Planning to co-teach with ELL teachers: how discourse positions teachers within professional learning communities

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PLANNING TO CO-TEACH WITH ELL TEACHERS: HOW DISCOURSE POSITIONS TEACHERS WITHIN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

by

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To my father, Donald D. Porter, for always encouraging me, believing in me, and telling me since I was a young girl that I could do anything.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive single case study was to describe the discursive practices of an ELL teacher and a general education teaching in a co-teaching PLC setting. The study implemented a qualitative research design based in grounded theory and positioning theory and gathered data through the use of both semi-structured teacher interviews as well as observations of a series of teacher PLC meetings. This study showed that the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in a co-teaching PLC setting are determined by their perceptions and beliefs about their institution’s definition of co-teaching and PLCs, and their individual positions as co-teachers in this system of instructional supports for English learners.
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Many schools implement co-teaching with ELL teachers as a way to support the learning of English learners. While this approach offers the potential to support the knowledge and skills of both ELL and general education teachers, little is known about the conversations that occur during these co-teaching PLC meetings.

Through teacher interviews and observations of PLC meetings a deeper understanding of how conversations occur between general education and ELL teachers was developed. This study found that the ways teachers engage in conversation during PLCs are influenced not only by the topics of the PLC, but also in the ways teachers perceive their position, or role, in the co-teaching relationship. It was also found that each teacher’s perception of the purpose of co-teaching influenced how they engaged in conversations during their PLC meetings.

The conclusion of this study found that in order to have effective co-teaching PLC meetings between ELL teachers and general education teachers, these teams must receive training in co-teaching practices as well as continual communication and supports from their schools in order to develop a shared vision of co-teaching that supports the academic language development of English learners.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were launched to ensure that all students in U.S. schools are college and career ready by the time they graduate high school (Core Standards, 2018). While an admirable goal, the CCSS did not describe how this goal would be achieved with students who had recently emigrated to the United States, or for whom English was not their first language. Despite the fact that the needs of this student population were not addressed in the Common Core, U.S. schools were still accountable to show academic growth among its population of English learners (ELs).

The impact of this challenge is even more apparent when considering the size of the English learner student population in U.S. schools. English learners (ELs) currently compose the fastest growing demographic of students in United States (U.S.) K-12 classroom (NCELA, 2012, Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013). Between 1998 and 2008, the number of English learners in U.S. public schools increased by 51% while the general population of students grew by only 7% (NCES, 2006). Within the past decade, reports estimate that one in four students in U.S. classrooms come from homes that speak a language other than English (August & Shanahan, 2006, NCELA, 2011, Kena, et al, 2014), however, not all language-minority students are necessarily English learners, or come from immigrant families (Garcia, Jensen & Scribner, 2009).

The National Center for Education Statistics reports that during the 2011-2012 school year, 4,693,818 limited English proficient (LEP) students participated in programs for English learners in U.S. public schools (Kena, et al, 2014). The Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence projects that by 2030, 40% of the K-12
population in U.S. schools will consist of students whose first language is not English (National Symposium on Learning Disabilities in English Language Learners, 2003). In the state in which this study took place, the population of English learners enrolled in public schools grew from approximately 14,000 students (2.9% of total population) in 2003, to 22,500 students (4.5% of total population) in 2015 (NCES, 2018). Given the pattern of growth in the English learner population, it is reasonable to assume that classrooms will continue to see growth within this student subgroup in future years.

**Statement of the Problem**

In many U.S. states, the increase of English learners in schools has grown at a rate that is more rapid than the number of teachers trained to meet their academic language support needs. General education teachers, English Language Learning (ELL) teachers, and English learners alike, face many challenges in dealing with the dynamics caused by this rapid student population growth. English learners face challenges in both the acquisition of the English language as well as academic content knowledge (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Educators of English learners struggle to support students' progress in their academic English proficiency as well as identify effective assessments to measure students’ academic growth (Shore & Sabatini, 2009; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Measuring academic growth of English learners is especially challenging for general education teachers, since most general education teachers in the U.S. have not received specific training in either the instruction or assessment of English learners (Gandára, et. al, 2005).

Despite the lack of specific teacher training for this growing population of students, federal law requires schools to demonstrate that English learners continue to
make academic progress as defined in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA, 2018). Academic achievement for English learners, especially at the secondary level, shows an achievement gap in reading performance (NCELA, 2011). The cause of this achievement gap is debatable, with some scholars arguing the difference in reading achievement stems from limited English proficiency rather than a lack of general knowledge and ability to read (Samson & Collins, 2012). Regardless of the source of these pervasive low reading scores, all teachers are held accountable to help English learners develop academic skills that will diminish if not erase the achievement gap altogether (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Education research shows that highly qualified teachers have a positive influence on the academic influence of their students (Croninger, et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hanushek, et.al, 1998; Peske & Haycock, 2002), but there is limited research on how teachers inadequately trained in ELL issues affect the academic achievement of English learners (Samson & Collins, 2012). Many districts depend on the expertise of their ELL teachers to support the academic development of English learners. Given the growing number of English learners in schools, however, it is an overreaching expectation to assume that ELL teachers can support the academic language development of English learners alone (Bell & Baecher, 2012).

While ELL teachers are trained to support English learners in grades K-12, the range of teacher preparation for non-ELL pre-service teachers in regard to ELL students varies greatly within the fifty United States. Few states require specific course work related to the teaching of English learners (Arizona, California, Florida, Pennsylvania, New York). Seventeen states only make general references to the needs of ELs, and
fifteen states do not require pre-service teachers to take any course work on the teaching of English learners (Ballantyne, Sanderman & Levy, 2007).

Not only are highly trained teachers needed in the education field, Wong-Filmore and Snow (2002) say there is a critical shortage of teachers prepared to meet the academic challenge of teaching English learners. This is especially true in geographic areas of the country for which diverse classrooms have not formerly been a common occurrence. Clearly, the expertise and pedagogical knowledge held by ELL teachers within our U.S. schools is an untapped resource, needed by both general classroom teachers and the students they serve.

Due to the lack of pre-service preparation for most teachers in the area of additional language acquisition, ELL teachers may serve as a valuable resource in developing knowledge among their grade-level classroom peers (De Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013). ELL teachers often possess knowledge and expertise in areas not usually experienced by general education teachers. These areas of knowledge may include understanding school from a bilingual and bicultural perspective, and the role of language and culture in learning, and the processes involved in supporting the academic acquisition of an additional language.

Intermittent trainings on ELL strategies for general education teachers have not shown adequate for general education teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge or effective application of skills needed to support English learners (Chan & Pang, 2006.) Perhaps for this reason, collaboration between general education and ELL teachers has become an attractive option for schools to create environments where ELL and general education teachers can share their expertise with each other when considering English
learner needs (Bell & Walker, 2012). In many schools, collaboration has taken the form of co-teaching between ELL and general education teachers (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are implemented in general education as structured meetings for co-teachers to plan classroom instruction and assessment. PLCs offer a learning model that nurtures an environment of creativity, idea formation and where competence can be collaboratively cultivated (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). Further, teacher PLCs have been proven to lead to sustainable teacher capacity, which ultimately results in increased academic achievement for students (Liberman & Miller, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Given the lack of training many general education teachers have received on how to support the learning needs of English learners, PLCs with ELL teachers offer one possible form of teacher support to improve both knowledge and skills of general education teachers. ELL teachers in return, have the potential to gain increased knowledge of content area topics and how grade-level standards are applied in the classroom (Bell & Walker, 2012).

While PLCs have shown to improve teacher capacity, co-teaching as a method of instruction has not shown significant evidence of increased academic outcomes for students (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016). While studies begin to appear on the benefits of implementing co-teaching as a model of ELL instruction, few studies show evidence that this teaching arrangement results in academic English language development for English learners.

Regardless of the chosen instructional model, English (2009) maintains that ELL and general education teachers require opportunities to engage in discourse if they are to
assume equal responsibility for meeting the academic and linguistic needs of English learners. Discourse creates topics, produces new knowledge, and guides meanings (Hall 2001). According to English, it is imperative that general education teachers engage in conversations related to the academic and linguistic development of English learners, as well as learn how to share instructional responsibilities with the ELL faculty (2009). The equitable distribution of instructional decision making either reinforces or diminishes individual teacher agency in conversations, (Edley, 2001), and in the case of decisions for English learners, the balance of discourse in PLC planning may impact the academic outcomes for this population of students.

**Research Question**

In schools in which a co-teaching model is used to instruct English learners, it is necessary to develop a better understanding of the process and discussions that occur between ELL teachers and general education teachers in their co-planning PLC meetings. Recognizing the importance of factors related to instructional decisions during a co-teaching PLC, the research question for this study asks, "What are the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in their co-teaching Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings"?

**Significance of the Study**

Discourse, whether it is in written, verbal, or visual form, is a dialectical social practice that not only reflects social structures but also contributes to their creation (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Fairclough, 2015). Applied to an education setting that includes English learners, discursive practices between general education and ELL teachers may have the potential to not only impact the social structures that dictate best
practice in co-teaching PLCs, but also create systemic social structures that impact English learners’ academic and linguistic development.

To fully understand the underlying processes that occur within professional learning communities, research must capture the nature of collaboration and identify what factors contribute to the success or failure of co-taught classes with ELL teachers. An examination of the discursive practices of teachers in PLC planning meetings offers valuable information into the ways teachers collaborate to design and deliver effective instruction for English learners.

Increased understanding of the processes involved in co-teaching teams creates a potential to directly advance ELL teacher agency and indirectly legitimize the voice of English learners. While a minority in numbers among teaching staff, ELL teachers possess the knowledge and skills necessary to support the academic and linguistic development among the increasing population of English learners in U.S. schools. A deeper understanding of how teachers interact through conversations in co-teaching PLC meetings contributes to the awareness of how schools nurture and sustain improved academic outcomes for English learners.

**Design of the Study**

The goal of this study was to observe and describe the discursive practices between an ELL and general education teachers in an education setting. A qualitative case study methodology was employed in order to discover the discursive practices of co-teaching in a series of PLC planning meetings. This study utilized semi-structured interviews, observations, and a discourse analysis within an urban school district’s elementary co-teaching PLC team meeting between ELL and general education teachers.
Basic principles of Grounded Theory were used to design this study. An in-depth analysis of semi-structured interviews as well as transcripts from PLC observations was conducted to generate initial codes (Creswell, 2013). These codes were then grouped through similarity of content into major themes. In teacher interviews, three major themes were determined through the similarity of content. In the observation of a series of PLC meetings between teachers, five major themes were the result of iterative re-coding for similarity of content. The major themes were developed through a constant comparative approach, so that the most relevant themes in each category of data were used to frame the narrative of this study.

Additionally, this study applied positioning theory to an analysis of teacher discourse, in order to describe the discursive practices of teachers in a co-teaching setting. In vivo coding was used to analyze the exact words and pronoun use demonstrated by teachers in their discussions during PLC meetings (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Positioning theory served as a lens to interpret the discursive patterns and themes identified in discussions between teacher participants in this study.

**Definition of People in the Study**

The terms used to refer to both teachers and students in this study were intentional and chosen to preserve the importance of humanity and equity. The terms used to describe teachers in the educational setting include *general education* teachers and *ELL* teachers. The term *general education* teacher refers to those grade-level teachers assigned a section of a numeric grade-level in the elementary school setting. For example, a third-grade teacher would be considered a general education teacher. This term was purposely
chosen over the optional term, “mainstream teacher”, because “mainstream” implies normality, or a position of majority in the school setting.

Terms used to describe teachers who work with students who are non-native speakers of English, as well as these students themselves were chosen to encourage a position of equity. First, I chose to refer to *English learners* through the use of both words, rather than abbreviate to “EL”. It is my contention, that acronyms used in reference to people, and especially used with a minority population of students, reduces students’ humanity and therefore negatively impacts student access to power and equity.

The term *ELL* was used to describe teachers with specific training and endorsements or licensure to support the academic language development of English learners. While there are many other terms currently in use for this group of teachers that might elicit stronger connections to power and equity, I chose to use *ELL* teacher so that the term would be easily recognizable in the current education field.

**Summary**

This chapter included a brief overview of the academic challenges faced by English learners, and the current attempts of teachers and schools to meet those needs. The significance of the study was addressed and coupled this study's inquiry to the need for ELL teacher and learner advocacy. The research question and study design were introduced in order to create a framework to interpret this study's results. The purpose of this study is to describe discursive practices of ELL and general education teachers in order to gain insight into how these interactions may function in a real-world context.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature that situates this study in the field of ELL and general education. The first section of this review provides an overview the
academic challenges of English learners in the K-12 school setting and discusses the capacity of both general education and ELL teachers to meet those academic needs. The second section addresses collaboration and co-teaching, a suggested approach to English learner instruction. Professional learning communities (PLCs) and teacher discourse within these meetings are situated within the processes of collaboration and co-teaching, concluding with a discussion on the implications of discursive practices in PLCs. Finally, the context of discourse between teachers in educational settings is addressed in order to show the importance of discursive practices between teachers in co-teaching PLC meetings.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology used in the study. It addresses the research design, methodological approach, research question, participants and setting, data collection processes as well as data analysis. A description of the study’s processes of trustworthiness and ethical considerations is included to show the transparency of this study's qualitative inquiry.

Chapter 4 organizes the data analysis first through major themes uncovered in teacher interviews, and then organizes themes generated through a constant comparative coding process of transcripts from PLC observations. An analysis utilizing in vivo coding is also applied to excerpts from PLC meetings in order to demonstrate specific discursive practices of each teacher.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results of the data analysis. Implications for administrators, ELL and general education teachers, English learners, as well as the ELL education field complete the report of this study, concluding with recommendations for future research in ELL education issues.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of current literature associated with discursive practices ELL and general education teachers utilize to discuss instruction with English learners. This literature review is presented in three sections. The first section addresses the academic need of English learners in U.S. schools and discusses the capacity of both general education and ELL teachers to meet their academic and language development needs. In the second section, collaboration and co-teaching are defined and discussed in the context of a model to address the learning needs of English learners. Examples of both collaboration and co-teaching models are shared in order to clarify the application of each approach to education settings. The next section of this chapter discusses professional development efforts to increase the capacity of teachers who work with English learners. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are specifically discussed as a method of increasing the knowledge and skill of teachers who work with English learners. Finally, literature that describes discursive practice of teachers within PLC meetings contributes to a deeper understanding of this study’s purpose. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature review.

The Academic Needs of English Learners

Public schools in the United States (U.S.) have seen a dramatic increase in the enrollment of English learners in recent years (Staehr-Fenner, 2014; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013). Between 2003 and 2012, the total number of English Learners enrolled in public schools increased in all but 10 states in the U.S. (NCELA, 2006; Kena, et. al., 2014). In 2012, English Learners made up 14% of enrollment of students in public schools in urban
areas, 9% in suburban areas, and 3.9% in rural schools (Kena, et. al, 2014).

Additionally, within the last 20 years, traditional immigrant destination states such as New York, California and Texas have experienced slower immigration growth, while the Midwest and Southeast part of the U.S. witnessed an increase in newly arrived U.S. immigrants within their states (Johnson & Lichter, 2008; Payan & Nettles, 2008; Samson & Collins, 2012). The persistent and seemingly increased immigration of families with school-age children challenges schools to not only develop policies, curricula, program models and instruction for these new students, but to also provide instruction that best supports the wide range of diverse language and academic needs represented among both newly arrived and long-term English learners (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates that all students have access to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and meet specific academic goals (ESSA, 2018). For teachers who have not previously had the opportunity to work with English learners in their classroom, understanding the process of language acquisition and developing overall academic knowledge and skills can be daunting (Russell, 2012; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013). A primary challenge for general education teachers in working with English learners is a lack of understanding of English language development and how language development may impact access to content knowledge (Russell, 2012).

This confusion in the process of language development among English learners was initially explained through the work of Cummins (1984) when he differentiated between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). In his work, Cummins explained teachers often assume
an unrealistic level of language proficiency for English learners due to the student's success at social conversation. These same learners often do not make academic progress, however, because their social language has not prepared them for the complex academic language demands of the classroom (Cummins, 1984; Cummins & Mann, 2007). As Cummins and Mann continue to explain, academic language proficiency encompasses the learner’s command of the oral and written forms of academic English that enable them to successfully participate in academic settings.

Cummins and Man (2007) note that there is limited transfer between conversational language skills and discrete language skills, which makes academic language proficiency challenging for students in academic settings. This would indicate that each category of language skill requires targeted teaching methodology specific to its purpose. In other words, teachers need to understand that teaching methods used to promote social language and rule-governed grammar rules will not necessarily advance the academic language proficiency of English learners.

Zwiers, O’Hara, & Richard (2014) contribute to this understanding of language development by describing the additional challenges English learners face unlike their native English-speaking peers. Academic demands for English learners can triple the work they must do to reach the same levels of academic proficiency as their native-English speaking classmates. These challenges include, (a) need to acquire background and cultural knowledge that aids in learning new content, (since most of native-English students acquire background and cultural knowledge outside of school), (b) the ongoing process of learning social and cultural English, and (c) the continual attempts to master complex academic English. Zwiers, O’Hara, & Richard (2014) conclude that rather than
blame students for not having an adequate background that prepares them for the culture of the U.S. classroom, it is the responsibility of teachers to look for ways in which they can shift practices of instruction and assessment to better meet the academic needs of this population of students.

Goldberg and Coleman (2010) elaborate on this discussion to address the importance of developing the productive language skills of English learners. While vocabulary development has long been hailed as one of the most important aspects of academic English acquisition, Goldberg and Coleman (2010) emphasize that it is imperative that academic language register associated with each content area must be established and expanded by each student.

Students must move beyond just recognizing the meanings of words in the content areas and expand to understand their larger meanings in sentence use as well as using those words to write original sentences. It is important for general education teachers to understand that it is not enough to simplify the language of the classroom to make a modified version of the content accessible to students (Mohan, 2006; Goldberg & Coleman, 2010).

All educators must accordingly develop an understanding of how students acquire and develop the English language in academic settings if they wish to be successful in educating English learners (Valdés, 1992). Even when English learners have exited ELL programs and have been deemed “fluent” in English, aspects of their native language may influence their access of academic content (Bunch, 2013).

Valdés (1992) explained that it may be challenging for teachers to identify if “non-native like” language used in speaking, reading or writing is attributed to continual
English language development, to fossilized skills during English language development, or in language choice and use of the target language. While it may not be important for general education teachers to fully understand or explain these concepts, it is important that they understand why their students’ language performance may vary from their peers, and how they can support language development that will access the skills represented in the content area standards (Bunch, 2013).

Limited background knowledge in the diverse ways that English language develops may impact the academic development of English learners in the classroom (Bunch, 2013; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013). The range of language diversity that may exist within the English learner population is broad, and sometimes difficult for general educators to understand (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013). Many academic English learners have been born in or resided in the U.S for many years, and in education are often referred to as “long-term English learners” (Zwiers, O’Hara, & Richard, 2014). Many of these students continue to require English language support because the versions of English they use in their homes differ significantly from the version of English in which they are required to read, write, listen to, or converse in at school. Understanding language aspects of language diversity among English learners is challenging for non-ELL teachers.

**English Learners and the Common Core**

When the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were released in 2009, limited guidance was provided on how to apply the standards with English learners (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). In fact, the CCSS introduction stated, "identifying supports for
English learners was beyond the scope of the standards” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010b, p. 6).

Despite the lack of guidance on how to apply the CCSS in work with English learners, these students are often held accountable to the same grade level standards as their classmates (Samson & Collins, 2012). According to Bunch (2013), increased academic demands in the core will be a challenge for all students, but will be particularly challenging for English learners and the educators who teach them. Additional challenges and/or concerns faced by teachers of English learners include how to introduce complex texts to students who have not yet acquired adequate English literacy to complete such academic tasks (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013).

While the goals of the CCSS are admirable, they present additional challenges for educators of diverse students (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013). The higher demands in accountability to the CCSS require solutions for diverse students that involve the collaboration of all stakeholders in student education; administrators, teachers, parents, students and community members (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013). If the field of education hopes to see true academic gains among English learners, this shift in instruction must be a collaborative effort between ELL and general education classrooms, to create a strong structure of support across all academic contexts (Lucas, 2011; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013).

While challenging, increasing the knowledge of general education teachers in the area of English language acquisition as well as ELL student access to the common core, could ultimately benefit the English language learning field overall (Zwiers, O’Hara & Pritchard, 2014). Scholars in the education field have established that well-developed
academic language is critical for the academic success of all students (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013), but the role of academic language has an even greater role in the field of ELL education. Without a focus on academic language development, English learners are not prepared for their post K-12 college and career goals. As Judith Lessow-Hurley stated in 2003, “simplistic notions of language and language development are all too often at the heart of both the politics and programs for students who don't speak English” (p.15).

The academic language development advocated for by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) presents a demand for the kind of abstract and cognitively demanding language English learners need to make academic progress overall (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013). Not only are English learners required to recognize new concepts and complex information in the content areas, academic language development requires that students also must recognize, internalize and apply the unique ways language is used in each content area (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013).

**English Learners and ELP Standards**

Currently, ten states in the U.S. use the ELPA21 English Language Proficiency standards to support academic language development for ELs in K-12 classrooms (ELPA21, 2018). The ELPA21 consortium developed English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards to support the simultaneous development of content knowledge and proficiency in the academic English language (ELPA21, 2018).

These standards were designed to correspond with the consortium states' college and career readiness standards. The ELPA21 site maintains that their standards focus on language skills necessary in the content areas of math, language arts, and science so that
students are prepared for language acquisition aligned to the demands of the Common Core State Standards. According to ELPA21 (2018), these standards are designed to be used by both classroom and ELL teachers, citing the rationale that all teachers must work closely to ensure the academic success of English learners.

**General Education Teacher Capacity to Meet Needs**

The rapid increase of English learners in the U.S. classroom has not been matched by similar growth in teacher education and training for the teaching of English learners (Zwiers, O’Hara & Pritchard, 2014). This creates an instructional challenge given that general education teachers are increasingly likely to have an English learner in their classroom (Ballantyne, Sanderson, & Levy, 2008). In 1991, 15% of U.S. general education teachers had at least one English learner in their class. By 2001, that percentage grew to 43% of all teachers (Zehler et al., 2003). Dove and Honigsfeld (2013), assert that it is especially challenging for general education teachers to acquire the knowledge and instructional skills necessary for effective instruction of diverse learners. Diversity related to English learners in schools is often approached through segregating students from the general education classroom until they are considered ready to academically participate on a level similar to their grade-level peers (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013; Staehr-Fenner, 2014).

Schools have traditionally relied on the expertise of ELL teachers to meet the academic needs of the English learner population, but ELL teachers are now among teachers listed in "critical shortage" in the U.S. (Uro & Barrio, 2013; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Due to ELL teacher staffing shortages, many English learners may spend the majority of their day with a general education teacher.
with no prior training in how to work with English learners (Uro & Barrio, 2013), and have limited contact with an ELL teacher.

With the immigrant student enrollment showing steady growth since 2001, it is safe to assume that a majority of American teachers now have at least one English learner in their classes (Ballantyne, Sanderson, & Levy, 2008). ELL certified teachers may be equipped to address the needs of this rapidly growing population, but typically, general education classroom teachers are not (Samson & Collins, 2012; Bunch, 2013; Zwiers, O’Hara & Pritchard, 2014). Due to these teaching challenges, general education teachers now begin to realize the wide range of cultural and linguistic diversity that English learners bring to the classroom (Dunn & Dunn, 1992; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010).

In order for English learners to make adequate academic progress and reach grade-level proficiency, they must receive instruction in all academic settings from teachers who are knowledgeable in best teaching and learning practices for this sub-group of the student population (Samson & Collins, 2012; Bunch, 2013). Although general education teachers are more aware of the challenges they face in not knowing how to adequately address the needs of English learners, they may not have any influence over how these challenges are addressed and depend on administrators to help them prepare to meet these needs (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013).

**Pre-service teacher preparation.**

Even the most dedicated teachers cannot meet the needs of English learners without specialized training and knowledge on how to teach this population of students (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). Part of the reason this type of preparation has been left out of many teacher preparation programs, is a belief that teaching English
learners was a matter of just applying “good teaching practices” (De Jong & Harper, 2005).

Surface-level training for pre-service teachers may have included basic strategies such as activating prior knowledge, using cooperative learning, using graphic organizers and including hands-on activities (De Jong & Harper, 2005), but specific strategies to promote academic language development were not typically part of these pre-service teacher programs. To assume a perspective of “just good teaching” creates a reliance on the similarities between first language (L1) and second language (L2) development and may miss the differences between L1 and L2 oral and literacy development for English learners (De Jong & Harper, 2005).

The lack of pre-service ELL education for general education teachers coupled with increased numbers of English learners in general education classrooms poses a threat to the academic development potential for many English learners in our schools (Russell, 2012). Since general education teachers have typically not received instruction around ELL educational needs, they are dependent on their current school districts to train them, and the expertise from ELL teachers to share best teaching practices for English learners (De Jong & Harper, 2005).

ELL Teacher Capacity to Meet Needs

The U.S. Department of Education does not mandate the implementation of any specific model of ELL instruction in K-12. This has typically left the decision for ELL instruction up to each school district, or even individual school building (Bell & Baecher, 2012). This can present a challenge for ELL teachers to meet the needs of their students, particularly since they are seldom consulted on best practices for ELL instruction (Bell &
Baecher, 2012). Commonly recognized models of ELL instruction include "push-in", "pull-out", and "sheltered instruction".

**Push-in.**

The "push-in" approach to ELL instruction is defined as when the ELL teacher "pushes in" to the content or grade level classroom in order to deliver instruction that develops academic English language proficiency (Bell & Baecher, 2012). This model gained popularity due to a belief that English Learners are more successful in an inclusive academic setting (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006).

A push-in approach to ELL instruction has also addressed concerns that English learners miss valuable instruction when they are pulled from the content of grade-level or content area classrooms (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2012). Abdallah (2009), supports push-in teaching, pointing out the potential for social English language development and modeling of English language structures for English learners when they have increased exposure to native English speakers.

Concerns about the marginalization of English learners prompted Theoharis (2007), to argue for the use of push-in ELL models in K-12 classrooms so that English learners would not be separated from their native English-speaking peers. The concerns of some educators about the need to promote inclusion of English learners into general education classes has resulted in a gradual increase in the use of this model of instruction since the 1980s (Pardini, 2006; Zehr, 2006).

