fascinated her most was writing on the chalkboard. She began her career teaching kindergarten and first grade. She is married and the mother of two young children. Recently, Wendy relocated to teach on a military installation in South Korea. She has the unique experience of having her own children learning in schools where English is not the primary language. This gives her some insight into the experiences of ELLs. Wendy's overall self-efficacy score was 97. Her highest sub-category score was a 36 and was in using instructional strategies.

## **Results**

This presentation of the results begins with a description of the theme development process. The themes are described and include descriptions of subthemes. The results are organized thematically under the sub-questions the themes addressed.

## **Theme Development**

The analysis and triangulation of data revealed four themes. To discover these themes, the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale – Short Forms (TSES-SF) was first scored. The responses of the TSES-SF were scored and analyzed according to the guidelines given by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). An overall score of 75 or higher indicates that a teacher has a high sense of self efficacy. The participants had scores that ranged from 79 to 104, with a mean score of 94.7 (see Table 4). Additionally, scores were broken down into three sub-categories as recommended by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy: classroom management, student engagement, and using instructional strategies. The scores in the sub-category of classroom management ranged from 27 to 36 with a mean score of 31.1. The scores in the sub-category of student engagement ranged from 22 to 36 with a mean score of 31.4. Finally, scores in the sub-category of using instructional strategies ranged from 27 to 36, with a mean score of 32. Following the analysis of the TSES-SF, the interviews were analyzed and coded. The responses were categorized according to sub-question (SQ) relevance.

Table 4

*Results of TSES-SF*

Participant	Overall Score	Classroom Management	Student Engagement	Using Instructional Strategies
Beverly	95	31	33	31
Evelyn	87	30	30	27
Kate	79	28	22	29
Laura	102	32	36	34
Lindsey	98	33	30	34
Maryn	98	31	35	32
Melissa	104	36	32	36
Natalie	98	34	34	30
Nora	89	31	28	30
Wendy	97	27	34	36

**Note:** Overall scores range from 9 to 108; Sub-scores range from 9 to 36

Audio-recorded interviews with participants were transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts and letters of advice were imported into Atlas.ti computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Throughout the data analysis process, careful attention was paid to follow the steps outlined by Moustakas (1994). To accomplish *epoché*, this researcher's own ideas and experiences as an educator were suspended, and the responses of the participants were analyzed apart from personal judgements. A quiet place to spend time focusing only on the phenomenon

of interest was found. Journaling was conducted. The meditative reflection and journaling practices were repeated regularly during data analysis (see Appendix M).

The interview transcripts and advice letters were read and reread in full to identify significant statements through the process of open coding. Excerpts from the data were assigned to an Atlas.ti node. When different excerpts expressed similar meanings, they were clustered by assigning them to the same node. Each node represented an open code, and each was assigned a brief label to describe its contents. The codes identified during this step are indicated in the discussion of the themes in the Research Question Responses section of this chapter.

Horizontalization was conducted by coding all data equally without regard for its potential redundancy, as long as the excerpts coded were significant to describing participants' lived experiences. Next, the codes were reviewed to eliminate excerpts that were either irrelevant to describing participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon of interest or were redundant. Redundant and irrelevant data was excluded from further analysis.

Open codes were clustered after horizontalization when they indicated different aspects of a common, overarching theme. In Atlas.ti, nodes representing related codes were assigned to a parent node, which represented the emerging theme. Textural descriptions were then developed by grouping direct quotations from the data that described *what happened* during participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon of interest.

Following the development of the textural descriptions, the coded data was reviewed to develop structural descriptions indicating *how* the phenomenon of interest was experienced, or *what it was like* for participants to experience the phenomenon. Imaginative variation was conducted as part of this step. The data was considered from different, imaginatively adopted perspectives to identify which of the phenomenon's reported characteristics were contingent on

the specific perspectives of individual participants, and which characterized its essence across multiple participants' perspectives. The structural descriptions of how the phenomenon was experienced were developed by grouping the relevant quotations from the data (See Table 5-10).

To achieve data triangulation in this study, scores from the TSES-SF, interview transcripts, and letters of advice were analyzed for consistent themes. The scores from TSES-SF were reviewed to identify teachers who have a strong sense of efficacy in any or all of three areas: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. All 10 participants reported high self-efficacy in each of the three areas, so the findings presented in this section are from the perspectives of teachers with high self-efficacy. Findings from advice letters and interviews were used in developing the themes presented later in this chapter.

This final step in data analysis was to convey what the participants experienced by synthesizing the results from the previous steps of the analysis. The textural and structural descriptions compiled from relevant data excerpts were synthesized into composite textural-structural descriptions, which were developed in narrative form, retaining the most relevant quotations as evidence of the findings described. The composite textural-structural descriptions presented in this chapter as themes are intended to convey the essence of the phenomenon of interest as participants experienced it.

The central research question guiding this study was: What are the experiences of teachers who self-determine to acquire and implement best practices to meet the needs of English language learners in the general education setting? This central question was investigated by addressing the three sub-questions (SQs) that were developed from the central question to provide additional focus for this study. The remainder of this presentation of results is organized

by sub-question, and within sub-question by theme (i.e., composite textural-structural descriptions).

***SQ1: What Experiences Motivate Teachers to Learn and Implement Best Practices for Educating ELLs in the GE Classroom?***

A total of 48 excerpts from the interview transcripts and advice letters from the ten participants were relevant to addressing this sub-question. The 48 excerpts were compiled into three textural descriptions and three structural descriptions of the phenomenon. The six descriptions were synthesized into two composite textural-structural descriptions to indicate the essence of participants' lived experience of being motivated by their experiences to learn and implement best practices for educating ELLs. A table of the six textural and structural descriptions developed from the data related to this sub-question is included in Appendix K as Tables 5 through 10. The table also indicates how the data from the interviews and advice letters was triangulated in forming the descriptions.

**Theme One: Experiences of Success and Fulfillment in Communicating with ELL Students' Parents.** Participants described several methods they used for communicating effectively with parents. Textural descriptions indicated that adapting teacher-to parent communications was an effective technique. These methods for adaptation included using visuals, emphasizing open communication and the importance of education, and building strong relationships with parents. In an interview response, Evelyn reported that she wanted to emphasize the importance of education, stating, "I think helping them understand the importance of the education, of the importance of understanding and learning the English language, but that they just said, you know, they don't speak the language." In addition, Laura noted that different methods of communication, such as creating visuals were beneficial:



Well, I think just kind of like this year, I just kind of give them a visual now because I like to take things now and show them step-by-step how to do things on the computer.

And, you know, and I mean, not just for them, but I guess all parents. But you know that I think that helps when they can visually see something instead of just typing up an email.

Lastly, several participants identified open communication as critical to the teacher-parent relationship. For example, Maryn shared, “I just try to give the ELL student as much information up front and work with vocabulary along with the ELL teacher. I communicate with parents to explain things to them so they can help the student at home as well.” Similarly, Wendy conveyed, “Communication, always trying to keep them in the loop. They need to feel included in the education.”

Participants were motivated to learn and implement best practices for communicating with ELL students’ parents by experiences of success and fulfillment in partnering with those parents to promote student success. Textural descriptions indicated that participants sent machine-translated communications home regularly and drew on the expertise of interpreters (often ELL teachers or educational aides) during in-person conferences to ensure they maintained an open channel of communication with ELL students’ parents. Structural descriptions indicated that participants placed a high value on and experienced fulfillment in engaging ELL students’ parents with their children’s education to ensure students felt welcome and engaged in the classroom.

Participants reported experiences of successfully using machine translations to send written communications to ELL students’ parents as part of what encouraged them to continue working to engage those parents. Laura had a classroom management sub score of 32, indicating that she has high self-efficacy in that area. Laura gave an example of how she self-determined to

overcome communication barriers. Laura shared that she used translated paper communications to teach ELL students' parents how to access and translate her emails to them, stating:

I just kind of give [ELL students' parents] a visual now because I like to take things now and show them step-by-step how to do things on the computer . . . I think that helps when they can visually see something instead of just typing up an email. This is a bigger issue now, like adding in a pandemic to the already having communication barriers . . .

Sometimes they need that piece of paper. A physical piece of paper, you know? I also love that they can use [machine] translators, so I can send [email] messages and know that they read them.

Natalie too had a strong sense of self-efficacy in classroom management, scoring 34 out of 36 in this area. Overall, a sense of having a can-do attitude was prevalent in her interview, which was in line with her TSES-SF scores. In her advice letter, Natalie recommended sending digital newsletters to parents using machine translation tools: "I understand that there will be a language barrier. But remember that a lot can be expressed without speaking the same language. Use tools such as translators to send messages home." Natalie, Laura, and other teachers reported that they had experienced success in communicating with ELL students' parents using an application called Class Dojo, which had a built-in, machine-translation tool. Parents were also able to respond to teacher communications in their own language, which would then be translated into English for the teacher to read, Evelyn shared:

We have a thing that we have called class dojos. And I can tell what parents have translated my stuff into Spanish [through a notification from the integrated translation tool]. And then, of course, when I get it [the parents' reply], it says "translated." It's so good to know they're reading my messages, and I like that I can communicate with them.

Participants were also encouraged to continue reaching out to the parents of ELLs by experiences of successfully communicating with them via human translators. Kate recommended this procedure in her advice letter, writing, “Try to keep communication between the families and you open. Use translation services if needed, but don’t be afraid to talk to them.” Maryn, who also had a high level of self-efficacy in classroom management, agreed with Kate, stating, “I keep an open line of communication and have translators to assist me as needed. There have been situations when I had to have someone translate for me because the parent didn’t understand the language very well.” In a passage from Maryn’s advice letter that was consistent with her interview response, Maryn added that other teachers and ELL parents could assist as effective translators: “Reach out to your school family and the ELL teacher if translators are needed. Sometimes other parents can help translate if both families are comfortable with that situation.” In many of the responses, high senses of self-efficacy were evident. Although each participant shared obstacles in areas of communication, they also shared the solutions they self-determined to overcome them.

*Subtheme 1. Textural – Adapting teacher-to-parent communications.* Participants were motivated to communicate with parents by the fulfillment they experienced when they received parents’ appreciation and saw students succeed. Kate referred to positive experiences of working with ELL students’ parents in her advice letter, writing, “I think you will find that working with ELLs and their families will be a truly rewarding experience.” In an interview response that was consistent with her advice letter, Kate said, “I find it personally fulfilling to work with [ELL students’ parents]. I love when they see the growth in their kids and when they see that I care . . . it just makes you feel so good.” Similar to Kate, Natalie suggested in her interview that the

fulfillment of receiving ELL students' parents' sincere appreciation was part of the motivation for working hard to engage those parents:

We'd have parents that just take you and hug you and squeeze you and just love you for teaching their child and for taking care of them. Because I see how much their child had grown over the year and what they had learned over the year. Building those relationships and celebrating success together is what made it such a great program.

Wendy alluded to experiences of parental appreciation as a motivation for engaging with ELL students' parents in her advice letter, writing:

One of the best pieces of advice I can give you is to always include their [ELL students'] parents in their education. It may seem like you are not getting through to them, but they will recognize your concern and they will recognize that you care.