**Pull-out.**

According to the pull-out ELL model, English learners move from the content or grade-level classroom to another location where they receive explicit language
instruction. A teacher with an ELL endorsement or license usually delivers this instruction, with the instructional content focused on the specific needs of academic English language development (McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010).

Some educators have shown a preference for the pull-out method of ELL support, claiming it is beneficial for English learners to acquire language in a separate, language-focused learning environment with their peers (Goldenberg, 2008; Olsen, 2008). If the instruction is contained to one instructional period, rather than a large part of the day, this provides time with native English-speaking peers as well as opportunities for focused language study.

Harklau (1999) provides another benefit of pull-out ELL when he describes the ELL classroom as a place of safety and security. In this safe environment, he claims that the affective filter of English learners may be lowered in ways it can not in the general education classroom, with the result that English learners might be more willing to engage in language production activities overall.

**Sheltered instruction.**

ELL models that implement a sheltered instruction approach, deliver content area instruction with specific language development supports (Short, Fidelman, & Lougit, 2012). These authors define sheltered instruction as, "practice of integrating language development with techniques to make curricular topics more comprehensible to ELs " (pg. 335).

The preference for this form of ELL instruction may stem from indicators that English learners academically fall short of their native English-speaking peers in academic content areas such as Math, Science, and History, resulting in an achievement
gap for English learners on both state and national large-scale assessments (Kindler, 2002; Kober et al., 2006; Menken, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

The focus of instruction in a sheltered instruction classroom is the content area subject and corresponding curriculum (Short, Fidelman, & Lougit, 2012). Some researchers have also referred to this model as content-based ELL instruction since optimally, the instructor of the sheltered instruction classroom would also be a language specialist (Short, 2006; Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989).

While sheltered instruction would appear to offer a solution to the delivery of both content area information at the same time as language development supports, there are also some concerns about the effectiveness of this approach (Macisa, Fontes, Kephart, & Blume, 2013). Goldenberg (2013) states that sheltered instruction has only shown a modest success in the academic language development of English learners. There are also concerns that these classes need to be taught by qualified language teachers rather than content teachers with no previous experience in the teaching of language learners (Bunch, et al., 2013). Finally, the diverse ways in which sheltered instruction may appear across schools, districts, and states may contribute to an inconsistent application of this model and weaken its overall effectiveness (Hakuta & August, 1997).

Increasing Teacher Capacity Through Collaboration

Collaboration is the process of working with another person toward a common goal (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). Collaboration may function in both informal and formal ways. In the education setting, informal collaboration involves open communication, and communicating ideas, beliefs, and resources with other teachers working toward the same goals. While valuable, Dove and Honigsfeld (2010) assert that for collaboration to be
successful, formal procedures must be developed, implemented, and maintained. Formal collaborative activities must include (a) joint planning time, (b) curriculum mapping and alignment, (c) parallel teaching, (d) co-developing instructional materials, and (e) collaborative assessment of student work, and 6) co-teaching. Below, I provide a brief overview of Dove and Honigsfeld's descriptions of formal instructional practices (2010).

**Joint planning time.**

Joint planning requires that when teachers are invited into planning, they are not only invited as members, but as equal decision-makers in the process of planning instruction. As equal members, ELL teachers are able to share their expertise on best practice in developing academic English language skills in the content areas. ELL teachers also are able to discuss English learners’ needs and ensure that instruction is developed in a way that makes the curriculum accessible to all English learners, regardless of their language proficiency level.

**Curriculum mapping and alignment.**

Curriculum mapping addresses the schedule for when instruction will be delivered throughout the school year, but Jacobs (1999) asserts that curriculum mapping is essentially about communication. The data generated through curriculum mapping informs not only when teaching occurs, but also what is accomplished through the course of a school year (Jacobs, 1997; Udelhofen, 2005).

Curriculum alignment offers an opportunity for ELL teachers to address the standards used during instruction with English learners. While it is understood that English learners are accountable to meet the same content area standards as their native English-speaking peers, additional English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards
describe how academic skills may develop according to each English learner's current degree of English language proficiency.

**Parallel teaching.**

Parallel teaching has sometimes been used as a synonym for co-teaching. In reality, parallel teaching is a collaborative concept that refers to the alignment between concurrent instruction that occurs between the general education classroom and a pull-out ELL classroom. Some schools do not have adequate ELL teacher staff to provide an ELL teacher within each classroom and must use the ELL pull-out model to provide direct language support to English learners. Parallel teaching may be considered a collaborative method to align instruction between the ELL classroom and the general education classroom through the process of both teachers collaborating over instructional themes, use of standards, and assessment of their shared students.

**Co-developing instructional materials.**

Not only is collaborative planning essential to English learner success, but the instructional materials used in the general education classroom should be developed with English learner needs in mind. Additionally, ELL teachers should contribute to the selection and application of these resources. Instructional materials need not be created specifically for use with English learners, but through collaboration with an ELL teacher, it may be possible to adapt and add linguistic supports to existing materials.

**Collaborative assessment of student work.**

One of the most important collaborative actions teachers can undertake is the process of sampling and examining the representative work of English learners. A systematic process of considering student work for content knowledge and language
development allows teachers to examine student strengths and weaknesses and subsequently devise instructional strategies to address academic needs. Dove and Honigsfeld (2010) suggest four specific considerations when examining student work; linguistic development, academic needs, impact of cultural experiences and challenges, and social-emotional aspects of learning.

Co-teaching.

With roots in the special education field, co-teaching has traditionally been described as the delivery of instruction by a teacher team consisting of a general education teacher and teacher specialist. Co-teaching frameworks in recent years have suggested varied arrangements of shared responsibilities between teachers, dividing responsibilities between direct instruction and supportive actions such as student support, assessment, and monitoring student work. Dove and Honigsfeld (2010) contend that teaching arrangements should be determined by the purpose of instruction. Regardless of the approach to co-teaching arrangements, the goal of co-teaching is student achievement, with effective teaching influenced by teacher interpersonal skills, content knowledge, teacher behaviors, and teaching philosophies (Conderman, Bresnahan, & Pedersen, 2009).

Collaboration and Co-teaching

The terms "collaboration" and co-teaching" are defined in different ways across the ELL education literature. In some instances, the term "co-teaching" is used in tandem with "push-in" and described as an approach in which ELL teachers work alongside content area or grade-level teachers (McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). Other researchers associate the co-teaching approach in ELL education with that of the work
initiated in the special education field and define co-teaching as two educators working within the same classroom and sharing equal responsibility for instruction (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008). While Gately and Gately (2001) refer to co-teaching as a practice traditionally undertaken between classroom and special education teachers, the term has recently expanded to encompass the working relationship between classroom teachers and other specialized educators in the classroom context (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010).

Perhaps Dove and Honigsfeld (2010) best differentiate between the terms collaboration and co-teaching by stating that co-teaching is a form of collaboration. Other researchers in the area of co-teaching distinguish the difference between collaboration and explain that collaboration is the process of consulting and working together towards a common goal, while co-teaching involves an explicit, actionable partnership in which both teachers are responsible for planning, delivery of instruction, and assessment of student learning (Davison, 2006; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2008). Collaboration is a general education approach in education and co-teaching is one possible form of action to address a collaborative educational approach.

The process of collaboration and co-teaching would seem to allay many concerns about the segregation and marginalization of English learners, given its inclusive design (McKay & Freedman, 1990; Nieto & Bode, 2008), however, others express concerns that there are not adequate staff available in schools to make this model effective (Platt et al., 2003). Despite a lack of empirical research of co-teaching specifically applied in ELL settings, there appears to be an increasing adoption of this model to meet the needs of English learners in the K-12 setting (Pardini, 2006; Platt et al., 2003; Zehr,
While teachers may take advantage of many opportunities to have conversations with their colleagues, the complexity of addressing academic instruction with English learners requires a planned, sustained, collaborative action among teachers (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013).

Co-teaching With ELL Teachers

Collaboration between general education and ELL teachers is imperative to the academic success of English learners in our schools (Gottleib, 2016; Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004). Co-teaching offers the most effective form of formal instructional collaboration (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). In co-teaching, ELL teachers are able to offer expertise to their teaching partner in all phases of planning, instruction, and assessment of English learners’ academic development (Bell & Walker, 2012).

Co-teaching opportunities with ELL teachers also offers supports and increased learning for general education teachers who may not have the training or previous experiences in teaching English learners (Samson & Collins, 2012; Bunch, 2013; Zwiers, O’Hara & Pritchard, 2014). Finally, content area subjects delivered through a co-teaching model with an ELL teacher increase the probability that English language proficiency standards will be applied to the planning, instruction, and assessment in content area classrooms (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

Challenges in Co-teaching in the ELL Context

Despite the benefits that co-teaching offers, there are also realistic barriers that co-teaching teams with ELL teachers have struggled to overcome. Some of these barriers include teacher beliefs towards the approach to co-teaching, (Davidson, 2006; Arkoudis, 2006), personality issues between teachers, (Friend & Cook, 2010; McClure &
Cahnnman-Taylor, 2010), lack of time for collaborative planning, (Bell & Walker, 2012), as well as general education teacher negative attitudes about having English learners in their classroom (Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004).

**Teacher attitudes toward co-teaching.**

General education teachers often view requirements to co-teach just extra work or extra responsibility in addition to their regular content instructional planning (Reeve, 2006). Without specialized knowledge in how to implement language supports and accommodations in their instruction, these teachers may feel extra pressure and subconsciously resent the ELL teachers who have joined them in their classroom, or the English learners who bring this added layer of work to their already hectic instructional plans (Brown & Stairs, 2012).

ELL teachers in particular reported difficulties in both being accepted in the general classroom in some instances, and in meeting language development goals overall with their English learner students (McClure & Cahhnman-Taylor, 2010). In their interviews with ELL teachers involved in co-teaching, McClure and Chanmann-Taylor found that ELL teachers reported consistent and unequal access to power during planning and instruction. The ELL teachers felt that their identity as equal colleagues were impacted by general education teachers' perceptions of their native language, ethnicity, and education.

**Lack of time.**

A lack of planning time appeared to be another major challenge in attempts at collaborative planning time between ELL and general education teachers. Bell and Walker (2012) observed that both informal and formal collaborative practices seemed to
be equally implemented in schools where teachers were expected to co-teach. While teachers were expected to meet and plan instruction for co-teaching, general teachers often canceled co-planning times or had conflicts that prevented them from meeting with their ELL co-teachers. Additionally, ELL teachers did not have a consistent open planning time available due to ELL teaching responsibilities with various language levels of students.

When teachers were unable to meet for a formal PLC planning time, they would utilize informal collaborative practices such as email, or quick conversations with ELL teachers before and after school, as well as during class transition times. Many of these informal conversations were in reference to instructional changes that general education teachers had made since last meeting with the ELL teacher. Bell and Walker (2012) concluded that many of the informal collaborations outnumbered the school’s expected formal co-planning times for teachers.

**Views of ELL education and students.**

In addition to the tangible challenges of helping English learners acquire academic English language skills, both English learners and ELL teachers sometimes face marginalization by general education teachers (Brown & Stairs, 2012). Arkoudis (2006) offered one explanation for this exclusion, stating that ELL teachers are often perceived as supporting language development alone, and therefore, are regarded by general education teachers as having less content and pedagogical knowledge than their general education colleagues.

Walker, Shafer, and Iiams (2004) conducted a study to explore general education teacher attitudes towards having English learners in their classroom as well as their
attitudes towards instructional supports required for these students. Their study found that teachers who had limited previous experience in working with English learners began their work with no negative feelings and were open-minded about their future interactions with English learners. Teachers who had positive prior experiences with English learners reported positive attitudes to their future work with EL students.

Interestingly, negative attitudes among general education teachers developed as the school year progressed and teachers discovered the challenges in working with students in need of English language supports. Teachers reported feelings of being frustrated and overwhelmed and possessing a general lack of knowledge in knowing how to meet the needs of EL students in their classroom.

The researchers in this study attributed the frustrations of general education teachers to perceived lack of supports by administration, lack of availability to a cooperating ELL teacher, and their own lack of knowledge of ELL student diversity both in cultural background and in the variance of English language proficiency that existed among their students.

**Actions to Promote Successful ELL Co-teaching**

Bell and Walker (2012) studied ELL and mainstream Professional Learning Community (PLC) teams in three urban high schools in order to better understand the collaborative processes that occur between teachers. They found that teachers in the study were more likely to collaborate if they believed there was a need for collaboration with another teacher. Additionally, Bell and Walker suggested actions to improve collaboration practices such as; developing a common understanding of the goal and purposes of collaboration, administrative support and maintenance of acceptable
conditions for collaboration, and professional development efforts to help teachers discover the benefits of collaboration.

Barriers to successful co-teaching can be managed if schools are recultured, according to Brown and Stairs (2012). The process of reculturing schools requires professional development that encourages open dialogue, addresses general education needs, examines teacher workloads and intentionally designs schedules so that co-teachers have time to engage in the formal collaborative process of planning.

An investment in professional development for teachers was also a key component of improving the teaching and learning conditions for English learners in Walker, Shafer and Iiam’s 2004 study. As a result of their interviews with general education teachers, these researchers found that administrative commitment to professional development would have improved the experience of those teachers who had little prior knowledge of experience working with English learners.

Their suggestions for removing barriers to co-teaching focused on the need for extensive and timely professional development on both issues of diversity as well the learning needs of English learners in their schools. Their recommendations also included leadership training for ELL teachers, so that these experts on language development could expand their leadership and advocacy skills when working with general education teachers.

Professional Development to Promote Teacher Success

Teachers are central to the change efforts within today’s schools, therefore professional development for teachers is a key factor in affecting system changes that improve the chances of students’ academic success (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). The goal
of professional development with teachers has often been targeted to identify ways to increase the knowledge of participants on practices in education, with the ultimate goal of teachers reflecting and refining their current practices in order to promote increased academic success among their students. Effective professional development should be based on the reality of teacher experiences, and sustainable over time, with peer collaboration as a primary objective (Chan & Pang, 2006).

New approaches to ELL teaching models cannot be accomplished unless there is a direct connection between educational policies and classroom practices (Fullan, 2007; Supovitz, 2006). In order to see this level of reform occur and create inclusive classrooms, educational stakeholders must learn how to make change a reality. This can only be reached through both an investment in teacher training (Elmore, 2008) and collaborative education practices that address essential skills needed to meet the academic needs of diverse learners (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010).

School and district organizational factors have a direct influence on what happens at the classroom level and ultimately on the achievement of English learners in those classrooms (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). “Coherent school-wide goals, ongoing assessment of student learning, strong leadership, and ongoing professional development linked to goals and assessments contribute to creating a school-wide culture of higher achievement and higher expectations for ELs” (p. 103).

Historically, professional development for practicing teachers has entailed workshops that tackle one topic in a single setting before moving on to another topic at subsequent meetings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; Hobson, 2001). Emerging methods of delivering professional development now focus on a process of inquiry that includes
teachers seeking to shift to practices that engage teacher in reformulating their practice and development as education professionals (Campbell, McNamara, & Gilroy, 2004; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Loughran, 2002).

Models of teacher professional development require that teachers draw on information from their teaching practice as well as other resources such as interaction with colleagues, and readings to further their process of inquiry and inform instructional decisions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; Hobson, 2001; Horn & Little, 2010; Witterholt, Goedhart, Suhre, & van Streun, 2012). Specifically, professional development for in-service teachers is moving beyond the traditional delivery of information or workshop-formatted sessions to interactive and collaborative opportunities for teachers to develop new understanding through communication and inquiry with their colleagues.

This new approach to professional development supports efforts to initiate effective change that directly impacts individual teacher beliefs as well as the ways they choose to implement teaching strategies (Fullan, 2007). It is the responsibility of both teachers and district leaders to take an active role in school reform efforts in the field of teaching and learning of linguistically diverse students (Fullan, 2011). While teachers must work to develop their understanding of diverse student needs and effective instructional practices to meet the academic needs of these students, administrators and district leaders must “foster a shared understanding of the needs of these students, develop an inclusive curriculum, and provide time and necessary resources for collaborative teacher practices” (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013).

Musanti and Pence (2010) recognized that researchers often approach studies of teacher professional development “constrained by the belief that professional
development is meant to fix teachers, to provide teachers with knowledge they do not have, and that is difficult because teachers are reluctant to change” (pg. 78). In the case of teaching English learners, however, Dove & Honigsfeld (2013) state that general education teachers are very aware of the daily instructional challenges they face when working with English learners. Despite this awareness, general education teachers may not have any influence over how their teaching challenges are addressed, or how they are prepared for such challenges.

This teacher awareness surrounding the lack of training and need for knowledge in working with English learners may explain why recent professional development for teachers has centered around the creation of learning communities (PLCs). PLCs focus on a process of peer collaboration methods that include meaningful activities that allow teachers to co-construct knowledge about teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). When applied to the teaching and learning related to work with English learners, increased training on the process of effective PLCs between general education and ELL teachers show promise in meeting the learning needs both types of teachers.

**The Power of Professional Learning Communities**

Professional learning communities (PLCs) gained popularity in the early 2000s, affecting the ways individuals, schools, and districts defined these meetings (DuFour, 2004). According to DuFour, PLCs may take place between grade-level teams, content area departments, co-teachers, or many other combinations of educator meetings.

Regardless of the composition of PLCS, DuFour believed that PLCs could maintain their purpose if they followed what he referred to as "critical questions". Initially, DuFour comprised three critical questions (DuFour, 2004), and expanded these
to the four critical questions typically cited in PLC norms and procedures in many U.S. schools (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). These four critical questions are: (a) What do we expect students to know and be able to do, (b) How will we know when they have learned it, (c) How will we respond when students have not learned it, and, (d) How will we respond when they already know it?

**The Purpose of PLCs**

The clear purpose of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is to make sure students learn (DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Regardless of teachers' personal preferences on working in isolation or in collaborative teams, most teachers are clear on the school’s goal to make sure student learn and will work to create a collaborative culture because they know that PLCs are a structure that ultimately promotes student learning (DuFour, 2004). DuFour describes the PLC process as systematic and structured, and because of those structures, the PLC process potentially leads to higher levels of student achievement.

Collaborative learning through PLCs allows teachers to establish networks of relationships through which they can reflect on their teaching practice, negotiate beliefs around the core concepts of teaching and learning and reconstruct new meanings to inform their future teaching practice (Little, 1987; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Achinstein, 2002; Chan & Pang, 2006). Professional learning communities have increasingly emerged from these practices, allowing teachers to come together to create a common learning environment that nurtures the practice of reflective teaching and agreement on what constitutes the best conditions for effective teaching and learning (Shulman & Shulman, 2004).
The generation of teacher knowledge may be developed through a process required for teachers to discuss and defend their different ways of knowing among teacher colleagues, initiate new knowledge through the negotiation of new ideas, and generating new ideas through collaborative work with colleagues (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994). Teachers’ beliefs and core values of teaching and learning are affected not only by their knowledge about themselves as professionals, but also from their interpretations of their teaching practice and how they have maintained the experience of being learners themselves (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994).

In a five-year longitudinal study, Nelson (2008) analyzed PLCs that participated in collaborative inquiry within seven school districts of various size and student compositions. The purpose of the study was to identify what constitutes “teacher work” and how it impacts student “learning practice”, and “knowledge-of practice”. Observations of teacher PLCs and classrooms in Nelson’s study monitored how teacher dialogue translated into classroom practice.

In analyzing the discussions that occurred within different participant PLC groups, Nelson gained a deeper understanding of the potential for professional growth through the implementation of an inquiry-based learning community. Both teacher qualities and actions had an impact on the degree to which teachers were able to inquire about their own teaching practices and examine how this influenced student learning. The most effective participant groups were able to shift from their traditional roles as teachers and were able to cast themselves into the role of learners. These teachers embraced the process of reflection as they worked through the inquiry cycle and came to a group consensus on the attributes of high quality student work within scientific writing.
Nelson identified some factors that may have explained the degree to which some groups were more successful in collaboration than others. The groups who quickly moved to an inquiry-based perspective tended to all have a shared history and established relationships, which seemed to result in an atmosphere of trust. These groups worked collectively to examine evidence of student work that would inform their creation of a common understanding of what would constitute high quality student work.

Other groups seemed to be stuck in re-living previous classroom experiences and examining decisions they had made in the past. This group did not delve into the inquiry process or consider how teaching practices might impact future work with students. By examining their individual data from previous teaching, they were unable to share a common vision but instead seemed unable to move past individual histories. This prohibited this group from talking about specific issues that impact teaching and learning. There were marked differences among group members about how teachers’ beliefs about learners, learning and teaching. They shifted away from a learning experience to one of sharing their own expertise in teaching.

Nelson found that sustainable change in the way teachers work together cannot happen by merely creating opportunities for teachers to meet and work together. Teachers must be guided through the process of create a positive environment in which teachers feel safe to leave behind the role of teacher and take on the role of a learner. Second, support must be specific and targeted to help teachers move past discussions that could potentially prevent their collaboration from moving forward. Nelson concluded that based on the effort and time devoted to professional learning communities, more research
should be conducted on how to overcome challenges and generate teachers’ knowledge of how to apply learning to their own teaching practice.

While PLCs offer opportunities for teachers to plan and share ideas, disagreement about individual teachers’ established ideas and practices can produce teacher resistance. When resistance occurs, this may result in opposition, confrontation, or attempts for teachers to regain some degree of agency (Achinstein, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994; Zellermayer, 2001).

Musanti and Pence (2010) found that teachers bring prior experiences and traditions of teaching practice to each professional development opportunity. These prior experiences may influence the degree to which they may or may not accept new ways of knowing as it pertains to collaborative learning and teaching practice.

Musanti and Pence (2010), conducted a three-year study that focused on how discourse among teachers was initiated, negotiated, resisted and adapted by teachers as they took part in professional development. In the process of conducting the study, the researchers found that they had initiated the study with the unstated belief that professional development “fixes” things that are wrong with teaching practices, to share new knowledge with teachers who need more information, and that teachers are often resistant to such changes.

As the study progressed, Musanti and Pence (2010) redirected their focus on the conversations that happened naturally through teachers interacting about their individual experiences in teaching, and the creation of collaboration that became a by-product of the time spent working together and the conversation that evolved as a product of collaboration.
Indicators of Successful PLCs

A review in the literature for components of successful PLCs is similar to the same criteria for successful co-teaching teams. DuFour (2004) offered a list of components that a PLC system should try to incorporate. First, there must be a primary goal on student learning. Teams must be given sufficient time to meet and plan together throughout the school year. Critical questions should drive the structure and decision-making processes in each PLC meeting. Finally, team members must have clear definitions of their roles in planning, instruction, and assessment.

Bartz and Rice (2017) contributed to this list of PLC essentials by stating that successful PLCs must have (a) a purpose, (b) effective use of human capital, and (c) exhibit diversity through the inclusion of members who exhibit a range of perspectives. Bartz and Rice highlighted the importance of inclusion in PLCs, stating that people in the workforce must learn how to work effectively with people who have views different from their own. Not only is the composition of diverse collaborative teams necessary, but efforts must also be made to support the success of such teams. Examples of such efforts included, but were not limited to, (a) work to create a climate of respect, (b) guaranteed equal time to speak and share ideas, (c) clarification of members' roles, and (d) establishment of rules and norms, to maintain meeting structures and keep the group on task.

Kelly and Cherkowski (2015) cited mutual trust as the most significant indicator of successful PLCs. In their study with high school teachers working in PLC groups, teachers shared that because they spent the majority of their day in isolation from their colleagues, they developed feelings of doubt and insecurity surrounding their teaching
knowledge and skills. When these teachers were able to come to a PLC where they felt safe to share their ideas and also questions about teaching, their feelings of insecurity shifted to feelings of trust and acceptance.

Kelly and Cherkowski stressed the importance of applying adult learning theories to the implementation and maintenance of PLCs within schools. By taking the needs of group members into consideration, schools gained the potential to create and sustain positive collaborative models that were able to impact teacher beliefs and practice.

In consideration of things that must be considered to promote effective PLCs, DuFour (2004) offered suggestions of things that also must stop happening if schools want authentic collaboration to occur. First, schools must provide training so that teachers feel knowledgeable about how to support students in mastery of academic standards. Teachers must have a strong understanding of how the school and district curriculum aligns and supports content area standards.

Second, schools must give teachers adequate time to analyze and discuss data and know how to interpret their findings. Teachers need to know when their students have not learned what they were expected to learn but must know how to devise a plan to meet their students’ learning needs. Finally, schools should make collaboration a priority and put an end to the belief that teaching in isolation is the best way to ensure student learning. There will always be challenges to create collaborative teams, but DuFour (2004) commented that the many schools who have created successful collaborative teams show that it is possible to overcome most barriers.

English learners’ academic language development cannot progress effectively with high quality instruction from the ELL teacher alone. In order for English learners to
make adequate academic progress and reach grade-level proficiency, these students must receive language support in all academic settings from teachers who are knowledgeable in best teaching and learning practices for this sub-group of the student population. Specifically, this means that grade-level teachers must implement ELL strategies in their instruction as well recognize how English learners may exhibit evidence that they meet common core standard requirements at each level of English language development.

The major challenge in this goal becoming a reality is the fact that most general education teachers have not received instruction in teaching and learning strategies for English learners in their pre-service education experience. These teachers are therefore dependent on the professional development of school districts to fill the knowledge gap in their education. Given that school district administrators most likely also did not receive education on best practices with English learners, options are limited for advanced professional development to meet the learning needs of general education teachers (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

One solution for this challenge is the development of effective and sustainable professional development through utilizing learning around how teachers collaborate together in order to develop their individual knowledge as well as knowledge in working in collaboration with colleagues. By studying the process by which individual teachers collaborate to share their teaching knowledge, and then interact to compare beliefs and ideas about teaching, themes and patterns may become evident to inform best practices in effective approaches to professional development for educators.
Teacher Discourse in Collaboration

Gee (2014) defined discourse as “a characteristic way of saying, doing, or being” (pg. 47). Weider and Pratt (1990) say that the utterances which occur within discourse only have meaning if they communicate both a who and a what. As we consider the importance of discourse that occurs within collaboration and co-teaching, it is important to consider not only who and what teachers are talking about, but the characteristic ways they use to discuss topics. Hall (2001) describes discourse as the various linguistic resources people utilize within everyday conversations. He adds that these linguistic resources create topics, produce knowledge and govern meanings in our interactions. It is the ways in which people maneuver within these discourses that demonstrate their agency in reaction to the conversational demands (Edley 2001).

English (2009) studied how the roles and responsibilities of classroom teachers, the ELL department, and students were constructed and reproduced in a site-based inquiry group’s conversation. English stated that a strong ELL program within a school requires strong forms of communication between all teachers, but there is often a lack of understanding as to the teaching roles and responsibilities associated with teaching English learners.

Through a year-long series of professional development meetings for teachers on the topic of best practices in ELL instruction, English (2009) recorded, transcribed, and studied the discourse that occurred during meetings between teachers. English’s analysis of discourse in her study revealed three themes related to teacher interactions and discourse related to discussion on ELL education topics. These themes were identified as top-down discourse, bottom-up discourse, and labeling discourse.
According to English’s discourse analysis, top-down discursive practices were typified when the classroom teacher and the selected curriculum were identified as the focus of power in making instructional decisions. This discourse positioned classroom teachers to hold decision making power while students were positioned as deficient and the recipients of knowledge. The curriculum dominated instructional decisions and diminished the linguistic and academic needs of English learners. This resulted in the positioning of English learners as problematic, deficient in relation to their English-speaking peers, and considered by classroom teachers as a barrier to the teaching of curriculum.

Bottom up discourse in this study positioned students as the location of power. English described the focus of this type of discourse as a focus on individualism, equality, and the power of students to take control of their education. English found that a bottom up approach to discourse, ignored the classroom and ELL teachers’ responsibilities for the academic and language development of students due to its tendency to attribute student success to students’ behaviors and attitudes. This resulted in the perception of students’ work ethic as innate and socially predetermined. In other words, in this form of discourse regarded students as responsible for their own education outcomes.

A labeling discourse implemented by classroom teachers regarded ELL teachers as the persons primarily responsible for the academic and linguistic education of English learners in the school. English (2009) described labels as socially constructed signs in this study that gave meaning to the context of discourse. This labeling process was accomplished through classroom teachers assigning English learners to a distinctive
category that attributed them with common characteristics that required both differential
treatment and supports. Due to this labeling discourse, classroom teachers personally
identified more with “mainstream” students and therefore positioned English learners
with ELL teachers, and subsequently outside their general education teacher domain of
responsibility.

English (2009) concluded that schools cannot assume there is one shared
discourse that constructs roles and responsibilities in the support of English learners.
Teachers strategically engage in discourse in different ways and summarily interpret the
reality of their teaching of English learners in specific ways. She concludes, “However,
no matter which model is used, content and ESL teachers need opportunities to engage in
discourse within which both parties assume responsibility for meeting the academic and
linguistic needs of ELLs” (pg. 504).

Summary

This chapter's review of the literature described the challenges and academic
needs of English learners in the K-12 setting. A discussion followed in which the
capacity of both general education and ELL teachers to meet the academic needs of
English learners was considered, with examples of current models of support provided
for comparison. The second section focused on the current use of collaboration and co-
teaching to meet the instructional needs of English learners and examined these models
for their use of knowledge and skill development for both general education and ELL
teachers. The final section of this chapter exemplified Professional Learning
Communities(PLCs) as a method of professional development for teachers. Finally, a
description of discourse and discursive use within PLC settings was explored to connect the literature review to the research question and methodology in this study.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

A review of the literature surrounding issues related to co-teaching PLC meetings between ELL and general education teachers showed that the context of Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings were influenced by formal and informal factors. The formal factors included the structures and procedures expected by school districts and administrators, the ratio of ELL staff to general staff in a building, the population of English learners in a school, and the mutually understood structures for conducting co-teaching and PLC meetings. Informal factors included teacher personalities, individual beliefs about co-teaching, and discourse styles that were influenced by the ways people chose to communicate with others. While some studies that addressed co-teaching in connection with ELL teachers were found in the research literature, many of these studies focused on the description of procedures and benefits. Co-teaching studies that observed and described discursive practices of teachers in co-teaching settings were limited. This study attempts to contribute to the current body of research literature through a qualitative study that employs the analysis of teacher discourse in interviews and observations of PLC meetings, in order to describe the discursive practices used by teachers.

Strategy of Inquiry

The purpose of this study was to observe and describe the discursive practices of an ELL and general education teacher in their co-teaching PLC meetings. A descriptive single case study design analyzed through qualitative methods was employed for this inquiry so that a specific case, the PLC meetings between an ELL and general education
teacher in an elementary school building, might be observed in great detail and described within real life contemporary context and setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2009). A descriptive case study design was determined to be most appropriate to describe the discursive practices that occurred between teachers in their interviews and PLC meetings, due to its ability to describe a unit of analysis, or phenomenon within the context of real-life through an immersion in the research setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2009).

**Researcher Position Within the Study**

Qualitative research focuses on “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14). As I prepared to conduct this study, and proceeded through data collection and analysis, I found that it was necessary to position myself in relation to the research setting, participants, and the topic of inquiry, in order to interpret this particular case study as accurately as possible (Eisenhart, 2006; Geertz, 1988; Malterud, 2001).

I am an ELL educator. I have had the opportunity to teach K-12 ELL classes, adult ELL classes in the community college setting, and adult ELL classes in community ELL programs. My current job is ELL Curriculum Coordinator, for an urban school district with a large ELL population. Through that position, I have supported both elementary and middle schools on curriculum and other issues related to ELL instruction. I have had the opportunity to work in both push-in and pull-out settings as an ELL teacher and have observed many interactions between ELL and general education teachers in my current position in a variety of ELL service models. It was inevitable that I
would develop personal theories on effective methods of ELL instruction.

What I have learned so far in my role as an educator, is that in general terms, no one ELL instructional approach should be applied to an entire system. Decisions surrounding the best delivery of language support for English learners must be determined by the specific variables within the setting in which they are applied. Examples of such variables include ELL student demographics, ratio of ELL teachers to ELL students as well as general education classrooms, school climate and culture, and administrative beliefs about ELL education and co-teaching supports, just to name a few. In the case of co-teaching and PLCs, I have seen successful and unsuccessful co-teaching situations. Some of the ELL teachers with whom I work have embraced this work while others have considered changing to a different education role in the building because "this was not what they signed up for as an ELL teacher".

As I worked through the procedures of this study, I found it necessary, given my background, to step back and remind myself to be the researcher through each phase of the study. I intentionally questioned my perceptions and interpretations through the lens of a researcher and made every attempt to describe events in their purest form with explanations derived from the research literature and evidence from participant discursive practices. I included several examples of teacher discourse from both teacher interviews as well as PLC observations, so the participants’ voices would shape the narrative.

I consider my background as an ELL educator to be an asset in this type of research. While I was intentional about the interpretation of evidence in each phase of the study, I was also familiar with the concepts I observed, which helped me know where to dig deeper in the literature for more information to inform my next steps. In particular, it
helped me determine the setting for this study since I have been able to compare and contrast the approach to ELL education supports in both the elementary and secondary education contexts. My personal experiences also helped as I compiled field notes during and after interactions with teachers in interviews or observations. As I reflected on what I had experienced, it became easier for me to step into the role of observer and researcher and use my personal position as a lens to consider what I had experienced.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Question**

The purpose of this study was to describe the discursive practices between an ELL teacher and a general education teacher in order to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which these teachers discuss topics related to the planning, delivery of instruction, and assessment of English learners. These categories were defined as part of the process due to their inclusion as foundational concepts in the process of constructing Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, 2004).

The research question for this study was subsequently constructed to guide inquiry into the ways in which teachers might use discourse in the PLC setting, asking: "What are the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in their co-teaching Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings?"

**Research Setting**

**Research Site**

The elementary school setting was chosen for this study in order to best describe the co-teaching PLC processes put in place to support the academic and linguistic development of English learners. Comparatively, while co-teaching may also occur at the secondary level, the schedule of secondary schools is arranged to allow for both class
time and planning time for all teachers. This form of structure does not usually exist at the elementary level as consistently as in secondary schools, which impacts the ways in which teachers are able to meet and co-plan instruction. This challenge was considered an important factor in observing the processes of co-teaching PLC planning meetings.

The suburb in this study typified the challenges currently faced by U.S. teachers responsible for growing populations of English learners in their classrooms (NCES, 2006; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Shore & Sabatini, 2009). Within the last ten years, the ELL population in this school district had increased by 52%, and 59.2% of students within the proposed school (both ESL and non-ESL) qualified for free and reduced lunch. English learners made up 8% of the enrollment in this school district. Groups of diversity represented in this district included White students (72.9%), Latino students, (11.2%), African American students (6.1%), Asian students (5.7%), Multiracial students (3.6%), Native American students, (0.3%), and Pacific Islander students (0.1%), (Niche, 2015).

**Participant Selection**

Letters of invitation to participate in this study were sent to the superintendents of several school districts that had a significant population of English learners represented in their district. A suburban school district in close proximity to a large urban area in the Midwest was chosen as a research site for this study due to its recent rapid increase of immigrant families in their school district.

The assistant superintendent of this district granted permission for me to directly contact the principals of elementary buildings in the district and request to base this study in their building. After an interview with the principal of this study, permission was granted to conduct this study in their school, and the principal recommended names of
potential co-teaching teacher teams. I was given permission to invite the teachers to talk with me and ask if they would like to participate in the study.

Purposive sampling was used for the selection of participants. For the purpose of observing instructional decisions in relation to content and language standards, participants were chosen by grade-level teams, in order to appropriately address the same grade-level standards. Another element of criteria was that the selected co-teaching team contained one general education teacher and one ELL teacher, creating a case in which teachers represented different perspectives on the topic of study (Creswell, 2013).

Participants for this study were identified through the following criteria: teachers held a standard license in their state, were employed in the same school district and within the same school, worked within the same grade level and had a regularly scheduled PLC time to plan and discuss instructional supports for English learners. The ELL teacher was required to hold both a standard teaching license and an endorsement in ELL teaching in the state in which this study was conducted. Finally, it was also desired that all participants in this study had completed at least 2 years of initial teaching, in order to draw on reflections of past teaching experiences that might inform their current consideration of interactions with their co-teaching colleague.

Human Subjects Procedures

Recruitment

The school setting was chosen through a two-step process. A request to conduct research in an elementary school in this district was filed with the district office. Upon acceptance of that request, I sent invitations to participate to principals in four different elementary schools within the district and made final plans to select a site based on those
responses. Inclusion in the study was voluntary and teachers within grade level teams had the option to not participate in the study.

Initially, three PLC teams in two different elementary schools in the same district volunteered to be a part of the study. Semi-structured interviews and PLC observations were conducted with all three teams. At the stage of data analysis, the width of the data generated by these PLC teams required that I narrow the focus of my analysis. Reflecting on the discourse that occurred in each of the three PLC teams, I finally selected one PLC team to analyze in depth due to the richness and amount of discourse that consistently occurred in their weekly PLC meetings.

The chosen participants met approximately once a week with additional observations available on some weeks, over a course of four months during the 2016-2017 school year. Each participant completed and signed an Informed Consent Form, required by the Human Subjects Review Board of the University of Iowa prior to data collection or observations.

Risks.

Given the small size of any elementary building within this school district, the biggest predictable risk in this study was that information shared by participants might possibly identify themselves, students, or colleagues in the final compilation of the study. Since the building principal was part of the recruitment process, there was also a risk that any opinions shared about the administration, school, or district might negatively impact the teacher who made those comments. Finally, the process of examining individual teaching practices created the potential to raise individual concerns about personal teaching capacity. While the goal of this study was to observe discursive practices of co-
teaching PLCs to eventually inform improved instruction for English learners, the potential for the negative impact on teachers was a risk that was seriously considered.

**Protections.**

In order to protect the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were selected for each of the participants, as well as for individuals (e.g., colleagues, children, family members, parents, community members) and places (e.g., school, cities, landmarks, locations) that were referenced in their discussions, interviews, or personal conversations with myself, the principal investigator. Student artifacts that were apparent in meetings were not included or referenced in this study.

Since interview responses and conversations during PLCs were collected in both written and audio form, I implemented protections for each method of capturing and recording discourse. Written notes were taken using a Microsoft Word program on my laptop during interviews and co-teaching PLC meetings. The laptop was password protected and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my private residence, in which I am the sole occupant. Audio data was captured using a handheld digital recorder, which was locked in the filing cabinet in my personal residence. The decision to use these devices was made so that no data in written or audio form would be accessed through the Internet. All forms of data were transferred for analysis on the same laptop, on which they were captured, with all devices password protected and stored in a locked filing cabinet. In the event that student names or identifying information was shared during interviews or PLC meetings, that information was summarily excluded in the data transcriptions. Through these methods, all data produced within this study was only accessible to the researcher through password protection and secured storage with locks.
To minimize the risk of repercussions for making any opinionated or negative remarks about the administrators or school district itself, I filtered comments in the data analysis process and removed any remarks that did directly pertain to the study and that might be construed as negative or offensive against the school district and any of its personnel. I also implemented a process of member checking in the form of narrative accuracy checks, in which I provided transcripts of the interviews to each participant of their own personal interview, and transcripts of the PLC meetings to the participants, to allow them to check transcripts for accuracy. Participants were given the opportunity to delete any comments they felt might be traced back to their identity or position.

While some studies may choose to implement peer observation or video taping of teachers in the classroom as a part of the data collection process, it was beyond the scope of this study to observe instructional practices. Observation of co-planning PLCs occurred when students were absent from the room, thereby excluding students from any part of the study. Since the purpose of this study was to describe the discursive practices that occur within a co-teaching PLC meeting, it was reasonable to focus on discursive practices alone within co-teaching planning meetings rather than analyze instructional practices.

**Research Design**

For this study, a qualitative research design using a descriptive single-case approach was employed through qualitative analysis methods. The principles of grounded theory were applied to the data analysis in order to generate major themes and construct meaning, and a second layer of analysis was implemented through the application of positioning theory to describe the specific discursive practices of teachers.
For this qualitative descriptive case study, the purpose was to describe the discursive practices between an ELL teacher and general education teacher in a co-teaching PLC meeting. Given the focus on discursive practices that included an ELL teacher, there was limited research to inform the study, making a descriptive case study particularly relevant for when unique situations of real-life experience justify an in-depth analysis and examination of the phenomena and the context in which it may occur (Creswell, 2013; Gerring, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Yin (2009) defines a case as a community, a relationship, a decision process or a specific project. Creswell (2013) states that the key in defining a case study is that it can be bounded or defined as occurring with a specific place and time. A descriptive case study seeks to understand a certain issue, or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurs, thus selecting specific cases to help define and understand the issue (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Since conversations including ELL teachers in PLC meetings had not been previously explored in depth, it was especially important to gain a deeper understanding of this particular real-life situation characterized by the absence of research (Gerring, 2006). This made the choice to implement a qualitative research design particularly relevant.

Qualitative research is also an appropriate research design for researchers who have a deep interest in the participants of a study. A qualitative approach to research allows insight into participants’ personal experiences through the representation of participant thoughts and perceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002). Considering my background in the support of ELL teachers’ efforts in collaboration and co-teaching, and the desire to describe these experiences through teachers’ voices, a
qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate and relevant for this study’s research design.

Grounded theory offers an inductive process that provides description that generate a theory about a process or action from the collected data (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Creswell, 2013). A key concept in this theory development is that is generated through data provided by participants who have had real-life experiences of the processes under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory therefore provides a general theory of a process influenced by the views of the study participants (Creswell, 2013).

This study utilized a systematic procedure of grounded theory, popularly formed in the research of Corbin and Strauss (1990, 1998). A constant comparative approach was used to systematically develop a theory that described topics of discourse as well interactions within discourse between teacher participants (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) describes this constant comparative approach in grounded theory as a “zigzag” process (pg. 86). As evidence of this “zigzag” approach in this study, I immersed myself in a process in which data was collected, and then immediately analyzed. Each week I returned to the field to retrieve more data, and reiteratively coded information to refine the emerging themes.

Discourse has become a firmly established research topic and a major concept in the field of social constructivism (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). The term “position” has come to replace concepts typically related to the roles people fulfill in social situations. Harré and van Langenhove (1999) state that positioning theory has come to be
known as “the study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” (pg.1).

Positioning theory asserts that social phenomena is generated in and through conversation (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). In essence, conversations become the location where social phenomena are created. Harré and Gillet (1994) expand on positioning theory by stating that many phenomena can be interpreted as features of discourse. In other words, discursive phenomena are not manifestations of what takes place within the mind of the speaker but are represented as the phenomenon itself. Positioning theory is therefore used to focus on how social phenomenon are created through discourse.

According to Harré and Gillet’s work (1994), discourse separates the everyday flow of life into episodes that define individual realities as well as the reality of the social world. Social mores typically live within and create boundaries within these episodes. Peoples’ abilities to navigate these rules may depend on their discursive practice skills within life’s episodes and ultimately within the social context of everyday life.

Harré and van Langenhove (1999) present positioning theory as a conceptual framework based on the position, the act of discourse, and the storyline that is created through discursive interactions. As such, there are three main ways to classify positioning and use it in analysis. The first way, is to analyze if individual persons are positioned as individuals or collectives as collectives. Another way of classifying is to analyze whether an individual reflexively positions themselves or if they are interactively positioned by someone else. A final way to classify positioning is to analyze whether
speakers position each other within a conversation, or if by the process of positioning the other, the speaker is consequently positioned in the same act.

This study analyzed positioning in discourse through the reflexive and interactive actions in which participants either positioned themselves or the other participant in the conversation. To clarify, interactive positioning occurred when what one person said positioned the other person in the shared conversation. Reflexive positioning occurred when what the person said positioned themselves in the conversation. Through this positioning lens as a conceptual framework, positioning theory offered the most appropriate way to describe the discursive practices of teachers within a co-teaching PLC meeting.

My observation of these discursive practices between teachers situated me in the role of participant observation researcher in this study. While initially eight teachers were interested in being in this study, I chose to focus on two participants and the processes of their co-teaching PLC meetings over the course of four months. I participated in the study through my observation of discussions during co-teaching PLC meetings, interviews with participants, and through reviewing discourse data and provided by interview responses and observed discussions during co-teaching PLC meetings. The information I gathered for this study included individual teacher interview notes, audio files of teacher interviews, audio files of weekly PLC meetings, and field notes gathered by myself during these observations.

Since the research question for this study required a description of the discursive practices between teachers, it was crucial to study both the context in which these conversations occurred as well as the background of teachers involved in these settings.
In order to provide a detailed description of this specific case discourse that occurred within conversations in the context of co-teaching PLC meetings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), I implemented a dialogic approach to represent a straightforward representation of what actually happened in the field (Van Maanen, 1988).

**Data Collection Procedures**

The strength of a case study lies in its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of the case under study (Creswell, 2013). To develop a deep understanding, multiple sources of information must be gathered. Data for this study were collected over the course of four months, with observations based in an upper elementary schools classroom in an urban school district. During this time, I collected the data in the form of (a) individual participant semi-structured interviews, (b) audio recordings of observed co-teaching PLC meetings, and (c) field notes from memos and observation notes of both interviews and observed co-teaching PLC meetings.

**Interviews**

Interviews that occur within qualitative studies are more like conversations than formal procedures with pre-determined response options (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Kahn & Cannell (1957) describe qualitative interviews as a conversation with a purpose (pg. 149). While there were some basic categories of information that were necessary to add background information for this study, I chose a semi-structured interview approach that included an open-ended questioning format (Appendix) for the majority of questions, so the unknown experiences and perceptions of teachers would be reflected in the recorded responses (Glesne, 1999). An open-ended questioning format allowed the participants to frame and structure their responses according to their individual lived
experience and views (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Interview responses were gathered through digital audio recordings and field notes during and after the interview, in order to inform initial knowledge and views of working with English learners, perspectives on collaboration and co-teaching, and PLC processes in their school. Once interviews were completed, I gathered digital audio recordings of each week's PLC meeting and coded each meeting both electronically through the recording device and by a corresponding code in my field notes.

**Observations**

Observations in qualitative studies are used to discover complex interactions in real-life settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Observations are not just being present in a setting (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2001), but a planned and self-aware procedure of observing and recording the events of a specific phenomenon. In order to balance an unbiased view with an intentional purpose to record my observations of the PLC meetings, I attended the first meeting with no predetermined categories of interest or prescribed checklists. In this way, I was able to note patterns as they emerged during the course of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

As a participant observer, I immersed myself in the weekly co-teaching PLC meetings in order to hear, see, and attempt to experience the reality of these meetings in the same way as the participants (Glesne, 1999). This required that I consider my positionality in the study as shared previously in this chapter. Due to my work in the field of ELL education, it was important for me to determine the boundaries of my participation before I attended the first observation. I decided that I would observe and take notes but would not be an active participant in the conversations that occurred. I
explained this to both teachers before the study began, and also explained that I was there to observe their natural conversations, but not interject my personal thoughts on the topics. While I did not share my personal thoughts with the participants, I took field notes during the meetings to note patterns of topics or conversational styles that occurred while teachers talked. Following each weekly PLC meeting I reviewed the notes and elaborated on my field notes to clarify and expand my observations. The digital audio recordings were then transcribed into a Word document, noting the participants, date of the meeting, and file code of the audio file. My field notes were added in the margins of the transcribed copy of each weekly meeting.

Field Notes

Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that field notes are "not just scribbles", (pg. 99), but should incorporate intentional note-taking and note-management systems. Field notes were incorporated in my observations in order to capture my impression of interactions and discussions during the meetings. These notes included my notations of what occurred during the process of observing the meetings, as well as notations and memos made in my review of the data after meetings had concluded. After the first observation, I began to see patterns and areas of note that I intentionally looked for and recorded during the meeting and reflected on in the margins of meeting transcriptions afterwards. After each co-teaching PLC meeting, I added a detailed account of my observations to the meeting's transcription and included analytic memos throughout my data collection and analysis to capture my thoughts during and after the process (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).
**Data Analysis**

Two methods of data analysis were used in this study. To support the observation of my descriptive case study I implemented an open-coding technique to identify general patterns and themes in relation to the discursive practices of an ELL and general education teacher in the co-teaching PLC setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The first step of coding required line-by-line coding in which general codes were assigned based on the topic represented in the conversation. Through an iterative process, codes were refined through multiple readings and grouped into categories that represented the topics represented in the conversation between participants in the study.

These categories were summarily developed into thematic codes (Cresswell, 2013), which were then used to select conversations from co-teaching PLC meetings between teachers, so that selected sections of discourse might be additionally analyzed through the conceptual framework of positioning theory (Gee, 2014; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Wodak, 2001). In this way, major themes that emerged from the data, as well as specific language used by participants, were used to inform and guide a discourse analysis of the data produced through interviews, and observations of PLC meetings (Jager, 2001; Gee, 2014).

**Qualitative Analysis**

All data for analysis was pulled from the transcription of teacher interviews and co-teaching PLC meetings, representing discourse that existed in both spoken and written form (Gee, 2014). Previous to the final analysis, codes were refined following each week’s PLC meeting, through the application of line by line coding and guided by previous coding sessions and field notes during observation visits. Before the final
analysis began, I re-read all transcripts in their entirety several times to both familiarize myself with the transcripts, but to also gain a general sense of the flow of conversations throughout the entirety of the study’s observations. Agar (1980) suggested that researchers immerse themselves in the details to gain a better view of the data in its entirety before the data is broken into parts and coded.

After several readings of transcriptions in their entirety, I applied an iterative process in which codes were generated, applied, and refined through qualitative analysis and the constant comparison method (Clarke, 2005; Creswell, 2013; Gee, 2014). As codes were generated, they were grouped by theme, so that higher-level codes might be developed. The data was re-coded using these higher-level codes in an iterative process, until all data was accounted for in the codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2013). Finally, I reviewed my identified themes through an event code verification process. The data within each unit of discourse was reviewed using the broader codes to verify they were reflective of the themes emerging from the data (Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 2014).

For this qualitative case study, grounded theory methods guided the bulk of the data analysis and created the foundation of theory formation from the data collected through teacher interviews and observations of co-teaching PLC meetings.

**Applying a Positioning Lens**

The themes and codes from the qualitative analysis of all transcribed data was used to develop metacodes that were then used to select particular conversations from each representative event for more specific analysis of the discourse between teachers in this study (Gee, 2014; Rogers, 2003). Gee (2014) advises that rather than analyze entire transcripts of conversations, researchers select key passages for analysis, and then delve
deeper into interpreting the linguistic interpretations rather than attempt to do a cursory analysis of all total transcribed data.

In this study I selected discourse passages that served as representative events, and then defined those conversations that best illustrated typical discourse events that occurred during co-teaching PLC meetings (Rogers, 2003). Representative events were determined by selected passages that showed examples of teachers positioning themselves in the PLC conversation in ways that resulted in a decision about instruction. Finally, I applied positioning theory as a lens to interpret and analyze the dialogue that occurred between teachers during their meetings.

Positioning theory was chosen as a lens to interpret the conversations in this study because it offered an alternative to traditional interpretations of "roles". Harré & van Langenhove (1999) contend that speech acts which occur within conversations create situations in which people are seen as locations for social acts. In other words, the pattern of language use by participants within a conversation held the capacity to create a social phenomenon. It is these discursive practices that Harré & van Langenhove (1991) define as the act of positioning. Harré & van Langenhove offer a more detailed description of positioning by saying, "Within the person/conversations grid, positioning can be understood as the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of the conversation have specific locations" (pg. 395). Specifically, positioning is how a person is located within a conversation in a jointly constructed storyline (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Smith, 1988).

Following the initial qualitative analysis to identify major themes, interactive and
reflexive positioning codes were applied to an analysis of select conversations from co-
teaching PLC meetings. Interactive positioning was defined as when one person
positioned the other in a conversation. Reflexive positioning occurred when a teacher
positioned herself within the conversation (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Specifically,
positioning was defined as how a person was located within a conversation of a jointly
constructed storyline (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999).

The specific type of positioning was determined through each participant's
pronoun choice. Pronoun use was then utilized as a marker to reflect positioning due to
the potential of pronouns to reflect a person's status or position in a social situation (Harré
& van Langenhove, 1999; Kacewicz, et al., 2014). Pronoun use produced two coding
categories. The initial code was determined through the use of collaborative or
independent pronoun use. Instances in which participants used the pronoun "we", were
coded as collaborative comments. When a participant used the pronoun "I", an
independent pronoun code was assigned. After pronoun use was determined, an
interactive or reflexive positioning code was subsequently assigned.

**Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**

Trustworthy qualitative research expresses a reality that provides a credible
account of reality (Richardson, 2000). Milne and Oberle (2005) state the credibility of a
researcher’s qualitative work is supported through the ability of the researcher to capture
and accurately report the perspectives of those people who are interviewed. Steps to
increase the rigor of this model in this specific study include participant-driven data,
questioning for clarification, timely transcription, intercoder agreement checks, and the
use of an audit trail.
Participant-driven data allowed the participants to share their experiences and decide which pieces of information they believed were relevant and most important to share (Milne & Oberle, 2005). Participant-driven data was also ensured through my use of a flexible interview technique. While I prepared a script of possible questions in advance to use during these semi-structured interviews, participants were allowed to share the information that they believed was most relevant and important for me to know.

With the permission of each participant, a digital audio recording method was used during the interviews, and in the co-teaching PLC team meetings, creating an atmosphere that promoted conversational exchange. I provided the option to not record the meetings before the study began, but both participants indicated verbally as well as in their consent forms that they would allow the audio recordings.

During the interviews, I encountered some situations in which the participant was not clear as to what I was asking. In these cases, I reworded the question and provided an example so as to give the participant a clearer perception of the context of the question. This technique also helped me reach more accurate information since I was required to clarify the language of both the questions. Finally, I took great care to keep my comments and interactions to a minimum during the interviews so that the experiences of the participants dominated the information that was provided, and so that my comments did not lead responses in any specific direction.

Milne and Oberle (2005) state that the accuracy of note-taking is a main component in the authenticity of information gained through interviews. Recordings of each interview were transcribed into a data table contained in a Word document. Since a digital recorder was used, each meetings’ proceedings were saved under the digital record
number shown on the recorder. This allowed easy access to review interviews during the analysis and transcription writing process. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, all notes made by the researcher were saved electronically on a password–protected computer with the researcher being the only person with that computer’s password. After all comments were transcribed in the data table, I listened to interviews several times while concurrently reading the transcribed notes to ensure accuracy and to refine my data codes and labels.

Creswell (2013) suggests intercoder agreement as a way to increase the reliability of code interpretation in qualitative studies. Intercoder agreements create an external check on the highly interpretive coding process that occurs within each level of the analysis of coding. Intercoder agreement checks determine what the coders are agreeing on, the agreement of code names, and whether agreement is sought on codes, themes, or both codes and themes.

Coders with knowledge and experience in open coding and in vivo coding processes were asked to contribute their personal analysis checks in order to increase reliability of the coding process. In the initial stages of open coding, two coders were given sections of the transcripts from interviews and observations and asked to generate their own line-by-line categories and initial codes. I then met with these coders to check our agreed understanding of what was represented in the data and appropriate designation of initial codes and labels applied to the data.

A second set of coders were asked to look at data after secondary themes and patterns were identified. These coders were supplied with sections of the original coded transcripts that showed the completed line-by-line coding, as well as two levels of the
refined codes into themes so as to view the cognitive process I used to refine codes into my final themes. The coders provided their report on agreement of my coding process and the accuracy of the final themes to represent the patterns derived from the data.

An audit trail provides the details of findings and some of the decisions that lead to a study’s conclusions and ultimate results (Robinson, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that an audit trail is conducted so that others may verify a study. The audit trail in this study was created through both digital recordings of the interviews and observations of PLC meetings with participants, the transcription of all interviews and PLC meetings, as well as the organization of my field notes in relation to both interviews and PLC meetings.

Finally, to ensure the privacy of all participants in this study, the digital recorder was locked in a file cabinet with access only available to myself. Hardcopies of the transcriptions were locked in the same file cabinet. In addition to securing these data sources, the computer used for this study was password protected on a personal computer and stored in a locked cabinet when not in use.

**Summary**

This chapter presented a rationale for the qualitative research design and methods based in grounded theory and applied to the transcripts of teacher interviews and co-teaching PLC meetings. The purpose of this study was to describe, interpret, and explain the discursive practices that occur between an ELL and general education teaching in their co-teaching PLC meetings.

A detailed rationale was provided to describe the process in selecting both the research site and participants for the study. Both risks and protections for participants in
this study were described through Human Subjects Procedures.

Teacher interviews and observations of PLC meetings were used to address this study's goal to describe the discursive practices used by teachers in a PLC setting. A detailed description of the data collection process provided reasoning for the selected data analysis methods.

A description of data analysis explained an open coding process by which major codes were refined into representative major themes. The second phase of analysis applied codes and patterns of discourse to the linguistic data through identifying pronoun markers that represented forms of position as supported through positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). The discourse analysis centered language as the tool used to construct the positioning practices of teachers the events and the social interactions constructed by the ELL and general education teacher in this study (Gee, 2014). Finally, I provided a description of the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and ethical procedures through interactions with this study's participants and my handling of the data.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents a summary of findings from both teacher interviews as well as observations of discursive practices between two teachers during a series of their Professional Learning Community (PLC) planning times. The data from semi-structured interview questions and observation notes from each PLC planning time were analyzed for this case study on the discursive practices between an ELL teacher and her co-teaching general education classroom teacher in an urban elementary school. The purpose of this study was to address the study's research question through observation and analysis of the discursive practices between a general classroom and ELL teacher in the co-teaching planning time, or PLCs.

Prior to the observation of the PLC meetings, individual teacher interviews were held in order to gather teacher insights into the subject of both co-teaching and the ways PLCs currently operate in their school. Through these interviews, three major themes emerged. The first theme included the purpose, function and procedural processes of PLC meetings. The second theme focused on teacher views towards collaboration and co-teaching. The final theme addressed instructional supports for English learners in the classroom. The data from interviews were then compared to the conversations in each of the weekly PLCs to learn to what extent teachers' insights and opinions shared during interviews also appeared during the weekly PLC meetings. Finally, positioning theory was applied to an analysis of key passages of discourse within each PLC to better recognize the ways in which each teacher's use of discourse served to position themselves within the PLC, and in some situations, in a position to either make independent or
collaborative decisions for instruction.

The Co-teaching Context

Introduction of PLC Team

This co-teaching team consisted of two female teachers. Findley served as one of the school's English Language Learner (ELL) teachers who supported this upper elementary grade level. Ellis, was a general education teacher in the same school and was the assigned classroom teacher with whom Findley taught.

I first conducted a semi-structured interview with Findley in her ELL classroom. The classroom was approximately half the size of a typical grade-level classroom in the school, and yet, three ELL teachers shared the space. Each ELL teacher had a desk as well as a small student table, which would seat up to 6 students. Cubicle walls, approximately six feet in height, separated each teaching space. For our interview, Findley and I met in her teaching space at time when the other ELL teachers were out of the room.

At the time of this interview, Findley had served in public education several years. She had been at her current school for more than five years. After some time teaching in the classroom, Findley returned to higher education to receive a master’s degree in a field related to education. She had originally been grandfathered into teaching ELL, and had attended a local ELL conference each summer, but with the enactment of NCLB and the requirement for highly qualified teachers, she was required to obtain an ELL endorsement in order to keep teaching English learners. Findley joined a cohort of teachers from her school and pursued her ELL endorsement through classes outside of her workday.
For our interview time, Ellis and I met in her classroom while her students were at Music class. The classroom was large and airy, with the outside wall consisting of all windows. At the front of the classroom was a large carpet area as well as a smart board for projection. Behind the carpet, student desks were configured into collaborative arrangements of four desks per grouping. The back wall was lined with bookshelves full of books, games, and teaching supports. On the far side of the room, near the windows, were Ellis's desk as well as a small table and chairs, which would accommodate up to six students.

Ellis had also been in public education for more than ten years and had been at her current school for more than five years. Her education background included a general education degree. At the time of this study, she had just begun to pursue her master's degree in education as well as an endorsement in ELL Education. When asked about the history of English learners in her classroom, she responded that she had always had a few English learners in her classroom throughout her entire teaching career, but that the number of students had significantly increased in the last eight years. In fact, Ellis shared that the school had experienced a rapid transformation of what it had looked like even a few years previous, with more immigrant families moving into the apartment buildings near the school. She continued to say that originally, the school's immigrant families had been primarily of Bosnian or Latino descent, but now the school was seeing more families from different areas of the world, including Southeast Asia and Africa. A third of Ellis's classroom for the current year included English Learners. For this reason, she said, she had decided it was good idea to go back to school for her ELL endorsement.

While Ellis and Findley were new to co-teaching together, this was not the first
co-teaching experience for either teacher. Ellis's previous co-teaching experience began in a different school district, where she referred to the approach as "team teaching".

While team teachers had not received training on how to teach together, Ellis found there were still distinct benefits to having two teachers in the same classroom. After coming to her current school district, Ellis had collaborated with different ELL teachers, and found it to be similar to the team teaching approach she had experienced in her previous district. She did indicate that her current co-teaching with Findley had evolved from the approach in previous years, saying, "Last year the ELL co-teacher would maybe pull kids out to do just a quick vocabulary for projects, but this year Findley's in the room so we can kind of split the groups up a little differently". When asked if she saw a benefit of either her previous team-teaching experience or the current approach to co-teaching, Ellis responded,

Ellis: I think it just depends on the schedule of how you can make it work. I know next door, one of the ELL teachers pushes in for her during math, and does a math group while the teacher is doing a math group, you know, I think there are a lot of different ways that you can make it work, depending on the time and the day that the person can come in.

In contrast to Ellis's previous co-teaching experiences, Findley had entered co-teaching with some training on how to co-teach with another educator.

Findley: Years ago, I did co-teach with another teacher, and we did one year just co-teaching and tried to you know, do what we could do as we were learning, and then the next year, we took the co-teach class together, and then they would give different assignments on the different strategies in co-teaching and each week we
would practice a new strategy and then get back and meet in our class. I found that to be very, very helpful.

Findley also said that while she and Ellis had not preceded their co-teaching relationship with any training, the school administrator had shared his vision of having more ELL teachers "push in" to grade-level classrooms this year. Even without training, Findley thought that she and Ellis were making positive progress in working together, despite the challenge of an increased student population of English learners; particularly English learners who were "newcomers", or in other words, had been in the United States less than one school year. In Findley's opinion, these students required time for explicit English support and instruction, and this could sometimes cause a scheduling challenge when trying to meet the diverse language needs of all the English learners in Ellis's classroom.

**Co-teaching PLC Structures**

At the beginning of the school year, the school district and school administrator communicated expectations for both co-teaching and planning time practices between teachers. These expectations included guidance for teachers to use DuFour, et al.'s critical questions for Professional Learning Communities (2016). The school administrator at Findley and Ellis's school referred to these four critical questions at the beginning of the year and reminded teachers to revisit these throughout their planning times during the academic year. These four critical questions were: (a) What do we expect students to know and be able to do, (b) How will we know when they have learned it, (c) How will we respond when students have not learned it, and, (d) How will we respond when they already know it?
PLC purpose.

The purpose of Ellis and Findley's PLC was to discuss instructional plans for the English Language Arts (ELA) time with ELL teacher support. This collaborative planning time was meant to provide an opportunity for both teachers to design instruction based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), as well as English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards as applied to the district ELA curriculum.

To support PLC work in this school, the school district had provided training to grade-level classroom teachers on the components of effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) during the previous school year. Included in these required components were what both teachers referred to as the “Four Critical Questions for PLCs” (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). The district Professional Development Facilitator had also provided teachers with tools from the state’s Department of Education ELP standards training modules to guide their work in supporting academic language development for English learners.

When asked about the purpose for PLCs in their school, Ellis responded that the main purpose of PLCs was to work on projects, since Project Based Learning (PBL) was a major initiative in their school. The school vision, she said, was that all invested educators such as grade-level teachers, special education educators, ELL educators, and Title I educators would join together to plan class projects and instill supports in their respective area as they saw student needs identified for support. When asked about the ELL teacher role in those project-planning times, Ellis responded that, "When we plan projects, we have our main content standards, but then we also have, the English language proficiency standards that we put into every project, so she helps with that and
sees where we can embed that in”.

When Findley was also asked about the purpose of her PLC time with Ellis, she said the goal of their planning time was to see how she could support ELA instruction with ELL supports. Findley shared that she was not able to attend the grade level team planning with all the grade level’s teachers, which made things a little more difficult since she missed out on some of the strategic planning for ELA time. This was her first year to co-teach with Ellis, and they were still working out how to plan and work together.

Findley: So we're still trying, we're at the point where we're trying to feel each other out and figure out how we can, how I can best support her without interfering with what she is doing in her classroom, um, and then she does have quite a large number of my ELL students.

**PLC planning and procedures.**

At the beginning of the school year, the school principal communicated PLC expectations to each grade-level PLC. These expectations stated that teams would meet on a regular basis and would operate with a weekly agenda. Each team was asked to establish norms at the beginning of the school year and reference those norms in all interactions during their PLCs. Finally, DuFour's work (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008), was identified as the guiding structure for all PLC work.

Previous to the onset of a new project, the grade level PBL team would meet for a half day to collaboratively create and plan the project. A weekly meeting would then be established throughout the duration of the project, but because of the meeting time, it was not always possible for all team members to be present at the PBL meeting. Findley was
unable to attend most of these meetings, since she supported another grade-level classroom at that time.

In addition to PLC time for Project Based Learning, grade-level general education teachers met weekly with their co-teachers to plan instruction for specific content areas. Ellis described her co-teach planning time with Findley as laying out the framework for what they wanted to accomplish during the ELA class time that week. She indicated that they really didn't have time to collaborate on specific teaching strategies, because most of their time was just figuring out what it was that they wanted to do. Ellis also shared that because Findley only co-taught one class period, sometimes other things would come up between classes to change their plans from their weekly co-planning time.

Ellis: Most of our planning is just laying out the skeletal part of the week, kind of where I hope we are going, and then, typically what happens is that she'll come in, and I've changed something, and we have a really quick two minute pow-wow, of this is what's changed.

According to Findley, even meeting once a week with Ellis could prove challenging at times. When the two teachers were not able to meet during the week, they would send frequent emails and discuss class plans. Sometimes they would check in on plans as they passed each other in the hall.

As for finding her place within the grade-level PLCs, the ability to attend these meeting was a major challenge for Findley. She shared that in the past, ELL teachers were each assigned a grade-level, and the expectation was that ELL teachers would attend the grade level PLCs of the classrooms they supported on a daily basis. The challenge of this, however, was that schedules between grade-levels either conflicted or
overlapped, so that attending all applicable PLCs was not possible.

Findley: This year, the PLCs are more student-driven, so there if they're going to be speaking about a specific student that you deal with, then you are invited, otherwise, we're not involved in the PLCs at all. We have an ELL PLC that we meet once a month as teachers, to kind of just talk about issues that are coming up with us. And I found that this is making it more challenging, because like last year, for instance, one of the 6th grade PLCs that I was on, yes, we did discuss students' needs, but then we would also discuss curriculum things that were coming up, and I could talk about like, the language standards, and how this might tie in. Ok, you guys are going to do this. Have you thought about this language standard? It could tie into this, and we could do this, and this, and this, to help the kids. That piece is gone now.

At the time of this study, Findley and Ellis had just begun meeting together for these co-teaching planning time, which they referred to as their shared PLC. They met weekly on Wednesday mornings from approximately 10:35 to 11:30am. This meeting occurred during Ellis's planning time, while the students in the class were out of the room for specials (P.E., Music, or Art).

Each week, when Findley arrived in the classroom, both teachers moved to a table at the side of the room to plan instruction. Each teacher came prepared with a laptop and Findley also brought a pen and notebook for taking meeting notes. For these meetings, I sat off to the side of the table, with the audio recorder placed on the table between the two teachers. Before the study began, I informed both teachers that I was there to observe, and would not take part in their discussion, and they should plan together as they
normally would. During the meetings, I took field notes as I observed interactions between the two teachers.

**Collaboration and Co-teaching**

As the review of literature showed, collaboration was described as the overarching concept of working together toward a common goal, while co-teaching was described as a form of collaboration, in which teachers formally collaborate to plan, provide instruction and assess student work (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). The theme "co-teaching" from teacher interviews consisted primarily references to the act of co-teaching, however, the label "Collaboration and Co-teaching" was assigned, in order to capture both informal and formal methods of collaboration.

While each teacher had indicated some background experience with co-teaching, their experiences were minimal, and occurred across various grade levels and settings. The training that each teacher received to prepare them for previous co-teaching experiences varied, and this indicated that their perspective on their current co-teaching arrangement might vary as well.

**Co-teaching roles.**

As each teacher discussed their views on co-teaching with me, I asked how they perceived their role of co-teaching while supporting the academic development of English learners. Findley described her role as an English language educator; someone who specifically focuses on the development of students' English as a new language.

*Findley: I see my role as instructing them in basic language they need to survive when they first get here; being able to make requests, ask for help, those kind of things, and then, going into the academic vocabulary, when they've got enough*
English to progress into that, and then helping them be able to be proficient in the reading, writing, listening, and speaking components. And I think a lot of it comes under the social aspects as well. A lot of times you get kids who can talk, and people think they're ready for the academics, and I think it's my job to kind of bridge between those two worlds.

I asked Findley how her role as ELL teacher functioned in the school within the administrative direction to push into classrooms. She said her focus of ELL instruction was usually vocabulary development that students needed to understand their PBL projects. I then asked Findley to describe what co-teaching between ELL teachers and general education teachers looked like in her school.

Findley: We're trying to not pull out the kids as much as possible. And co-teach model, it differs everywhere. I'd say for us, it's more, we're in there, we help supplement what the teachers are doing, but we're still targeting our ELL students, um, 'cause the district has kind of guided us that if you're in a co-teach model, you really need to be focusing on your ELL students, not so much the "gen ed" students.

When I asked Ellis how she saw her role as a co-teacher who supports English learners, she responded that these students were a part of her class, and that she was responsible for their learning in the same ways as her native English-speaking students.

Ellis: Well, a few years ago, I would have told you that the ELL teacher would have done most of it, but I feel like having the skills, and having the knowledge of how to support those students has to be something that classroom teachers need to be able to do, and like I said before, a lot of the strategies that I think support
English learners are good for your low SES kids as well. They're my students. I mean, they see other teachers, but they're my students, so it's my job to support them in their education and build their knowledge, and provide the vocabulary for them, and make accommodations for them, give them the scaffolds to get them there.

I then asked Ellis to tell me about her role as a general education teacher working with an ELL co-teacher. Ellis shared that while Findley primarily pushed into her room for co-teaching, there were times when Findley would pull some of the English learners out for explicit English instruction or support. Her rationale for this decision was that her EL students focused better when they were in a quieter environment with fewer distractions. Findley agreed with this, saying that when English learners needed explicit instruction and practice, for example, in pronunciation work, it worked better to pull English learners to her classroom, so they could better hear the instruction and their own speech production attempts. The larger classroom made this kind of explicit work difficult.

**Co-teaching challenges.**

While both Findley and Ellis shared that their initial attempts at co-teaching were going well, they also said there were some challenged to co-teaching, overall. For Findley, the biggest challenge was not feeling as connected to new instructional training in comparison to the building's grade-level teachers. As the school district focused on Project Based Learning (PBL), there were several trainings for grade-level teachers to learn about the process and best strategies in working with students. Special Education, Title, and ELL teachers had not been included in that training, and Findley said this
resulted in her feeling "left out" of the process and not as informed as she would like to be.

Findley: They did a mini two-hour workshop for us. I feel bad because I feel like I ask questions that are kind of "duh" questions probably to Ellis, just because I don't understand it and I haven't been part of it, so like, she'll use a word like "agency", and I don't totally understand what "agency" is, and I have to ask her what's agency, and you know, she has to teach me, and take her time to teach me things that we both weren't trained on together.

Ellis cited her own organization and getting used to the practice of working with another teacher as her biggest challenge in co-teaching. She shared that there were times when she had changed a lesson plan for the day, but forgot to notify Findley, so when Findley came to her classroom, she had to quickly let her know about the changes.

Ellis: I think twice she has come in now and I'm like, Oh! I forgot all about it, that we're doing this! So, it's all still kind of new, but I think just making sure that it, it forces me to make sure that I'm thinking ahead to the week instead of you know, Monday morning, trying to plan everything out.

A common challenge that both teachers identified was lack of time to work together. Both teachers stated that they needed more time to plan together and work on instruction as a co-teaching team. For Findley, the time challenge extended beyond the co-teaching time with Ellis to the lack of time with many of the classrooms she supported every day.

Findley: I feel like that in order to make collaboration what it should be you have to have the time. I'm co-teaching with three different teachers. You just don't have
the time to plan with all three. I mean, one teacher, our planning is, like, I come in the room, we have a quick talk while I'm getting ready to pull my students and that counts as our planning because there's no other time to meet.

Ellis echoed the feelings Findley had expressed about never having enough time to plan together for instruction, but also had frustrations in scheduling and planning instruction around the times that Findley was available to be in her room. Ellis knew that their instructional time to co-teach together was limited to a certain window of time each day, and this could sometimes make planning and delivering instruction a challenge.

Ellis: I think time will always be the biggest challenge. Finding time to collaborate, finding time to, well, sometimes she'll come in, and I'll be meeting with kids that she wants to meet with it, and it's all just trying to make it kind of flow seamlessly, it's just kind of hard.

Co-teaching benefits.

Despite the challenges of co-teaching and finding time to plan together, both Findley and Ellis could see definite benefits and potential for the co-teaching approach. Findley appreciated the insight she gained from being in the general education classroom, since previous to this year she would often have to guess about what was going on and how she could support general education instruction. Findley commented that not only did she pick up new ideas from her co-teaching colleagues, but also saw new strategies that she could apply to explicit instruction sessions with her English learners. She continued to say that ultimately this resulted in success for her English learner students since she was more aware of their learning needs beyond the scope of direct contact with her students.
Findley also believed that her presence in the general education classroom was beneficial to grade-level teachers since she was there to share her insight and expertise with English learners and their learning needs. In her experience, sometimes even the strongest teachers needed additional ELL strategies to help meet the learning needs of English learners. This was particularly true if these teachers had ELL newcomers in their classroom.

Findley: I work with some teachers who have newcomers, and I've been in this long enough, that there are certain rooms you go into, and the newcomer kind of just sits there, and the teacher teaches around them, and if they get something, great, and if they don't, they don't.

From Findley's perspective, co-teaching and planning time provided an opportunity to impact English language learning both in the general education classroom and the pull-out time for explicit English instruction. Not only was she more aware of how to support learning for her English learners, but she frequently had opportunities to discuss ways to provide instructional strategies in the grade-level classroom that could support language development as well.

Findley: I feel, especially during our planning times, like when we talk, and she'll bring up something, and I'll say, well, you know, have you thought about doing this kind of vocabulary, or you know, I know some of the kids don't have this, or this might be a different way of talking about that. I think that we're able to kind of supplement, but I think she picks up on a lot of that. I think it's helped, because she can kind of see just it's a different way of thinking of things.
Ellis reported similar thoughts on how the process of co-teaching and planning together with the ELL teacher was beneficial to her as an educator. She felt that working with someone whose focus was specifically English language development served as a reminder for her to consider the needs of these diverse students both as she planned for, but also facilitated learning in the classroom.

Ellis: I think it just gives me really good reminders about what I can be doing to support my kids. I know there's so much that I can learn from watching her and seeing what she's doing. I think I've picked up on the way that a concept has been phrased a little differently than how I've done it, and then that's something I can apply and try on my own.

**Instructional Supports for English Learners**

Co-teaching and collaboration can look many different ways in both planning and classroom instruction. In order to discover each teacher's perspective on what constituted best instructional practices with English learners, I asked both Findley and Ellis about their views on how to implement effective instruction in the classroom when working with English learners. In other words, what types of instructional supports, did these teachers believe were most effective to support the academic language development of English learners?

**Standards informed instruction.**

While the state in which this study occurred adopted the Common Core in 2008, the English Language Proficiency standards were adopted in January of 2014. Despite the Common Core or English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards not cited as a major
challenge by either teacher, navigating these standards with English learners was still a
demanding part of these teachers' workday.

Findley said that for her, a lot of working with the common core standards was
just getting to know them well and really know what they were targeting as a learning
goal. While she was familiar with the standards, it was challenging to use them with two
grade-levels of teachers. "You have the teachers who are focusing on standards, and then
you have the teachers who are focusing on our curriculum, which tend to be two different
things. It can get confusing".

Findley expressed a greater degree of comfort in working with the ELP standards
and attributed that comfort to the training provided by the school district. She had not
received as much Common Core training as she would have liked, but through her part in
helping grade-level teachers become familiar with the ELP standards, she felt she had a
better grasp on the ELP standards.

In the process of educating grade-level teachers on the ELP standards, Findley felt
that their school gained a better understanding of the work of ELL teachers. By
connecting the ELP standards with the Common Core, she said that ELL teachers were
able to show their colleagues how to support language learning in their classroom and
help their students make progress in English academic language development.

Findley: We do the project planning, we integrate our language standards, and we
let them know which standards, they're probably talking about when they're doing
the template on that. We did a staff development, and talked about our standards,
and that was awesome because our teachers didn't even know we had ELP
standards. They thought that you just went in, and you taught what you felt like
teaching in English. I thought it was really good for them to know that we have standards just like they have standards, then just try to refer them to some of them, and we have them practice, like just taking an assignment and looking at the standards and figure out where their assignment would fit in and how they could make it attainable for all levels of language learners.

Ellis shared that her struggle with the standards was more personal. She felt that she needed more time and training on how to effectively use the standards to guide her instruction. She described the pressure she felt in trying to get her students to grade-level standards because the gap between students' current academic knowledge and where they needed to be at grade-level to meet the standards, was significant.

Ellis: I'm only two years into teaching this grade level, so I still don't feel confident knowing what they [standards] all are. I feel like until I can really get a good grasp of those, and knowing how to better adapt and adjust them, well, I think some of the math standards, of what we expect kids to be able to do and when (long pause). I think rigor is great, um, but I think it's so important that we need to meet them where they're at, before we can get them there. Oh, it's so overwhelming and it's easy to just, I don't know, when I get overwhelmed sometimes, I'm like, "I'm done. I'm just done". How do you step away from what you know, and do sometimes what's right? But it's messy and uncomfortable. It doesn't feel right.... yet.

While the school had recruited ELL teachers in the training of ELP standards for classroom teachers, the ELP standards continued to be a challenge for Ellis. She shared that she still felt unclear on how to use them and admitted that since she had Findley as a
co-teacher, she would more often than not, leave the application of the ELP standards to her.