*Subtheme 2. Textural – Using interpreters to communicate with families.* Experiences of ELL student success, based in part on successful communication with parents, also motivated participants to continue working to engage parents. In her interview, Kate cited the experiences of successfully promoting student success as part of what motivated her to communicate with ELL students' parents: "The more we [teachers and parents] can work together, the more success for the kids." Beverly described an experience and motivation similar to Kate's, in saying in an interview response, "Working with families is very important to the success of the students. We need to be a team." Similar to Kate and Beverly, Laura indicated that experiences of promoting ELL students' success by communicating with their parents motivated her to continue engaging parents: "If the parent is on our side, and they and you are a team, we are going to be seeing better results. I'm going to do whatever I can to make it work for everyone." Nora also described student success as a motivation for communicating with ELL students' parents, stating: "I cannot

emphasize enough how valuable a positive relationship with a parent can be . . . When there is a positive attitude about education in the home, students will do much better in the classroom.”

**Theme Two: Experiences of Empathy in Engaging ELL Students.** Participants were motivated to learn and implement best practices for engaging ELL students by experiences of empathy for those students.

*Subtheme 1. Structural – A strong interest in helping ELL students thrive.* Participants described their experiences of empathy of ELL students in reporting their awareness of those students’ need to belong and the importance they as teachers placed on meeting that need. Kate expressed her perception of ELL students’ need and the importance she empathetically placed on meeting it in saying in an interview response: “When the ELLs have what they need, when they’re supported, they tend to thrive. I think a sense of belonging, acceptance makes a big difference—when they feel like they belong, not just like an outsider.” In her interview, Maryn indirectly reported her experiences of empathy in sharing the positive effects of validating ELL students’ expressions of their different cultures: “For the ELL student, it shows that every place [country] is appreciated and that not everyone is the same. It helps them feel a sense of belonging.” Like Kate, Lindsey used the word “outsider” during her interview in expressing her empathy for ELL students, saying that the motive for teaching ELL students primarily in GE classrooms was, “They are made to feel more like they’re a genuine part of the class, not outsiders.” Beverly expressed empathy for ELL students as a motivation for meeting their needs through her advice letter:

I have found that it’s not that hard to do what needs to be done to meet their [ELL students’] needs. ELLs are just like other kids- they want to feel accepted and want to be

part of the class. The best advice about that is to encourage them to interact and work with their peers. They need to have opportunities to talk with other children.

*Subtheme 2. Structural – Gratitude for technology.* The participants demonstrated empathy for their students and this empathy motivated them to employ best practices, to include utilizing technology to aid in communication. Participants wished to have meaningful communication, despite language barriers. Evelyn shared her experience of using translation tools with her students. Lindsey stated that she drew on the language skills of English-proficient ELLs to help less knowledgeable peers with communicating needs: “I used the children who were proficient in the language to help me quickly establish signals for urgent needs—bathroom, sick, hurt, help. I also buddy up the children with a[n] English speaker to help with translation.” Kate expressed empathy for ELL students and a sense of investment in their success in writing in her advice letter: “One tried-and-true method for helping ELLs succeed is to involve them in as much peer-to-peer work as possible . . . ELLs are much more likely to engage and take risks with their peers than with adults.” Maryn said during her interview that she used songs as a best practice for engaging ELL students: “I just keep exposing them to opportunities to interact in conversations with peers and ensuring understanding of vocabulary. Repeating songs that teach basic phonics and phonemic skills.” Websites, such as ABC Ya, and YouTube as resources for language-rich songs were mentioned by several participants. Natalie wrote in her advice letter about the best practice of asking other teachers and administrators for help in communicating with ELL students to include technology resources: “There have been times that I did feel overwhelmed, and in those cases I either went to the ESL teacher, or I got the help that I needed through the counselors or administrators. We always need more devices, of course, but what we have is very helpful when it’s used.” Nora shared her experiences of working with upper-

elementary aged ELLs, and how they can have different needs than younger students. “I don’t think I could do it [meet the needs of ELLs] without Google Translate and computers to communicate. Especially when we get that one student who doesn’t speak Spanish. Translators aren’t always available for them.”

***SQ2: How Do Teachers Develop Their Self-Efficacy in Their Ability to Educate ELLs in the GE Classroom?***

A total of 61 excerpts from interview transcripts and advice letters from all 10 of the participants were relevant to addressing this sub-question. The 61 excerpts were compiled into three textural descriptions and two structural descriptions of the phenomenon. The five descriptions were synthesized into one composite textural-structural description to indicate the essence of participants’ lived experience of developing their self-efficacy in their ability to educate ELLs. Table 7 (see Appendix K) is a list of the textural and structural descriptions developed from the data related to this sub-question. Table 7 also indicates how the data from the interviews and advice letters was triangulated in forming the descriptions.

**Theme Three: Experiences with Effective Strategies and Resources Enhance Teacher Self-Efficacy.** Participants developed self-efficacy through experiences in which they successfully used effective strategies and resources to teach ELL students in a General Education (GE) setting. Participants’ continued access to the same strategies and resources, combined with their first-hand knowledge that the strategies and resources were effective in surmounting obstacles to teaching ELLs in a GE setting, increased participants’ self-efficacy in relation to the

task of teaching ELL students. The strategies and resources with which participants experienced success were divisible into two broad groups.

*Subtheme 1. Structural – Deriving confidence from experience and success.* The first group of strategies with which participants experienced success was used to integrate ELL students' cultures and experiences into general instruction. Participants reported that they used this set of strategies to help ELLs feel engaged and welcome in their new, unfamiliar school environment. Kate expressed in an interview response that she encouraged children to talk and write about their cultures in classroom activities, saying, "We do show and tell, we talk about how we celebrate holidays, we write journals and narratives and share them." Kate added in the same interview response that she experienced this strategy as successful because of the message it conveyed to ELLs, which was, "For me, just having an attitude of like, you're important here, you are a part of this family even if you came later." Like Kate, Wendy stated in an interview response that she devoted class time to learning about diverse cultures by exploring different holidays: "We dive into what cultures around the world look like and what they do. And that's really good for kids . . . Everybody wants to see themselves reflected where they are." Maryn experienced success in using media to explore students' diverse cultures: "We use visuals to help incorporate information about diverse cultures, especially cultures pertaining to a particular ELL student. We notice similarities and differences, watch videos to help us understand other cultures." Similar to Maryn and Kate, Melissa reported success with a variety of culture-integration strategies, writing in her advice letter, "Celebrate the ELLs' culture! Move beyond the classroom to the community. Plan and organize a quarterly Culture Day with traditional games, musicals, art, and food." Melissa added in her advice letter that she perceived the



strategies she recommended as effective because, “ELLs have an opportunity to shine, show what they have learned, and share their talents with the community.”

*Subtheme 2. Structural – Understanding the ELLs’ perspectives.* The second group of strategies with which participants experienced success was used to teach and communicate with ELLs in the classroom. In her letter of advice, Beverly referenced a resource she had used successfully to teach ELLs: “One program that I really like using is RAZ-Kids. It has leveled readers that are excellent resources for ELLs. They also have specific books for ESL.” Beverly added in her advice letter that she found the recommended resource effective because she perceived it as contributing to positive learning outcomes for ELLs: “Using programs like this helps ELLs see and hear lots of words. They need exposure to everything! The more words they see and hear, the more they’ll begin to understand.” Similar to Beverly, Evelyn described a premade resource as effective: “You put them [ELL students] on a program and it levels their reading. They would get a book and you read it to them, and you would say, OK, this is what I want you to work on.” In the same interview, Evelyn said of the resource she described, “It was helpful. If you [as the ELL] read the text, you see it, you’re saying it, you’re hearing it, it’s going to help you learn that word.” Wendy stated in an interview response that she experienced success in teaching ELL students using a strategy she developed: “I learned to start really narrating every single thing I did so that he could learn the language for everything I was doing . . . I continued doing it in classes and it helps build vocabulary with every student.” In Laura’s letter of advice, she referred to a classroom strategy that she used to successfully differentiate instruction for ELLs:

Group the students by ability, which helps with building lessons based on the needs of the students. When they are grouped by ability, the teacher can easily differentiate their instruction and provide activities that require the students to interact and communicate.

As Laura's response suggested, participants experienced additional successes in applying effective strategies to differentiate supports for ELLs who had different abilities and levels of English proficiency. Nora stated in an interview that ELLs had the highest support needs when they were placed in an English-medium GE setting without any prior knowledge of English: "The biggest challenge is that when they come here not speaking any English. We are still throwing our curriculum at them full force, like, 'You can't speak English, but here you go, you need to learn all this stuff.'" Natalie described her success in using a strategy to engage an ELL who spoke only Spanish after a previous teacher sent him to sit in the corner of the classroom because he would not participate: "I learned how to say 'sit here' in Spanish. We finished out the year and I had him again the next year . . . He'd done nothing the whole rest of the year. And he soared. He did he did great." Meeting the individual support needs of different ELL students could be complicated when the nature of some deficits was ambiguous at first. Beverly stated in an interview response that she tried different approaches until she successfully met the support needs of an unresponsive student:

This particular student was one of my lower academic students. She interacted with her peers. However, when I asked her a question, she would not respond. It got to the point that I asked mom if there was a something going on, like a medical problem with her. I [also] wondered if it was part of their custom because she was an English language learner, but mom assured me it was not. So, I had to come up with a different approach to

working with the student. After trial and error, we started to be able to communicate much better.

*Subtheme 3. Textural – Successes in incorporating ELLs' cultures into classroom.*

Participants developed their self-efficacy through years of successfully implementing strategies and resources like those described previously in relation to this theme. Most participants were decades into a successful teaching career, and when they addressed the topic of how they developed their self-efficacy in relation to teaching ELLs, they expressed that they felt capable of addressing future challenges because they had managed so many past ones successfully. Maryn attributed the development of her self-efficacy to her long, wide-ranging experience of success with effective strategies that she believed prepared her for successfully managing any future contingencies:

I could write a book! I have been teaching for over 25 years now. I have had diverse groups of students teaching in different schools . . . I have had many ELL students from various places: Mexico, Pacific Islands, France, Ghana, Africa, Colombia, Korea, Japan, China, et cetera.

Melissa stated in an interview response that after years of experience working with students who struggled behaviorally and academically, she not only had self-efficacy in relation to teaching such students, but she was more comfortable doing so than teaching typically achieving students: “I have taught oppositional defiant, bi-polar, learning disabled, ESOL [ELL], LIMM, Autistic, and APPS [gifted] students. I feel more effective when teaching underachievers.” Similar to Melissa, Kate said in an interview response that her self-efficacy was founded on her long history of success in teaching diverse students: “As a classroom teacher, I've

seen it all. I teach whoever comes through my door. I've had special education, ELL, gifted, hearing impaired, pretty much everything.”

***SQ3: What Factors Do Teachers Identify as Influencing Their Self-Determination to Seek Out, Acquire, and Implement Best Practices?***

A total of 36 excerpts from interview transcripts and advice letters from all 10 of the participants were relevant to addressing this sub-question. The 36 excerpts were compiled into one textural description and two structural descriptions of the phenomenon. The three descriptions were synthesized into one composite textural-structural description to indicate the essence of participants' lived experience of factors that influenced their self-determination to seek out, acquire, and implement best practices. Table 9 (see Appendix J) is a list of the textural and structural descriptions developed from the data related to this sub-question. Table 9 also indicates how the data from the interviews and advice letters was triangulated in forming the descriptions. The textural and structural descriptions were grouped to form the theme, or composite textural-structural description, used to address the sub-question. These descriptions are outlined in Table 10 (see Appendix K).

**Theme Four: Intrinsic Motivation Makes Teachers Self-Determined.** Participants had an emotional stake in student success that made students' successes ends in themselves. Participants also reported that they felt called to serve students by teaching, and that their reward was their empathetic engagement with students' pride and enthusiasm over successes. Participants' calling to teach, and their associated experiences of student successes and student joy as rewarding ends in themselves, increased participants' self-determination to seek out, acquire, and implement best practices.

*Subtheme 1. Structural – Empathy for students’ excitement.* When participants described their calling or intrinsic motivation to teach, they emphasized that helping students succeed was intrinsically rewarding for them. Kate referred to the intrinsic motivation that called her to her profession when she said in an interview response, “I kind of always wanted to be a teacher . . . I love teaching people . . . There's something so great about showing a child something new and they catch on, it's just so cool.” Maryn associated her calling or intrinsic motivation to teach with her love for children and a family calling to serve as educators: “I have always loved children and I knew that I wanted to make an impact in their lives. The love of teaching also runs in my family.” Nora used language similar to Maryn’s in saying in an interview response, “I always wanted to be a teacher, I’ve always enjoyed working with children and I wanted to help them and make a difference in their life.”

*Subtheme 2. Structural – Having a stake in student success.* Participants described the intrinsic rewards and empathetic joy of helping ELLs succeed using similar language, suggesting that those fulfillments were derived from succeeding in their overall calling to teach. Evelyn described working with ELL students as one of the most fulfilling parts of her career in her advice letter: “I have been a teacher for over 30 years and what I have found in all of my years is that working with English language learners is one of the most rewarding things you will do as a teacher.” Melissa referred in her interview to witnessing students’ incremental progress as a significant fulfillment that she was intrinsically motivated to pursue: “I see small successes every day. When a learner grasps a difficult concept finally, or makes a friend, those are good days.” Wendy wrote in her advice letter that the intrinsic rewards of helping students succeed were associated with the severity of the challenges students had to surmount: “I have always found that working with what other people would call challenging students is the most rewarding part

of the job. Seeing these children have success and growth is the best thing in the world.” Maryn described witnessing EL students’ successes as the most intrinsically rewarding part of her job: “What I like best is seeing the ELL student become successful in the classroom.”

*Subtheme 3. Textural – Being called to teach.* Participants indicated that their self-determination and intrinsic motivation to help students succeed was further enhanced by the idea that teaching was not simply a career choice for them, rather it was calling and an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children. They shared experiences of the empathetic joy they took in their students’ excitement. There were descriptions of teaching being a rewarding experience and one that participants felt they were meant to do. In her advice letter, Natalie wrote about ELLs’ enthusiasm as making their successes more rewarding for the teacher: “Working with ELLs is an incredibly rewarding experience. I often find that their enthusiasm is much greater than other learners in my classroom. One thing I can definitely tell you is that you will be rewarded for your efforts.” Teaching was described as more than just a job by participants. Kate shared, “I consider teaching as what I was meant to do in my life and a way that I can make a meaningful difference.” Similar to Natalie, Nora wrote in her advice letter about empathetic investment in ELLs’ enthusiasm as enhancing self-determination to help them succeed: “I have found that their [ELLs’] successes are so much sweeter than the success of others. They work so much harder than some of our other kids do, so when they do have a victory, it is just amazing.” Evelyn spoke in an interview response about the intrinsic reward of seeing an ELLs’ happiness about an achievement: “If they got a book and read a couple of pages to me, just watching in their face, that's the biggest reward. You know, just seeing how excited they get.” Kate also associated the intrinsic reward she derived from ELLs’ successes with their smiles when they achieved a goal: “It's so exciting to see them [ELLs] start to communicate with

their friends, and with me. Their smiles are huge and so genuine when they finally feel successful.” Natalie spoke in her interview of deriving an intrinsic reward from ELLs’ “academic growth, but also the friends, the smiles, the language and the confidence that grew throughout the year...that was what the key thing for a lot of these kids. I love that.”

### **Summary**

The central research question guiding this study was: What are the experiences of teachers who self-determine to acquire and implement best practices to meet the needs of English language learners in the general education setting? The central question was addressed by responding to the three sub-questions. The first sub-question focused on experiences that motivated teachers to learn and implement best practices for teaching ELLs in GE settings. Findings indicated that participants were motivated to learn and implement best practices for communicating with ELL students’ parents by experiences of success and fulfillment in partnering with parents to promote student success. Findings further addressed the first sub-question by indicating that participants were motivated to learn and implement best practices for engaging ELL students by experiences of empathy for those students.

The second sub-question focused on how teachers develop their self-efficacy in their ability to educate ELLs in the general education classroom. Findings indicated that participants developed self-efficacy through experiences in which they successfully used effective strategies and resources to teach ELL students in a GE setting. Participants’ continued access to the same strategies and resources, combined with their first-hand knowledge that the strategies and resources were effective in surmounting obstacles to teaching ELLs in a GE setting, increased participants’ self-efficacy in relation to the task of teaching ELL students.

The third sub-question focused on factors that teachers identified as influencing their self-determination to seek out, acquire, and implement best practices. Findings indicated that intrinsic motivation enhanced participants' self-determination. Participants had an emotional stake in student success that made students' successes ends in themselves. Participants also felt called to serve students by teaching, and they felt motivated by empathetic engagement with students' pride and enthusiasm over successes. Participants' vocation to teach, and their associated experiences of student successes and student joy as rewarding ends in themselves, increased participants' self-determination to seek out, acquire, and implement best practices. Chapter Five includes discussion, interpretation, and implications of these findings.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of teachers who have self-determined to overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for meeting the academic needs of English language learners in the general education setting. This study was guided by two theories, Krashen's (1981) second language acquisition theory (SLA) and Deci and Ryan's (2008) self-determination theory. This study was an attempt to answer the central research question: How do classroom teachers experience and overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices to meet the needs of English language learners? Data was collected through self-efficacy scales, interviews and letters of advice. Through analyzing the data, themes were developed.

Chapter Five reviews the findings of the study. First, a summary of the findings is presented. Second, the implications of the study findings for theory and practice are discussed. Next, the delimitations and limitations of the study are reviewed. Following that, recommendations for future research are then laid out. Finally, a conclusion to the study is presented.

### **Summary of Findings**

This research investigated the lived experiences of teachers who have self-determined to overcome obstacles to implementing best practices for educating English language learners. Four major themes emerged from the study findings. The first of these themes was that teachers experienced success and fulfillment in communicating with ELL students' parents. The second theme to emerge was that teachers experienced empathy in engaging with ELL students. The third theme to emerge was that teachers had experiences with effective strategies and resources

that enhanced teacher self-efficacy. Finally, the fourth theme to emerge was that teachers possessed intrinsic motivation that made them self-determined. These themes are discussed in greater detail here.

### **Theme One: Experiences of Success and Fulfillment in Communicating with ELL Students' Parents**

The first theme to emerge from this study was that teachers experienced success and fulfillment in communicating with ELL students' parents. This theme was further divided into several sub-themes. In communicating, teachers had to adapt their communications depending on the parent they were communicating with. This demonstrated the flexibility of these teachers to adapt to different conditions. A second sub-theme demonstrated that teachers derived value from working with parents. Finally, the third sub-theme that constituted this theme was that teachers did have to use interpreters to communicate with families at various times. As such, teacher efforts were not independent of help. This theme was therefore characterized by effective communication that occurred because teachers were flexible in their approaches, valued parents, and sought out appropriate communication support.

### **Theme Two: Experiences of Empathy in Engaging ELL Students**

The second theme to emerge was that teachers experienced empathy in engaging with ELL students. There were sub-themes that emerged in this area as well. The first of these sub-themes was that teachers experienced a strong interest in helping ELL students thrive in their studies. The second of these sub-themes was that teachers improved on their work by drawing on the expertise of other teachers. Finally, the last sub-theme to emerge was that teachers were grateful that they had technology to aid their instruction of ELL students. Teachers were

therefore empathetic when engaging with students because they were interested in helping them thrive, had peers to draw aid from, and had technology that supported their work.

Themes One and Two address the first research question, “*What Experiences Motivate Teachers to Learn and Implement Best Practices for Educating ELLs in the GE Classroom?*” Participants were motivated to learn and implement best practices for communicating with ELL students’ parents by experiences of success and fulfillment in partnering with those parents to promote student success. In addition, participants were motivated to learn and implement best practices for engaging ELL students by experiences of empathy for those students. Participants described their experiences of empathy with ELL students in reporting their awareness of those students’ need to belong and the importance they as teachers placed on meeting that need.

### **Theme Three: Experiences in Effective Strategies and Resources Enhance Teacher Self-Efficacy**

The third theme to emerge from this study was that teachers had experiences with effective strategies and resources that enhanced teacher self-efficacy. Five sub-themes emerged as a part of this theme. The first of these sub-themes was that teachers grew confident from their successful experiences with students. The second of these sub-themes was that teachers felt successful when incorporating the culture of ELL students into the classroom. As such, the very act of integrating ELL students into the class may have constituted the form of successful experience that would have increased their confidence.

The third sub-theme was that teachers felt they experienced success when implementing various teaching strategies and drawing from resources to aid ELL students. The fourth sub-theme to emerge was that the types of support that teachers required to be effective varied extremely from one ELL student to another, indicating the high degree of variation between

students. The final sub-theme to emerge was that teachers felt that they were effectively able to understand the perspectives of ELL students, which aided their ability to teach to a diverse population of students. Consequently, the third theme describing the successes of teachers, which in turn impacted their self-efficacy, included successes in areas as broad as the implementation of teaching strategies to finding the kinds of support they required to be effective. These are areas represented on the TSES-SF in student engagement and using instructional resources.

Theme Three addressed the second research question, “*How Do Teachers Develop Their Self-Efficacy in Their Ability to Educate ELLs in the GE Classroom?*” Participants developed self-efficacy through experiences in which they successfully used effective strategies and resources to teach ELL students in a GE setting. Participants’ continued access to the same strategies and resources, combined with their first-hand knowledge that the strategies and resources were effective in surmounting obstacles to teaching ELLs in a GE setting, increased participants’ self-efficacy in relation to the task of teaching ELL students.

#### **Theme Four: The Calling to Teach Makes Student Successes Rewarding**

The final theme to emerge from the study was that teachers possessed intrinsic motivation that made them self-determined. Three sub-themes emerged from this theme. The first sub-theme was that teachers felt a sense that they had a calling to teach. The second sub-theme was that teachers felt a sense of empathy for the excitement students felt. The final sub-theme to emerge was that teachers felt they had a stake in the success of their students. As such, teachers were intrinsically motivated by a number of factors that ranged from their own personal calling to feeling invested in the excitement and successes that students experienced.

Theme Four addressed the third research question, “*What Factors Do Teachers Identify as Influencing Their Self-Determination to Seek Out, Acquire, and Implement Best Practices?*”

Participants had an emotional stake in student success that made students' successes ends in themselves. Participants also reported that they felt called to serve students by teaching, and that their reward was their empathetic engagement with students' pride and enthusiasm over successes. Participants' calling to teach, and their associated experiences of student successes and student joy as rewarding ends in themselves, increased participants' self-determination to seek out, acquire, and implement best practices.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study expand upon the research conducted in the field of education in relation to educating ELLs, teacher perceptions of efficacy, and in self-determination. Previous research shows that ELLs are a rapidly growing population that are not achieving academic success at the same rate as their native English-speaking peers (Polat, Zarecky-Hodge & Schreiber, 2016). Research also shows that teachers do not feel like they are equipped to meet these learners' needs (Sato & Hodge, 2016). To conduct this study, literature was reviewed in these areas and two theories were integrated into the theoretical framework for this study: self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and second language acquisition theory (Krashen, 1981). Future educators of ELLs and policymakers will be able to use this research to understand how experiences of success in teaching ELLs can lead to more success as a result of higher perceptions of self-efficacy.