Ellis: I don't know where those ELP standards fall in with our project exactly. I don't know them well enough yet, and so, that's probably where I push it off so, like, Findley will help me with this because, these are my science, math, reading and writing ones I need to do for this project, and she can help, so that's where I probably just brush it off to her. And because there's so many similarities to some of them and the Common Core, it just feels like it's just one more thing that we have to do.

**ELL instructional strategies.**

The ELL methods class in which Ellis was currently enrolled helped her recognize ELL teaching strategies that would support her English learners' academic language development. While she had not previously given much thought to the different ways of helping students connect with what they already know, she commented that she was learning more about helping ELL students demonstrate that knowledge in alternative ways.

Ellis: I can see there's a different way for ELL kids to share their learning. I think it's a good reminder for me too that it doesn't have to look the same for everybody. I can check what they're doing different.

Ellis also reflected that collaboration had been one of the ideas she had discovered to help English learners in the classroom. She commented on the importance of giving students time to talk about the concepts about which they were learning and using both visuals and realia during instruction. She concluded by saying that providing time for
English learners to process and work with their new academic language skills was definitely an important component of effective teaching strategies with English learners.

Findley said that while visuals, graphic organizers, and labels on diagrams are important to help put things into context for English learners, the need for teachers to model and show learning was more important more than only speaking about topics in class.

Findley: I feel that in education, we say a lot. We need to be showing more, and demonstrating more, and doing hands-on more, and I think kids are a lot more successful, even kids that aren't ELL, because a lot of kids don't learn just by hearing things.

**Instructional support challenges.**

Within the challenges of designing effective instruction for English learners, both Ellis and Findley stated that newcomer student education presented one of the greatest challenges in their efforts to support academic English language development. Newcomers were defined as students who either recently arrived in the United States (U.S.), or had been in the U.S. less than one school year. Language development for newcomer students was especially difficult to support in the upper elementary grade classrooms for Findley, since the academic content, and therefore linguistic challenges, were more complex.

Since the language gap was more significant in the upper elementary grades, student engagement became a constant challenge for Findley as a teacher. With the increased number of refugee students, the school had received in the past few years, Findley shared that it was not uncommon to receive an eleven-year-old student who had
only attended one year of school previous to coming to their school district. These types of academic gaps made it difficult for newcomer students to enter a classroom and meet the same academic expectations as other students their age.

Classroom teachers were also challenged in knowing how to support newcomer students, according to Findley. In her opinion, it was sometimes difficult for teachers to recognize language development needs because the students' social English language had developed sooner. Additionally, for these students, the boredom created by an inability to participate in class often resulted in what Findley described as "naughty behaviors" or acting out in class. In these situations, it was not uncommon for classroom teachers to misidentify English learners students for special education due to the combination of developed social language, lower academic performance, and increased behavior issues in their classrooms.

Findley: Because when they've been here that long, it's, you know, people will hear them and 'oh, they were talking about this and this and this, and they were describing how to play this game on the playground and they were using a lot of advanced vocabulary', and so try to explain that that's a lot different from the vocabulary involved in ELA (English Language Arts).

While instructional supports for newcomers were also a challenge for Ellis, it was the home-to-school communication with newcomer families that she felt impacted her instruction with these students the most. She described herself as feeling "ill-equipped" to meet these students' learning needs and elaborated that the challenges in making a connection with the home was almost as difficult as the daily challenges in the classroom.

Ellis: It's really hard, and not having, not feeling like I have any way of contacting
parents for really great things that the kids are doing, or concerns that they're not
doing, other than going through this person who translates. I think that part is
really frustrating. You know, it's so easy to shoot an email to most parents and
say, "hey, so-and-so did this today and it was really great", and I don't feel like I
can feel some of those successes with all of the newcomer parents, and all of the
families.

**Summary of Teacher Interviews**

While the school district and school administrator had communicated
expectations for PLCs in Ellis and Findley's school, the two teachers differed on what
they saw as the primary focus of the PLC structure in their school. Ellis felt that the focus
of PLCs was to target Project Based Learning, while Findley believed grade-level co-
teaching PLCs were the focus of PLC work for the year. Part of this disconnect might be
contributed to the fact that ELL teachers in the school were not included in the initial
Project Based Learning (PBL) trainings, and many including Findley, were not able to
attend grade level PLC meetings specific to Project Based Learning.

Surprisingly, when asked about their roles as co-teachers, neither teacher
responded that their purpose was to collaborate with the other in designing instruction for
English learners. Findley described her primary role as a support to English learners in
Ellis's classroom, and on PBL projects. She shared that while she offered knowledge
about language development, her role was to support what Ellis, the classroom teacher
was already doing. Ellis's perspective was that she was equally responsible for all
students in her room, regardless of their English-speaking skills. She explained that she
was responsible for instruction, accommodations, and scaffolding, while Findley focused
on the students whom needed intensive language development support.

One of the advantages for this co-teaching team was that Ellis, the classroom teacher, was taking classes to earn her ELL endorsement. Ellis commented that she was always learning new strategies about how to work with English learners in her course work or through observing Findley in her room. She commented that one of the best ways she could support English learners was to scaffold learning and give them more time to process. Findley specified the need for teachers to model more and talk less. She knew that students in many classes were not processing instruction because it was almost entirely verbal.

Standards were a challenge for both teachers to some degree. Findley felt comfortable with the new state English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards, but said it was difficult to get classroom teachers to implement them. She was not sure how to support this work school-wide to a greater degree. Findley also commented that she felt familiar enough with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) but since she worked in several grade levels, it could be challenging in keeping the grade-level standards clear.

Ellis, on the other hand faced challenges in both standards areas. She was new to her current grade-level classroom, so was still figuring out the standards for this new grade. She felt she did not completely understand the ELP standards, and primarily left the implementation of those standards in the hands of Findley.

Overall, interviews with both teachers in this co-teaching PLC showed that they each came to the co-teaching experience with similar, but not aligned views of their purpose, team roles, or instructional plan. What they were in agreement on was that the ELL teacher served as a support in the room, rather than a co-teacher with equal
responsibilities in planning, instruction, and assessment.

**Introduction of Observations**

Each Wednesday from 10:35am and 11:30am, Findley and Ellis would meet to discuss plans for co-teaching English Language Arts with Ellis's upper elementary class. The meetings were held in Ellis's classroom, while her students were out of the room at one of their music, art, or PE classes. When Findley arrived in the classroom each week, she and Ellis would meet at a worktable to the side of the room to discuss their instructional plans for the upcoming week. Findley came equipped with a laptop as well as a notebook and pen, and more often than not, took notes in her notebook about ideas generated in the planning session, as well as notes of things to follow up before their next co-teaching time with students.

The PLC observations for this study occurred weekly, beginning in October of 2016, and ending in January of 2017. There were seven observations in total, providing for holiday weeks, parent teacher conferences, and times when teachers were at conferences outside of the school district. Through the process of first open coding and then the in vivo coding process, themes across these PLCs were refined and grouped into categories based on their common properties. Iterative coding and assigning labels of PLC conversations eventually resulted in the development of five major themes.

Themes were determined to be a major theme based on the number of utterances coded in each category, with the themes including the most utterances determined as a major theme. Gee's (2014) description was used to define an utterance as oral communication that communicated both a "who" and a "what". A descriptor for each of the five themes, *Co-teaching and Collaboration, ELL Student Needs, Instructional*
Planning, Teacher Roles, and Standards, is listed below in alphabetical order, rather than in order of frequency.

Co-teaching and Collaboration were initially two different labels in the preliminary coding. Co-teaching was determined to be utterances related to specific teaching acts in the classroom with students present, or utterances related to specific co-teaching practices to inform instructional practices in the classroom. Collaboration was defined as utterances related to joint decisions or inviting the other teacher into the discussion by asking their opinion on ideas or suggestions. In a final stage of coding, these two labels were collapsed to create the theme of "Co-teaching and Collaboration". Categories that were collapsed to create this theme included; sharing ideas, suggestions for resources, asking opinions, collaboration with other grade sections, collaboration with other ELL teachers, co-teaching plans, co-teaching methods, and professional development in co-teaching.

Coded labels that included concepts specific to the academic and social needs of English learners were organized into a common theme represented by the code "ELL student needs". Categories of discourse that referred to these topics and were collapsed into this final category included the topics; Diversity in the classroom, ELL student progress, ELL learning challenges, Interventions with ELLs, ELL student work product, ELL student self-monitoring, and ELL social integration, ELL Teaching Strategies, and ELL Learning Strategies.

"Instructional Planning" accounted for a large number of preliminary labels in the coding process. To keep a clear vision of the intent of this label, codes within this category related specifically to utterances related to the academic planning, discussion of
practices or materials related to academic planning, or reflection on teaching that informed subsequent planning. Categories that were collapsed to create this theme included; *academic language, vocabulary, scaffolding, differentiation, small group plans, instructional supports, scheduling instruction, project-based learning, English language arts, and content information.*

The theme, "Teacher Roles" contrasted from the "Co-teaching and Collaboration" theme in that utterances in this theme specifically addressed how one teacher functioned in the classroom in relation to the function of their co-teacher. In other words, the function of teachers in this category were the opposite of collaboration or co-teaching in that they reflected utterances about independent thoughts or actions regarding their role during instruction or planning. Utterances in this category included comments in which a teacher stated what they wanted to happen, or statements of what would happen during instruction, without asking the other teacher's opinion on that decision. Categories that were collapsed to create this theme included; *ELL Teacher role, classroom teacher role, instructional decision-making, content decisions, instructional sequence decisions, and teacher perspective.*

The "Standards" theme, while small in comparison to other themes, was included in order to show the degree to which standards were considered in the process of academic planning or delivery of instruction. Categories collapsed to create this theme included; *Common core standards, English language proficiency standards, standards in planning, and, connections to outcomes.*
PLC Week 1

Findley and Ellis were anxious to get to know me a little better when I joined them for the first PLC. They each had interviewed with me previous to this first meeting, but this first visit seemed to offer the opportunity to ask questions about how the study would proceed, and what I wanted them to do. Both teachers admitted that they were a little bit nervous about this process but were also excited to be a part of the study and discuss interactions between classroom and ELL teachers in general. Co-teaching was new to each of them, and they repeatedly commented that they needed ideas and suggestions about ways they could improve their co-teaching approach together. While they had both experienced brief experiences in co-teaching in previous teaching partnerships, this was their first year to work together, and they were eager to participate in a process that focused on the planning that happens between general education and ELL teachers.

Findley: So, this is a new experience for us.

Ellis: Yeah

Findley: So, we're still trying We're at the point where we're trying to feel each other out and figure out how we can, how I can best support her without interfering with what she is doing in her classroom, um, and then she does have quite a large number of my ELL students.

Ellis: Yes, a little more than a third are English learners.

Findley: And she's going for ELL, her ELL endorsement right now.

Ellis: Yeah, I've been doing some reading. I haven't read everything. We have our own little cohort here, another general education teacher.
After the introductions, Findley segued into the actual planning of the PLC by asking Ellis what the plans were for the upcoming week during the English Language Arts (ELA) part of class. Ellis replied that they would be working on Reader's Theater in class. The discussion centered on how groups would be arranged and how each teacher would support their own respective reading groups. Findley worked with the English learners in her group and said that she would continue the tasks they were currently working on in English language development.

Ellis shared a website where she had pulled resources and information about glaciers; a topic that the students were currently exploring. She also shared that she would arrange groups according to their research teams rather than by reading level. Since the text in the resources was a grade-level text, the two discussed how they could plot key vocabulary in advance for the students and pre-teach certain aspects of the information in the text. Once Findley heard the general direction of the instruction for the upcoming week, she began to make notes of ways she would support the learning in both her ELL pullout group or directly as co-teacher in the classroom. She suggested that she prepare EL students in her small group by developing background knowledge and focusing on vocabulary terms they would encounter in the glacier unit.

While Findley did not address the source of the specific standard from the common core, she suggested that during this part of the unit, they incorporate the idea of identifying the main idea, and determining the importance of details in the text. She shared that the EL students could use more practice in developing this skill. Ellis agreed that she had seen the same issue with all the students and suggested incorporating audio supports that she had found on a website that helped students learn new vocabulary.
Findley: I'm trying to think. Comparing and contrasting, what it could compare a glacier to.

Ellis: I think it’s, um, and this week we can kind of think it’s just the introducing and the thinking about it. I think it will come into effect more next week when we move into the landforms.

Findley: ok

Ellis: I think comparing and contrasting will occur then.

Findley: Well, you know, I could even have some other kind of vocabulary things too. I'm thinking, we could even, you know, you're determining importance, so I kind of see that as a little bit of main idea.

Ellis: mm hmmm

Findley: And details that are important versus details that really aren't that important, so I could even work on that aspect when we make our chart.

Ellis: ok

As the teachers began to conclude their decisions for instructional plans, Findley referred to her notes and said that she needed to find a time to work one-on-one with an ELL student who was in need of a reading intervention. This student required specific instruction, unique to his learning needs, and therefore required time with the ELL teacher outside of their small group ELL class. The two teachers discussed options of when Findley could pull the student for intervention, and finally decided that they would try to pull this student from part of the general class instruction time in order to meet his intervention minutes.
Findley: But I need to see him at least 25 minutes a day on his own.

Ellis: Yeah

Findley: So, I just, I'll just try to do better with time management, but at the same time I don't want him to miss out on a bunch of stuff, but I still feel that in order to access the curriculum, I have to address some of that language and vocabulary.

Ellis: Yeah, because he definitely needs both language and....

Findley: And it's just such a different level than anybody else. Ok, I'll just try to do a better job of watching my time.

Ellis: Yeah, it's just really hard. That window of time is just so tight.

Findley: What do you guys do at 11:25?

Ellis: Math

Findley: And then at this time, you always have specials?

Ellis: Mm hmm.

Findley: I wonder, (pause), if I shouldn't look at that as a possibility. I mean obviously we would never pull out of PE. He would have a heart attack, but I'm wondering about a part of Music.

As the two teachers continued the discussion schedule options, Findley shared with Ellis that she was finding it difficult to keep all her co-teaching times straight, especially with instructional time ran over in one classroom, making it difficult to get to the next classroom. Ellis responded that she was not always aware of the time and found that she had not finished teaching one content area before Findley arrived for their shared Language Arts time together. Findley assured Ellis that she should not feel bad about this
and that she was glad to see some of the general instruction, since it helped inform her work with her English Learners. Both teachers resolved that they would continue to work on timing as they prepared for another week of instruction.

Findley: I feel like I'm kind of either always coming or going or...

Ellis: And I feel bad, just I, we're just not, I'm not a time person either, so when you (laughs) come in, and then, I just, the timing of it, I can't get so that they're ready to go with you.

Ellis: But I feel like, I don't feel bad about that, like, the other day when I came in and you were doing the word study thing. That was awesome because then I could go on and address that language stuff with the kiddos I see.

Ellis: Yeah

Findley: I don't see that as being bad. That's another thing I can address with them.

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**Figure 1:** PLC 1 Themes. This figure represents the primary topics discussed between teachers in their first co-teaching PLC.
Summary of PLC 1.

Figure one shows the distribution of main themes discussed between Findley and Ellis during their first Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting. Notably, the majority of the discourse in this PLC surrounded *Instructional Planning* for the upcoming week in English Language Arts (ELA), and the plan for a unit on state landforms. Discourse around *Instructional Planning* included instructional scheduling, resources to support instruction, grouping of students, and the specifics of teaching note-taking skills to students.

*Teacher roles* represented the second largest theme represented in the discourse of this PLC. Discourse connected to teacher roles included statements either by a teacher about her perceived role in the delivery or planning for instruction, or by a teacher informing the other teacher of what they expected they would do. In addition, throughout the PLC, each teacher used language that described individual thoughts or actions that they held in relation to their role in the classroom, rather than using language that would invite the other teacher into collaborative decisions or actions during their co-teaching time.

In this particular PLC, the majority of language related to co-teaching was used while introducing their team to me and describing the fact that they were new to teaching together and a bit unsure of how to exactly proceed with best co-teaching practices. There was discussion about the co-teaching schedule and how it was difficult for Findley to meet the times required by her schedule, but it seemed that this was left as a situation that Findley would need to solve according to her ELL teacher schedule and how it aligned with Ellis's classroom.
Much of the instructional discussion related to *Co-teaching and Collaboration* centered on ways to support learning for all students in the class. Once decisions were made for how to instruct all students, Findley interjected opinions as to which parts of the instruction might be challenging for English learners and what she could do to support their language development needs. While *ELL Student Needs* were discussed in relation to general classroom instruction, the bulk of conversation specific to *ELL Student Needs* centered on a specific discussion about a particular student's intervention needs.

The final theme of *Standards* was not directly mentioned in this PLC but was alluded to in a discussion about compare and contrast in text. A specific discussion about how the lesson plans specifically connected to a Common Core standard that included how to compare and contrast did not occur. Also absent were any comments about how to use the English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards to support language development through the lesson plan.

**PLC Week 2**

As Findley and Ellis began their second PLC, Ellis shared that plans for the upcoming state landforms unit had been discussed in the general grade level team planning time earlier that week. The grade level team planned how they would approach the unit and then individual teachers decided what they would each do during their ELA time in each of their classrooms. Findley had been aware that the state landform unit was approaching, so had already begun vocabulary work with her English learners to work on concepts and terms her students would encounter in this unit. Findley took notes throughout the discussion, asking questions about the expectations Ellis had for the unit and for the academic expectations for students.
After hearing the entire unit plan, Findley asked Ellis what she saw as Findley’s role in the classroom during this unit. She was curious if Ellis wanted her to float around the room and help various groups, or would she be assigned to work with specific groups? Ellis responded that during the ELA time she was going to focus on trickster tales, and that the state landforms work would be done during the class Project Based Learning (PBL) time.

At this point Findley looked concerned and verbalized her concern by asking what Ellis thought would be more beneficial for her to do with her ELL group both in the classroom and during the time she pulled them out. She asked if Ellis wanted ELL support for her PBL project or for reading skills in ELA. Ellis paused, and asked if perhaps Findley wanted her to "flip flop" her time, so that the ELA work would occur during the time Findley was scheduled in the room.

Ellis: So, I, and I'm happy, I mean, I can flip flop PBL and reading too. I'm not worried about it.

Findley: I know, and I'm flexible as well. I can do whatever. I just want to make sure that whatever I'm doing is supporting you best and supporting the kids best.

Ellis: Ok

Findley: So, it's kind of what your vision is. I can even, you know, if you're doing reading groups and you want me to back off of some of this stuff, I can be doing reading skill activities too.

Ellis: Ok

Findley: Because that's what I've been doing, like, when we don't have a direct focus, I've been kind of reinforcing some other language components that I see
when I'm in here when I hear them talk, or things I see them doing in their writing, and then I kind of just work on the skills.

At this point, Ellis decided to discuss the approach to teaching fairy tales and trickster tales during their ELA time in the upcoming weeks. She shared with Findley that her goal was to expose students to different kinds of fairy tales, discuss the components of the fairy tales, and then have students write an original fairy tale of their own.

Ellis shared that she wanted to make sure that she included more time for writing development in the ELA class time. Both teachers agreed that writing skills were important, and that they needed to focus on developing those skills in their students in the upcoming weeks. As both teachers discussed writing skill techniques, Findley asked about using more sentence frames. She wondered if Ellis had ordered a packet of sentence frames they had both observed in another teacher's classroom.

Findley: I'm thinking about those sentence frames that Gwen showed us...did you put down to order some of those?

Ellis: I didn't, only because, I don't know, a resource like that, I feel like it's great, but I feel like it would end up on the shelf, and I feel like I create sentence frames depending on what it is that we're doing.

Findley: Ok, because I'm thinking, and I did put down to order some for myself, but I can make some posters to use in here.

In this conversation, Findley continued to explain her perspective on the importance of providing strong sentence frame starters, especially for those English learners who struggle with writing. She cited two students in particular who had low English proficiency skills, and who benefitted from structured writing supports such as
implementing sentence frames to scaffold their writing. Findley shared that before she introduced sentence frames into her instruction with these two students, she had seen only superficial writing, but that the use of frames had helped these two students explore deeper thinking about their writing topics.

Findley: I know I'm getting, like, way ahead looking at persuasive writing, but there are so many pieces that I could help construct.

Ellis: Yeah.

Findley: And thinking about some of our ELL kids, like (student name A) and (student name B) who are a little more challenged in writing, it could really help organize their thoughts, but also get more meat out of them.

Ellis: Yes

Findley: 'Cuz I find all of ours, but those two particular, I see a lot of superficial kinds of writing.

Ellis: Oh yeah.

Findley: And lots of more repetitive sentences.

Ellis: It's the basic sentence structure that they need.

Findley: Exactly, exactly, all right, cool. So, I'm going to focus on how to summarize. I'll work on that today and tomorrow, and then probably a little bit into next week.

Scheduling and planning for future class times presented an opportunity for the teachers to discuss their roles in the co-teaching arrangement again in this PLC. Ellis mentioned that because they had special speakers coming in to the classroom during ELA time, the schedule might interfere with their usual instructional plan and content
instruction might have to shift to another time of day so that students didn't miss out on ELA time. This created an opportunity for Findley to bring up her role as co-teacher and ask if there were other approaches that they could use to co-teaching that they might implement during this time.

Ellis: It doesn't really interrupt you so much, but to get things done, I'll have to push PBL and reading next week because we have storytellers coming in.

Findley: Well, if there's more stuff that I need to do to beef up or help assist too, I mean we're both in here together. There's no reason I can't do whole class stuff too if that helps

Ellis: Well, and now I'm thinking...I wonder if next week...um...we're trying for writing ... to do the Being a Writer expository unit. Have you ever looked at it? Maybe that's something you could work on, doing that writing.

Findley's comments, or offer of leaving the usual model of co-teaching during this time resulted in Ellis considering Findley's comments and thinking about different ways they could approach instruction. Ellis continued that she thought students needed to work on how to develop a research questions, and asked Findley her opinion about using note cards to help organize research notes throughout the project, so they could manipulate their notes and move them around as they prepared to write. Findley agreed with this approach and added that if she was going to do more of the writing piece with English learners, she would want to pull them into smaller groups because she thought this would promote more productive ELL teaching and learning, to which Ellis agreed.

As the time approached for this PLC to finish, Findley brought up an idea for improving their co-teaching time together. She shared some potential resources she had
discovered at a recent conference. As they discussed the potential resources, each teacher commented on their working relationship and confessed they were still uncertain about the school's expectations for co-teaching. Throughout their conversation on this topic, they both said at different times that they were unsure of specific steps to take that would increase their teaching relationship and instructional effectiveness with students, but they also both made positive comments about their desire to learn new ways of co-teaching together.

Findley: So, there were just some really cool things, like there's this quiz that you do where there's three words in each line and you pick, as soon as you can, pick a word that best describes you, and then it kind of categorizes and shows what each of our strengths are.

Ellis: Oh

Findley: Also, our weaknesses. So just some conversations we can have too so we can build our working relationship. And then they had just some really cool strategies that they used to just help, just better serve the kids.

Ellis: Ok

Findley: And address things.

Ellis: Yeah

Findley: Because, I know we were just kind of thrown together, but I want to maximize our time.

Ellis: Yeah, I think that's great

Findley: I want to make sure that, you know, that's not just you having to do all the work, and leading me, because that's not fair. That's not how it should work. It
should be both of us working, and both of us planning

Ellis: I don't feel that way at all. I feel like I just throw all these ideas out and then you're like...okay, I'll go do all that

Findley: No, (both laugh). I mean it comes together, and I've worked with you before, but I think, I mean, we have such little time, there's no way there's no way I'm going to take time from you.

Ellis: That would be great. I would love to learn more things.

![PLC 2 Chart]

Figure 2: PLC 2 Themes. This figure represents the primary topics discussed between teachers in their second co-teaching PLC.

**Summary of PLC 2.**

In Figure two we see that *Instructional Planning* again composed the majority of discussion within this planning session. The discourse around *Instructional Planning* required a larger portion of the meeting time, since the discussion focused on ways to introduce a new unit, as well as the specific supports that would need to be introduced to support student learning.
Teacher Roles comprised the second largest section of discourse in this meeting. Both teachers discussed how they saw their role in introducing instruction, and how to subsequently support student skill development. In this PLC, there were several times in which Findley asked Ellis how she perceived her role as the ELL teacher in the room. This demonstrated dual situations in which Teacher Roles were utilized by making a statement about a teacher's own perception of their instructional role, as well as a situation in which a teacher asked the opinion of the other teacher about their role in the classroom.

Discussions related to Co-teaching and Collaboration were almost equal to the amount of comments that represented individual Teacher Roles. Perhaps due to the planning required for a new unit of instruction, both teachers considered how they would approach teaching together across this new unit, hence, their discourse included more language that was collaborative in nature.

While the first four categories are ranked the same as in the first PLC, the amount of time discussing ELL Student Needs was reduced in this meeting. Any discussion about ELL Student Needs was related to introducing vocabulary for the new unit and how to schedule groups for learning. Noticeably missing from this unit planning was any mention of how to base instruction in either the Common Core or English Language Proficiency Standards.

PLC Week 3

In the third PLC, Ellis and Findley were just returning from Thanksgiving break, and it seemed difficult for them to focus on planning for the upcoming week. They spent a significant amount of time asking each other about how their respective holidays had
been and knew enough about each other's families to ask questions about spouses, children, and travel plans that obviously had been shared prior to the break. They asked how their children had enjoyed specific movies that they had planned to see over break, foods they had planned for their holiday dinners, and activities that had been planned to keep their children busy. The conversation demonstrated that they knew each other well enough and felt comfortable enough to have previously shared details about their personal lives.

Instructional planning began with a discussion of where their plans had left off before the break, and where they were ready to continue for the week. Since the previous week had been short due to the holiday break, they decided to continue the plans they had made previously and finish up their work with expository writing. As they discussed the progress made by students, they decided that no particular group of students was progressing more or less than others, and that the writing was challenging for all students. In designing plans to move forward, they discussed grouping ELL students during the co-teaching ELA class:

Findley: Ok Do you want me to be in here floating around or would you rather I pulled out my group and continued to work on these skills with them? What do you feel would be better?

Ellis: Today if you just want to pull and work on some differentiated...I, just… different skill things today. We're going to just finish working together on my slide. Um, tomorrow's when they'll be more responsible for...this group will...they'll do the lobe, and so, I don't know if then that might be easier to pull like two groups.
Findley: So, I'll just continue to hit that then.