### **Theoretical**

The theories underlining this study were self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and second language acquisition theory (SLA) (van der Walt, 2013). SDT is a theory of motivation that researchers indicated was a result of intrinsic goals and outcomes (Hagger et al., 2014). The implication of this theory was that positive outcomes of various actions resulted in

increased self-determination. For this study, self-determination is defined as doing what needs to be done, despite obstacles and challenges. Participants indicated that their self-determination and intrinsic motivation to help students succeed was further enhanced by the empathetic joy they took in their students' excitement. Participants' vocation to teach, and their associated experiences of student successes and student joy as rewarding ends in themselves, increased participants' self-determination to seek out, acquire, and implement best practices. As such, the outcomes of the current study were consistent with the implications of the theory, as teachers' actions, when successful, in turn improved self-determination and motivation.

Previously, research regarding SDT indicated that as autonomy and efficacy increase, the teacher began to feel a greater sense of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This was partly the result of successful actions improving a person's feeling of confidence. Within the current study, this phenomenon was observed as teachers' self-determination improved as they successfully implemented teaching strategies that had positive effects on ELLs, as well as various other successful actions as teachers. As such, the current study extended prior theoretical findings to the context of teachers who are educating English language learners in a general education setting. This theory previously focused on teaching in a general education setting. The current study demonstrates the implications for this theory on a different group of teachers who experience different challenges to implementing best practices.

SDT is guided under three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Participants in this study were able to attain these needs by self-determining to meet the needs of their ELLs by successfully communicating with parents, by choosing to meet learner needs despite obstacles, and by maintaining open communication with parents. Research done by Deci and Ryan (2008) showed that for teachers to have genuine

success in what they are attempting to accomplish, they must be intrinsically motivated, and that motivation comes from a sense of autonomy. Being the expert in meeting the needs of ELLs will lead to greater and greater feelings of autonomy and efficacy.

Krashen's (1981) second language acquisition theory is based on the premise that individuals are created with the ability to acquire a second language. Krashen asserted that when people are given opportunities for meaningful interactions with a new language, they will acquire this new language. The experiences should be authentic and natural in order to benefit the learners the most (Krashen, 1981). Several participants noted that their ELLs were eager to participate and learn, when they were allowed to learn in a nurturing, safe, and supportive environment. Further, learners must have opportunities to see how language works. Krashen explained that knowing a language, in a technical sense, is not the same as acquiring a language. To acquire a language, students must have ample exposure to natural uses of the second language. Natalie shared these insights in her letter of advice, "I try to be sure to almost over explain everything that I am doing. I also put lots of emphasis on working with peers. Children learn so much from their fellow classmates, I say maybe more than they learn from us sometimes." Participants in this study were eager to implement strategies that are supported by SLA. Opportunities such as peer tutors, multi-age social activities, and enrichment opportunities, such as summer programs, were all examples shared by participants that support SLA.

### **Empirical**

Before this study was conducted, there was a body of research indicating that self-efficacy of teachers was an important aspect to consider (George, et al., 2018; Perera, & John, 2020). However, as previous research indicates, the largest obstacle facing teachers is the tremendous lack of preservice and in-service training they receive for meeting the needs of ELLs

(Khong & Saito, 2014). This study further expanded this concept. The current findings of the study indicate that self-efficacy is a self-reinforcing construct. As teachers succeed, they feel more confident, which in turn emboldens them in their teaching. One way of improving self-determination among teachers is fostering more achievement at the beginning of their teaching careers. This is, perhaps, the most important finding to come out of this study.

Although a certain degree of support may always be needed for teachers of ELLs, additional support early in teachers' careers may help them achieve the success that bolsters their self-determination and empowers them to be more confident and successful in the future. Many teachers feel ill-equipped and lack training in how to best teach ELLs (Sato & Hodge, 2016). Teachers are not receiving the training needed to have expertise in educating this diverse group of learners (Feiman-Nemser, 2018). The problem is general education classroom teachers are ill-equipped to meet the needs of ELLs and research was needed to gain insight into how teachers self-determine to overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for meeting the academic needs of English language learners in the general education setting. Given the broad areas in which teachers felt they succeeded when working with ELL students, such support could be provided in the form of technology, facilitating encounters with parents, and generally connecting with ELL students as the teacher attempts to integrate them into the classroom. This study demonstrated the methods that teachers with high self-efficacy use to increase their classroom successes. Appendix K summarizes the main findings of this study, listing the best practices identified in this study.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of teachers who have self-determined to overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for



meeting the academic needs of English Language Learners. The findings of this study have implications for practice which are outlined below. There is no doubt that teachers face many challenges when educating ELLs, and yet, examples of success by overcoming those challenges were evident in TSES-SF scores, interviews, and letters of advice. This researcher expected to hear stories of insurmountable challenge and negativity. Instead, what was heard were examples of problem solvers, overcomers, and teachers who are passionate about what they do.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study was framed by both Krashen's (1981) theory of second language acquisition (SLA) and Deci and Ryan's (2008) self-determination theory (SDT). For this study, participants were asked to reveal their experiences in overcoming obstacles to educating English language learners through the lens of understanding that students were designed with the ability to successfully interact with and in a second language when given the right environment in which to learn (van Der Walt, 2013). Participants were asked to describe how they were able to meet the needs of their students, including interacting with and supporting their parents, despite the challenges they faced, based on the central question: What are the experiences of teachers who self-determine to acquire and implement best practices to meet the needs of English language learners in the general education setting? Participants shared various examples of how they overcame many obstacles to foster success for their ELLs. In general, in each interview and letter of advice, participants expressed that yes, they faced problems, but they found ways to overcome them. This was also evident in their high feelings of self-efficacy on the TSES-SF results.

Melissa gave this account of how she met the needs of a particular student:

I collaborated with the ELL teacher in order to implement techniques to differentiate her lessons. I connected with her cultural behaviors, beliefs, mannerisms to make the

lessons more meaningful to her. I used pictures with words to define meanings and concepts. I constantly spiraled activities for letter recognition and letter sounds.

Melissa shared that she believes her ELLs can learn and make progress when she gives them the needed support and modifications. She made efforts to value her student's culture and ensured that the content was meaningful to all learners by including her ELLs. The data gathered through the efficacy scales, interviews, and letters of advice revealed a pattern of teachers self-determining to overcome barriers to educating ELLs. The participants believed that when given what they need to learn, ELLs can thrive in their classrooms.

Knowing that ELLs, in general, have the ability to learn and navigate a second language, there is an indication to create programs for pre-service and novice teachers which focus on opportunities for success in meeting student needs. This early intervention would result in increased feelings of efficacy in teachers. As mentioned previously, this is a self-perpetuating cycle that will benefit students and teachers. Programs should be implemented that help establish early successes for teachers, which would result in the outcome of improving the self-determination of those teachers. This would be of particular value when educating ELL students, which presents unique challenges for educators.

### **Empirical Implications**

As previous research indicated, self-efficacy of teachers is closely tied to student success (George, Richardson, & Watt, 2018; Perera, & John, 2020); therefore, it is a worthy endeavor to explore ways to increase efficacy in teachers. The participants in this study had a desire to succeed. They also held beliefs that their students could succeed, and therefore, wanted to help students achieve those successes. This desire should be fostered by allowing educators opportunities to build self-efficacy.

English language learners are the most rapidly growing population in the United States (Villegas, Saizde-LaMora, Martin, & Mills, 2018). It is estimated that by the year 2025, 25% of American students will be an ELL (NCES, 2021). Research also indicates that this population lags behind their peers in academic achievement. Participants reported that they use alternate materials and resources to engage their ELLs. These teachers sought out the support and modifications needed in order to meet the needs of their ELL students. In her interview, Natalie described her experience of trying to form connections with the families of her ELLs. She and her colleagues formed a program during the summer to support student needs. She shared that they had weekly activity days on Wednesdays throughout the summer. These days were open to all ages, which gave the teachers a chance to form relationships with the siblings and parents of their students. She described it, “I was just building those relationships to help build that trust, to, [help them know] all of these people do care about our kids.”

A second empirical implication is that more support needs to be given in educating diverse learners, specifically ELLs, at the beginning of teachers’ tenures. Research indicates that many teachers do not feel that they are adequately trained to educate ELLs (Sato & Hodge, 2016). Participants expressed desires to connect with and foster success in all learners, particularly ELLs. Highly efficacious teachers have been shown to have students with higher achievement scores (Perera, & John, 2020). This combination of a desire to see students achieve success and the strong sense of efficacy will led to student success. Seeing student success was indicated as an intrinsic motivator by several participants in this study. By providing training and professional development geared toward educating diverse learners, teachers may have opportunities to achieve wins early in their careers. Pre-service teacher education must include training in cultural sensitivity and integration. The cultures of ELLs are a vital part of their

development. The cultures can be seen as an asset when thinking is shifted away from what ELLs are lacking. By placing value on the cultures of their students, teachers and schools in general will have stronger home to school connections. Pre-service teachers also need training in how learners acquire a language. This training must include elements of language acquisition, elements of teaching reading, and how to have a language-rich learning environment. The importance of each of these elements needs to be included.

As indicated from the findings of the current study, being highly trained to meet ELL needs from the start of their teaching careers will help to improve teachers' confidence and self-determination due to feelings of strong self-efficacy. Such an outcome is desirable since it may help teachers to perform more effectively when working among the ELL population. This study focused on experienced teachers, however, with intense and targeted training, these self-determined behaviors may be seen earlier in teacher careers. This study revealed that higher self-efficacy of teachers leads to more success. Pre-service and novice teachers should be exposed to and taught strategies for educating ELLs and meeting the diverse and unique needs of these learners. Setting teachers up for success early in their careers will have a direct benefit on the students they teach. Further investigation into capitalizing on this concept is implicated.

### **Practical Implications**

There are practical implications from this study that will positively impact all stakeholders. Through this study, it was revealed that participants have a strong desire to work with the families of their students. Research has shown that when families are involved in their children's education, more student success is seen (Houri, et al., 2019). A theme of this study was that teachers were motivated by experiences of successfully communicating with parents, despite the obstacles that might have prevented that communication. Participants were motivated

to build relationships with parents, despite obstacles, because they knew that those relationships would benefit their students. It is a long-held understanding in education that when all stakeholders work together, students achieve more academic success (Hourii, et al., 2019; Seitsinger et al., 2008). Administrators' role in this process is to appropriately allocate staff and resources. Listening to the teachers say and what research says is needed is necessary. Teachers should be given every tool needed to have effective communication with the parents and families of their ELLs. These tools include print-rich classrooms, with books at varying levels on academic topics that should be available for students. Vocabulary activities to supplement district materials with pictures need to be in place. Additional staff must also be in classrooms to assist in teaching small groups and creating and modifying resources to meet ELL needs.

Teachers need additional resources for communicating with families. Communication should happen regularly, but also as needed. This can include electronic translation tools, translators, family advocates or mediators, and volunteers. Translators and advocates should be present and readily available to assist with conferences, placement meetings, and phone calls. This will require administrators to reallocate funding. Due to the rapid increase of ELL population, there must be an increase in funding. This study showed implications of teachers' willingness and desire to build strong chains of communication between schools and families. Strong home to school connections have been linked to greater retention rates and more success in school. The population of ELLs is much higher proportionately at the elementary level than in later years of school (NCES, 2018). This can be due to many factors, but one factor is that as ELLs are in schools longer, they gain proficiency in English and test out of ESL programs in schools (NCES, 2018). So, while this study focused on elementary teachers and English language learners, there are implications for success for older students as well. By building

strong home to school connections at the elementary age, it is more likely that the students will stay in school through graduation.

Some strategies for effective communication between the families of ELLs and schools were revealed through this research process. Teachers who are motivated to communicate with the families of ELLs can implement these strategies. One example was to use translation tools so that all families can read class newsletters. Another was to send information home in various formats, such as email, through applications such as Class Dojo, and paper copies in communication folders. Understanding that not all parents are comfortable with a single mode of communication is a positive step toward including all families. A second strategy was to use interpreters when they are available. Having interpreters in meetings and for phone calls is a way that teachers were assured caregivers understood what they were trying to communicate. This also gave the caregivers the chance to feel like they were understood. Translation tools and translators should be provided to facilitate communication between families and the school. This is another area in need of funding. Natalie shared an experience of trying to communicate with Burmese parents. Although roughly 76% of ELLs in American schools are Spanish speakers, that leaves roughly 24% of ELLs who are not (NCES, 2018). A pool of translators that can be accessed through the school district is needed. Administrators must look at areas of their budgets that need adjusting and allocate funding for this need.

Additionally, teachers should be provided with support needed to host educational opportunities outside of school hours to enrich the education of ELLs while also including their families. Participants in this study shared experiences of voluntary enrichments and programs, but a shift to fully implementing such practices is warranted. Participants shared experiences of success with enrichment opportunities and events, and research supports the need for them (van

der Walt, 2013). These enrichment events would also improve the school to home connection. Krashen's (1981) second language acquisition theory asserts that people are created with all that they need to acquire a second language and that when given the opportunity to engage within a culture and natural settings, they will attain proficiency. By receiving the needed support, ELLs can achieve success in academic areas (Ariza & Hancock, 2003). Through social events that include enrichment opportunities, such as math and science family nights, STEAM workshops, family reading events, and workshops held in the summer, ELLs can experience enrichment opportunities that are often lacking in populations of lower socio-economic status (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Participants expressed interest and willingness to host such events. These events should encompass all ages and have activities that can be completed as families. This would encourage socialization and interaction of parents, teens, elementary-aged, and even preschool-aged children. Although ELLs and their families should specifically be encouraged to attend enrichment opportunities, they should not be limited to ELLs. Learning and engaging with English-speaking peers will build confidence and acquisition in English (van der Walt, 2013). These opportunities could benefit not only the elementary-aged ELLs, but their families as well. These experiences would foster socialization and interaction in the adults. In light of those findings, policymakers and professional development teams should create opportunities for teachers to host such events. Funding, help with organization, and leadership for these events should be provided by local education agencies.

Participants in this study expressed positive feelings of working with other professionals, such as ESL teachers. Administrators should help facilitate these teams. In her letter of advice, Wendy expressed the sentiment of the benefits of working together as a team, "I really think that it is so important for all learners, and especially English language learners, to feel like we are a

team. The team is made up of the classroom teacher, the support teachers, educational aides, the student, and the parents.” Administration and district level staff can be added to that team.

School leadership should recognize the importance of this team and put into place practical supports to allow teachers opportunities to strengthen those connections. Teachers should be given time and training by administrators to establish roles within these groups and training on the best methods to use when co-teaching.

To further the concept of working together, ELL advocacy groups should be formed. Téllez and Varghese (2013) expressed this concept in their research and similar sentiments were shared by participants. ELLs will benefit from having a team working together at the school level to assure their unique and varying needs are being met. This team could assist with student placement, helping parents navigate the school process for enrollment, services, and paperwork. Following up with families after enrollment would be beneficial to families to maintain the channel of communication and cooperation. Additionally, pointing parents to community resources would be appropriate. This advocacy program might look similar to student support teams that are already a vital part of the tracking process for students who are not meeting academic goals. Expanding on this concept to ensure ELL needs are being met should be a priority. A staff member, such as a counselor, social worker, or academic coach, will need to be reallocated or hired to facilitate this team of professionals. This facilitation will also benefit teachers as they navigate the very challenging role of educating learners with such diverse needs.

Participants expressed concerns over the lack of support available for ELLs and classroom teachers. Several participants shared the need for far more help with meeting the needs of their ELLs, while other participants shared experiences of working with teams of teachers and aides specifically put in place to work with ELLs. Evelyn shared her experience of



working with both a teacher for migrant students and an ESL teacher, as well as an aide. At certain times of the day, there are four adults in one classroom working with groups of students. This model is an example of how schools can effectively meet the needs of ELLs as well as the other students and should be looked at by professionals wishing to improve the educational experiences of ELLs and their teachers. Polat (2010) explained that in most schools, ELLs spend 90% of their time at school with their classroom teacher, only 10% with an ESL teacher. This is appropriate because we know that students learn better through social interaction and engagement with peers (van der Walt, 2013). More in-class support is needed. Hiring additional well-trained ESL teachers and aides to support mainstream classroom learning is indicated. This change would need to take place at district, and perhaps even state levels.

A final practical implication is for schools to implement targeted and specific long-term professional development for teachers and other staff who work with English language learners. There is no one-size fits all approach that will work for educating this very diverse population. Classroom teachers are being tasked with meeting a wide range of ELL needs without the necessary tools to do that job. Programs need to be implemented that equip teachers with the skills needed to assess for language needs. Research-based materials and programs should be out into place and used consistently. Ample professional development on how to use those materials and programs should be provided. Teachers need strategies for incorporating ELLs into the classroom seamlessly. Many participants expressed sentiments of wanting their ELL students to be part of the classroom, to not feel like outsiders. Training should be implemented that helps to foster incorporating the cultures of all learners in a school and at the classroom level. This training must be implemented at the pre-service level, as mentioned previously, but it must also be revisited as professional development as new strategies and ideas arise.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Phenomenological research requires the recruitment of participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As such, the current study was delimited to teachers who met the screening criteria for participation as gauged using the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale – Short Form (TSES-SF) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). This delimitation included the criteria of being an elementary classroom teacher who had taught at least five English language learners and had more than two years of teaching experience (see Appendix C). The second phase of screening included assessment using the TSES-SF, only selecting individuals who had a high sense of efficacy. Finally, after completion of these forms, the study was delimited to those teachers who had a high sense of efficacy on the TSES-SF scale. Following this process, the study was delimited to ten female elementary school teachers who ranged in age from 32 to 58 years.

There are several limitations associated with qualitative research (Anderson, 2010). In qualitative research, data is drawn from a fewer number of cases. As such, the findings have too small a number of participants for the findings to be generalized to the larger population that the sample may superficially represent. In this study, all participants were female. Male teachers are grossly underrepresented in elementary schools (Cruickshank et al., 2018), therefore, none were found to participate. The sample, by the nature of its small size, could not encompass many of the characteristics of the larger population that would allow for such generalizations. The researcher, by describing the context of the study to the greatest degree possible, can at least maximize the ability for the findings to be transferable to a similar setting.

Other limitations of qualitative research have to do with the quality of the work produced. The quality of the research that is produced is dependent upon the researcher's skill, as well as

the ability to reduce researcher bias during the interpretive process. The ability for bias to influence the interpretation of findings makes it that much more difficult to maintain rigor throughout the study. Further, the volume of data also impacts both the rigor and time involved with the study. The greater amounts of data mean that the researcher must attempt to control bias for much longer periods given the length of time necessary to review and re-review the qualitative data.

Yet another threat to the rigor of the study is the potential for the researcher to influence participant responses during data gathering. In this study, careful attention was paid to this area of limitation due to the relationship this researcher had with each of the participants. Further, participants in this study were willing to participate without any promise of personal gain; they participated simply to further the research on educating ELLs or due to the relationship they had with the researcher. There were some distinct characteristics that participants of this study shared. The participants volunteered to be a part of this study without any promise of a personal gain. Researchers attempt to control for these issues of rigor by minimizing the degree to which they lead the participants during the interview and constantly remaining cognitively aware of their bias during interpretation (Tufford & Newman, 2010). This allows the researcher to minimize the degree to which their biases influence the participants as well as their own interpretive process. Throughout the interview process, this researcher made conscious attempts to set aside personal biases and avoided leading participants.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The current study was limited to research among a small participant pool using a qualitative methodology. Such an approach limited the generalizability to the larger population and instead allowed for generalization only to highly similar contexts. However, future research

could help to address this by expanding this study to a larger participant pool as well as incorporating quantitative measures of teacher efficacy and student achievement. This would require the conversion of the current findings to operationally defined variables that could be quantitatively assessed.

Using a quantitative methodology and surveys that could be assessed using statistical method would allow for the study to be conducted among a larger population who could be more widely surveyed, with data that could be analyzed more rapidly than qualitative methods allow for. This could in turn allow for such research to yield the strength and direction of relationships in the datasets. This would allow future research to more easily identify factors which create feelings of efficacy and self-determination within participants. The resulting data, assuming it is taken from a sufficiently sized population, would be generalizable to the larger population.

Another beneficial study design would be a case study to include participants of various roles including teachers, parents, students, and administrators. This type of design would provide a deeper understanding of each participant's experiences. This diverse sample would also provide multiple perspectives from a variety of stakeholders. Finally, an exploration of effective advocacy for families of ELLs and programs to foster parental involvement in their children's educations is warranted.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of teachers who have self-determined to overcome challenges in the acquisition and implementation of best practices for meeting the academic needs of English language learners in the general education setting. Previous findings indicate that ELLs with limited English proficiency fell behind in academic performance versus what their peers typically lag in

academic performance when compared to their peers (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016; Polat et al., 2016). This effect extended from academic performance at the elementary level through college graduation. Consequently, unique challenges arise when dealing with this part of the population and effectively educating them. The current study was designed around exploring the experiences of teachers working with ELL students, and the theories underlying the study were both self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and second language acquisition theory (van der Walt, 2013). The implications of these theories were that when teachers who already had high efficacy experienced success, those successes contributed to increased self-determination. These two theories worked in tandem and led to increased feelings of efficacy. However, it is yet to be discovered if the initial high self-efficacy was derived from personality or developed through experiences.

Interviews were conducted with participants ( $N = 10$ ) in order to best identify what experiences were common to the participants. Following this, the researcher reviewed the interviews, identifying themes that emerged between all participants. The resulting themes reinforced the previous theoretical indications that successful actions did help to increase self-determination. This extended prior theory into the area of education conducted among ELL students.

The findings also had implications for practice, since the findings suggested that programs should be implemented that help establish early successes for teachers, which would result in the outcome of improving the self-determination of those teachers. This would be of particular value when educating ELL students, which presents unique challenges for educators. Given the qualitative nature of the study, this researcher recommends that a larger, quantitative research

study be conducted on the basis of the current findings in order to expand the generalizability of the study.

This research investigated the lived experiences of teachers who have self-determined to overcome obstacles to implementing best practices for educating English language learners. The results of this study expand upon the research done in the field of education in relation to educating English language learners, teacher perceptions of efficacy, and in self-determination. Future educators of ELLs will be able to use this research to understand how experiences of success in teaching ELLs can lead to more success as a result of higher perceptions of self-efficacy.