As Ellis and Findley finished discussing their grouping plans for writing projects, Findley mentioned that she was having some behavior issues with a student in her ELL group and wanted to inform Ellis about the situation in case it impacted her classroom as well.

Findley. I've been trying to do more and more individually because he's just not able to function in a group. And I'm working a lot on social skills in addition to instruction. I'm just letting you know, if you notice that he's being sent back...he's being sent back because he can't participate in the group and then I'm just trying that out with him.

Both teachers agreed that they were seeing the same behavior in both grade level classrooms as well as the ELL pullout group for Ellis's class. They shared ideas on how to use behavior interventions to help this particular student learn how to self-monitor his behavior more. Ideas included using dots to place on the carpet so that he would be more aware of where he should sit, and hopefully remain seated during small group meetings on the carpet.

Findley felt that it was time to have a special meeting with his sister and uncle, who were this student's guardians. While she had previously had phone conversations, she felt it was now time for a face-to-face meeting about the behavior issues. Ellis brought up the fact that this student was new to their school and district, and Findley confirmed this, saying he was from a different state, and they had not received a transcript yet from his previous school. As they ended their PLC time together, both teachers agreed that they would continue to communicate about concerns in regard to this
student's behaviors, and work together to plan rewards or redirection between their two classrooms as necessary.

**Figure 3:** PLC 3 Themes. This figure represents the primary topics discussed between teachers in their third co-teaching PLC.

**Summary of PLC 3.**

The third PLC between Findley and Ellis was atypical of earlier meetings. I attribute this difference to the timing of the meeting in relation to the Thanksgiving school break. Given that these two teachers met on Wednesday each week, and that they had only had two full days of instruction during the previous week, instruction was disrupted, and it was only logical that they continue on with their previous plans from two weeks before. This resulted in an atmosphere that was more relaxed, and once both teachers agreed that planning was not necessary at this point, this opened the door for a discussion about student issues.

Figure three shows that for the first time, discourse related to *Teacher Roles* composed the majority of the discussion between both teachers. This can be attributed both to revisiting the current lesson plans and a discussion to determine if student groups
should continue as planned, or if adjustments were needed. The amount of discourse relevant to Teacher Roles was also accounted for in the lengthy discussion about student behaviors and what each teacher planned to do in order to address these behaviors in their individual classrooms.

*Instructional Planning* comprised the next category of discussion in PLC 3. While there was not a great deal of discussion attributed to the construction of new planning, the majority of discourse under this category was related to each teacher discussing previous plans, checking in with the other, and commenting on plans to move instruction forward in the following week.

Due to the relaxed atmosphere in this PLC, and the availability of extra time for discussion, *ELL Student Needs* were addressed to a greater degree than previously possible in planning time. In this case, three particular ELL students were discussed throughout the PLC time. The first discussion addressed the lack of progress for two students in Ellis's class, and plans on how they could support those students further in their academic work. A third student's behavior was discussed between Findley and Ellis since they both witnessed the same challenges in working with this student in both the grade level classroom as well as the ELL small group in Findley's room.

The discussion on how to work together in meeting the behavior challenges of a particular ELL student created the opportunity for discourse related to *Co-teaching and Collaboration*. While brief in quantity, the collaborative conversation allowed this team to discuss how they would address academic challenges as a united front both in and out of the grade level classroom.
PLC Week 4

Findley began the fourth PLC by sharing about a recent weekend trip to the Council Bluffs area, where she had seen the bluffs and loess hills discussed in the grade level PBL project. She took several pictures to share with the students, as well as information she learned from local people in that area of the state. Both teachers considered how they might share some of these photos next year when they entered the same unit on state landforms, and different speakers they might have come share about that topic in the classroom.

Next, the two teachers talked about grade level "business", such as a new student who would be starting the following day and whether or not that student was an ELL student, and the potential that this student would be placed in Ellis's classroom, based on classroom sizes. The discussion evolved into a conversation speculating on how many of their students would travel back to Mexico, or other native countries for the winter break and when they might return. Findley commented to Ellis that in her observations, sometimes the families never did return after winter break.

Ellis asked if this was increasing among their school's ELL population, and Findley shared that they were seeing a lot of "fluidity" between a neighboring urban school district and their own. She explained that when students returned from other school districts, she would notice they had moved around among two or three schools within the other district and then moved back to their own previous school district with the result that she would have them as students again. Both teachers speculated on the reasons families were moving so often each year. These comments extended to
considerations about how constant moves might explain increased academic challenges they observed among some students in their classrooms.

Findley: There is constant moving. I have this year...many more homeless students that I am dealing with. So, then it depends on the shelter in which they're at, and some of the emergency services will put them up at certain hotels for a certain amount of time until a spot opens up at a shelter. Then when they do, and I guess I've had that before, but I haven't had the number of students that are in shelters...but males...adult males have to go to different shelters than the others, so then you're talking about families being split, and trying to figure out how they can spend time together. It's very challenging, and it's really hard on our kids.

The teachers reluctantly shifted to academic planning because they were so engrossed in the discussion about their students' social needs. They talked about their progress on the grade level PBL project. Topics for instructional planning included the need to help students use accurate photos for their work, using punctuation and capitalization on slides, and summarizing information into an amount of text appropriate for a slide.

As they discussed resources for the project, Findley asked if Ellis could share those resources for the upcoming instruction with her. Ellis showed Findley how these resources were stored in a common folder and how to access them. They proceeded to review the progress their students were making and discuss instruction for the upcoming week.

Findley: So where would you...when you think about how our reading is going...and I know we just finished up with reader's theater...on what you're
doing...where...what kind of skills or vocabulary things would you think I should be, I mean, do you want me to pre-teach these kinds of things here, would you like me to work more on a different skill? I've been working a lot on the summarizing, so I'm glad to hear that they're doing some of that. So, I can continue to hit that too.

Ellis suggested that the English learners needed additional support in summarizing information appropriate for the amount of information required on a power point slide. She thought that note-taking might also be a challenge for them and suggested to Findley that this might be an area that she could work with English learners during small group time and the pull-out ELL class time.

![Figure 4](image.png)

**Figure 4:** PLC 4 Themes. This figure represents the primary topics discussed between teachers in their fourth co-teaching PLC.

**Summary of PLC 4.**

While the fourth week of planning between Findley and Ellis was not as academically dense in content as the first two weeks, figure four shows that the majority of discourse in this planning time revolved around *Instructional Planning*. Part of the
relaxed approach to academic decisions might be explained by where these teachers found themselves in the current unit. In other words, the bulk of academic decisions had been made in earlier weeks, and now, *Instructional Planning* discussions consisted of fine-tuning week-to-week implementation of unit goals.

The following themes of *Teacher Roles*, *ELL Student Needs*, and *Co-teaching and Collaboration* had almost equal amount of discourse distributed among these three themes. This shows that the content of discussions in this fourth week of PLC planning time was mainly distributed between the topics of *Instructional Planning* and *ELL Student Needs*. This also shows that the ways in which the two teachers discussed these topics was almost evenly balanced between discourse that reflected individual perspectives and actions (*Teacher Roles*), as well as discourse that promoted collaboration and the promotion of co-teaching methods for their shared teaching time (*Co-teaching and Collaboration*).

**PLC Week 5**

As the school approached another holiday break, both teachers commented on how hectic things were in the classroom and how students were losing focus. Both teachers also commented that they felt tired and were also ready for some time away from work.

The planning discussion began with Ellis summarizing instruction in the ELA classroom and saying that students would continue their work on note taking and summarizing this week. Findley shared that ELL students were also still working on these skills in her pullout ELL classroom, and that it seemed to be going well. She asked Ellis if she saw this success transferred over into the general classroom. Ellis agreed that she
saw improvement in this skill area. This was a relief for Findley as she mentioned the challenge of sometimes not knowing if ELL classroom work transferred to the grade level classroom.

As Ellis and Findley discussed their instructional plans for the following week, they agreed they wanted to finish working on students' summarizing skills. Ellis mentioned that students were doing better about working independently as groups, and she had found that as she circulated the room and checked on groups, students could proceed with their tasks without her input as much as before.

Findley was thoughtful for a moment, and then asked how the English learners were functioning in these independent work groups? Ellis seemed to carefully consider her response, and eventually replied that English learners seemed to be doing as well as their peers when asked to work independently in the work groups. Ellis continued to say that she was working on her actions related to checking in on students. If students were making progress without her direct support, she would move on. Sometimes students wanted her to stay and guide them on next steps, but Ellis had found that when she walked away and let students figure things out on their own, they could often independently work through the tasks.

At this point, Findley introduced the idea of adding some text to the expository writing work, to reinforce the writing tasks and provide writing prompts. Ellis agreed that this was a good idea, and both teachers continued to discuss possible text sources to support the expository writing work. Findley suggested some texts that she had available to her through a website subscription. Ellis conditionally agreed to this idea, as long as she could approve the text.
Ellis: I don't want to have this content heavy. I don't want anything state landforms related. We need something different.

Findley: Ok, I can pull some more up too. But that's what I figured we could do today maybe is kind of the reading and the summarizing...just finishing that up today and tomorrow if we needed to.

Ellis: Okay.

After agreeing on the idea of introducing text into the small group work, Findley asked Ellis about her role in the classroom during the upcoming unit on expository writing. Since she would be in the classroom later that day, she was not sure what her role would be during instruction. As both teachers discussed the plan for the day, Ellis got a little uncomfortable, as if she had just realized that she had not discussed classroom plans with Findley and wasn't sure how Findley felt about her instructional approach to the unit.

Findley: So, would you see my involvement, would you like me to be in the room...maybe coming up with some alternative articles and things to have them think about doing this independently? And are you thinking of having them do this today independently?

Ellis: Yeah. (makes face as if..."is that okay"?)

Findley: Ok. It's fine.

Ellis: Ok

(Awkward pause and Ellis has an uncertain look on her face)

Findley: (laughs) It's okay! There was no panic there...it's uh...you know it’s my time, so it's fine.
Ellis: Or if we feel that they're not quite there...today could be reading the article and kind of filling in maybe those big ideas...so once we're working on that piece and then if they're just kind of running out of energy...switch to that part tomorrow.

While Findley had agreed that it was fine with her if groups worked without her support, she continued this discussion by voicing concerns about the diversity of students in groups and considered if all students were ready to work independently on this task. She began to work through the names of English learners in the small groups and voice concerns about their ability to engage in the task independently or at least with their ability to successfully engage with a grade-level text. She discussed English language development levels with Ellis to help explain her concerns about ELL independent work, especially in one specific reading group.

At this point, both teachers were discussing ELL students' academic reading proficiency, and this impacted the ways in which they each thought instruction should be designed for this particular day and activity. Ellis challenged Findley's interpretation of a particular student's English language proficiency level, saying that she believed his reading level was higher than the other ELL students. Findley said that this was possible, but she sounded doubtful.

There was a brief pause in planning as both teachers looked through their notes. Findley broke the silence and shifted the conversation to a connected, but separate topic. English learners had taken the state’s ELPA assessment the previous spring and their school had recently received the student results. She had put together some data sheets to share with teachers but wanted to also explain what this information would include
because this was a fairly new process compared to ELL assessment processes in previous years. Findley explained that while the state had previously used the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA), this past year was the first time the new English Language Proficiency standards and subsequent English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) had been implemented with English Learners.

To help classroom teachers interpret the ELPA results, Findley had worked on data sheets, which she would make available to all teachers. She elaborated that students were no longer given an overall composite number status between one and five, but now would receive a score between one and five in each language domain of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These scores would be interpreted to assign students a language development category of Emerging, Progressing, or Proficient.

Findley continued to explain that the speaking portion of the assessment was now being gathered through an audio program on a computer, whereas previously, it had been assessed one on one with a test administrator. She expressed some concerns about the accuracy of this approach and how this might impact student scores. This prompted Ellis to ask about the speaking proficiency of a particular EL student in her classroom, and both teachers discussed how speaking development could appear differently in newcomers compared to students who had been in the U.S. for more than one academic year.

This information prompted Ellis to ask Findley about the speech production of a particular English learner in her classroom. She mentioned that both she and another grade level teacher had noticed some hesitancy in his speech, and they had considered consulting with the school speech pathologist. Findley said that yes, she had noticed this,
but that she had not been concerned yet, since she had seen similar speech hesitancy traits in other newcomer students. She explained to Ellis how word retrieval takes time to develop in newcomers, and that it would be a good idea to compare his progress with some other newcomer students as they considered this particular student's speech development.

Figure 5: PLC 5 Themes. This figure represents the primary topics discussed between teachers in their fifth co-teaching PLC.

Summary of PLC 5.

Figure five shows that for the first time during this study, Co-teaching and Collaboration accounted for the majority of discourse during the PLC planning time, with Instructional Planning covering almost the same amount of utterances within the discourse. Standards also appeared as a part of the discourse, although it was the smallest theme represented in this week's discussion. ELL Student Needs, and Teacher Roles made up the remaining portion of the PLC discourse, with the amount of language represented in each category fairly equal.
Another difference, which also may account for the representation of themes within this PLC, was the slightly awkward interactions, which occurred for the first time during my observations of this planning time. Findley gently challenged Ellis's choice to observe and not provide direct supports to work groups that contained English learners. While Findley did not state that she disagreed with this decision, she asked how the English learners were functioning in these independent work groups? Ellis seemed to pick up on the thinking behind this question, since she paused before responding. Her eye contact with Findley was direct as she responded that the English learners seemed to be doing as well as their peers under this kind of guidance.

At this point, Findley began using the pronoun "we" in her suggestions, as she suggested adding some additional text to the expository writing task. Ellis's response did not include the collaborative pronoun "we", and instead, her response was formulated in a way that formed an individual decision about instruction by stating, "I don't want to have this content heavy. I don't want anything state landform related."

While I use the word "awkward" to describe these interactions during the PLC, other words that could be used might be “thoughtful”, “hesitant”, or “pondering”. There was not an obvious air of antagonism in the discourse between these two teachers. In fact, I sensed that they had just encountered their first interaction in which they did not completely agree on instruction and were trying to be respectful of the other person as they discussed possible solutions.

This desire to be collegial in their work was once again apparent as Ellis became aware that she had changed the co-teaching plan for later that day but had not informed Findley of the plan. Findley assured her that this was fine, and while Ellis apologized,
there was once again a slight awkward moment as both teachers struggled to move forward as they became aware that the co-teaching plan seemed to somewhat falter.

These challenging interactions might account for the increased amount of discourse related to *Co-teaching and Collaboration* during this PLC meeting. As each teacher realized that they were not quite agreeing on the plan, or had not been made aware of the plan, they each used more collaborative language to show a positive intent. They accomplished this with increased use of "we", rather than "I", or by asking the others’ opinion on ideas.

**PLC Week 6**

As Ellis and Findley began week six of their PLC planning time, they seemed to be tired and were slower to get started with instructional planning. They sat back in their chairs and asked how the other's week was going and engaged in small talk more than they had in past weeks. They offered some ideas of things they needed to work on as a class, and then both said that they felt that both they and the students were having trouble with focus, perhaps because of the upcoming winter break. Ellis thought it would be a good idea to go over classroom routines and expectations again because her students were "falling apart". Findley agreed, and said she was seeing the same thing in other classrooms she supported. She surmised that the students were excited about the approaching holiday, and that was making it difficult for everyone to stay on task.

It was finally agreed that they would use time the following day to review classroom rules and routines. Findley mentioned that she would like to be a part of that review so that it would reinforce her role as a co-teacher in the room.
Findley: I'd like to be part of that too. I mean, just because then it shows I am part of the room and you know...and it also helps my awareness and understanding of what's happening...and this way maybe I will actually understand and help too.

Ellis agreed and also said that they could spend some time in free reading and encourage students to choose books they could read over the winter break. Both teachers brought up names of students who needed the extra reading time outside of class and discussed some books that they could suggest to these students in class the next day.

This discussion evolved to discuss a specific English learner who was not only having reading issues, but also trouble participating in the classroom. Findley commented that the student had originally come from an African country, two years previous. The student had first lived in the state of Georgia and had recently come to this state. The student had already been in two other school districts in this state before arriving at their school.

Ellis and Findley discussed the different ways this student was having trouble with participation in classroom activities. Findley said that if she sat next to this student and worked one on one with her, the student was very receptive and absorbed information "like a sponge", but when the teacher walked away, the student did not continue to work independently.

Ellis also observed that this student never raised her hand or let her know when she did not have the supplies she needed or was confused about instructions. Her classmates often would alert the teacher that she was falling behind in the activities or if she did not have materials to do the lesson. Ellis asked Findley if she knew whether or
not she had received intervention at her previous school, and if she was eligible yet for intervention in their school. Findley explained that since this student was new, they were waiting to receive the student file and find out about previous services, and this delayed the intervention process.

The discussion about the reading challenges for the new English learner triggered a discussion about the challenges in getting special education services for English learners. Both teachers shared that they sometimes felt uncertain about when to refer a student for intervention or special education consideration, because they were unsure if the lack of progress came from academic struggles or English language barriers. Findley commented that sometimes it took so long to get transfer records from another district that they often did not know if new students were already receiving interventions or if they had been problem-solved at all for intervention supports.

The teachers were so engrossed in this topic, that they set aside their lesson planning, and turned to me, drawing me into the discussion by turning to face me and explain how they saw this issue in their work with students. They wanted to discuss the bigger issue of identifying learning needs of English learners who struggle academically more than expected by teachers.

Ellis: (turning to speak to me) I'm glad I have an ELL teacher to work with in situations like this. We can sit down and look through data together. I think a lot of times the ELL teachers have the advantage. Typically, sometimes with mine you get bigger groups...but...the kids are so different I think, in that small group than when they're...they can talk a little more openly there whereas in here, they are still in the room and they might still be in a small group with me, but
everybody is still in the room...and so, I think sometimes the ELL teacher might notice things that I might not.

Findley: Mmm hmmm. I think a lot of times, I mean, just the teachers that I work with, it's awesome because they'll bring up...they'll say...you know, I noticed this...can you check into that...and it gives me kind of like that stage to go from and I can dig a little bit deeper...and I think a lot of times, I find myself confirming what they're saying

Ellis: Mm hmmm

Findley: I mean, I... teachers are spot on...I mean you know...you've got that gut, you've got that peer comparison...they see how they function all day. I mean, (student name) would be a great example. If (student name) was not identified special ed, I totally would have been on that right away.

Ellis: Yep

Findley: Like, you can see it, I can tell the way he's learning, compared to the others....

Ellis: Mm hmm....

Findley: I don't know...I just...and Ellis always has kind of had that sense...you do...you just kind of can sense when kids are just falling out a little bit out on that. I mean, it's hard...just the language...I struggle, and I question myself a lot...you know, what's typical, what's not...and its hard right now what I find the struggle is the Burmese population. We're getting a lot more refugee students, and refugees can somewhat mimic a special education student and it's not special education, it's that they lack instruction versus having a disability. And it's really hard, you
know, to tell which students truly struggle versus what is a lack of instruction. So, I find myself questioning it a lot.

Ellis: Yeah, I think it's becoming more of a common thing. Maybe these students need extra supports for a longer time. I don't know.

As both teachers continued to discuss the specific challenges of refugee students, they also discussed the challenges of 6th grade students trying to perform 6th grade-level math problems when they haven't yet learned the foundational 2nd grade math functions. They mentioned that since they are a Project Based Learning (PBL) school, the PBL theory specified that if students did not understand a concept, they would be pulled with other students who experienced similar challenges, and the teacher would work on that skill in mini-workshops. Ellis and Findley agreed, however, that mini-workshops were not enough to get their most recent refugee students up to grade-level skills.

As they concluded their planning time together, both teachers continued the discussion about the multiple challenges of meeting English leaners' needs, in particular, refugee students' needs. They commented on the English language needed in all content areas, not just English Language Arts, but agreed that they did not have the ELL staff to cover all content areas. As they packed up their things to move on to their next teaching responsibilities, they commented that they didn't have all the answers. Findley concluded saying she wished she could support every content area in just one grade-level all day, so she could really know what the students were doing and support that work, but shaking her head said, "I just can't get to all of their classrooms".
Figure 6: PLC 6 Themes. This figure represents the primary topics discussed between teachers in their sixth co-teaching PLC.

**Summary of PLC 6.**

The primary discourse within the sixth PLC surrounded *ELL Student Needs*. This was a theme that had only rated third highest in previous PLCs, and yet during this weekly discussion, it accounted for over half of all utterances. While figure six shows *Co-teaching and Collaboration* accounted for a large portion of the meeting's discourse, the difference may be attributed to the fact that both teachers appeared to naturally fall into this collaborative voice through a unified perspective on advocacy for their ELL students. During the previous week, it seemed that the teachers used more collaborative language to manage their working relationship.

There was minimal discussion around *Instructional Planning* in comparison to other themes, but this made sense, given the time in the semester, and their initial decision to revisit classroom rules and routines, which would require minimal planning. *Teacher Roles* also composed a small portion of the meeting discourse patterns, but this was accounted for by the greater degree of collaborative language between teachers.
Finally, while *Standards* were mentioned, it was in relation to the discussion of academic expectations for refugee students who had recently arrived in the country, rather than standards applied to *Instructional Planning*.

**PLC Week 7**

When I arrived for the final weekly observation of Ellis and Findley's co-teaching PLC, I found them to be more relaxed and refreshed than the week before the break. Both teachers seemed motivated to finish up the current unit and move on to a new unit of instruction. Findley opened the meeting by telling Ellis she had pulled the English learners the previous day, so they could finish their writing portion of the project. They both agreed that this unit had been longer than they anticipated, and they were anxious to start planning the next unit.

Ellis said that the next unit had a Science theme, so there would be a lot of new vocabulary that all students would need to learn. She described for Findley the project that the grade level team had planned and explained that students would build a simple machine. Both teachers discussed the vocabulary terms that would be introduced in the beginning of the unit and agreed on nine common terms they would both emphasize during their individual time with students.

Findley asked how long Ellis predicted the Science unit would take, so she could plan out her separate instruction with English learners in the classroom. They discussed a timeline and then the materials needed to teach the unit. Findley mentioned that she would also pull together some alternative materials to supplement the planned instruction, so she could support the context of learning for English learners.
As they wound down the current unit, Findley asked what her role would be in the classroom that day and for the week following.

Findley: Do you want me to come in and help float...or help...I mean...
Ellis: Whatever you can do...
Findley: Ok. Is there anything else? If you said you're going to do the reader's theater...so...um...are you going to do it the same way where you pull your whatever group and I can pull the others?
Ellis: Mm hmm...yep, if you want. Oh, I think I have an extra... (hands her a paper).
Findley: Ok...thank you...perfect.

At this point, a female student came to the door and wanted to talk to Ellis. Ellis listened to her questions, and then told her she needed to get back to her classroom. After the student left, Ellis turned to me and shared that this was a student whom she had also had as a student the previous year, and that the student sometimes wanted extra attention.

Findley commented that she also worked with this student in her small group time, pulling her to work with her English learners, even though this girl was not ELL. Her reasoning for pulling her into the ELL group was that this student struggled with writing and needed extra help.

Findley: Sometimes I pull the SpEd kids...because I was supporting writing, and so what we just did...like...over a three-day period...there were kids who were just behind in getting their drafts done in the class.
Ellis: There are a lot of my kids who either get special ed services or reading services, and my writing block is so short, that I have them finish it during
our intervention time...but they're getting intervention...so there were about eight kids who had not had enough time to finish.

Findley: So, I just kind of mixed them up, and pulled some of the ELLs and some of the other ones, and just helped to support...because it just seemed silly to have her come up with an extra chunk of time when I was already doing it.

Ellis: It was great...it was a life-saver.

Findley: We're gonna do the same thing...and actually what I do will help all kids.

Ellis: Oh right...yeah

Findley: I don't have a problem with it...I really don't.

As Ellis and Findley began to finish their planning time together, they discussed a specific English learner who was struggling with writing and finishing her project for this unit. The student had very low English language proficiency and was struggling academically in the classroom. She did not work well independently, even though both teachers had tried different supports to help scaffold her learning during instruction. Both Ellis and Findley discussed different techniques they had tried in this writing unit to help the student work independently. Findley mentioned that she was beginning to see some progress in this area, and thought this student needed more language supports in addition to writing skill development.

Findley: I think that's my biggest goal for her...to help her develop her language skills, and to get her to be more independent...because I cannot sit with her...and you (Ellis) cannot sit with her.

Ellis: She's not going to get 90 minutes a day.
Findley: She's not going to get 90 minutes of ELL a day. I don't have 90 minutes to give her, so I think keep working on that...and obviously I think her and (other student name) will probably come up discrepant on A-Reading...CBM-R. So, when they both come up discrepant, which they will, I imagine an intervention will probably be me.

Ellis: I don't know

Findley: But if they don't...just assume it would be me and I'm fine with that.

Ellis: Perfect

Figure 7: PLC 7 Themes. This figure represents the primary topics discussed between teachers in their final co-teaching PLC.

Summary of PLC 7.

Figure seven shows that Instructional Planning returned to the primary theme of discourse in the final PLC observation during this study. ELL Student Needs comprised the second greatest amount of discourse during the PLC. This was most likely due to the extended conversation related to how to meet the academic needs of a particular English learner in Ellis's classroom. Interestingly, language related to Teacher Roles surpassed
Co-teaching and Collaboration language after this pattern had been reversed in the two weeks previous. Perhaps the most surprising omission from the discourse themes was the lack of language addressing either Common Core or English Language Proficiency standards, since both teachers were discussing the launch of a new learning unit.

While both teachers had used more collaborative language in their discussions in the past two PLC meetings, this meeting saw a slight shift. The difference between the language of Teacher Roles and Co-teaching and Collaboration was less than in other PLCs, which might indicate that these teachers were doing better at working to collaborate in their planning. It is also worth noting that this PLC addressed planning for an upcoming new unit. In observing the discourse between the teachers, it was noted that Ellis, the classroom teacher, initiated more decisions made by the grade level PLC team, thus situating Findley, the ELL teacher in a reactive instructional role. This resulted in Findley asking Ellis for guidance as to her role in the co-teaching class time, rather than the two teachers collaborating to plan their delivery of instruction through co-teaching.

Summary of Teacher Observations

Throughout the seven observed PLCs between Findley and Ellis, the theme of Instructional Planning comprised the majority of conversations. This theme most often received the majority of discussion for four of the PLCs, was the second highest for two weeks, and was third only once. This shows that the majority of what Ellis and Findley discussed in their PLC was the actual actions they would take to plan for instruction with students.

In relation to Instructional Planning, Ellis and Findley discussed what their individual responsibilities would be during preparation for a class or teaching during a
class. This comprised the category of *Teacher Roles*. This category was usually the second most frequent theme that made up PLC discussions. On the week that it had a lower position in the conversation, both teachers had agreed to carry over plans from the previous week, and so there was not as much discussion about instruction or planning responsibilities.

Conversation related to *Collaboration and Co-teaching* only received the majority of conversation in one of the seven PLCs, and more often, was one of the lower rated categories. Since comments were coded in this category only if they related to specific references to teaching acts specific co-teaching practices, this shows that there were a higher degree of comments connected to individual teaching acts rather than collaboration with the co-teacher.

Throughout the seven PLCs, discussion about *ELL Student Needs* usually occurred toward the end of the PLC planning time. It felt as though Findley waited until the planning for the week was complete, and then brought up specific ELL concerns. These concerns related to specific academic challenges of select English learners, and typically did not include discussion targeted on instructional decisions class-wide. It is interesting to note that Findley was the only teacher to bring up these needs, and Ellis did not bring up specific ELL learning needs in their conversations.

Perhaps most noticeably absent from PLC conversations was discussion surrounding either the Common Core or English Language Proficiency standards. Comments that included language related to the common core, such as how to identify or show evidence of "compare and contrast", "main idea and detail", "proficiency level", were coded as related to standards, but there were no explicit discussions on this topic,
nor did teachers ever refer to the standards for guidance or clarification during the course of this study.

**Teacher Discourse**

As the coding process of PLC observations developed labels and eventual major themes, I began to notice the ways that teachers discussed their role in instructional planning was two-fold. I first noticed this as the ELL teacher asked the classroom teacher how she should support instruction in the classroom. This was contrary to my perception of the goal of planning for co-teaching. I also noticed that the classroom teacher often stated the goals and topics that would be covered during the co-teaching time, rather than inviting the ELL teacher into a discussion of what she felt needed to be addressed each week.

In a deeper analysis of the patterns of discourse, Figure 8 shows a comparison of utterance types represented in each week of PLC meetings during the seven weeks observed during this study. Utterances related to *Teacher Roles* dominated the discourse during weeks one, two and three, but were almost equal with *Co-teaching and Collaboration* utterances in week four. In week five and six, utterances identified with *Co-teaching and Collaboration* were much greater than those identified with *Teacher Roles*. In the final week of the study, *Teacher Roles* again outnumbered *Co-teaching and Collaboration*, indicating that the discussion focus and purpose of each PLC seemed to influence the patterns of discourse between both teachers.
Figure 8: Comparison of Utterance Types Between Teachers. This figure illustrates the frequency of discourse types between teachers over a series of PLC observations.

Rather than analyze the transcripts of PLCs in their entirety, I followed Harré and van Langenhove (1999), as well as Gee's (2014) guidance on providing only select passages in a discourse analysis. Following these researchers' additional guidance on passage length, I included text passages that were no less than six utterances in length and made sure that each passage demonstrated enough utterances by participants to show a pattern of discourse between the speakers.

Each line of discourse was separated by the identification of the type of pronoun used by each speaker, with the pronouns used to serve as clues for the speaker's position and focus of attention in the conversation (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Brunye, et al., 2009; Kacewicz, et al, 2014). Pronouns were bolded for clear identification in the text. Each line was separated by individual use. If a line contained more than one pronoun, it was because the speaker paused, and resumed their statement, repeating the pronoun in their restatement. Pronouns related to objects, as well as pronouns related to students in the classroom were not included in the analysis. When pronouns were used in reference
to students or a class, they were put in parenthesis to denote them from pronouns that teachers used in reference to themselves.

Each line of discourse that contained a pronoun was subsequently categorized according to the mode of positioning associated with that pronoun used in context. (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Kacewicz, et al, 2014).

Using Harré and van Langenhove's (1999) position on the use of pronouns as markers, discourse was identified as either "reflexive positioning" or "interactive positioning" in order to directly connect to this study's research question. "Reflexive positioning" was indicated when the speaker positioned themselves, and "interactive positioning" was indicated when one speaker positioned the other.

In the following tables, I show select passages that demonstrate how teachers positioned themselves or each other during the conversations that occurred during their co-teaching PLC. Passages were chosen on the criteria that they showed a clear example of how one or both teachers used pronouns to communicate a mode of positioning during the discourse.

Table 1
Collaborative Discourse Shift to Independent Discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher Discourse</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F. Alright, so where are we going this week?</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>E. <em>We’re</em> going to do reader's theater.</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>E. <em>(They’ll)</em> present today... so it will ...throw off when <em>you</em> pull <em>your</em> group.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>E. <em>I</em> think when (we) first come in</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>E. <em>I’ll</em> have my biggest group present first...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued)
Collaborative Discourse Shift to Independent Discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher Discourse</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>E. so instead of pulling (them) by reading levels, <em>I'm</em> going to pull (their) team</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F. <em>We</em> had talked about having (them) do a jigsaw activity.</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F. Is this what <em>you're</em> thinking?</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>E. <em>We</em> are going to do that for the landforms next week...so this week <em>we're</em> really just focusing on glaciers.</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 provides an example in which Findley, the ELL teacher in this study, opened the PLC planning time by inviting a discussion about the focus of instruction for that week. In line one, she uses the pronoun "we", to show an inclusive invitation to collaborate on the instructional planning. This line in the discourse is assigned an interactive position mode because, by using a collaborative pronoun, she is positioning Ellis as her planning partner.

Ellis responds in line two with a collaborative pronoun, however, in line three she positions Findley when she refers to "your" group. In this case, the pronouns "you" and "your" in this line, serve to create independent identities as teachers, therefore moving away from the collaborative tone previously introduced. Ellis continues to separate the teaching descriptions in lines three through six, using individual pronoun use to describe her own teacher actions. She uses reflexive positioning to place herself within this planning session, as the individual who will determine the instructional plan.
Findley pulls the discussion back to a collaborative approach in line seven, using "we" to ask about a plan they had previously discussed. While this uses interactive positioning to bring Ellis back into collaboration, Findley somewhat defeats this direction when, in line eight, she uses interactive positioning to place Ellis as the person to make the final decision about the plan. While Ellis responds with a collaborative pronoun in line nine, she uses interactive positioning to place Findley as the receiver of the instructional schedule and plan.

This PLC meeting began with Findley using collaborative language but switched to individual plans for each teacher. This might have been brought back to a collaborative conversation, however, by the continued use of collaborative language despite interactive positioning. Line eight showed a pivotal point in which the use of language handed over decision-making to the classroom teacher, even though she had not asked for that sole responsibility.

Table 2
ELL Teacher Combined Positioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher Discourse</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F. When <em>you</em> envision....um...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F. <em>me</em> coming in during this time</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F. do <em>you</em> envision...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F. <em>me</em> floating and helping different groups that need help...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F. do <em>you</em> envision...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F. <em>me</em> being assigned to certain groups...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F. do <em>you</em> still envision...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ELL Teacher Combined Positioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Discourse</th>
<th>Pronoun Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 F. <em>me</em> pulling kids out...what ...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 E. <em>I'll</em> be honest, ...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 E. when <em>you're</em> coming during reading this week...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 E. So <em>I</em> just.... <em>I</em> want them to have exposure to it</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, the pronoun use throughout this section of discourse was "individual", however, the positioning varied by how each teacher positioned herself or her co-teacher. In lines one through seven, Findley uses repetitive language in which she asks Ellis how she "envisions" Findley functioning in the classroom during instruction. By using passive language, Findley positions Ellis into the role of decision-maker with the authority to determine how Findley will function in the classroom as the ELL teacher.

While Ellis does not at any time demand this decision-making role, it creates a situation in which she might instinctively respond with an independent pronoun, using "I" to describe her response, and therefore the team's instructional plan. In lines nine through eleven, Ellis states what is going to happen during class for that week. In line ten, Ellis interactively positions Findley, by placing her as the teacher from outside coming into the grade level classroom. In line eleven she states what she is going to do as the classroom teacher. In other words, she is communicating that when Findley arrives in the room, this is the action that is already in place. In line twelve, she provides a rationale for her thinking, which is also through independent pronoun use and the use of reflexive positioning.
While Findley's use of language in the beginning of this discourse created an unbalanced decision-making situation, the use of collaborative language could have remedied that situation and put the discussion back on a collaborative track. For example, in lines nine and ten, Ellis might have responded by asking Findley what she thought would work best, or what ideas she had about how to support English learners during that part of the English Language Arts curriculum. In line thirteen, Findley might have responded with her own instructional ideas, or posed a question using the collaborative pronoun "we" to establish her voice as a co-teacher, and yet, she simply responded with, "ok...ok".

Table 3
ELL Teacher Instructional Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher Discourse</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>E. I can flip flop PBL and reading too...I'm ...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>E. I'm not worried about it</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F. I know, I can do whatever...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F. and I'm flexible as well.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F. I just want to make sure,</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F. that whatever I'm doing...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F. is supporting you best, and supporting the kids best.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F. it's kind of what your vision is,</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F. I can even, you know, be doing reading skill activities too.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 3, the example passage comes from a part of PLC in which there was an awkward moment between teachers. Ellis had shared her instructional plan with Findley,
at which point Findley realized there was no active role for her to play during the time in
the general education classroom. She asked Ellis what the plan was for her involvement
in the room, and Ellis realized that she had swapped out activities that were normally
done during Project Based Learning (PBL) time, with her regular English Language Arts
(ELA) time with Findley. In this passage, they are discussing how to address the
regularly scheduled co-teaching time.

In line one, Ellis states that she can switch the PBL and ELA times in her
classroom. She says that she is not worried about the instructional plan. In both lines,
Ellis positions herself in the discussion, perhaps unaware that she is deciding the plan for
ELA time with Findley without consulting Findley on the process. In lines three and four,
Findley acknowledges Ellis's flexibility and responds that she is also willing to be
flexible in this planning. She uses reflexive positioning to place herself in the situation as
an individual, not as a part of the team.

While Findley continues to use reflexive positioning in lines five and six to
establish her independent thoughts, she also pushes back somewhat on the previous
conversation, using the term "just", to communicate that she wants to address her role as
a co-teacher in the room. She continues to make her statement in line seven, but now has
switched to interactive positioning, placing Ellis back in the role of decision-maker when
she says, "what supports you best". She reinforces this in line eight by intentionally
saying that instruction in the classroom is "what your vision is". While Findley uses an
independent pronoun in line ten to refer to her place in the context of teaching, it is
unclear if she is offering to supplement the already established class plan, or if she is
offering a different activity option during the co-teaching time.
While this situation was possibly more difficult to turn into a collaborative conversation, it could have been salvaged at the beginning when Ellis offered to "flip-flop" the teaching times. Findley could have responded that this would be a preferable plan since she and Ellis had co-planning time to work on ELA content, unlike the PBL time in which she had no connection, prior knowledge, or input on planning. Even if both teachers had decided to keep the schedule change as initially suggested, Findley might have redirected the conversation to a collaborative plan by posing questions such as, "what do we want to accomplish by the end of this class period?", or "what are the goals for our English learners during this activity"? This passage showed that when positioned in a conversation by another person, it is possible to change the direction of the conversation with intentional language use.

Table 4
Offer to Collaborate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher Discourse</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F. <em>I'm</em> almost wondering...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F. if <em>we</em> wouldn't want to use a text....</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>E. That's what <em>I'm</em> thinking too.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F. And <em>I</em> have an account on A to Z reading....</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F. so <em>I</em> could get something on there...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F. if there was a certain topic <em>you</em> wanted, or certain level, even for other students in the room, not just for our ELLs because obviously everybody has to do this.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F. <em>I</em> could find something...</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F. What do <em>you</em> think?</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 (continued)
Offer to Collaborate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher Discourse</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>E. <em>I</em> don't want to have this content heavy.</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>E. <em>I</em> don't want anything state related....</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 presents a discussion that was more collaborative in nature compared to previous examples. In line one, Findley uses an independent pronoun to share her own thinking about instruction but finishes the sentence in line two with a collaborative "we", inviting Ellis into her thought process and requesting her input in making a joint decision. While Ellis responds with in independent pronoun in line three, her comment is in agreement with Findley's suggestion. Findley makes an offer to collaborate in lines four and five but positions her actions as separate from Ellis. Rather than suggest that both teachers search for appropriate resources, Findley offers to take on this work alone. This might still be interpreted as a collaborative action until in line six, she positions Ellis once again into the role of decision-maker through asking what topic Ellis wants, and then again in line seven offers to find an appropriate text alone.

In line eight, Findley asks Ellis's opinion. This is a clear request for collaboration. Although Findley uses the pronoun "you" rather than "we", she elicits Ellis's opinion about her suggested resources, and draws her into the collaborative decision process. Ellis's response in line nine shifts the collaborative direction of the conversation back to independent by her use of reflexive positioning and the statement, "I don't want...". She repeats this discourse pattern in line ten, again saying, "I don't want...", thereby establishing the concept that she has final say on what text will be used in this lesson.
Balance of Collaborative Language

A final layer of analysis through the lens of positioning required that I compare the amount of collaborative utterances between both teachers across the seven PLC meetings. While an analysis of each instance of pronoun use was determined to be too granular for this study, an inquiry into the degree to which each teacher used collaborative versus independent language uncovered general patterns in their discursive practices across all PLCs.

Transcripts from each PLC were reviewed, and comments directly related to instructional planning were coded as either "collaborative" or "independent" in nature. Examples of "collaborative" statements were those in which the speaker asked for the other teacher's input, their feedback on an idea, positioned the instructional actions as jointly owned, or where they entered into a discussion about the planning using inclusive language that promoted a collaborative decision-making process. Conversely, examples of "independent" statements were those in which the speaker made statements about their exclusive actions during the co-teaching time, positioned their instructional actions or those of the co-teacher as exclusive and not connected to the other, or where they responded to a request with a statement that made a decision without using inclusive language or drawing the other teacher into the decision-making process.
Figure 9: Comparison of Findley's Collaborative and Independent Statements. This figure illustrates the comparison of collaborative and independent statements related to instructional planning across seven PLCs.

In Figure 9, a comparison of Findley's statements across the seven PLCs in this study, show that in most PLC meetings, Findley made more Independent statements that collaborative, although her collaborative statements outweighed independent statements in PLCs four and six. In a review of the discourse in each PLC, Findley tallied more independent statements because she tended to position her instructional actions separate from those of Ellis in the classroom. Examples of these statements included, "I'll work on this with my students", "what would you like me to do during this time", or "whatever you decide is fine".
**Figure 10:** Comparison of Ellis's Collaborative and Independent Statements. This figure illustrates the comparison of collaborative and independent statements related to instructional planning across seven PLCs.

Figure 10 shows that like Findley, Ellis made more independent statements related to instructional planning than collaborative statements. A comparison of Ellis's statements across the seven PLCs in this study show that Ellis made more collaborative statements in weeks five and six of the study. Ellis rated more independent statements because she tended to position her instructional actions separate from those of Findley, and often made decisions about instruction without asking for Findley's opinion. She had a tendency to inform Findley of the plans for the class time rather than co-plan the time with Findley. Examples of statements that earned an independent rather than collaborative label included, "This is what we're doing this week...", "I want to make sure that we cover....", or "I don't want to have this content heavy...".

**Summary of positioning.**

Patterns of discourse between the two teachers showed that the ELL teacher consistently positioned herself through interactive statements that put her in a position of submission, while the classroom teacher positioned herself as the decision-maker for
instructional content and planning. When collaborative language was used, it brought teachers to an equal decision-making position. When language associated with interactive positioning was used, any attempt at collaboration ended. This resulted in an uneven co-teaching experience during PLCs, with the ELL teacher viewed as the helper in the room, and the classroom teacher as the teacher to decide instructional content and methods.

**Summary**

Several layers of coding were applied to interview notes and transcription of PLC meetings to discover general patterns and themes related to the discursive practices of two teachers. These general patterns and themes were analyzed to inform this study's research question: *What are the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in their co-teaching Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings?* An analysis of patterns and concluding themes was applied first to results from teacher interviews, and then to field and transcription notes from observations of co-teaching PLCs between a general education and an ELL teacher.

Through this analysis process, I realized that a description of discursive practices consisted of two parts. Results showed that to describe discursive practices, it was necessary to address both "what" teachers discussed as well as "how" they discussed it. The "what" was addressed through open coding and refining of codes into themes. The "how" was recognized through the process of in vivo coding and attention to pronoun use during PLCs, with patterns interpreted through the theoretical and analytical lens of positioning theory. Both reflexive and interactive positioning modes were applied to the in vivo codes to identify how teachers positioned themselves within their work with their
co-teacher, and eventually, how they utilized language that was either collaborative or independent in nature throughout the series of observed PLCs.

Finally, the themes from interviews provided background information that informed possible reasons "why" teachers chose their PLC topics of discussion, as well as the ways they discussed those topics with each other. This additional information from interviews offered teacher perspectives on both the school's approach to PLCs and co-teaching in general, as well as their individual perspective of the same processes.

Overall patterns showed that the general education teacher in this descriptive case study assumed responsibility for decision making, and often responded to collaborative comments in ways that positioned herself back into the decision-making role. The ELL teacher reinforced this perception of roles by exhibiting patterns of submissive conversation style, and repeatedly positioned herself as the helper in the classroom rather than a co-teacher.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the discursive practices used by an ELL and general education teacher in their co-teaching Professional Community (PLC) meetings. In this final chapter, I will merge major themes from the review of literature to events that occurred in this qualitative case study. Discussion of the findings will consider the complex challenge of describing discursive practices, and how that description must include content, (the what), and form, (the how), that are a part of discursive practices.

Discourse from teacher interviews will be used to describe background and perceptions, (the why), that may have influenced the discursive practice of each teacher. The implications that result from these discursive practices will be presented as they apply to school administrators, both ELL and general education teachers, and the ELL education field as a whole. I will present my conclusion based on findings from this study, and finally share limitations and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This study shows that the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in a co-teaching PLC setting are determined by their perceptions and beliefs about their institution’s definition of co-teaching and PLCs, and their individual positions as co-teachers in this system of instructional supports for English learners.

The ultimate goal of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is to ensure students' academic success (DuFour, 2004). PLCs are employed in schools so that teachers may work together to discuss methods to most effectively support academic development of students. These conversations are directly connected to decisions to plan
and deliver instruction. In the specific context of co-teaching PLCs, these plans include not only how to support students, but also how teachers will assign specific actions in the direct delivery of instruction in the classroom. In co-teaching PLCs that include an ELL teacher, those discussions must involve specific conversation about how to implement best ELL teaching practices when supporting English learners.

Content Patterns in Discourse

Through an analysis of the PLC conversations that occurred in this study, the contents of those discussions were organized into five major themes: "instructional planning", "ELL student needs", "standards", "teacher roles", and "collaboration and co-teaching". The content of these discussions was further analyzed to describe "what" teachers talked about and "how" they discussed that content.

The qualitative design of this study allowed me to interact with each PLC through observation, and then reflect on what I had seen and heard in relation to the transcription of the meeting’s discourse. Each week as I visited this PLC planning time, I became increasingly aware of the focus in the discussion on the mechanics of teaching. These co-teachers particularly discussed what they had to do and what tasks needed to be done to accomplish those jobs. The major content, or, "the what" of these meetings were spent discussing, topics related to instructional planning, or of topics directly related to what students needed to work on in their English Language Arts class time. Many of these discussions were organized around what students had done in the previous week, and how teachers planned to schedule instruction for the current week.

Instructional planning discussions included what texts to use, what projects were being started or continued, what activities students should complete, as well as
discussions of the progress individual students or work groups were making according to the instructional schedule. This theme also included discussions around what actions each teacher would take to prepare for class time. References to teacher actions typically referred to which small group each teacher would work with, or what resources each teacher would locate and provide previous to the class in which it was needed.

As I witnessed each week’s PLC time, I wondered when they talked about both the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as well as English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards as applied to their support for English learners. While standards were never explicitly identified through number or title, general concepts that I recognized from the Common Core State Standards would sometimes come up in the conversation in reference to an activity. For instance, Findley, the ELL teacher, suggested a text that she said would be a good source to use to practice how to compare and contrast. The English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards were never mentioned in connection with the planning of instruction. The ELPA21 site maintains that ELP standards are necessary so students are prepared for the language acquisition aligned to the demands of the Common Core State Standards (ELPA21, 2018). The only time that these standards were mentioned during this study, however, was in a conversation about receiving the annual language assessment results, when Findley explained from where the ELP standards were derived. In order for English learners to demonstrate their mastery of the Common Core State standards, I expected that these meetings would have included an overview of how the ELP standards interacted with the Common Core State Standards, and how both teachers planned to monitor student progress toward these two areas of standards.
ELL student needs were a regular part of the planning conversations, but these needs were usually introduced at the end of the planning time, and always introduced by the ELL teacher. Consistently, it seemed that the needs of English learners were a subtopic of the PLC agenda. It felt as though the focus of the PLC meeting was on planning the English Language Arts class time, and considerations for how to support English learners was included at the end of the PLC planning time. English (2009) referred to this approach as “top-down” discursive practices that occur when the classroom teacher and the district curriculum are viewed as the focus of power in making instructional decisions. In the case of this study, the ELA curriculum and general education considerations were the focus of planning in each PLC meeting, indicating a “top-down” discursive practice in planning.

The needs of English learners were typically discussed at the end of each PLC meeting. For instance, as the planning times concluded, Findley would usually ask what Ellis had in mind for her work with ELL groups in the room. This conversation often took place in the last ten minutes of the PLC time. There were times when ELL student needs would surface during discussions about classroom behaviors, or during the context of instructional planning when both teachers considered which specific actions they would take as teachers during instruction. While these were limited, it did show that both teachers were invested in the success of the students and took into consideration their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

As I observed the patterns of discussion through the course of this study, I found there was a disconnect between what I had expected to see and what I actually saw during conversations. Since this was a co-teaching PLC between an ELL teacher and a general
education teacher, I expected to see discussions about specific actions of how to support ELL learning. I expected to see references to the ELP standards, and conversations about how to demonstrate mastery of the CCSS while also implementing the ELP standards. I also expected to see specific decisions about how both teachers would share teaching responsibilities in the room using an equitable co-teaching approach. I hoped to see suggestions of ELL strategies taken up by the general education teacher and discussions around how to implement those strategies into class-wide instruction.

What I typically saw, however, was a meeting that served as a time for the general education teacher to share what she was doing for her class that week, and the ELL teacher taking notes and discussing ways she would support English learners either in the room, or by pulling them out for explicit language supports. As I left each week’s PLC, I reflected and wondered, why were my expectations different from the reality of my observations?

**Language Patterns in Discourse**

After the second PLC, I started to notice the ways in which the teachers were speaking during the PLCs not only in relation to their teacher roles, but also in the speech choices they made to refer to their actions and to their co-teacher’s actions. As I listened closer, I found that these speech choices extended to the ways they phrased questions, ideas, or suggestions in their co-teaching planning time. As I considered these language choices that teachers utilized in their PLC conversations, I became aware of a pattern of how instructional plans and subsequent actions were discussed. I refer to these as the language patterns that emerged in conversation, or "the how" of the conversations.
Use of pronouns.

The most obvious language pattern I noticed was each teacher's use of the pronouns, "I", "you", or "we". I first took notice of this when Ellis used the pronoun, "I", paused, and switched her word choice to "we". This seemed to reflect that she was trying to use more inclusive and collaborative language. I made note of this and started to track how each teacher was using pronouns to discuss instructional plans, their roles, and conversations about students. Pronoun use throughout the weekly PLCs eventually served as “pronoun markers” (Kacewicz, 2014) that indicated the speaker’s positioning in the discourse between teachers.

As the findings in this study show, teachers used more independent language than collaborative language throughout the majority of the PLCs. In particular, Ellis used "I" to establish her actions as the classroom teacher and to state what the instructional plans for each week. Findley used independent pronouns to establish her actions as the ELL support in the room, and in a way that distinguished herself apart from the final decisions about instruction scheduling or procedures.

Findley continued to cast herself in the role of helper rather than equitable teacher through the use of comments or questions during the meetings. Several times, Findley would ask, "What would you like me to do", or "What do you envision as my role during this time". She also made comments such as "It's your vision. I'm just here to support you". Ellis reinforced this perception that Findley was there to help, using independent pronouns as well to make decisions about what would happen during class, or to describe her decisions on the instructional content and schedule for learning for the upcoming week.
The patterns of pronoun use by both teachers supported the concept that ELL teachers are often perceived as the support teacher in co-teaching situations, either because ELL teachers are perceived to only support language development activities, or because general education teachers consider them to have less pedagogical knowledge in the content classroom (Arkoudis, 2006). Findley’s continual self-positioning of herself in the submissive role contradicted the statements she made in her individual interview regarding her level of expertise in ELL teaching and how she hoped to be able to help her co-teachers acquire more ELL teaching strategies. The contradiction in Findley’s individual beliefs, and her positioning in the PLC conversations indicates that her discursive practices in PLC meetings were influenced by her perceptions of her role in the co-teaching relationship in her school (Bell & Walker, 2012; Brown & Stairs, 2012).

**Reflexive and interactive positioning.**

I realized that what I was seeing was examples of what Harré and van Langenhove (1999) had described as the ways that people can position themselves within conversations to create a social phenomenon. When considering both interactive and reflexive positioning, it became evident that Findley and Ellis were exhibiting the act of both reflexive and interactive positioning throughout their co-teaching PLCs.

To review, interactive positioning involves positioning the other person within a conversation. I used to pronouns to mark when this occurred and found that I could identify when teachers used the pronoun "you", they most often were commenting on the action they wanted the other person to take. Ellis used this type of positioning the most often; making statements about the actions Findley would take during classroom
instruction. Examples of this were, "You can take your group during that time", and "I want you to work on this with your group".

In some cases, the pronoun "you" was also used to position their self by asking the other person to make a decision about their role. For example, Findley often asked Ellis "What would you like me to do"? While Findley made this comment, she positioned Ellis into the role of decision-maker and herself in the role of classroom support.

Reflexive positioning is the practice of positioning yourself through conversation. Both teachers used this type of positioning, but for different purposes. Ellis often made statements that positioned herself as the authority to decision the content and procedures for the co-taught ELA time. Examples of these comments included, "I don't want to use anything too content heavy", and, "I want to have this wrapped up in the next week". Findley also used reflexive positioning, but her language choices resulted in positioning herself as the support in the room rather than an equal teacher. Examples of Findley's comments included, "I'm just here to support your vision", and, "It doesn't matter to me, it's all about what you want".

At each point when a teacher used language, there was a response, and that response determined the subsequent action. What emerged from the observation of these exchanges was that discursive patterns held the potential to move teacher actions from independent actions to collaborative actions that implemented equitable co-teaching decisions and practices. The patterns of language choice throughout these PLCs, however, established a situation in which co-teaching practices were not really
exemplified, although this had been the stated goal by both teachers in their individual interviews.

Just as I reflected each week on the content of the discussions I was witnessing, I began to also reflect on possible reasons these teachers were choosing to engage in discourse in these ways, establishing patterns of interactions within their PLCs. I asked myself several times if the language choices I was witnessing actually reflected each teachers’ beliefs about their capacity and their co-teacher’s capacity to meet the academic and linguistic needs of English learners.

Drawing from findings in the review or literature, I determined that the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in a co-teaching PLC setting were determined by the definitions of co-teaching provided by their school. I also determined that each teacher’s perceptions and beliefs about their positions within this co-teaching system determined the ways they chose to use discourse and interact with each other in their co-teaching planning time.

**Factors that Influenced Discourse**

From the beginning of this study, it was obvious that both teachers were friendly and seemed to genuinely like each other. This was apparent in their individual interviews, before I had begun to observe their PLC meetings. I didn't sense any competitiveness or animosity between them either in individual interviews, or in their interactions during PLC meetings. I concluded that the language patterns used in PLC meetings stemmed from each teacher’s perception of their individual position in the co-teaching PLC.

In order to gain a better understanding of factors that influenced these interactions, I looked back at individual teacher interviews to determine possible factors
that influenced “why” teachers interacted in specific patterns of discourse. I connected teacher discourse in both interviews and PLC meetings to the review of literature to formulate my perceptions of the discursive practices of these general education and ELL teacher.

**Beliefs about PLC structures.**

This study shows that the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in a co-teaching PLC setting were first determined by their perceptions and beliefs about their institution’s definition of PLC procedures. From comments made by both teachers, the message they had received regarding PLCs was that the co-teaching PLC was initiated so that ELL teachers could plan how to support English learners in the general education classroom. The content area assigned for this delivery of co-taught instruction was English Language Arts. This message was different than an alternative communication that sets expectations for equitable planning, delivery of instruction, and assessment of student work for the purpose of supporting the academic language development of English learners. This is not to say that equitable instruction was not the school’s purpose of co-teaching PLCs, but the perception of these teachers was that the ELL co-teaching PLCs were intended to plan how ELL teachers would support the general education teacher during instruction.

This particular school had implemented an instructional approach aligned with project-based learning. This instructional method required specific PLCs formed around the planning of projects, student tasks, standards alignment and essential elements of instruction. These PLC times were separate from the ELL and general education teacher PLC times, which made it difficult for ELL teachers to attend both meetings. This
impacted the ability of all teachers working within this grade level to discuss and collaborate around the focus of instruction (Chan & Pang, 2006). Obviously, the co-teaching PLC took priority for Findley’s schedule, but she was then not able to attend grade level project-based PLCs. Ellis attended those PLC meetings and shared that information each week with Findley.

The result of this communication process, however, was that Ellis began their co-teaching PLC time with information about what the grade-level PLC had already decided. This immediately positioned Findley as the recipient of decisions, rather than providing an opportunity for her to co-design instruction from the initial stages of planning. As indicated in the review of literature in this study, collaborative learning through PLCs allows teachers to establish networks of relationships through which they can reflect on their teaching practice, negotiate beliefs and decisions and together, make decisions that will inform their future instruction (Little, 1987; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Achinstein, 2002). If any part of the co-teaching teams is left out of the grade-level planning time, however, the connection to classroom instruction is therefore compromised. In the case of ELL teachers begin left out of the initial planning meeting, this means that instruction that directly affects English learners becomes reactive rather than proactive and intentional.

While this might seem to be an isolated scheduling conflict, Findley had mentioned in her individual interview that ELL teachers were not invited to the training on project-based learning at the beginning of the year but were given a summary of this instructional method after the training that general education teachers received. She said
that, as a result, she felt ignorant about terms other teachers were using, such as “agency”, and was continually asking Ellis to explain project related concepts to her.

This situation showed how the planning of professional development to support PLCs communicated to ELL teachers that they were not considered an equal partner in this PLC initiative, ultimately influencing the ways Findley perceived her role in the overall PLC process. She also commented that the approach to PLCs in the past had given ELL teachers a voice in instructional decisions, and that from the beginning stages of planning, ELL teachers were able to discuss linguistic supports with general education teachers and contribute to the supports that were introduced during instruction. While a system of co-teaching had not been implemented to the degree it existed at the time of this study, Findley commented that she felt ELL teacher capacity to have a voice in instructional decisions had all disappeared since the previous year.

Both Ellis and Findley mentioned that their school had presented DuFour’s four critical questions for PLCs, but I did not hear them refer to these questions during the time that I observed their PLC meetings. In this case, the school had provided a clear framework to guide each PLC’s work, but it was unclear how the school followed up on how teachers implemented the framework of these four critical questions. While this thread of inquiry lies outside the purpose of this study, it is interesting to consider how the implementation of these questions might have changed the course of equitable decision making for English learners in this particular PLC. By addressing the first two questions alone, (a) *What do we want students to know and be able to do*, and (b) *What will we do if they don’t know it*, Ellis and Findley would have been reminded to consult
both the CCSS and ELP standards, and then plan instructional strategies that would support the learning needs of their English learners in the classroom.

**Beliefs about collaborations and co-teaching.**

This study also showed that the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in a co-teaching PLC setting were influenced by the way they perceived their position and decision-making power in the co-teaching arrangement. A review of interview responses from each teacher showed that while both teachers understood that they were engaged in the process of co-teaching, they described that process as the ELL teacher coming in to help support English learners. This was reinforced by comments that described decisions to either pull students for explicit language instruction, or work with small groups in the room while other non-ELL groups were working with the general education teacher.

English (2009) showed in her study that in the case of co-teaching, there is often a lack of understanding related to the role and responsibilities of ELL teachers. While the power of planning decisions by Ellis and the focus on the ELA reflected the “top-down” discursive practices identified in English’s study, there were also evidence of “labeling” discursive practices in which Findley, as the ELL teacher, as considered primarily responsible for the academic and linguistic education of the English learners. Ellis had indicated that these were her students, and she considered herself responsible for their learning, but when it came to the application the ELP standards and strategies in the classroom, she handed those actions over to Findley. Ellis also indicated that she was still learning about ELL strategies and the ELP standards, so the delegation of ELL actions
was more likely related to acknowledgment of Findley’s expertise rather than a sense that she was not responsible for the English learners in the classroom.

These divisions of teaching responsibility might have been clarified through training in co-teaching for general education and ELL teachers previous to the pairing of teachers in this school (Bell & Walker, 2012; Butler & Schnellert, 2012). While each teacher had some form of previous co-teaching experience, only Findley had received training in co-teaching procedures. She shared that these trainings were "awesome" and that she and her co-teaching partner had learned a lot about both planning the co-teaching and also trying out different instructional configurations.

Ellis shared that she had also been in a co-teaching arrangement in another district, but that neither she nor the other teacher had received any training in those practices. She did say that in her former co-teaching experience, they found it very beneficial to have two teachers in the room but did not elaborate on how they utilized co-teaching to support student learning.

In the analysis of each teacher’s collaborative and independent language use, Findley demonstrated more collaborative language use throughout the course of the PLC meetings in this study. Ellis used independent language to a greater degree than Findley and was most often the teacher who made decisions about scheduling and overall planning. Often, this information involved sharing details from the grade-level PLC that Findley was unable to attend. This automatically placed Ellis in the position of authority since she possessed important information that was not accessible to Findley. When considering Findley’s choice of collaborative language patterns, it is unclear if she chose
collaborative phrases because she wanted to utilize co-teaching language, or if she was intentionally positioning herself in the role of support teacher.

As I looked closer at the discursive patterns exhibited by each teacher, I found that there were multiple opportunities when independent language patterns could easily have shifted to collaborative language by a change as simple as using the word “we” instead of “I”, or by asking the other teacher, “What do you think”? It is important to note that if those language choices had shifted, the decision-making power in these PLCs would have shifted as well. Whether this was intentional control or not, was not clear.

What was very clear, was that these two teachers got along well. They were warm and friendly toward each other and did not exhibit any self-promoting behaviors or attitudes. This caused me to believe that both teachers were interacting and discussing instructional issues as they did, because they believed it was the right way to conduct a co-teaching meeting. At the beginning of the study both teachers commented that they were new to co-teaching, were just getting to know each other, and were really anxious to learn how to co-teach together better. What I perceived in my observations were two teachers who had a lot of individual skill and strengths but were not sure how to best merge those skills into a cohesive co-teaching unit.

**Beliefs about ELL teaching and learning.**

A final factor in this study showed that the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in a co-teaching PLC setting were influenced by each teacher’s perception of their position in the co-teaching setting, and not necessarily from their degree of knowledge of best practices in ELL teaching and learning. Brown and Stairs (2012) demonstrated that ELL teachers often face marginalization and alienation
from their co-teaching general education peers, but that was not the case between Ellis and Findley. While Ellis was beginning an ELL endorsement, she was beginning to recognize ways to best support English learners in her classes, attributing her ELL classes as well as information she learned from working with Findley. Ellis clearly valued the collaboration opportunities with Findley and commented on how she was learning more about ELL teaching and learning issues by observing Findley in the classroom. Conversely, Findley had years of ELL teaching experience as well as a background in special education in which she interacted with English learners with special education needs, and also mentioned that she benefited academically from being in the room with Ellis.

Despite these differences in the degree of knowledge about ELL teaching and learning, Ellis used less collaborative language and made more independent decisions for instructional during the PLC meetings. Additionally, Ellis made comments throughout the study as to how she learned strategies from working with Findley or observing her interact with English learners in the classroom. This provided evidence that Ellis did not believe she possessed more knowledge in ELL education. Consequently, Ellis’s discursive patterns of independent language use can be connected to her belief that it was her position in the PLC rather than her knowledge of ELL strategies justified her decision-making actions. The relation of role in the PLC in contrast to the amount of specialized knowledge would also explain why Findley used more submissive language and deferred to Ellis’s planning decisions even though she had more knowledge about best practices in ELL education.
This phenomenon reflects English’s (2009) discourse analysis findings that compared top-down, bottom-up and labeling discursive practices. Ellis’s actions that positioned herself as the decision-maker in PLC meetings reflects top-down discursive practices which reflect the belief that the classroom teacher and curriculum are the focus of power in instructional decisions. Labeling discursive practices were also observed in this study to some degree, since labeling discursive practices position English learners within the domain of ELL teachers’ responsibility. This was not completely applicable to this PLC since Ellis also commented in her interview that these English learners were her students, and she considered herself responsible for their learning.

These factors related to teacher beliefs about their institution’s definition of PLC procedures, about the process of co-teaching, and about positions of power within the PLC meeting demonstrate the potential impact on teachers’ discursive practices. It is important for administrators, general education teachers, ELL teachers, and English learners to understand how these outside factors can impact the ways in which co-teaching engage in discursive practices related to co-teaching issues and ELL education.

**Implications**

Co-teaching PLC meetings typically occur between two teachers and are not witnessed by administrators or other teachers in the building. When considered on a systems level, the impact of co-teaching in the classroom, however, holds implications for school administrators, classroom and ELL teachers, as well as the ELL education field as a whole.
Implications for Administrators

The decision to implement co-teaching in a school or district indicates a belief that students will benefit from the presence of two teachers with specialized knowledge collaboratively delivering instruction. When this belief is applied in the context of a general education teacher working with an ELL teacher, the expectation is that English learners will receive more rigorous supports through the process of instruction delivered through ELL strategies. Without clear communication surrounding these expectations, however, co-teaching processes are left to the determination and definition of the teachers who engage in these practices.

Foremost, school administrators must provide clear communication surrounding co-teaching. This clear communication should include specific definitions and examples of what is collaboration and what is actual co-teaching. If schools wish to derive benefits from a co-teaching approach, they must support the professional development of teachers who engage in this activity and nurture an equitable approach in which both teachers initiate and contribute to decisions about the delivery of instruction. Butler and Schnellert (2012) emphasized professional development as a key factor in affecting system changes that improve the chances of students’ academic success. Without professional development that specifically targets best practices in co-teaching between general education and ELL teachers, co-teaching teams are left to devise their own approach to co-teaching in classrooms with English learners, and this most often results in ELL teachers becoming an associate to the general education teacher (English, 2009; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).
Barriers to successful co-teaching practices must be eliminated, and administrators may be the most appropriate persons to address these barriers. The distribution of ELL teachers to classrooms should be considered, so that ELL teachers have adequate time to plan and prepare for each classroom in which they co-teach (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). This also impacts the scheduling of planning times between ELL teachers and their classroom co-teachers. If ELL teachers are to have an equitable voice in the planning of instruction, they must have adequate time to meet with their co-teachers and share specialized knowledge in best ELL teaching practices (Samson & Collins, 2012; Bunch, 2013).

When we consider the lack of teacher preparation related to work with English learners for most general education teachers, (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008), it becomes imperative to give these teachers access to ELL teachers who can teach and reinforce ELL teaching and learning strategies on a daily or weekly basis. In absence of this, the teaching partnership becomes a process in which general education teachers inform ELL teachers of their plans and ELL teachers serve as an extra support in the room, rather than an educator with specialized knowledge. The result is that English learners lose any exposure to teaching methods that best meet their language development needs. In other words, collaboration with good intentions but no specific application to student learning remain as only good intentions.

Finally, administrators should consider the professional development they provide in their schools around the co-teaching process. DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker (2008) suggest four critical questions that every PLC should address when they meet. With adequate training on the implementation of these processes, PLCs would begin their
planning by addressing the standards they want students to master (Question #1 - what do we want them to learn) and discuss action steps to support this learning (Question #2 - what do we do if they don't know it). These first two questions alone have incredible potential to impact the academic development of English learners. In absence of considering the ELP standards, teachers cannot plan instruction that takes language development needs into consideration.

**Implications for General Education Teachers**

Co-teaching is a difficult process for most teachers to acquire. It is reasonable to assume that this process is even more difficult for general education teachers who are accustomed to making all decisions related to instruction in their classroom. Co-teaching with an ELL teacher, however, offers a source of information about English learners that many general education teachers may not already have (DeJong & Harper, 2005).

As described in chapter two of this study, general education teachers have usually not had training or education on the unique learning needs of English learners (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). Given the increased number of English learners in U.S. classrooms, general education teachers will most likely continue to see increased numbers of these students in their classes. While professional development opportunities are limited, access to the specialized knowledge possessed by ELL teachers offers one possible solution in how to reinforce learning related to academic language development.

Perhaps one of the most impactful things co-teachers can develop is a clear understanding of the difference between collaboration and co-teaching. Collaboration is a perspective and approach to instruction, but co-teaching requires specific actions that support collaborative goals. Unless general education teachers approach co-teaching as
an equitable action with ELL teachers, they are limited to decisions being made from their limited knowledge of English learners and the strategies necessary to support their learning. In the case of co-teaching for the purpose of supporting the language development needs of English learners, general education teachers may need to examine their own beliefs about the focus of power in the classroom and how their own discursive practices support equitable collaboration with the ELL co-teacher and how instructional decisions best support the language development of English learners.

One area of knowledge that would benefit general education teachers is an understanding of how to apply the ELP standards in their work with English learners. Conversations with a co-teacher offer opportunities for teachers to clarify their understanding of how to apply both language standards and Common Core State Standards in their work with English learners. As teachers discuss ways to help English learners use their language to demonstrate mastery of the standards, they will gain invaluable knowledge on the scaffolding and strategies necessary to support academic language development within this student population. In particular, general education teachers should become familiar with the English language proficiency standards in their state, and consider these standards in the initial stages of determining content and language objectives for each lesson.

**Implications for ELL Teachers and ELL Education**

As co-teaching continues to become a favored choice in the delivery of language supports for English learners, the field of ELL education must consider the knowledge and skills necessary for both current and future ELL teachers in our schools. Primarily, ELL teachers must have a clear understanding of the difference between collaboration
and co-teaching and their position within these systems. This is especially significant as schools begin to implement co-teaching as a primary strategy to meet the language needs of English learners. ELL teachers must claim their role in both the decisions and the delivery of instruction, making sure that linguistic supports are implemented at each state of planning, delivery of instruction, and the assessment or work created by English learners.

In order for ELL teachers to implement rigorous language instruction in the classroom, they must develop a command of lesson objectives that are based on both the CCSS and English Language Proficiency standards. Not only must teachers understand how these two standard sets interact, but they must know how to apply standards to each level of language proficiency exhibited with the ELL student population. In other words, ELL teachers require professional development that clarifies how English learners at different language proficiency levels are able to interact successfully with the Common Core State Standards.

The challenge of supporting effective academic language development for English learners is imposing in even the most supportive education settings. Decisions about ELL supports are often made without including ELL teachers in the planning process. To accomplish this same goal in settings which do not have a clear understanding of language development processes, ELL teachers must develop skills to advocate for English learners. These advocacy skills include strengthening discursive practices used in planning sessions with general education teachers. As Harré and van Langenhove (1999) showed in their research in positioning theory, discursive interactions
create storylines which are impacted by the way people position themselves and others within a conversation.

As this study showed, at any moment within the discussion of PLC co-teaching planning meetings, the conversations could have been rechanneled into collaborative conversations that promoted equitable teaching practices. It is imperative that ELL teachers be aware of these discursive opportunities and strengthen independent conversational patterns to practices that bring equity and access to decision-making during instructional planning for English learners. As the achievement gap continues to persist between English learners and their native-English speaking peers, ELL teachers must consider ways to advocate for rigorous language learning in our schools.

Often, ELL teachers are viewed as support staff rather than language experts in the building. As Findley mentioned, ELL teachers do not have a say in which PLCs they are able to attend. They do not have a say in the way they deliver instruction, or which model of ELL education will be implemented in their school. If these opportunities are not offered to ELL teachers, then it is necessary for ELL teachers to ask for equity in professional development opportunities. This requires that ELL teachers stay current on best practices in the ELL teaching and learning field, as well as research that informs best co-teaching approaches between general education and ELL teachers. It is the responsibility of ELL teachers to make themselves visible in the education setting on behalf of English learners and their families, so that these students with some of the greatest academic needs, become visible to all stakeholders in the education system.

The ELL research field can support the advocacy work of ELL teachers in our schools by exploring the impact of co-teaching practices on academic outcomes of
English learners. While studies have shown the practices and benefits of collaboration and co-teaching between general education and ELL teachers, few studies have shown the academic benefits of this instructional approach for English learners. The implication from this study for the ELL education and research field is that research and ELL teacher preparation must be proactive in advocating for the academic language needs of English learners. Unless ELL teachers enter these co-teaching partnerships with a clear understanding of their roles, and without a clear understanding of discursive practices that promote equity in teaching, ELL teachers will continue to be relegated to the role of associate in the co-teaching partnership with general education teachers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study addressed the question, "What are the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in their co-teaching Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings?" Results showed that to describe discursive practices, it was necessary to address both "what" teachers discussed as well as "how" they discussed it. In addition, it was necessary to look outside the PLC meetings to gain a better understanding of the factors that influenced these discursive practices. Information from teacher interviews helped explain "why" teachers used discourse as they did, and "why" they may have positioned themselves in the conversations as they did.

Overall patterns showed that the general education teacher in this case study assumed responsibility for decision making, and often responded to collaborative comments in ways that positioned the general education teacher in the decision-making role. The ELL teacher reinforced this perception of roles by exhibiting patterns of
submissive conversation style, and actions that positioned herself as the helper in the classroom rather than a co-teacher.

This study showed that the discursive practices of a general education and ELL teacher in a co-teaching PLC setting were determined by their perceptions and beliefs about their institution’s definition of co-teaching and PLCs, and their individual positions as co-teachers in this system of instructional supports for English learners. The implications from these results are that teachers who engage in co-teaching practices require support from their administrators, and clear definitions of co-teaching practices as well as logistical supports to make quality co-teaching possible.

The capacity for general education teachers to support the academic language development of English learners can be increased through co-teaching opportunities with ELL teachers. This opportunity implies that general education teachers must welcome ELL teachers into the co-teaching process and ensure that equitable processes are implemented in each phase of collaboration and co-teaching.

Finally, ELL teachers must take the initiative to advocate for equitable positions in both collaboration and co-teaching. Advocacy efforts provide the potential to not only improve the ways in which ELL teachers are viewed within our schools, but to help reduce the academic achievement gap between English learners and their native-English speaking peers by ensuring best instructional practices that support academic language development.
Limitations and Recommendations

Descriptive case studies are intended to depict the real-life experiences of a case with specific boundaries. In this study, the case was the co-teaching PLC meetings between two teachers. This case was not representative of all co-teaching PLCs and was intended to describe one team's discursive practices alone. Future studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of co-teaching PLCs between general education and ELL teachers through the observation of multiple PLC teams and conduct comparisons of discursive practices between these cases.

This study observed seven PLCs over a period of four months. Observations over an entire school year might show additional insight into the discursive practices used by teachers in co-teaching PLCs. Given that the teachers in this study had just begun working together as co-teachers, four months of observations limited the ways in which these discursive practices may have developed over time. Additional studies on co-teaching PLCs with an ELL teacher might consider observing teams who have developed a working relationship over an entire school year or across multiple school years.

While the purpose of this study was to focus on the discursive practices of teachers in their PLC planning, the ELL education field would benefit from additional studies that connect discursive practices within planning to instructional practices observed in the classroom. Further insights into the impact of teachers’ discourse in planning may be gained by additional observations that compare and contrast instructional decisions and their application in the classroom with students.
Reflection

Within each discursive interaction lies the potential to make connections or create barriers. The discursive practices of teachers in co-teaching settings provide multiple opportunities to engage in language that invites the other in to collaboration or creates barriers that isolate each other’s contributions to instruction. Discursive practices hold the potential to transform independent actions to invitations to share the equity of academic decisions. By developing a better understanding of discursive practices, teachers may gain a deeper knowledge around the nature of collaboration, and work towards education practices that promote the academic success of English learners.
APPENDIX
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Introductory Protocol
1. Thank the teacher for agreeing to participate in the interview.

2. “To facilitate our note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. Please sign the audio consent form.”

3. “For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the recordings, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign an informed consent form to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (a) all information will be held confidential, (b) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (c) we do not intend to inflict any harm.”

4. “Again, thank you for agreeing to participate.”

5. “I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.”

6. “Do you have any questions you would like to ask before we begin the interview?”

7. Provide opportunity for questions. Inform the participant that they may clarify questions or ask additional question at any time during the interview.

Introduction:
“You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about teaching and learning in your school, and because you participate in grade-level team meetings. My research project as a whole, focuses on how teachers discuss issues connected to applying Common Core State Standards and English language proficiency standards with their English learner students. My aim is not to evaluate your teaching techniques or experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about the discussions teachers have during grade-level collaborative team meetings, and how those discussions might contribute to a deeper knowledge of ESL teaching and learning practices.”

Interviewee Background:
1. Please select the choice, which best represents the number of years you have taught in K-12 education:

a. 1-5 years  b. 6-10 years  c. 11-15 years  d. 16-20 years  e. 21-25 years  f. 26-30 years  g. 31 years or longer

2. How many years have you taught in K-12 education?
3. Please select the choice, which best represents the number of years you have taught at your current school?

a. 1-5 years  b. 6-10 years  c. 11-15 years  d. 16-20 years  e. 21-25 years  f. 26-30 years  
g. 31 years or longer

4. Please select the choice, which best represents the number of years you have taught in this school district?

a. 1-5 years  b. 6-10 years  c. 11-15 years  d. 16-20 years  e. 21-25 years  f. 26-30 years  
g. 31 years or longer

5. Please indicate your highest educational level completed:

a. Bachelor’s Degree  b. Graduate Student  c. Master’s Degree  e. Doctorate

6. Please indicate the number of years you have had English learners as students in your classroom(s):

a. 1-5 years  b. 6-10 years  c. 11-15 years  d. 16-20 years  e. 21-25 years  f. 26-30 years  
g. 31 years or longer

7. Please describe any additional endorsements in education you may have beyond your standards teaching license:

**Perspectives on Collaboration and Co-teaching PLCs**

1. Tell me about the makeup of your grade level/ELL PLC team.
2. How do you share your ideas and how often?
3. Do you use a formal or an informal approach in your meetings?
4. Do you adhere to an agenda or established group norms?
5. Please tell me about your team’s instructional plan?
6. Please describe your experiences with collaboration and co-teaching prior to this school year.
7. Tell me about the weekly PLC planning time this year.
8. Can you tell me about ways this co-planning has had an effect on your classroom instruction?
9. Have you experienced benefits from collaboration?
10. Do you ever have challenges related to your co-planning time?
11. In what ways, if any, do you think co-planning has had an effect on student learning?

12. What are some ways you would improve your meetings?

13. How has collaboration affected your professional relationship with your co-teacher?

14. Has weekly collaboration affected the culture or school climate?

15. Is there anything that you would like to add or clarify that I did not ask?

**Perspectives on Teaching English Learners**

1. As a general education/ELL teacher on a co-teaching team, what do you see as your role in the instruction/assessment of English learners?

2. How would you describe instruction that supports English language development?

3. In your experience, what have you found to be some of the most challenging aspects of meeting the needs of the English learner students in classroom instruction?

4. Describe some of the experiences you have encountered in using the Common Core State Standards in instruction with English learners.

5. Describe some of the experiences you have encountered in applying the Common Core State Standards in instruction with English learners.

6. In what ways have you had the opportunity to use the new state English Language Proficiency standards in instruction with English learners?

7. Is there anything that you would like to add or clarify that I did not ask that you would like to add?

**Conclusion**

Thank the teacher for their time and provide contact information if they wish to follow up or clarify a question or response.
REFERENCES


Iowa Core (2017) Retrieved from [https://iowacore.gov/content/iowa-core-facts](https://iowacore.gov/content/iowa-core-facts)