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB Application

Date: 11-17-2020

**IRB #:** IRB-FY20-21-10

**Title:** A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WHO HAVE SELF-DETERMINED TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES

**Creation Date:** 7-9-2020

**End Date:**

**Status:** Approved

**Principal Investigator:** Melody Steenbergh

**Review Board:** Research Ethics Office

**Sponsor:**

#### Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	<span style="color: orange;">Exempt - Limited IRB</span>
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#### Key Study Contacts

<b>Member</b>	Lucinda Spaulding	<b>Role</b>	Co-Principal Investigator	<b>Contact</b>	lsspaulding@liberty.edu
<b>Member</b>	Melody Steenbergh	<b>Role</b>	Principal Investigator	<b>Contact</b>	msteenbergh@liberty.edu
<b>Member</b>	Melody Steenbergh	<b>Role</b>	Primary Contact	<b>Contact</b>	msteenbergh@liberty.edu

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent Form

#### Consent

**Title of the Project:** A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS WHO HAVE SELF-DETERMINED TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES

**Principal Investigator:** Melody Steenbergh, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a general education (classroom) elementary teacher who has at least two years' experience in educating at least 5 English language learners. Additionally, a score of 75 out of 108 on the TSES-SF will be needed to participate. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is gain insight into the experiences of educators who have decided to overcome obstacles that might prevent them from meeting the needs of the English language learners in their classrooms. This research is being done to add to what we know about meeting the needs of this particular group of students. It is hoped that this research will provide insight that will allow other teachers to benefit from what is discovered.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Fill out the screening questionnaire, and the self-efficacy (TSES-SF) questionnaire. Please submit them to me within a week. The results of the TSES-SF will be used as data in my research project.
2. Participate in an interview that will last approximately 30-45 minutes. This interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy. The interview may be done face-to-face, via a technology such as Google Meet, or by phone.
3. Write a letter of advice to a fellow teacher who is new to education English language learners. This letter will be sent to me via a Google Docs and should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please complete this task within one week.
4. Participate in a member checking review of my written report to ensure accuracy of my reporting. This should take approximately 45 minutes.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a greater understanding of the best ways to meet the needs of a very large part of our student population in the United States. It is believed that this benefit will have positive and lasting effects on both the students as well as society as a whole.

#### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected computer and in a locked cabinet and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hard copy data will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study Melody Steenbergh. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 586-817-1186 or [melodysteenbergh@gmail.com](mailto:melodysteenbergh@gmail.com). You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding at [lsspaulding@liberty.edu](mailto:lsspaulding@liberty.edu).

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).



**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and/or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

## APPENDIX C

### Questionnaire and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

The following questionnaire was used to determine eligibility of participants.

### Questionnaire and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

The following questionnaire was used to determine eligibility of participants.

Question 1: Are you a classroom teacher in an elementary school?

Question 2: Have you had experience in teaching English language learners in the general education setting?

Question 3: Have you educated 5 or more English language learners?

Question 4: Have you been teaching for 2 years or more?

Question 5: Would you be willing to participate in a study being done by a doctoral student who is researching the education of English language learners?

If you answered yes to all of the above questions and wish to participate in my study, please provide your contact information.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Part 2: Please complete and return with your answers above, this self-efficacy questionnaire.

This information was used to guide my study.

## APPENDIX C

### Questionnaire and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

<b>Teacher Beliefs</b>		This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create challenges for teachers. Your answers are confidential.								
<p><b>Directions:</b> Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking any one of the nine responses in the columns on the right side, ranging from (1) "None at all" to (9) "A Great Deal" as each represents a degree on the continuum.</p> <p><b>Please respond to each of the questions by considering the combination of your current ability, resources, and opportunity to do each of the following in your present position.</b></p>										
		None at all	Very Little	Some Degree	Quite A Bit	A Great Deal				
1.	How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
2.	How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
3.	How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
4.	How much can you do to help your students value learning?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
5.	To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
6.	How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
7.	How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
8.	How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
9.	To what extent can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
10.	To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
11.	How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
12.	How well can you implement alternative teaching strategies in your classroom?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)

<p>13. What is your gender?</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Male</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Female</p>	<p>16. What level do you teach?</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Elementary</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Middle</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> High</p>
<p>14. What is your racial identity?</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> African American</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> White, Non-Hispanic</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Other</p>	<p>17. What is the context of your school?</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Urban</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Suburban</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Rural</p>
<p>15. What subject matter do you teach? (as many as apply)</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> All (Elementary/ Self-contained)</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Math</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Science</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Language Arts</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> Social Studies</p>	<p>18. What is the approximate proportion of students who receive free and reduced lunches at your school?</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> 0-20%</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> 21-40%</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> 41-60%</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> 61-80%</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;"><input type="radio"/> 81-100%</p>
<p>19. What grade level(s) do you teach?</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">(X) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)</p>	<p>For office use only.</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">(0) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">(0) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">(0) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)</p>
<p>20. How many years have you taught?</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">(0) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">(0) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)</p>	

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### Part 1: Introduction

The researcher will say, “Hello, thank you for being here today. I am conducting this interview because I am seeking information on best practices for English language learners. I will be asking you some questions. Please answer them as completely as you can. I will be taking notes and using an audio recording. These are being used to help me in remembering what was said and for my research purposes only. Recording the session will allow me to give my full attention to our interview and transcribe it later.”

#### Part 2: Questions

The researcher will ask the interview questions.

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. What motivated you to become a teacher?
3. What experiences have you had as a teacher? Can you describe them?
4. What experiences have you had educating diverse learners?
5. Will you tell me about the first ELL you had in your class? What are your experiences specifically working with English language learners? Can you describe a specific experience with a particular student? Have you had any powerful experiences? Please describe.
6. Tell me about your most recent experience with an ELL.
7. What challenges have you faced in your experience with ELLs? Will you describe them to me?
8. What support were you provided?

9. How did you overcome the challenges you met? Or, how are you overcoming them now?
10. What do you see as challenges to working with ELLs?
11. When and how have you seen success with teaching ELLs?
12. What did or does that success look like?
13. What experiences have you had working with the parents of ELLs?
14. What are the supports the families of ELLs provide?
15. What are some supports you provide to the families of ELLs?
16. What do you see as challenges to working with the families of ELLs?
17. What do you see as advantages or benefits of working with the families of ELLs?
18. What have you seen the school do to support ELLs and their families?
19. What do the administrators of your school do to encourage the inclusion of diverse learners?
20. Describe what that looks like for ELLs.
21. Please describe or tell about how the school incorporates the cultures of ELLs into the school culture.
22. What have you done to incorporate students' cultures into your own classroom?
23. Describe what your school system could do to support educators who work with ELLs.
24. What benefits would this have on ELLs?
25. Thank you for sharing all of that honest information with me. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about working with ELLs?

Part 3: Closing “Thank you very much for participating in my research. I appreciate your time and feedback. I will share my report with you once I have it completed and ask for your feedback.” It is expected that the interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

## APPENDIX E

### Efficacy Survey Scoring and Reliability

#### Directions for Scoring the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale<sup>1</sup>

**Developers:** Megan Tschannen-Moran, College of William and Mary  
Anita Woolfolk Hoy, the Ohio State University.

#### Construct Validity

For information the construct validity of the Teachers' Sense of Teacher efficacy Scale, see:

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*, 783-805.

#### Factor Analysis

As we have used factor analysis to test this instrument, we have consistently found three moderately correlated factors: *Efficacy in Student Engagement*, *Efficacy in Instructional Practices*, and *Efficacy in Classroom Management*. At times, however, the make up of the scales may vary slightly. With preservice teachers we recommend that the full scale (either 24-item or 12-item short form) be used, because the factor structure often is less distinct for these respondents.

#### Subscale Scores

To determine the *Efficacy in Student Engagement*, *Efficacy in Instructional Practices*, and *Efficacy in Classroom Management* subscale scores, we compute unweighted means of the items that load on each factor. Generally these groupings are:

##### Short Form

*Efficacy in Student Engagement:* Items 2, 4, 7, 11  
*Efficacy in Instructional Strategies:* Items 5, 9, 10, 12  
*Efficacy in Classroom Management:* Items 1, 3, 6, 8

##### Long Form

*Efficacy in Student Engagement:* Items 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 22  
*Efficacy in Instructional Strategies:* Items 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24  
*Efficacy in Classroom Management:* Items 3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21

#### Reliabilities

In the study reported in Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001) above the following reliabilities were found:

	Long Form			Short Form		
	Mean	SD	alpha	Mean	SD	alpha
<b>TSES</b>	7.1	.94	.94	7.1	.98	.90
<b>Engagement</b>	7.3	1.1	.87	7.2	1.2	.81
<b>Instruction</b>	7.3	1.1	.91	7.3	1.2	.86
<b>Management</b>	6.7	1.1	.90	6.7	1.2	.86

<sup>1</sup> Because this instrument was developed at the Ohio State University, it is sometimes referred to as the *Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale*. We prefer the name, *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale*.

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Letters of Advice**

Thank you for taking your time to complete this letter of advice. Please write a letter to a potential teacher offering your advice in the best way to overcome obstacles to educating ELLs in order to meet their academic needs. This letter can be completed using this Google Document.

Consider the following prompts:

What advice can you share with an educator who is a novice at educating ELLs?

Are there any specific programs or resources you have found to be particularly helpful?

How can teachers effectively advocate for their ELLs alongside fellow educators and administrators?

What advice do you have for partnering with and incorporating the families of ELLs in the education process?

## APPENDIX G

### Timeline for Completion of Research

**Table 2**

*Timeline for Completion of Research*

Task	Time to Complete
Send out Questionnaires and TSES-SF	4 Weeks
Send Reminders	2 Weeks
Gather Questionnaires and TSES-SF	4 Weeks
Score TSES-SF to Determine Participants	2 Weeks
Follow-Up with Potential Participants/Schedule Interviews	3 Weeks
Conduct Interviews	6 Weeks
Analyze Data	3 Weeks
Report and Synthesize Data	4 Weeks



## APPENDIX H

### Interview Transcript

1. Please introduce yourself to me. I'm [Natalie]. I teach 2nd grade in North Carolina schools at \_\_\_\_\_ elementary. I am married to a minister of music at \_\_\_\_\_, as you know, and have 3 grown girls.
2. What motivated you to become a teacher? I knew when I was 11 that I wanted to be a teacher. I started teaching children's choirs at church. I actually knew when I was in kindergarten that I wanted to be a teacher. You know when you draw the pictures of what you want to be when you grow up? I drew a teacher. My kdg teacher told my mom, she wants to be a teacher and you better pray that she is because she is the bossiest student I have ever had! But my experience as a choir teacher just kind of solidified that. It was always in the back of my mind. Well, that was that. But my experience so teaches children's choir at church just kind of solidified that for me. It's always was in the back of my mind. But after doing that three-year-old choir, my piano teachers like you teach choir with me. I was like, and she's like, come on. And I loved it. I loved it. Loved it. My piano teacher invited me to teach 3 y/o choir and I just loved it.
3. What experiences have you had as a teacher? Can you describe them? I've taught 11 1/2 years in KY, 5 years in GA, and this is my 7th year here. I've taught kinder through 3rd grade. In my 7 years of stay home I taught Kindermusik to preschool. I've had preschool experience through 3rd grade, and it's all been regular ed.
4. What experiences have you had educating diverse learners? My first 2.5 years I was in the school that was in the neighborhood that was in the housing unit where families from the Philippines were housed. That was in the days when kdg was 2 sessions. They would

walk to my school. So, I would have a class of 20 or so kids, 1/3 would be that group of ESL, and while I had a morning class, the other 1/3 of the ESL population would do a special KDG ESL program, it was perfect. Then in the afternoon, my morning ESL kids would go to that same program. That's how it needed to be done for kdg. They were comfortable in the school, parents had trust in us, they were fed breakfast and lunch. They had the benefit of having experiences with English speaking kids as well as the safety net of all ESL program with teachers they could really trust there too. For kdg it was just perfect.

5. Will you tell me about the first ELL you had in your class? What are your experiences specifically working with English language learners? Can you describe a specific experience with a particular student? Have you had any powerful experiences? Please describe. When I was in KY next time, we had a big influx of Burmese. They were recruited to work in the, they were recruited to work in the chicken plant, the Tyson chicken plant. And that was full day kindergarten. And about a third of my class was Burmese and they were all day. The interesting thing about that was you can be Burmese, but you might not have the same dialogue or language. So, I would encourage other students to help, like you know, tell her she's fine, tell her where the bathroom is. And one day, a little girl spoke out. She said, I don't talk to her. I said, oh, yes, we are all friends. You know, you that teacher talk, we're friends in school... You are going to tell her that school is a happy place and that she's OK not to be sad. She said she didn't speak a language. She's like, I no talk to her, I cannot talk to her. So, we go to the same place but that the families. There were the rays, you were new, you were the feminine, had a different last name than the masculine, so there was a different ending to the last name. If

you were the girl or the boy from the same family and those who are like rays and says, and then from this dialect there was MU and I mean, it was just it was a new kind of region. They were from based on some of the endings in their last names. But yeah, they would be from the same place, but not the same country, and some of them from the same refugee camps before they were brought to America, but they couldn't. And they were housed at the same apartment complex, but they would not speak to each other. And one dialect, they were very proud of what their kids could learn. And they were like competitive, almost like to learn letters. And sounds like we gave out these plastic gold medals. And they were so proud when their kids got their gold medals, the other family, they could care less. They'd go to work and leave their kids their four year, five-year-old at home to fix the rice for the day. I mean, it was it was just it was it was a world of difference, even though they were from the same country. In that first year, the kids that I had, we were I was taught, and I talk with my hands. And when I heard the name loom and she grabbed my hand one day and she said, Miss Sug. I said what? She said, she's looking at my ring. She said, you have lub I said, I have what she said you have lub. I said, how do you know. She said my mother me she everything she have love you have you have love. Another interesting experience was that they didn't keep a calendar like there wasn't we never like they didn't have a year of what, like I'm born in nineteen sixty-eight. Their parents didn't bring them to school. So when somebody new would move into it, we called it the village, when somebody moved into the village, they would just get on the bus with all the other kids and then somebody would bring them to the office. One of the kids would say, my friend and they bring it were like, we didn't know their name. We didn't know how to spell it. We didn't know how old they were. They were

like, open your mouth. I mean, our social worker, we kind of look and see how many teeth they had, and if they were potty trained. Oh, my gosh. Yeah. So I had one little boy who there was no way he was five, but then they would say he was born the year before, but the year of the O- or the year of the tsunami or the year or whatever tragic thing happened that was you were born the year of the block. You were born the year. That was because it wasn't nineteen ninety-five or whatever. They didn't have that on their birth date. Which was so bizarre, and so we they brought him to my room and I'm like, he is a baby and like at rest time he his arms like this and his legs would be that that diamond shaped like baby, like a frog. He was clearly too young for kindergarten, but...

6. Tell me about your most recent experience with an ELL. Two years ago, I got a student in March. He spoke no English. He'd been in the county the whole year and had never completed assignments that his mom said he'd been sat in a corner because he wouldn't participate. And so, I learned how to say, sit here in Spanish. I'm a French person. I didn't take Spanish. Regretting that decision... So, we finished out the year and then I had him again the next year. His mom wanted him. And because we knew we needed a year of kindergarten because I couldn't get him to March. He had done nothing the whole rest of the year. And he was he soared. He did he did great. He did great. But just the exposure and they spoke no English at home, and no one were back and forth with their big hurricane. He arrived after the hurricane in Puerto Rico.
7. What challenges have you faced in your experience with ELLs? Will you describe them to me? One of our challenges working with that group because they did not know, know they were safe. Our Philippine kids wouldn't give us, wouldn't take their coats off because they were afraid it was going to get stolen because they had on the boat coming

over, they had to hold on to it, or if they came back it would be gone. They wouldn't put their coats in the locker. I would tell them, it's OK, it will be there. It stays there all day. But they couldn't trust that in the beginning. So, we have that that kind of experience with them trusting us, it took time to build that. That tiny boy that I was telling you about that he graduated high school this year, though I saw his picture like his first year. I remember teaching him like colors. What color is this? And he says, I don't know. And what color is this? I don't know. And what I was like, OK, what color is this? And he said, I don't know. Do you? Yes, I know. What is it? That's what I'm asking you. What would you tell me? Why do you keep asking me? It's so cool, I just saw that he graduated! So, the ESL teacher there from home posted his picture on Facebook and I commented was like, I can't believe it because he did two years with me in kindergarten. So very cool that he stayed in that town and that he graduated.

8. What support were you provided? Our social worker was amazing. We also had assistant and an ESL teacher in our room. So, we were able to 3 groups at a time and it was so good for the kids.
9. How did you overcome the challenges you met? Or how are you overcoming them now? In building the relationships in that area, in our village, we would go on Wednesdays all summer. We would play games and make crafts and just kind of hang out, and then the teenagers would come out and we get to speak with them and we could kind of say, OK, now do you know how do you know what's the problem here? What's going on? Because they could give us the scoop. And yeah, the moms did not speak, but the teenagers, they would tell all so we could find out kind of the scoop on what was going on. They were really helpful. For that, so I was just building those relationships to help build that trust to

all of these people, do care about our kids. And the parents would think, and I was trying to imagine myself as a parent, I put my child on that big yellow bus. I don't know where my kid is all day or who's even taking care of them. So, I was like, I am the teacher. And we'd have parents that just take you and hug you and squeeze you, get your teacher, your teacher and just love you for teaching their child and for taking care of them. Because I see how much their child had grown over the year and what they had learned over the year.

10. What do you see as challenges to working with ELLs? The fear of the kids had when they like they wouldn't give us their coat. They wouldn't by OK and that it was safe, that school was an OK place to be. But I'll never forget that was the same group that we took to see Beauty and the Beast at the movie theater. And we took that same group to the circus, just the yellow kids. And they were I mean, that's how much they the family went from fear and trembling to yes, you can take my kid and your personal car to go with challenges where the needs of the family had for clothes and feel like you're coming from a very hot country and you're going to a country that has cold weather and you need to learn that we wear underwear and those kind of images. We all felt like they were met better at the school were about my Burmese experience was our social worker was very in tune to that. And from what I understand, they were supposed to be hosted by Scum's, but can't remember what the name of the government, the part of the government that hosts your people that are coming in. So, I go to DC and said we can take so many families, we can have them, we can get them jobs. And so, they brought them to Bowling Green and the housing was horrible. And the jobs are killing chickens, and I didn't feel like there was the challenge was that they weren't supporting they weren't helping the

parents get the translators that they needed to help communicate with the schools or the school scrambling to get this new dialect there. And the jobs are killing chickens, and I didn't feel like there was the challenge was that they weren't supporting they weren't helping the parents get the translators that they needed to help communicate with the schools or the school scrambling to get this new dialect there. I didn't feel like there was the challenge was that they weren't supporting they weren't helping the parents get the translators that they needed to help communicate with the schools or the school scrambling to get this new dialect there. In my mind, if they sponsor them, they should have brought the whole family to the school, registered them, and not so that the kids aren't getting on a bus. And their problem is that they've been with them from go to school and how old they are, no immunization, no nothing. And being dropped off at the school, I just feel like they really dropped the ball. That was very frustrating because there were things that we could help with. But there are also things that we couldn't help with. And that person in charge of recruiting was not willing to help or as he was. But that was a struggle, the weather water, whatever, that we had some concerns with that with the testing that was done on our kindergartners, because some of them would qualify that we didn't think needed to. And some of them wouldn't qualify that we thought didn't that and then some that really should have been out. But really, we're staying in and we're like, why do they still qualify to be in? And then it was it was not made clear and plain to classroom teachers. We didn't have a clear and we didn't have a clear. We had lots of meetings where we sat and listened to blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And but we needed to know the nitty gritty of what how that pertain to us. And they weren't willing to. I mean, at one point I even said in the meeting, could you come to my classroom and

demonstrate to me for me what that looks like in a classroom of English-speaking students?

11. When and how have you seen success with teaching ELLs? I really like overcoming the challenges you've actually given me lots of good insight on that, but one of the things we did there, we, our social worker, had a week of activities when school got out. And so, we went we took our kids and we went and we do something. Was it? It wasn't a week, it was every Wednesday we went like in the summer, yes, for like the first four weeks of summer and save money out of her budget and bought a bunch of different graph things that we did each week. So, we would go and all of us would go. We would take our kids because our kids went to school with them so they could go. And they all lived in the same housing complex. And so, we would we go and we do crafts, we play games. We had kickball games going on, just communication, snacks, popsicles, whatever. And then after that, after we had used all the stuff that she had bought with her thing, then we corralled ourselves together, like, OK, you want to bring us up to set you up. So, the teachers, we still went every Wednesday, all summer long and that we would like we could still see the kids... and otherwise they wouldn't have been speaking English all summer...

12. What did or does that success look like? It was it was it was a really special time for really who I think those are the kinds of things that make you want to be a teacher. Yes. Fill your bucket, so to speak. In our situation, it was. Well, obviously, the academic growth, but also the friends, the smiles, the language and the confidence that that grew throughout the year, that was what the key thing for a lot of these kids. I love that,



though. I like the picture I have in my head right now. Happy families come into the Wednesdays and the rest.

13. What experiences have you had working with the parents of ELLs? Same as mentioned.

Building those relationships and celebrating success together is what made it such a great program.

14. What are the supports the families of ELLs provide? Honestly - just getting their kids to

school! I was thankful for the trust they had in us to allow us to have their kids for the day.

15. What are some supports you provide to the families of ELLs? The Wednesday summer

programs, field trips, helping them navigate the school system. Our social worker was amazing. She really invested in the families.

16. What do you see as challenges to working with the families of ELLs? language barrier,

mostly. Our school had 32 languages spoken in it. The Tyson plant wasn't good about providing translators, like they provided none. So, we had to get really creative when

trying to communicate with the parents. A tricky area is understanding cultures. I didn't know what the Burmese culture was and was the some of them don't eat pork, some of

them I don't. Then you go to their house and there's raw meat laying out on the sidewalk,

being cured and, you know, the different foods... And you have to watch your face

because you're like or you want to throw up, you know that you have to frame all that.

So, we learned we made mistakes. I mean, we had kids eating pork when it was, we didn't

know until it was after the fact. And then the kids were like, no, we don't eat like, OK,

OK, we're not. And then some of them would fast they'd have fasting holiday or religious

fasting of like you were five. You need to eat. And we make them eat at school, you can't learn if you're not eating...

17. What do you see as advantages or benefits of working with the families of ELLs?

Without that relationship being built we wouldn't have had the success that we did. We needed them to trust us enough to send their kids, to let us teach them. to encourage homework, and all that. The families of attendance was one. I mean, they were really motivated to get them to school, which is huge. Yeah, we struggle with that in every population. So honestly, that's huge that they're willing to put their kid on the bus and get their kid to school.

18. What have you seen the school do to support ELLs and their families? We hit our social

worker was huge, but we it was a very community-oriented school and so on when we would send out a field trip form, there were always a lot of our parents would send in to pay for to because they knew they wouldn't be able to pay for it, which we would always take them anyway. But they knew they just wanted, you know, in the in the child range. We were we were lucky that our we our administrator would sit in that same meeting as the people from the Board of Education that would talk. And she would just say, my teachers are doing great. My teachers are doing. She was she kind of like lower the stress level because she would just encourage us because she knew that we were all trying our very best and she was able to kind of squelch that rising stress. Every time we had a meeting with that man, she'd bring it back to my teacher. She would, but then her hands were tied as well with the regulations and all that that were going on. But she was adamant in her support for her students, parents, and staff. they loved her, she rode a motorcycle into the gym! She made herself relatable and the school knew she cared.

19. What do the administrators of your school do to encourage the inclusion of diverse learners? We had down the main hallway of our school, the flags were hanging from every country in our school that represented our school so the kids could walk down the hall and see their flag. And we had our department would do cultural thing like they would teach games we had. And so they would teach us different facts, cool facts about each country. And then I think we did that for like a week or so. And at the end of whatever that unit was that they did for us, the children from each country would dress and their. Native clothes, their flag in it was I mean, the teachers would just stay in their ball. I mean, it was just so moving that they would come in and they were so proud they would carry their flag and they would come up to the microphone and they would say, like, good morning, my name is I'm carrying the flag of blah, blah, blah in their native language. They would say it in their language. And so, the whole school and then used to sing them. I so proud the parents would come and watch their children. And so, it made the family feel included that they were part of what made our school what it was. And that was one of many things that we did this hour when we had family reading, not only math on our social worker, we'd take a bus with the family so that that so they could go to. Yeah, and another opportunity to see the school. Some of them had never seen the school. There could have been going to an. Yeah. They had no idea where their kids were eating, where they were playing what where the classroom was. Had no clue. Could you imagine not knowing where your child went to school. So that was really. And so, you know, they were making tape games and that kind of reading stories and stuff like that that we would play. So, the parents kind of got a little education themselves. Now on that kind of stuff.

20. Describe what that looks like for ELLs? just like I said, they feel included. They feel like part of the school, not some outsiders.
21. Please describe or tell about how the school incorporates the cultures of ELLs into the school culture? Same as I said!
22. What have you done to incorporate students' cultures into your own classroom? basically already covered that!
23. Describe what your school system could do to support educators who work with ELLs?  
One of the things would be like, let me do my job. I don't know, I don't even know how to nicely for you to transcribe that. But let me teach. Give me your number mumbo-jumbo and forms to fill out and just give me a chance to do what I'm trying to do. I've got my master's degree given me. That would have been a long time. And, you know, yes, this these children aren't numbers and they might be a way to score of a two or three or whatever. But when I see what I'm seeing, every day has got to be more meaningful than what you did with this child who doesn't even know you. A one-hour test is not going to tell you what you need to know about this child.
24. What benefits would this have on ELLs? I just I think that to allow flexibility. I can't read the next word. I wrote something about agreement with teacher and regular classroom teacher fluidity. Did I write that on a. Flexibility like the teacher and the yellow teacher would have flexibility in planning what the child actually means? Yeah, are like come in and meet the kid, don't just pull them out and think things. Yes. Based on a test.
25. Thank you for sharing all of that honest information with me. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about working with ELLs? nope

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Letter of Advice**

To a New Teacher,

I was asked to share some advice with you regarding teaching English language learners. I am always in awe of my fellow educators who choose to take on this profession. English language learners are a unique population, but also within the population, they are so very diverse. I really count myself fortunate to be able to teach English language learners.

I haven't seen a specific program for ELLs, but I have found some resources to be helpful. One program I like is Reading A-Z. It has leveled readers as well as resources specifically made for ESL education. Another easily accessible resource is vocabulary cards. I like to create vocabulary cards with illustrations or photographs for all of the subject matter vocabulary. We use these in the classroom for stations, for writing, and for practice. I also have students create their own cards.

One tried and true method for helping ELLs succeed is to involve them in as much peer to peer work as possible. Children learn so much through interacting and socializing. I find that for ELLs they are much more likely to engage and take risks with their peers than with adults.

Just like with all of your students, remember to stand up for your ELLs. They deserve all the support they can get, and unlike with special education, they don't have the firm laws in place to protect their rights and give them the services and accommodations they need. Sometimes, you have to bring attention to areas that are lacking, such as support for ELLs.

I think you will find that working with ELLs and their families will be a truly rewarding experience. Try to keep communication between the families and you open. Use translation services if needed, but don't be afraid to talk to them.

I hope you have lots of success and that you love educating ELLs as much as I do.

Sincerely,

Kate

## APPENDIX J

### Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale – Short Form

Nora N

#### Teachers Sense of Efficacy Scale - Teacher Beliefs

Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking any one of the nine responses, ranging from (1) “None at all” to (9) “A Great Deal” as each represents a degree on the continuum.

Please respond to each of the questions by considering the combination of your current ability, resources, and opportunity to do each of the following in your present position.

This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create challenges for teachers. Your answers are confidential.

1. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom? \*  
7 Quite a bit
2. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work? \*  
7 Quite a bit
3. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy? \*  
6
4. How much can you do to help your students value learning? \*  
6
5. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students? \*  
7 Quite a bit
6. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules? \*  
9 A Great deal
7. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork? \*  
9 A Great deal
8. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students? \*  
9 A Great deal
9. To what extent can you use a variety of assessment strategies? \*  
9 A Great deal
10. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused? \*  
7 Quite a bit
11. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school? \*  
6
12. How well can you implement alternative teaching strategies in your classroom? \*  
7 Quite a bit
13. What is your gender?

Female

14. What is your racial identity?

White, non-Hispanic

15. What subject matter do you teach?

All (Elementary, self-contained)

16. What level do you teach?

Elementary

17. What is the context of your school?

Suburban

18. What is the approximate proportion of students who receive free and reduced lunches at your school?

41-60%

19. What grade level do you teach? \*

5

20. How many years have you taught? \*

16

## APPENDIX K

### Theme Development Tables

Table 5

*Sub-question 1 Data Triangulation for Textural and Structural Descriptions*

Description type Description	Interviews (N=10)		Letters (N=10)	
	<i>n</i> of participants contributing	<i>n</i> of references	<i>n</i> of participants contributing	<i>n</i> of references
<b>Textural description</b>				
Adapting teacher-to-parent communications	5	7	3	3
Drawing on the expertise of other teachers	1	1	5	5
Using interpreters to communicate with families	4	6	2	2
<b>Structural description</b>				
A strong interest in helping ELL students thrive	3	5	3	3
Experiencing the value of working with parents	7	9	5	5
Gratitude for technology	2	2	0	0



Table 6

*Grouping of Textural and Structural Descriptions into Composite Textural Structural Descriptions for Sub-question 1*

Theme/composite description Description included in theme	Interviews (N=10)		Letters (N=10)	
	n of participants contributing	n of references	n of participants contributing	n of references
Theme 1. Experiences of success and fulfillment in communicating with ELL students' parents Adapting teacher-to-parent communications Experiencing the value of working with parents Using interpreters to communicate with families	9	22	8	10
Theme 2. Experiences of empathy in engaging ELL students A strong interest in helping ELL students thrive Drawing on the expertise of other teachers Gratitude for technology	5	8	6	8

Table 7

*Sub-question 2 Data Triangulation for Textural and Structural Descriptions*

Description type Description	Interviews (N=10)		Letters (N=10)	
	n of participants contributing	n of references	n of participants contributing	n of references
Textural description				

Successes in incorporating ELLs' cultures into classroom	10	10	1	1
Successes with teaching strategies and resources	6	7	9	12
Support needs vary considerably between ELL students	9	15	0	0
<b>Structural description</b>				
Deriving confidence from experience and success	6	7	0	0
Understanding ELLs' perspectives	6	8	1	1

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Table 8

*Grouping of Textural and Structural Descriptions into Composite Textural Structural**Descriptions for Sub-question 2*

Theme/composite description Description included in theme	Interviews (N=10)		Letters (N=10)	
	n of participants contributing	n of references	n of participants contributing	n of references
Theme 3. Experiences with effective strategies and resources enhance teacher self-efficacy	10	46	9	14
Deriving confidence from experience and success				
Successes in incorporating ELLs' cultures into classroom				
Successes with teaching strategies and resources				
Support needs vary considerably between ELL students				
Understanding ELLs' perspectives				

Table 9

*Sub-question 3 Data Triangulation for Textural and Structural Descriptions*

Description type Description	Interviews (N=10)		Letters (N=10)	
	n of participants contributing	n of references	n of participants contributing	n of references
Textural description				
Being called to teach	9	9	0	0
Structural description				
Empathy for students' excitement	9	15	1	1
Having a stake in student success	4	4	6	7

Table 10

*Grouping of Textural and Structural Descriptions into Composite Textural Structural*

*Descriptions for Sub-question 3*

Theme/composite description Description included in theme	Interviews (N=10)		Letters (N=10)	
	<i>n</i> of participants contributing	<i>n</i> of references	<i>n</i> of participants contributing	<i>n</i> of references
Theme 4. Intrinsic motivation makes teachers self-determined	10	27	7	8
Being called to teach				
Empathy for students' excitement				
Having a stake in student success				

## APPENDIX L

### Key Findings and Best Practices

1. Teachers experienced success and fulfillment in communicating with ELL students' parents.
  - a. Adapting teacher-to-parent communications
    - i. Recommendation: providing visuals, having multiple forms of communication
  - b. Experiencing the value of working with parents
    - i. Recommendation: work as team (parents, students, teachers)
  - c. Recommendation: Using interpreters to communicate with families
2. Teachers experienced empathy in engaging with ELL students.
  - a. Drawing on the expertise of other teachers
    - i. Recommendation: Create networks for teachers to share best practices
  - b. Gratitude for technology
    - i. Recommendation: Use technology to engage with ELL students.
3. The teachers had experiences with effective strategies and resources that enhanced teacher self-efficacy.
  - a. Recommendation: incorporate ELLs' cultures into classroom
  - b. Recommendation: Assess the level of support needed for ELL students (it will not be the same for every student)

## **Appendix M**

### **Excerpts of Journaling**

By interview 4 a theme of enthusiasm is emerging. Enthusiasm and excitement when discussion turns to student involvement and parental support/involvement.

What is sparking enthusiasm? What motivates teachers when odds seem stacked against.

Interview 7 and almost no negativity has been expressed. I continue to set aside the notion that teachers complain a lot. There has been none so far. Teachers seem to want to overcome. Why is that? What fosters that? Safe place to express thoughts, challenges, ideas?

Most teachers have many years' experience. Would be interesting to compare newer teachers with more veteran teachers to see if there is a shift.

Scales are lining up with interview responses. An additional quantitative study on which factors have the most influence would be fascinating.

What would the implications be of having advocates/community partners/ programs to educate families along with students? Teachers are very enthusiastic about working with families. The idea of a partnership seems to be underlying.

I keep coming back to this idea of advocacy. How would that look?

Emerging themes: fulfillment in working with parents, much empathy, more success leads to more self-efficacy. This seems big. How does more success lead to more self-efficacy? What does look like for future PD? For teacher mentorship programs? For advocacy? Follow-up study?

## Appendix N

### Permission to Use TSES-SF



ANITA WOOLFOLK HOY, PH.D.

PROFESSOR  
PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Dear Melody Steenbergh,

You have my permission to use the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* in your research. A copy the scoring instructions can be found at:

<http://u.osu.edu/hoy.17/research/instruments/>

Best wishes in your work,



Anita Woolfolk Hoy, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus