


1-1-2010

# Making sense of exit exam policies: A phenomenological study of English language development teachers

Scott N. Forrest  
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Scott Forrest

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Walden University  
2010

Abstract

Making Sense of Exit Exam Policies: A Phenomenological Study

of English Language Development Teachers

by

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M.A., San Diego State University, 2003

B.A., Grand Canyon University, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Teacher Leadership

Walden University

October 2010

## Abstract

There is a lack of understanding regarding how sensemaking could be incorporated into a professional development program to improve teacher quality and student achievement. The lived experiences of high school English language development teachers as they interpret English language development and one state's high school exit exam instructional policies were explored in this phenomenological study. The conceptual framework that supported this study is based on the theory of sensemaking, the processes by which educators interpret and implement policies. The participants were English language development teachers of English learners who have not yet passed the exit exam. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and artifact collection. An analysis of participants' responses was conducted which lead to the disclosure of themes related to sensemaking. The findings of the study indicated teachers' interpretations and implementations of instructional policies are not in line with the intentions of the policies. Contributing to positive social change, this study provided a better understanding of teacher sensemaking and its potential to transform professional development, improve teacher quality, and increase student achievement. The study includes recommendations for professional development programs including developing standards-based outcomes, supervising policy implementation, defining roles and responsibilities, and building teacher capacity.



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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Simon and Dr. Strunk for their encouragement, constructive criticisms, and suggestions throughout the whole process of conducting the study. I would like to especially thank Dr. Simon for her mentorship as she kept me motivated and pushed me along and supported me throughout the journey. I also want to thank Dr. Rozendal for her thorough review of the study and her helpful suggestions and insights.

Next, I would like to thank the California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL) for their support and cooperation with this study.

I also thank my parents, D.B. (Dan) and Patricia Forrest for instilling a passion for education and a love of lifelong learning.

Finally, I want to thank Samuel Serrato for always standing by my side and supporting me throughout the years of my continued education.



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## Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

Mandated instructional policies are passed down from the national, state, and school district levels. However, this process does not necessarily translate to teachers implementing the policies as originally intended by the policy makers. One such example of a policy is the requirement of high school exit exams. All students, including English learners, in California public high schools are required to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) before receiving a diploma (California Department of Education [CDE], 2009a). An English learner is a student who is not yet proficient in the listening, speaking, reading, and writing of English based on objective assessments as mandated by the CDE (2006, p. 2). Thus, concerns arise when there is a disparity in exit exam pass rates between English learners and English-only students.

The intention of this phenomenological study is to explore the processes English language development (ELD) teachers use to make sense of instructional policy related to improving the pass rate for English learners. A phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of several individuals who share the same experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006). In the study, I explored the sensemaking processes of ELD teachers as they interpret and apply CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. The working definition of sensemaking, based on prior literature (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Parris & Vickers, 2005; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002), is the processes, in both formal and informal settings, through which teachers interpret, evaluate, and make decisions about a policy that results in the implementation of a policy. More discussion of sensemaking is presented in the literature review in Section 2. A phenomenological



study of sensemaking provides a better understanding of teacher sensemaking and its potential to transform professional development, improve teacher quality, and increase student achievement.

### **Background**

Federal legislation (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) called for sweeping reforms in education. The main focus of NCLB is on creating “stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents” (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2004). As a result, schools with populations of diverse cultures and languages have been impacted by NCLB. More specifically, NCLB’s stronger accountability for results (e.g., high-stakes testing) increases the focus on strict guidelines and accountability systems. NCLB also mandated programs that are to help English learners academically. This section includes a brief overview of NCLB as it relates to high school exit exams and English learners.

#### **No Child Left Behind and Exit Exams**

WestEd (2003), a nonprofit educational research agency, explained the intent of NCLB “is to boost the value and credibility of a high school diploma and, in the process, motivate students to work harder” (p. 1). NCLB (2002) required states to have assessment systems for monitoring schools ensuring they are making progress towards educating all students to high standards. As such, the NCLB legislation prompted the widespread use of high school exit exams. Title 1 of NCLB specifically required the use of academic assessments within accountability systems:

The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic assessments. (Sec. 1001)

Title 1 of NCLB further explained the purpose can be accomplished by ensuring that high quality academic assessments, accountability systems, teacher training and preparation, curriculum, and instructional materials are aligned with challenging state and academic standards so that students, teachers, parents and administrators can measure progress against common expectations for student academic achievement.

### **No Child Left Behind and English Learners**

A predominant theme throughout the NCLB Act is that of improving achievement for subgroups who historically, and consistently, fall behind in academic achievement compared to other subgroups. Specifically, Title 3 of NCLB (2002) mandates the implementation of scientifically-based programs that help English learners meet the same high academic standards as other students. The USDOE's (2003) Institute for Educational Sciences described scientifically-based research as having reliable evidence that shows a program works. Additionally, in relation to English learners, the NCLB Act states that schools must "improve the education of limited English proficient children, by assisting the children to learn English and meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards" (Sect. 3115). In response to this legislation, the state of California and California public schools have instituted policies governing exit exams and English learning.

### **California's Response to No Child Left Behind**

California met the NCLB requirement of an assessment system through the development of the CAHSEE. The CAHSEE was first offered on a volunteer basis in 2001. The California School Board of Education later made it a requirement for a high school diploma in 2003 for the graduating class of 2006 (CDE, 2009a). The CAHSEE's purpose was to "significantly improve pupil achievement in public high schools and to ensure that pupils who graduate from public high schools can demonstrate grade level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics" (CDE, para. 1). However, California performs lower than the national average for student subgroups on math and reading (Baker, Griffin, & Choi, 2008).

The population of California schools represents a variety of ethnic groups. The four largest groups are Hispanic or Latino (49.04%), White-not Hispanic (27.86%), Asian (8.4%), and African American (7.28%) (California Department of Education Demographics Unit [CDEDU], 2009). There are approximately 1.6 million English learners in Grades kindergarten through 12 in the California public schools compared to approximately 1.3 million in 1995 accounting for almost one quarter of all the students in California (CDE, 2009b). This population also represents one third of all the English learners in the nation and includes over 100 languages (CDE, 2006).

In response to the growth of the English learner population, California instituted the English Language Acquisition Program (ELAP) in 1999, providing funds to schools "to improve the English proficiency of English learners and to prepare them to meet the state's academic content and performance standards" (CDE, 2009b). Although ELAP

was instituted prior to the CAHSEE, the need for improvement in meeting the academic content and performance standards for California's English learners was illustrated in the historical pass rates on the CAHSEE. For example, the March pass rates of 10<sup>th</sup> grade English learners on the English Language Arts (ELA) section was 41% in 2004 and 41% in 2008 compared to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade English-only students' March pass rates of 80% in 2004 and 85% in 2008 (CDE, 2008). Apparent achievement gaps like this have prompted research studies on exit exams.

### **The Achievement Gap and Exit Exams**

Warren and Edwards (2005) studied the correlation between high school exit exams and high school drop-out rates. They concluded that the association between high school exit exams and diploma acquisition does not vary according to student characteristics (p. 68). Yet, other researchers have found conflicting results to these, suggesting that achievement gaps may indeed vary by student characteristics such as socioeconomic status and ethnicity (Bielenberg & Fillmore, 2004; Burris & Wellner, 2005; Goldschmidt & Martinez-Fernandez, 2004; Ramirez & Carpenter, 2005; Thompson, 2007; Walker, 2002). This conflict may also suggest there are achievement gaps among student subgroups based on student characteristics such as first and home languages. This claim is supported by California's exit exam and subgroup data that were previously discussed.

In addition, Goldschmidt and Martinez-Fernandez (2004) found that narrowing the gaps among schools had no significant impact on student passing rates. These authors stressed the importance of schools focusing on their own students and their

students' needs rather than comparing student successes between schools. Their study indicated the variation in passing rates on exit exams was attributable to classroom characteristics and students within each class more than the differences in schools. Warren and Edwards (2005) generalized that students who are prone to fail would not acquire a diploma even if there were no exam. They argued, "It may be the case that teachers in states with high school exit examinations have been successful in helping those students who would not have dropped out anyway to pass exit examinations on the first or subsequent attempts" (Warren & Edwards, 2005, p. 69). Their study is similar to the study of Picklo and Christenson (2005) that they suggested teachers are not effectively utilizing instructional strategies to meet individual needs of struggling students and students who do not pass the exams.

There are some suggestions offered to raise the academic achievement of students. Nichols (2003) argued that a standards-based approach to learning is essential to the success of students on high school exit exams. Grogan (2001) contended there must be the capacity of teachers to skillfully prepare students for an exit exam, and they should be integrally involved in the planning and research behind the use of instructional strategies. Otway (2007) argued for professional development that would equip teachers with the skills needed to help English learners make academic gains. Additionally, Baker et al. (2008) suggested there is evidence that schools focus more on the preparation for a test than on instruction (p. 24).

## **Problems with Exit Exams and English Learning**

The CAHSEE pass rates of English learners are lower than English-only students from 2003-2007 (Baker et al., 2008, p. 16). Prior literature has indicated problematic issues for English language learning in relation to exit exams. First, the exit exams themselves may not be valid measures of academic achievement of English learners. The Center for Applied Linguistics concluded there is a need for the development of new and improved assessments of adolescent English learners' native language abilities, English language development, and content knowledge learning (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Additionally, Gándara, Rumberger, and Callahan (2003) argued that although California funded education with billions of dollars, it failed to develop a valid measure of academic achievement for English learners. They further argued for the development of an assessment that is "responsive to the needs of English learners" (Gándara et al., 2003, p. 37). Baker et al. (2008) expressed their concern that the exam covers too many standards with too few test items for each standard (p. 22). Also, there may be problems with the interpretation of exit exam results for English learners. Thompson (2007) warned that "educators, parents, policy makers and the media should interpret test scores with caution" because they do not give "an accurate reflection of what students know and an accurate reflection of their skill levels" (p. 25).

There is a need to understand how ELD teachers make sense of the mandated policies regarding exit exams and the education of English learners. In particular, there should be more focus on how these policies are implemented in the classroom and how decisions are made by teachers at school sites and in classrooms.

### **Problem Statement**

The achievement gap found in accountability exams throughout California and the nation (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Thompson, 2007) implies instructional practices are insufficient in closing the academic achievement gap for English learners. Only 34% of the English learners in the state of California passed the ELA portion of the exam and 44% passed the mathematics portion in March of 2008 (CDE, 2008). This finding is compared to the pass rate of 79% in ELA and 76% in mathematics of English-only students (CDE, 2008). It is not known what support systems are in place to help ELD teachers make sense of and effectively implement accountability exam instructional policies. Stakeholders need a better understanding of utilizing sensemaking strategies when implementing instructional policies. The implementation of instructional policy at the classroom level affects student achievement (Spillane et al., 2002; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006). In addition, the implementation of these policies has been linked to instructional practices in that instructional practices mandated by state and national policy are not always implemented as intended by the policy makers (Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002).

Klein, Moon, and Hoffman (2006) posited that sensemaking, the ability or attempt to make sense of an ambiguous situation, is a motivating and continuous effort to understand connections, anticipate their trajectories, and act effectively. Researchers of prior studies (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Coburn, 2005; Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002) have identified processes of sensemaking to improve the interaction between humans and information. However, there is a lack of understanding regarding

how sensemaking could be incorporated into a comprehensive professional development program to improve teacher quality and student achievement. A possible solution may be the identification of processes teachers use to interpret and implement instructional policies. A phenomenological study design was needed to obtain a better understanding of how sensemaking is practiced by ELD teachers.

### **Nature of the Study**

#### **Methodology and Research Questions**

I used a qualitative phenomenological methodology in this study. More specifically, I described the lived experiences of eight individuals who shared the same experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006). This methodology was used based on prior studies as well as its potential to provide a deep description of the sensemaking processes of teachers. I explored the sensemaking processes of ELD teachers, and the study was based in the theoretical framework of sensemaking. A more detailed description of the research methodology and design will be discussed in Section 3.

The study was focused on how high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. Thus, I posited this general research question: How do high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? More specifically, I addressed the following subquestions:

1. How do ELD teachers interpret and implement the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies?



2. What are the underlying themes and contexts that influence the ELD teachers' sensemaking processes?

### **Research Objectives**

Parris and Vickers (2005) advocated for further research to understand the processes and experiences with sensemaking of individuals within an organizational structure. Sensemaking is an approach to thinking about and implementing research and practice. A phenomenological approach was chosen to develop a better understanding of the processes and experiences with sensemaking of teachers. Creswell (2003) explained the purpose of a phenomenological study is to develop a description of the essence of the participants' shared experience. The objective of this phenomenological study was to explore the processes used by ELD teachers to make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies within the organizational structure of their schools. To accomplish this objective, data were collected through interviews and the collection of artifacts such as ELD lesson plans and outlines of units of study.

Researchers of prior studies have employed qualitative approaches to explore the sensemaking processes of individuals within various organizations. Maitlis (2005) conducted a qualitative case study to elaborate on the theory of sensemaking within the organizations of three British orchestras. Coburn (2001) used a qualitative study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers in a California elementary school make sense of reading policy. Other researchers of prior studies have utilized qualitative methods to better understand phenomena and answer research questions similar to this study. Parris and Vickers (2005) described how individual members of a

team make sense of policies within public administration organizations through an exploratory phenomenological study. Bansler and Havn (2006) gained insight into a phenomenon experienced by a group making sense of technology. Klein et al. (2006) described the phenomenon of sensemaking and suggested further research be done to develop a richer theory of sensemaking. More on the phenomenological approach will be discussed in Section 3.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the shared experience of high school ELD teachers making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. For the purpose of this study, sensemaking is defined as a process by which educators interpret policies and make decisions, both formally and informally, about how they respond to the policies (Louis et al., 2005, p. 178). Teachers construct knowledge and interpret policy through both formal and informal conversations and interactions (Bielenberg & Fillmore, 2004; Coburn, 2005, Gabriel, 2005; Louis et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). Louis et al. (2005) contended if teachers have more control in the formation and implementation of policies they will be less resistant to the policies. Yet, few studies described sensemaking in terms of closing the achievement gap for English learners. I explored the sensemaking processes of high school ELD teachers as related to the closing of the achievement gap for English learners..

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study was based on the theory of sensemaking. I identified how ELD teachers make sense of instructional policy as they prepare English

learners for the exit exam. The notion of sensemaking has been studied within a wide range of social contexts such as organizations, public administration, spreading of rumors, and education. Louis et al. (2005) explained sensemaking in an educational setting as a process by which educators interpret policies and make decisions about how they respond to the policies. Sensemaking also requires the sharing of information and experiences through social interaction (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Spillane et al., 2002). Information gathering within a group may also lead to a shared understanding of an organization (Parris & Vickers, 2005). Additionally, there is a phase of sensemaking in which the participants evaluate situations or an organization and develop action steps and possible solutions in response to situations (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Parris & Vickers, 2005). Parris and Vickers (2005) argued that members of an organization use sensemaking processes to understand the nature of an organization, identify problems and possible solutions, and evaluate whether or not an organization is doing well.

Bordia and Difonzo (2004), in their study of rumors, concluded that groups follow a consistent pattern in sensemaking processes: Reactions and responses are solicited, group members share information and experiences, and members evaluate the information. Similarly, Spillane et al. (2002) found a pattern in how educators make sense of policy: construct an understanding of policies, interpret their own practices, and draw conclusions about potential changes in their practices. Table 1 shows the general processes of sensemaking as outlined in three studies.

Table 1

*Processes of Sensemaking*

Parris and Vickers (2005) Public Administration	Bordia and Difonzo (2004) Rumors	Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) Education
Understand the organization	Solicit reactions and responses	Construct an understanding
Identify problems and possible resolutions	Share information and experiences	Interpret into own practices
Evaluate how well the organization is doing	Evaluate the information	Draw conclusions about potential changes

Although the sensemaking can come from various contexts, they still share similarities that may support teachers in their sensemaking process. Teachers may construct a better understanding of an organization or situation as they share reactions and responses. They may subsequently link their learning to their own experiences and practices as they identify problems and possible solutions. Finally, teachers may draw conclusions about potential changes to their practices as they evaluate the information and the organization as a whole. Sensemaking processes, such as the ones previously described, are important to the development of teacher quality, because teachers affect student achievement to the extent they are able to make sense of mandated policies and put them into practice (Louis et al., 2005).

There is a need for this research because of the mandates by district, state, and national policy in reference to high school graduation requirements and the education of English learners. Much of the prior literature has shown processes of sensemaking

among groups and teams of people including public school teachers. Nevertheless, there is a gap in the literature regarding the understanding of how sensemaking could be incorporated into pedagogy to improve the achievement of English learners. For example, Spillane et al. (2002) discussed the need to construct a clear understanding of how policies evolve from understanding to practice in order for educational reform to be successfully implemented. This phenomenological study provided a clearer understanding of how ELD teachers make sense of instructional policy. A more detailed description of sensemaking research and studies will be discussed in Section 2.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following terms are used throughout the study. There are many variations to the definitions of some of the terms. These definitions are based on their uses throughout the prior literature and studies.

*Achievement gap:* Walker (2002) defined an achievement gap as, “The disparity in performance between minority and majority, affluent and poor students” (p. 3). The achievement gap in this study refers to the disparity in pass rates between English learners and English-only students on the CAHSEE.

*English language development (ELD):* Academic instruction in English that is “appropriate to each student’s level of English proficiency” (CDE, 2006, p. 3). The participants in the study teach classes that provide academic instruction in English for English learners.

*English learner (EL)*: “An EL is a K-12 student who, based on objective assessment, has not developed listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiencies in English sufficient for participation in the regular school program” (CDE, 2006, p. 2).

*Sensemaking*: The working definition of sensemaking is the processes, in both formal and informal settings, through which teachers interpret, evaluate, and make decisions about a policy that result in the implementation of a policy (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Parris & Vickers, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations**

#### **Facts Assumed to be True**

I assumed the participating teachers gave truthful responses in their interviews. I also assumed that the selected participants were representative of the demographic make-up of California public school teachers. All precautions were taken to ensure this representation. A third assumption was that the submitted lesson plans were representative of the typical lesson plans regularly developed by each teacher.

#### **Limitations of the Study**

There are a few weakness of the study. First, I may have influenced the study with personal understandings and preconceptions of sensemaking and the instructional policies. In response, I decided how to introduce personal understandings and biases into the study (Creswell, 2007). Next, the study was limited to a small number of participants within public high schools in California. The findings of the study may not be generalized to all ELD teachers in California and the nation. However, the smaller number of participants allowed for deeper inquiry and more time with each individual.

Finally, the way the participants think about instructional policy may have been influenced by their participation in the study. They may have thought more specifically about their views and experiences than they normally would or that typical teachers would. However, this thoughtfulness could be desirable outcome considering the purpose of the study was to discover specifically how the participants make sense of instructional policies and understand how sensemaking processes may be incorporated into a professional development program to affect teacher quality and student achievement. The limitations of the study and the methods to minimize them will be addressed in more detail in Section 3.

### **Scope of the Study**

I explored the sensemaking processes of high school ELD teachers in this study. The teacher participants were interviewed about personal processes of making sense of CAHSEE instructional policies as they relate to English learning. Additionally, the teachers' ELD lesson plans and other artifacts were analyzed with a focus on how CAHSEE instructional policies are implemented. This study was limited to high school teachers of ELD classes that included students who have not taken or passed the CAHSEE. The study's setting was in California with eight ELD teachers from eight different schools representing seven different school districts.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Application to the Local Problem**

The results of the study may help local educators develop concrete applications of sensemaking that can improve the interpretation and implementation of CAHSEE and

ELD instructional policy. For example, the study may provide insight on utilizing Coburn's (2005) recommendations for shaping teacher sensemaking by defining the reforms and framing the boundaries as teachers interpret and construct understanding of the policy. The study may also lead to the identification of processes that will enable ELD teachers to have a better understanding and more control of policy implementation as they consider exit exam instructional strategies. It may also affect changes in the "ecology," as described by Lambert (2002), and the "reculturing" of school sites as explained by Weinbaum et al. (2004). For example, the insight provided by the study may help schools build communities of teacher leaders who have the capacity to affect positive educational change that promotes higher levels of student achievement. This goal may be the catalyst needed to close the CAHSEE achievement gap for English learners.

### **Professional Application**

An examination of sensemaking shed light on some of the resources teachers use to make sense of a policy as they interpret it and put it into practice. It also led to the study of how teachers influence the implementation of instructional policy through operational learning and conceptual learning (Weinbaum et al., 2004, p. 23). That is, educators may consider the procedures outlined in policy and reflect on why the policy was written. More specifically, the exploration of sensemaking may help educators better understand the processes teachers use to interpret the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies, how teachers make decisions about the implementation of the policies, and the underlying themes and contexts that influence the teachers' sensemaking processes. This



information may then lead to the creation and reformation of professional development programs that utilize effective processes of sensemaking.

### **Positive Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include a better understanding of teacher sensemaking and its potential to transform professional development, improve teacher quality, and increase student achievement, especially for English learners.

Another implication for positive social change is that educators may develop concrete applications of sensemaking that can improve the interpretation and implementation of instructional policy. In turn, education policy makers and administrators may gain an understanding of how to better communicate and facilitate the implementation of instructional policy as related to the achievement gap in exit exams. Staff developers and teacher trainers may also gain a better understanding of how to effectively facilitate the sensemaking processes of teachers.

### **Implications**

A review of the related literature highlighted the processes of sensemaking. For example, teachers construct knowledge and interpret policy through both formal and informal conversations and interactions (Bielenberg & Fillmore, 2004; Coburn, 2005, Gabriel, 2005; Louis et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). Louis et al. (2005) contended if teachers have more control in the formation and implementation of policies they will be less resistant to the policies. Yet, none of the previous studies indicated applications of sensemaking processes that may be replicated in school sites. Therefore, an implication of this research study is to identify effective sensemaking processes of ELD teachers that

may be utilized in the development or reformation of professional development programs. This inquiry is important because past researchers have highlighted the need for professional development programs that utilize effective sensemaking processes (e.g., Coburn, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002).

### **Summary**

A phenomenological study exploring the sensemaking processes of teachers as they interpret and apply instructional policies is important. Understanding the processes by which teachers interpret and implement policies can reform professional development programs toward the improvement of teacher quality and student achievement on accountability exams specifically for English learners. This study provided a detailed description of the sensemaking processes of high school ELD teachers as they prepare English learners for the exit exam.

In Section 2, I will review the literature about sensemaking across various contexts. Sensemaking will be described in terms of educational policy and achievement gaps. I will also discuss the utilization of sensemaking strategies in professional development as shown in the review of literature. Additionally, I will describe the connection between sensemaking and English language acquisition. Finally, I will review data collection methods as related to the study of sensemaking. The research methods used in the study, including the research design, data collection procedures, and the analysis of the data will be described in Section 3. I will also describe the validity, transferability, and reliability of the study as well as the limitations of the study. In Section 4, I will present the findings of the study in addition to an explanation of the

process of generating, gathering, and recording data as well as the system for keeping track of data and the emerging understandings of the data. I will summarize the findings, draw conclusions based on the findings, and offer commentary regarding the findings in Section 5. I will also discuss the limitations of the study, and make recommendations for further research.

## Section 2: Literature Review

ELD teachers need to consider two areas of instruction to make sound decisions toward the academic achievement of their students: exit exam instruction and English language acquisition. The review of literature is structured around these two instructional areas through the theoretical perspective of sensemaking. The goal of this study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of high school ELD teachers as they interpret CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. In this chapter, I present a review of literature pertaining to areas that contribute to the phenomenon of sensemaking. The purpose of this literature review is to provide the background necessary for understanding the processes of sensemaking and how this relates to teacher quality, English language acquisition, and exit exam instruction. The exploration of sensemaking may help educators understand the processes teachers use to interpret exit exam and ELD instructional policies, how teachers make decisions about the implementation of the policies, and the underlying themes and contexts that influence the ELD teachers' sensemaking processes.

The literature review is comprised of five sections. In the first section, I identify and explain the processes of sensemaking. The impact of professional learning communities (PLCs) on teacher sensemaking is explored in the second section. The third section is focused on current studies regarding English language acquisition and instruction. The fourth section includes key components of exit exam instruction. Finally, the fifth section includes an examination of teachers as researchers and research strategies that impact sensemaking. The five sections provide the background necessary

for understanding how ELD teachers interpret and implement instructional policies related to English learning and exit exams. The review of literature also includes the investigation of underlying themes and contexts that may influence ELD teachers' sensemaking processes. The five sections of the literature review are important to the study because they add to the understanding of how teachers make sense of instructional policies and how sensemaking processes may be incorporated into a professional development program to affect teacher quality and student achievement.

### **Strategy for Searching the Literature**

Research and applicable support references were collected through both electronic and conventional methods. The Walden University Online Library provided access to ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest Digital Dissertations. Keyword searches included the words, word variations, and synonyms of sensemaking, English language acquisition, and exit exam. Additional Internet searches using search engines, such as Google Scholar and Yahoo!, were used.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the shared experience of high school ELD teachers making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. Parris and Vickers (2005) advocated for further research on the sensemaking of individuals within an organizational structure. Additionally, DeBray (2005) noted there is a lack of knowledge of how secondary schools implement testing policy. This literature review shows relevant literature that addressed knowledge and

skills needed for teachers to effectively make sense of instructional policy as related to exit exams and English learning.

## **Sensemaking**

### **Definition of Sensemaking**

Louis et al. (2005) explained that sensemaking is a process by which educators interpret policies and make decisions, both formally and informally, about how they respond to the policies (p. 178). Klein et al. (2006) offered a similar, yet more specific definition, “Sensemaking is a motivated, continuous effort to understand connections (which can be among people, places, and events) in order to anticipate their trajectories and act effectively” (p. 71). Sensemaking requires the sharing of information and experiences through social interaction (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Spillane et al., 2002). There is a phase of sensemaking in which the participants evaluate situations and develop action steps (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004). Additionally, sensemaking allows participants to move from the surface levels of participation to deeper understandings of policy (Spillane et al., 2002).

### **Processes of Sensemaking**

Bordia and Difonzo (2004) analyzed rumors on Internet sites and online discussion boards. The goal of their study was to analyze the sensemaking processes through which people create and use rumors. They concluded people used sensemaking statements the most. The online groups tended to follow the same pattern: Reactions and responses are solicited, members share information and experiences, members evaluate the rumor based on information, and the group loses interest and moves to another issue.

Although the results may not be generalizable to areas outside of Internet sites, the study provided a framework of sensemaking processes that may be studied in other contexts such as an educational environment. The sensemaking processes described provide a lens through which to observe and analyze the sensemaking processes of teachers.

Spillane et al. (2002) developed a cognitive framework of sensemaking in the process of implementing policy. They explored how people make sense of reform initiatives and focused on how implementing agents construct understanding of policies, interpret their own practices, and draw conclusions about potential changes in their practices. They also described the interaction of implementing agents in three dimensions: cognitive structures, the situation, and the policy signals. The authors argued that failure in implementation may be avoided by creating clear policy outcomes, adequately supervising the implementation toward the goals, clearly defining responsibilities, and building capacity for the teachers to change behaviors. Sensemaking processes impact teacher quality because teachers affect student achievement to the extent they are able to make sense of mandated policies and put them into practice (Louis et al., 2005).

### **Sensemaking and Instructional Practices**

Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) provided an example of how policy (i.e., standards-based assessments) may be interpreted and implemented at the classroom level. These authors contended that assessment is successful when it is standards based and integrated into daily classroom instruction. Yet, the stakeholders' understandings of success may not be in agreement or in alignment with policy. Spillane et al. (2002) raised this concern: "Even teachers who used the same language (e.g., reading strategies) did not

have the same ideas about revising reading instruction” (p. 397). Grogan (2001) argued there must be the capacity of the teachers and buy-in of the teachers to skillfully prepare students for an exit exam. Teachers should be integrally involved in the planning of instruction and understanding of the reasons and research behind the instructional strategies.

### **Influence of Sensegiving**

Maitlis (2005) studied the social processes of sensemaking, especially in terms of how people’s understanding of a policy may be influenced by others. This influence, sensegiving, is an attempt “to influence others’ understanding of an issue” (p. 21). Parris and Vickers (2005) studied influences on sensemaking in organizational teams. More specifically, they described the impact of rhetoric and its use to persuade and influence others on a team. Sensegiving may also be seen in Coburn’s (2005) study of administrators’ influences on teachers. Coburn contended that administrators affect instructional practices through their influence on the teachers’ interpretations of policy. Coburn also argued that school leaders mediate teachers’ connections to policy and that principals should be trained to better collaborate and participate in sensemaking with the teachers.

Anderson (2004) studied the perceptions of teacher leaders and principals about teacher leadership and the influence of teacher leaders on principals and vice versa. The researcher concluded that formal teacher leadership roles may impede other informal teacher leadership roles. Anderson also found there was more principal influence over teacher leaders than there was with teacher leaders on principals.



### **Sensemaking and Policy Implementation**

Spillane et al. (2002) observed a problem in the way teachers make sense of policy implementation, “These teachers saw the standards through the lens of their current practice, and the understanding they constructed failed to reflect the sort of fundamental changes in extant practice pressed by reformers” (p. 399). Consequently, how can administrators facilitate the changing of the teachers’ perspectives to accurately produce the fundamental changes in practice? The authors alluded to an answer when they commented on conventional policy implementation. Spillane et al. explained that principals and teachers are motivated by self-interest, thus principals should use incentives and monitoring systems to influence changes in practice. This conventional viewpoint of implementation theory is also espoused by Frase (1992), who encouraged formal evaluations and corrective measures to support and motivate teachers to follow established policy.

In contrast to the conventional approach, Spillane et al. (2002) argued that failure in implementation may be avoided by creating clear policy outcomes, adequately supervising the implementation toward the goals, clearly defining responsibilities, and building capacity for the teachers to change behaviors. Likewise, Picklo and Christenson (2005) suggested the instructional practices intended by policy are not always implemented. Specifically, they concluded teachers do not utilize a wide variety of instructional strategies to better meet the individual needs of struggling students and students who do not pass exams. One solution may be the implementation of collegial collaboration based on the theory of sensemaking. As a result, a focus of the

phenomenological study will be on the participation of the ELD teachers in collegial collaboration and how they may use collaboration to make sense of instructional policy.

### **Sensemaking and Classroom Teachers**

Louis et al. (2005) explored how teachers perceive and make sense of accountability policies. They argued that there should be consideration of the role of teacher agency in relation to the standards movement and how teachers change their practices to align with their understanding of policies. They found that sensemaking activities affect teachers' understandings of policies and their instructional practices.

Picklo and Christenson (2005) suggested that teachers do not utilize a wide variety of instructional strategies to better meet individual needs of struggling students and for students who do not pass the tests. No Child Left Behind (2002) is a policy that impacts classroom instruction and assessment. The problem arises when these policies are implemented without consideration of each student's needs. NCLB requires a focus on subgroups, but Picklo and Christenson argued teachers are not employing enough instructional options to meet the needs of each subgroup within their classrooms. This is a case in which the implementation of policy does not match the intent of the policy (Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002).

### **Sensemaking through Professional Learning Communities**

There is an impetus in California to develop PLCs. The topic of PLCs was included in the literature review because of the likelihood that participants in the study may be members of PLCs at their school sites, and this topic could affect the outcome of the study and possibly be a recommendation for future studies. PLCs also have the

potential, as a part of a comprehensive professional development program, to improve the sensemaking processes of teachers.

The utilization of PLCs is one way that teachers may make sense of policy. Lambert (2002) suggested, “By investing leadership in the reciprocal, purposeful learning within a school community, the school’s sustainability becomes much more possible” (p. 79). PLCs offer opportunities for reciprocal learning and leadership in a school setting. Dumbrajs (2007) examined the concept of teamwork through the perspective of teachers. The researcher offered recommendations for the development of effective study teams: allow the teachers to independently solve problems; make sure the problems are directly related to the teachers’ work; facilitate an atmosphere of openness, trust, and commitment.

The concept of using teams to solve problems relates to sensemaking. Teams may be used as a vehicle through which teachers make sense of instructional policy and collaboratively develop strategies to implement the policy. Teacher sensemaking may subsequently be developed through PLCs. Sensemaking supplements reciprocal processes with deeper understandings moving the participants from the surface levels of participation (Spillane et al., 2002).

PLCs are more than a meeting or gathering of teachers. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2004) argued that successful schools have teachers who enjoy working together as they accomplish their goals through collective action and shared purpose. The review of literature informs the working definition of a PLC: Individuals coming together as a group to reflectively collaborate, inquire, and learn around a shared purpose.

Klein et al. (2006) depicted sensemaking as not an individual activity but as a social activity. Parris and Vickers (2005) suggested that information gathering within a group leads to a shared understanding of an organization. As such, PLCs may enhance teacher sensemaking and teacher quality through professional development opportunities, collegial interactions, and teacher leadership development.

Supovitz and Christman (2005) offered research-based suggestions for developing PLCs that are focused on instructional practices. They advised not to waste time of teachers with administrative and day-to-day tasks for school upkeep. Instead, they advised focusing on putting standards and strategies into practice and of clarifying the authority and roles of all members while allowing autonomy and authentic collaboration. Zhang (2008) pointed out that teachers have styles of thinking and inferred that teachers learn best when professional development is differentiated for their individual thinking styles. As such, a PLC may be differentiated for the styles of thinking for the teachers. PLCs done in this manner may help the success and effectiveness of the teachers' sensemaking of policies.

### **Professional Development through PLCs**

Elements of an effective PLC correspond with the attributes of effective professional development as described by Hirsh (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005b) and outlined by the National Staff Development Council ([NSDC], 2008): driven by results, based on standards, and embedded in the job. Furthermore, PLCs can organize teachers “into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district” (NSDC, 2008). For example, PLCs may be driven by what students need to know and be

able to do as outlined in instructional policy. In addition to focusing on standards, PLCs may focus more on teachers as learners and embed professional development into their daily jobs. PLCs may impact sensemaking by focusing on standards, providing a variety of choices, promoting job-embedded professional development, and differentiating for styles of thinking.

**Focus on professional standards.** Teacher learning may be enhanced through the integration of the *California Standards of the Teaching Profession* (CDE 1997) into PLCs. Hirsh (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005b) discussed teaching standards as a necessary attribute of effective professional development. Valli and Hawley (2002) stressed the importance of connecting teachers' existing knowledge with how they learn when developing professional development opportunities. Little (2002) also provided an argument for focusing on teaching standards: "...we will enhance our understanding of reform trajectories and outcomes by considering not only teachers' *capacity* for reform, but also the *meaning or significance* that teachers attach to specific reform initiatives" (p. 41, italics in original). Adding a focus on what teachers should know and be able to do (i.e., teaching standards) should help teachers identify the significance of initiatives and instructional policy. PLCs aligned to professional standards of teaching promise to improve teacher quality and student achievement.

**Embed professional development.** McDonald (2001) made an observation that is applicable to teacher sensemaking at the school site level: "What is needed here are new school designs that make room for teacher learning on the job" (p. 211). The strategy of embedding professional development into the teachers' daily jobs was

recommended by Hirsh (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005b). Hirsh explained that professional development should become a part of the teachers' daily work activities and occur at the work site. Lieberman and DuFour (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005c) also recommended giving opportunities for teachers to use ideas in their own classrooms. School leadership can affect teacher sensemaking by promoting and encouraging peer observations and feedback among members of PLCs.

### **Collegial Interactions in PLCs**

Teachers learn when they are allowed to voice their understandings, originate initiatives from within the department, formulate their own visions, and use dialogue (Laksov, Mann, & Dahlgren, 2008). Teachers are also more likely to internalize learning when there is collaborative experimentation, inquiry, and discussion (Levine & Marcus, 2007). In a PLC, teachers have the opportunity to collaboratively focus on improving instruction and student achievement through collegial interactions. This aspect is important to teacher sensemaking because sensemaking requires the sharing of information through formal and informal interactions (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Louise et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2002).

**Interaction among novice and experienced teachers.** An aspect of sensemaking worth considering is the interaction among novice and experienced teachers. Teachers at all levels of expertise can learn and be transformed through their own actions and the actions of the other participants (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). Teachers at various levels of experience can benefit from collaboration offered through PLCs. Novice teachers may acquire more advanced learning processes and

leadership skills through collaboration with experienced teachers (Gatbonton, 2008). For instance, the experienced members of a team may share historical and political insight; the novice teachers may offer innovative approaches. Subsequently, through collegial interaction, the team can develop a plan to implement instructional policy based on the perspectives of both novice and experienced teachers.

**Interaction through reflection.** One way teachers learn and make sense of information is through reflective thinking. Lambert (2002) explained reflection occurs when teachers remember the past while assessing the underlying assumptions of their memories. Recollecting personal memories and past practices is important to teacher sensemaking. Spillane et al. (2002) concluded teachers view reforms through the lens of personal practice. Cole and Knowles (2000) argued that knowing one's own personal history as it relates to one's professional life is central to effective teacher learning. Furthermore, reflection helps teachers connect theory with practice (SEMERCÍ, 2007).

One means of developing the bridge between theory and practice is through reflective activities. Reflective activities facilitate the framing of teachers' thinking and learning as they converse and collaborate (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005a; Zimmerman, 2000). Schön (1983) also explained the benefits of reflection as a practitioner experiences their own practices:

Through reflection, he [practitioner] can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience. (p. 61)

Therefore, practitioners have the professional knowledge that is required of the task at hand. Practitioners become much more effective through the artistic application of knowledge that is developed through experience. They follow the reflection in action process outlined by Schön that is similar to the processes of sensemaking: They allow themselves to be surprised and confused, they reflect on the situation or phenomena based on prior experiences, and they carry out an experiment related to the phenomena (p. 68). I considered the reflective processes among groups of teachers as they deal with instructional policies in this study.

**Interaction among individuals.** It is important to consider the concept of individuality in teacher sensemaking given the varied backgrounds and levels of experience among a group of teachers. Ancess (2001) explained, “Teacher learning can be characterized as problem solving or inquiry that starts with teachers’ particular goals for their students; theories about their particular students as learners...” (p. 75). Some studies indicated team learning is more effective when it is linked to each participant’s prior knowledge and experiences (Dumbrajs, 2007; Muir & Beswick, 2007; Tillema & van der Westhuizen, 2006). Siegel (2005) recommended the following for professional development: encourage teachers to share their personal knowledge and experiences of teaching and give time for teachers to consider the variables that are within their own contexts. PLCs provide opportunities for teachers to collaboratively relate instructional policy to each participant’s individual situations and experiences.



### **Teacher Leadership Development through Sensemaking**

The members of a teaching PLC may make sense of policy together while simultaneously building a leadership team. For example, Davidson and Dell (2003) utilized a study team framework through which teacher leaders were trained. A review of the literature showed attributes of teacher leadership that should be considered as a group of teachers collaborate and develop leadership: Teacher leadership is teacher learning and teacher leadership is a shared responsibility.

**Teacher leadership is teacher learning.** Lambert (2002) defined leadership as “being responsible for the learning of colleagues” (p. 38). Davidson and Dell (2003) suggested certain benchmarks that are necessary for teacher leadership to occur: a school vision, opportunities for making shared decisions, and training and encouragement to assume leadership roles. Lambert described study groups as one way of building leadership capacity in teachers (pp. 38-39). A PLC can provide a structure to reach the benchmarks toward teacher leadership. That is, they can promote teacher leadership by aligning the team goals with the vision and policies of the school and the district (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002; King, 2000; NSDC, 2008).

**Teacher leadership is a shared responsibility.** As previously discussed, effective sensemaking requires interaction and the sharing of information among the teachers. This interaction should be a shared responsibility. Spillane et al. (2002) defined leadership as the practice of the individuals acting and interacting together, while Harris argued leadership is a shared entity (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005a). In either case, leadership requires a group of individuals leading together. Spillane explained

schools are too complex for only one or a few to lead. As such, there needs to be structures that engage teachers in the processes of leadership. For example, Morrissey and Cowan (2004) described structures established by principals that promote shared decision making while increasing leadership capacity among teachers (p. 47). PLCs provide opportunities for shared decision making when there are collaborative processes such as experimentation, inquiry, and discussion (Levine & Marcus, 2007). These collaborative processes are aligned to the processes of sensemaking. Teachers are able to collectively address and make decisions regarding instruction and student achievement in light of instructional policy.

### **Community of Practice Leading to Social Change**

A community of practice, such as a PLC, could assist teachers in clarifying the significance of the achievement gap problem and generating solutions. Buysse et al. (2003) expressed a “need for more effective methods of translating research findings into useful policies and practices” (p. 263). A community of practice may shed light on some of the resources teachers use to make sense of a policy as they put policy into practice. A community of practice may also examine the influence of instructional policy through operational learning and conceptual learning (Weinbaum et al., 2004, p. 23). That is, they may consider the procedures outlined in policy and reflect upon why the policy was written. In turn, the collaborative efforts may generate positive changes in instructional practice as related to English learners. Further, the collaborative results of reflection on the implementation of instructional policies may extend beyond the local site; it may also “advance the knowledge base for the field as a whole” (Buysse et al., 2003, p. 268). A

community of practice, therefore, can help clarify how sensemaking of policy relates to the instruction and achievement of English learners.

### **Sensemaking through Data Collection**

The strategies teachers use to collect and analyze data may influence their sensemaking. Pulliam (2005) recommended teachers receive support and training in how to access, analyze, and interpret data. Subsequently, decisions about instructional practices may be made in a collaborative effort. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) provided insight to the use of data as it relates to professional development, “From the perspective of inquiry as stance....teaching and thus professional development are centrally about forming and reforming frameworks for understanding practice” (p. 54). This perspective is quite different from the traditional professional development plan of setting a definitive goal and finished product within a set time period. The traditional paradigm does not allow for ongoing inquiry and reformations. Thus, data will be most beneficial when it is used for sustained inquiry toward the reformation of education within the contexts of the teachers’ experiences and classes. It is for this reason that a phenomenological approach was used in the study of ELD teacher sensemaking.

### **Teaching as Researching**

Cole and Knowles (2002) explained that teaching as inquiry is synonymous to teaching as researching. Therefore, teachers need to learn the processes of research if they are to participate in meaningful inquiry. Teachers should learn how to effectively use data to inform their inquiries and make informed decisions as teacher leaders. More specifically, Valli and Hawley (2002) argued, “To be self-monitoring, teachers must

acquire inquiry skills of data collection, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and reflection” (p. 94). It is for this reason the participants were actively involved in the phenomenological research process as they gathered data and reflected on their personal sensemaking processes.

### **Time and Collaboration in Teacher Research**

The most efficient use of data to inform teachers’ inquiries requires both time and collaboration among the teachers (Rogers, 2004, p. 133). If teachers are expected to analyze and use data to inform instruction, then there should be training and time available for the development of research studies. For examples, teams of teachers may be directed to find out where students need improvement, based on exam scores, and to develop an action plan to address the areas of needed improvement. A caveat to this process is the time spent on analyzing the data will be moot unless data is chosen and procedures are developed to ensure the process is effective and efficient for educational decision making. Klein et al. (2006) argued that researchers must be able to explore and analyze data without the influence of someone else’s interpretations (p. 71). With this argument in mind, teachers should be allowed to explore data without preconceived interpretations or sensegiving from administrators. Klein et al. explained that there are many aspects and nuances to the data that each person considers. For example, teachers may interpret the data based on the perspective of classroom instruction while administrators may interpret the data based on the perspective of textbook or program use. The phenomenological study showed how ELD teachers analyze and use data to inform instruction.

### **Effective and Appropriate Data in Teacher Research**

Creswell (2003) stressed researchers should “provide a rationale for the data collection procedure using arguments based on its strengths and weaknesses, costs, data availability, and convenience” (p. 156). This process will help assure the effective collection and use of data. The process of data collection should include only data that will promote the efficiency of decision making. Crawford (Canter & Associates, Inc, 2004) explained a researcher should begin by collecting data, deciding which data is the most important and narrowing down the data. A review of previous literature showed characteristics of data that may be deemed important. Data is most effective and efficient for educational decision making when it is directly related to a specific topic of inquiry and when it comes from multiple sources. Data is appropriate when it is collected in a systematic way and is part of the regular daily activities of the educators. These characteristics should be carefully considered as participants and the researcher collect data.

**Effective data is related to a specific topic of inquiry.** Data must be valid if it is to effectively inform decision making. Specifically, educators should be able to draw meaningful and useful inferences from the data (Creswell, 2003). The data should relate to specific research questions and analyzed for trends and patterns related to the research questions (Briggs, 2007; Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, the connection to the topic of inquiry and the processes of data analysis should be explained to allow for judgments as to the transferability of any results to teaching situations (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003, p.

109). This study showed how teachers use data that is linked to their questions and decision making processes.

Ramirez and Carpenter (2005) offered a warning concerning the analysis of student data and the achievement gap. They researched school policies and practices as related to the subgroups represented in achievement gaps. They concluded that generalized assumptions based on differences between subgroups are neither valid nor helpful. The authors suggested teachers should focus more on the differences of subgroups within a major group much more than differences between major groups because what works for one group may not necessarily work for another. This perspective may have implications for the development and implementation of accountability policies and instructional practices as educators make sense of achievement data.

**Appropriate data collection is a regular part of daily activities.** The study showed how teachers collect data within their daily activities. Teacher inquiry and research should become part of the teachers' daily work (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). The strategy of embedding professional development, such as action research and inquiry, into the teachers' daily jobs was espoused in previous literature. Incorporating the research process into the teachers' classrooms not only influences teacher quality (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005a; NSDC, 2008), it also influences the larger community. Rogers (2004) explained the impact of classroom research on the community, "The images and metaphors that emerge from their descriptions suggest an ever widening circle of growth that begins in a teacher's classroom and moves slowly and quietly into

the school community” (p. 108). The study participants collected data that relate to their perspectives and understanding of instructional policy.

### **English Learning Instruction**

A standards-based approach to learning with clear benchmarks is essential to the success of students on high school exit exams (Nichols, 2003). Therefore, all students must have opportunities to learn the standards-based skills required to pass the exam. To provide these learning opportunities, the curriculum gap must first be closed to narrow the achievement gap (Burris & Welner, 2005). Thus, a successful instructional approach provides standards-based curriculum, tailored to students’ needs, through which each student may attain the required levels of achievement. In the context of this study, the needs of English learners are considered through the perspective of English language acquisition theory.

### **Research Studies on English Language Acquisition**

Hatch, White, and Capitelli (2005) conducted a qualitative case study of a bilingual education teacher. They traced the teacher’s journey of becoming a teacher researcher over a period of 4 years. They examined the teacher’s use of language acquisition strategies. The authors advocated for change in instructional practices to meet the needs of English learners. They concluded instructional practices that show no positive effect on the achievement of English learners must be changed.

Haworth et al. (2006) conducted a qualitative action research project to learn how language learning may be enhanced. They observed and identified the processes through which children learn English for a period of 3 years. The results indicated mediators that

are important to bilingual development: adults, peers, cultural tools, and language. The researchers concluded, “Skilful teaching in an early childhood context clearly requires professional judgments about when and how to intervene in children’s learning, how to facilitate its occurrence and when to allow it to just happen naturally” (p. 307). Thus, skilful teaching of English learners requires the ability to modify the teaching environment to allow the acquisition of language.

Lee and Krashen (2002) studied predictors of success in writing English as a foreign language. The predictors included writing habits, reading habits, revision behavior, and writing apprehension. The researchers recommended facilitating a learning environment that promotes the development and organization of ideas. They argued better writers focus on content and organization during revision. They also suggested reading contributes more to improved writing competence than the process of writing.

### **English Language Acquisition and Constructivism**

In the current study, I considered the theory of constructivism as it relates to English language acquisition. Constructivists are concerned with individuals and how these individuals construct their own bases of knowledge. They are equally concerned with the ways learners make sense of and use their knowledge (Hinchey, 1998; Faltis & Hudelson, 1998). In relation to the acquiring of English, English learners must construct the meanings of vocabulary and text for themselves (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). Peregoy and Boyle asserted that to create an optimal content learning environment, topics must be meaningful and purposeful to the learners and relate to their prior knowledge. Therefore, meaningful interactions arise as a critical key to English language acquisition.



Paulo Freire (1999) uses a metaphor of banking to highlight the importance of students critically constructing knowledge. The traditional method of teaching language and literacy may be compared to banking. It is an act of depositing information. Students receive information from the teacher, memorize the information, and repeat the information on an assessment. Freire contended there is no real communication, only passive learning. Freire further observed, “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (p. 54). The constructivist approach to learning, according to Freire, is more liberating. Through this perspective, teachers and students are partners in the learning process. Students are involved in cognitive acts and both are simultaneously teachers and students.

Girod and Wong (2002) described a teacher’s attempt to change students’ learning behaviors. According to the authors, this study “provides compelling evidence for students to change, and offers an analytic lens with which to judge success or failure partly on the degree to which these student dispositions are altered” (p. 219). The premise of the statement seems to suggest successful teaching includes changing the disposition of students. However, it may not always be beneficial for teachers to alter actions, values, and beliefs of students. Instead, rather than change student learning behaviors, students may benefit when teachers guide instruction based on students’ current actions, values, and beliefs. That is, teachers should link learning to the students’ prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences (Walker, 2002). Teachers should also lead students to “capitalize on their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses” (Zhang &

Sternberg, 2002, p. 11). Rather than change students' thinking processes, teachers may have more success changing the instructional approach to capitalize on students' backgrounds and strengths.

Hatch et al. (2005) addressed the issue of choosing appropriate learning theories and strategies in the context of English language acquisition. The teacher in the study identified a concern in her school's approach to improving instruction. She observed, "We didn't change the structure of the ELD class or ask what do we need to do differently—it was all based on what the students needed to do differently" (p. 327). In response to the concern, the teacher changed instructional practices to meet the needs of the students. This observation leads to a perspective based on how instructional practices may be altered to meet individual learning processes of students.

### **English Language Acquisition and Styles of Thinking**

Sternberg's theory of mental self-government describes people's preferred ways of thinking and preferred ways of using their abilities (Zhang & Sternberg, 2002). That is, the theory focuses on the students' processes of thinking rather than on their styles of learning. Sternberg and Zhang (2005) developed a framework through which to differentiate instruction based on styles of thinking. They listed general characteristics of styles of thinking and reviewed the main tenets of the theory of mental self-government. Finally, they synthesized previous research studies to develop a theoretical framework integrating thinking styles with forms of assessment and instructional assignments. The authors concluded that teachers should teach to a wide variety of styles rather than try to match every lesson to every style. They also explained how Sternberg's thinking styles

differ from learning styles: “Learning styles are generally viewed as dealing with preferred ways of learning material (e.g., orally, visually, and kinesthetically), whereas the styles of which we speak deal with preferred ways of thinking about material” (p. 245). The difference in focus is the difference between what students do and how students think. This distinction is important in the context of English language learning because the students represent various cultures from around the world.

Adjusting the instructional practices based on the theory of mental self-government may be better suited for English learners. Zhang (2002) categorized the components of the theory into two types of intellectual styles. Type I describes learners who prefer thinking styles that allow more creativity. Type II describes learners who prefer norm-favoring and straight-forward thinking styles. Later, Zhang (2003) added a third type of intellectual style that may exhibit characteristics of either Type I or Type II thinking styles.

Zhang and Sternberg (2002) studied the relationship between thinking styles and teachers’ characteristics. The purpose was to validate the theory of mental self-government in a cross cultural setting. The researchers suggested the theory of mental self-government has educational value in a multicultural setting and the knowledge of thinking styles enhances the quality of teaching and learning. They also provided evidence that the theory of self-government is valid in a multicultural setting.

Zhang (2003) analyzed the relationship between critical thinking and intellectual styles. More specifically, they investigated contributions of thinking styles to critical thinking dispositions. They concluded thinking styles positively contribute to the critical

thinking dispositions. The results of this study indicated implications for the classroom. Teachers may provide a variety of ways to deal with information by addressing each type of intellectual style. The researchers suggested that utilizing various thinking styles to differentiate for the three types of intellectual styles in the classroom may increase the critical thinking of the students.

### **Natural Language Acquisition**

The principles of Krashen and Terrel's (1983) theory of natural language acquisition were considered. Krashen and Terrel described the skills of language as being acquired as opposed to learned. They also stressed the use of comprehensible input. Comprehensible input is information which is presented in a way that is meaningful or makes sense to the learner. For example, information may be presented through pictures and gestures.

Another aspect of the theory is students acquire a language through meaningful interactive communication more than through the use of textbooks and lectures. Krashen and Terrel's (1983) natural approach to language acquisition is hinged on the idea of learning through social activity. Students acquire a language through meaningful communication rather than just through textbooks and lectures (Krashen & Terrel, 1983; Wink, 2004). Interaction is needed especially when misunderstandings occur. In these cases the learners involved must interact in a comprehensible manner and negotiate meanings in order to communicate effectively. Furthermore, the comprehension of a language should precede instruction (Krashen & Terrel, 1983; Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). Krashen's acquisition learning hypothesis asserts that acquisition is "a natural language

development process that occurs when the target language is used in meaningful interactions with native speakers, in a manner similar to first language acquisition-with no particular attention to form” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008, p. 43). Peregoy and Boyle added that a low risk, low anxiety atmosphere is considered conducive to language acquisition. The course work must be based on communicative goals, as opposed to drills and pattern practice aimed at language learning, and activities must be planned as to lower the anxiety levels of the learners. Students subsequently are more likely and able to effectively communicate.

Alptekin (2007) compared the natural language acquisition approach to direct instruction of language. The goal of the study was to identify the strategies the learners used rather than proving or disproving one strategy. The researchers looked for differences in the acquisition of languages when one language is learned through tutoring and the other is acquired without tutoring. The conclusion suggested that the strategy of compensation, guessing intelligently, is used the most in either context of learning. It also indicated metacognitive strategies are used more through tutored learning.

### **Comparison of the Literature on English Language Acquisition**

Prior literatures pertaining to English language acquisition have similarities. For instance, some focused on the differentiation of instruction. Siegel (2005) stated cooperative learning, a common strategy for language acquisition, may be differentiated to meet the needs of the teachers and the students. Güvenç and Ün Açıkgöz (2007) showed that cooperative learning and concept mapping promote the better use of learning strategies more than traditional teaching. The researchers defined learning strategies,

“Learning strategies are intentional actions and thoughts that students use when they study to facilitate acquisition, comprehension, retention and retrieve new knowledge and skills” (p. 118). Likewise, Hatch et al. (2005) argued for the changing of instruction to meet the needs of English learners, while Sternberg and Zhang (2005) argued for teaching to a wide variety of styles. Haworth et al. (2006) recommended improving language acquisition through the facilitation of a productive learning environment.

The natural approach to language acquisition has the potential to equip English learners for an exit exam. Hatch et al. (2005) identified the need to change instructional practices based on the needs of English learners rather than changing the way students learn. Lee and Krashen (2002) recommended facilitating a learning environment that promotes the development and organization of ideas suggesting the achievement gap may be narrowed by increasing the writing and reading levels of English learners. This type of learning environment may also be accomplished through cooperative learning strategies (Güvenç & Ün Açıköz, 2007; Siegel, 2005).

The importance of professional development was mentioned in the literature. Some of the researchers suggested training for teachers (Hatch et al., 2005; Siegel, 2005). Siegel and Hatch et al. were specific in how professional development should be structured. They suggested basing professional development on the prior knowledge and experiences of the teachers.

### **Exit Exam Preparation**

High school ELD teachers are faced with the task of intervening for students who fail the exit exam and ensuring the students pass the exam before graduation day. It is

important to clarify that teaching the skills and concepts of an exam may mean teaching to the test. While teaching to the test, the focus should not solely be on the test and test taking strategies. Lewbel and Hibbard (2001) argued that “the goal is not to teach students to pass tests but to teach them to apply deep conceptual understanding of content” (p. 18). In other words, teachers must not only prepare the students for the exam but also make sure the students actually master, at the very least, the minimum skills expected of high school graduates. Nichols (2003) argued an approach to learning developed from state content standards and clear benchmarks is essential to the success of the students on high school exit exams. That is, the curriculum and teaching strategies must focus on the standards that are represented on the exit exam. A caveat to this approach to learning is that the use of textbooks, prepackaged lessons, and skill-and-drill do not work without true student engagement (Lewbel & Hibbard, 2001).

As previously discussed, most English learners are not passing the exit exam the first time. WestEd (2003), a nonprofit educational research agency, emphasized that remediation is essential for those who fail the exam (p. 2). WestEd also warned against using only rote practice approaches with remediation, “Yet when such classes employ ‘skill-and-drill’ or simply repeat methods that have not proven successful for these students in the past, no one profits” (p. 2). Goldschmidt and Martinez-Fernandez (2004) explained that the educational experiences within a classroom significantly affect student academic performance in classes and on exams. More specifically, there must be the capacity of teachers to skillfully prepare students for the exit exam.

Lewbel and Hibbard (2001) argued that applying standards to the real world promotes student engagement because the students see relevance to learning. They further contended that it fosters critical thinking and maintains student-centered and interdisciplinary instruction. Hartzler and Jones (2002) suggested one way to engage students and increase their confidence is to match students' needs with their personal interests and learning styles by providing a variety of options to students. Students will subsequently "stand a greater chance of finding an educational setting and approach that matches their individual needs, and becoming engaged learners" (p. 3).

Lewbel and Hibbard (2001) described how a school district raised scores on standardized tests. They suggested the use of performance-based learning assessments and student-centered curriculum. They also asserted that the goal is not to teach students how to pass the test; the goal is to teach students to become independent critical thinkers and learners. The goal should be to facilitate an environment in which learners can independently identify, apply, and use the required conceptual and content area skills in realistic settings. Lewbel and Hibbard also maintained that real world applications foster critical thinking and student-centered instruction. Thus, learning standards should be viewed as authentic applications and performance tasks.

Grogan's (2001) study of nine teachers, who used various strategies to prepare high school students to pass the Virginia Standards of Learning tests, indicated four methods teachers may use to minimize the negative effects of externally imposed tests. The researcher concluded there must be the capacity of the teachers and buy-in of the teachers to skillfully prepare students for the exit exam. They should be integrally



involved in the planning and the reasons and research behind instructional strategies. Additionally, Grogan argued that the integration of curriculum across disciplines positively affects student achievement. Finally, Grogan posited that establishing and maintaining healthy relationships between teachers and students positively affect the students' scores on exams and that daily classroom assessment activities influence student learning the most.

Teachers may use formative assessments as tools for preparing students for exit exams. Baldwin, Readence, and Bean (2004) suggested the use of mirror assessments that reflect the format of statewide exams. On the other hand, the review of literature indicated a warning that assessing with only multiple choice exams will not identify all areas of improvement, because it is difficult to accurately identify the students' learning and thinking skills through only multiple choice exams. Areas of strength and weakness of each student may be identified by utilizing performance tasks in conjunction with mirror assessments. McTighe and O'Connor (2005) encouraged teachers to use a variety of assessments. They recommended teachers use assessments through which students apply their learning and demonstrate their understanding of the learning standards. A variety of assessments will also shed light on what learning strategies are the most effective toward student achievement. Grogan (2001) emphasized this point:

Teachers must retain and reinforce classroom strategies that facilitate teachers' knowledge of students. It is this knowledge of the individual students in each classroom that allows teachers to facilitate learning experiences that have the potential to engage those particular students. (p. 13)

Teachers should use strategies that identify problem areas and show the thinking processes of each student (Herman & Baker, 2005). Formative assessments should also align to the learning standards and provide ongoing and meaningful feedback to the students (Grogan, 2001; McTighe & O'Connor, 2005). Herman and Baker added that performance tasks and assessments ought to be continually monitored and improved.

### **Research Methodologies**

The review of literature included a discussion of alternative research methodologies as a means to consider the different methodologies that could have been used to investigate the shared experience of high school ELD teachers making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. Each methodology was critiqued for its appropriateness for the study.

### **Particular Humanism and Qualitative Research**

Careful attention was made to ensure the participants of the current study were treated in a just manner. Freire (1999) argued that humans are not prescriptions of life; they are the actions and reflections of life. Life should not be controlled or manipulated with prescribed established formulas. Based on this premise, I took into account each individual's ideas, skills, talents, and expertise as its goal is to explore the lived experiences of high school teachers of English learners. It is for this reason research methodologies based on particular humanism were considered. A particular humanist is concerned with doing justice to the humanity of the participants as well as the researcher (Simon, 2006). Qualitative methods were utilized in the study because they align best with the particular humanist philosophy.

Qualitative research is used to “answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants’ point of view” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 101). The phenomenon in this study is sensemaking of instructional policies. In particular, the sensemaking processes of ELD teachers were explored as they address CAHSEE instructional policy. This exploration of the phenomenon aligns with a goal of qualitative research as stated by Creswell (2007), “...we want to understand the contexts or setting in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (p. 40). The qualitative research approaches considered for the study were case study, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology.

### **Case Study**

Case study research is the study of one or more cases related to a single issue (Creswell, 2007). Case studies involve observing an environment while attempting to find patterns of influence on the environment (Simon, 2006). Burriss and Welner (2005), through a case study, focused on one school. They described how a school district in New York narrowed the achievement gap. The researchers concluded school districts should offer high-track curriculum to all students. They asserted the school closed the gap by providing support classes and after school help, monitoring struggling learners closely, and closing the curriculum gap by offering higher track classes to all students.

The environment in the current study consisted of the schools and the classrooms of high school ELD teachers. The current study also related to the issue of policy sensemaking. Specifically, an instrumental case study tradition was considered because

it focuses on one issue and selects one bounded case to study the issue (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). In the study, an instrumental case study was feasible based on my ability to gain frequent and consistent access into the participants' classrooms, the participants' team meetings, and the participants' professional development. The case study tradition would also provide time and flexibility to effectively schedule and complete in-depth interviews with the participants. However, the current study focused on more than one case.

### **Grounded Theory**

The goal of grounded theory research is to generate or discover a theory that explains a process (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006). I examined the process of sensemaking in the current study. A newly generated theory may then be used to develop a framework for further research about the experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006). Creswell (2007) warned that a major challenge faced by the researcher in grounded theory research is to “set aside, as much as possible, theoretical ideas or notions so that the analytic, substantive theory can emerge” (p. 68). This challenge is evident in the current study because of the prior theories presented and discussed through the review of literature on sensemaking. The goal of the current study is not to discover or develop a new theory of sensemaking. Instead, I explored the sensemaking processes of ELD teachers, and the study was based in the previously developed theoretical framework of sensemaking.

### **Ethnography**

Creswell (2007) defined ethnography as the examination of the shared patterns within an entire cultural group of more than 20 individuals, and it utilizes “extended

observation of the group, most often through participant observation” (p. 68). Fetterman (1998) explained the ethnographer’s role, “...the ethnographer writes about the routine, daily lives of people. The more predictable patterns of human thought and behavior are the focus of inquiry” (p. 1). Ethnographic research also involves the study of a particular cultural group for several months or years (Simon, 2006). McInerney (2007) conducted an ethnographic study of teachers and senior student members serving on a decision making forum in a culturally diverse school in a low socioeconomic community in Australia. The methods in the study included extensive observations and purposeful conversation in addition to the analysis of photographic and curriculum records. The purpose was to explore the concept of social justice in educational policy and practice. McInerney argued for the need for educational systems and institutions to speak out and replace oppressive curricular policies and practices with principles of social justice.

In the current study, the focus is on discovering the sensemaking processes of ELD teachers as they relate to the interpretation and implementation of the instructional policy. However, an ethnography research study will not be feasible for the current study because the focus of the study is on discovering the shared processes of sensemaking among ELD teachers rather than on creating a detailed account of a culture in a particular school or organizational setting. Also, I will not be able to access enough participants nor have the adequate time required of ethnographic research due to scheduling constraints.

## **Phenomenology**

A phenomenology describes the lived experiences of several individuals who share the same experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006). Specifically, the purpose of a phenomenological study is to reveal the meanings underlying the experiences of the participants (Dukes, 1984). Moustakas (1994) explained that knowledge results from personal experiences and that phenomenology was founded as a method of discovering the essence of those human experiences. The aim of phenomenology is to isolate the objective view of an experience in order to identify the internal perceptions one holds about an experience and avoid becoming distracted by personal assumptions and preconceptions as to identify the essence of a given phenomenon (Husserl, 1927). Creswell explained a phenomenological research study “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57). The shared experience, or concept, in the current study is the sensemaking of common instructional policies among the participants.

Creswell (2007) described two types of phenomenological research. The first, textural description, describes what the participants experienced. The second, structural description, describes how participants experienced the phenomenon in terms of the conditions, situations, or context. The current study will utilize a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience as suggested by Creswell. Simon (2006) explained that a phenomenology discovers the participants’ lived experience and narrates the experience. Therefore, the phenomenological study may include aspects of narrative research. Creswell described

narrative research: “As a method, it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (p. 54). Sharing the stories of the participants may promote the particular humanist goal of doing justice to the humanity of the participants. The stories may also be analyzed for categories or themes (Simon, 2006).

A specific form of a phenomenology is the hermeneutic phenomenology approach. Hermeneutic research focuses on the lived experiences of the participants and interprets and views the data as texts of life (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). Hatch (2002) explained that the objects of study in a hermeneutic phenomenology should be on the socially constructed realities and the meanings the participants give to experiences.

### **Potential Themes to be Explored**

Moustakas (1994) explained significant statements are analyzed in phenomenology to uncover the essence of the experience. From these statements, themes may be discovered and identified. The focus of the current study was on identifying and exploring key themes utilizing a within-case analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). Possible themes of exploration have been suggested in prior literature such as collegial interactions, reflective practices, constructivist approaches, and English language acquisition strategies. Other themes relating to the factors influencing teachers of English learners were also considered: inservice training, collaboration, trial and error, scholarly reading, and knowledge of best practices (Otway, 2007). I also considered the process of individual team members' sensemaking as discussed by Parris and Vickers (2005). Finally, I analyzed themes related to teachers' views of stress, standards, and classroom practices related to their perceptions of state CAHSEE mandates (Louis et al.,

2005). More on the phenomenological methods and the analysis of themes will be discussed in Section 3.

### **Conclusion**

The theoretical framework guiding this study was the theory of sensemaking. Sensemaking is the processes, in both formal and informal settings, through which teachers interpret, evaluate, and make decisions about a policy that result in the implementation of a policy (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Parris & Vickers, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). The review of literature provided a foundation by which to answer the general research question in the phenomenological study: How do high school ELD teachers make sense of the school district's CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? In section 3, I will describe the methodology used to answer the research question .

### **Summary**

In this literature review, I examined sensemaking within the contexts of organizations, public administration, spreading of rumors, and education. It further narrowed the focus to the influences of sensemaking on instructional practice, policy implementation, PLCs, and educational data collection. The exploration of sensemaking is necessary to provide the background for understanding the processes of sensemaking and how they relate to teacher quality, English language acquisition, and exit exam instruction. Louis et al. (2005) posited that sensemaking processes impact the quality of teaching and affect student achievement.

The review of literature provided a framework through which to analyze and further understand how ELD teachers make sense of instructional policy as they prepare



English learners for the exit exam. It highlighted the common processes of sensemaking and links sensemaking to the instructional practices of teachers of English learners and to English language acquisition. Hatch et al. (2005) advocated for change in instructional practices to meet the needs of English learners. They also argued that instructional practices showing no positive effect on the achievement of English learners must be changed. Haworth et al. (2006) suggested skillful teaching of English learners requires the ability to modify the teaching environment to allow the acquisition of language.

Data collection and analysis influences the sensemaking of teachers. The review of literature clarified the need for teachers to collect, examine, and use data. Cole and Knowles (2002) explored the importance of teachers learning how to effectively use data to inform their inquiries and make informed decisions. Creswell (2003) suggested researchers should be able to draw meaningful and useful inferences from the data. Furthermore, teachers should relate data to specific research questions and identify trends and patterns related to research questions (Briggs, 2007; Creswell, 2003). Incorporating research into classrooms also influences teacher quality (NSDC, 2008) and impacts the larger community as research expands from the teachers' classrooms into the school community (Rogers, 2004). Data analysis related to the ELD teachers' perspectives and understanding of instructional policy should help identify how they make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies.

There is a need to explore the sensemaking processes of ELD teachers because of the achievement gap found in accountability exams throughout California and the nation (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Thompson, 2007). The achievement gap may keep students in

California, such as English learners, from passing the CAHSEE and receiving a high school diploma. The collaborative efforts, often found in sensemaking, may generate positive changes in instructional practice as related to English learners.

In section 3, I will outline the research methods for the current phenomenological study. In addition, I will discuss in more detail the potential themes and specific processes of sensemaking that were highlighted in the review of literature. More specifically, the methods for identifying the themes and sensemaking processes will be linked to the research questions.

### Section 3: Research Methods

The achievement gap found in accountability exams throughout California and the nation is of great concern (Burris & Welner, 2005; Thompson, 2007). This concern is especially important due to mandates in national policy in regards to the gap between pass rates of English learners and English-only students. The NCLB Act (2002) requires schools implement scientifically based programs that help English learners meet state academic achievement standards at the same levels as other students. A phenomenological study of ELD teachers' sensemaking was needed to obtain deeper insight on possible ways to decrease the achievement gap on the CAHSEE for English learners. The purpose of the current phenomenological study was to identify the processes ELD teachers use to make sense of and implement instructional policies related to improving the pass rate for English learners on the CAHSEE. The information gained from the study provided a better understanding of instructional policy sensemaking shared by ELD teachers. The results of this study also provide educational leaders with helpful information to transform professional development programs, improve teacher quality, and increase student achievement.

The intention of this section is to describe the methods that were used to collect and analyze data in response to the research questions and explain how the methods helped solve the problem of the disconnect between the intent of instructional policy and the classroom implementation of policy (Spillane et al., 2002; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006). The section includes the research methodology, paradigm, and approach as well as the purpose of the study and the research questions that guided the study. The section

includes information on how participants were selected. Additionally, data collection procedures, data analysis, and instrumentation are described. Finally, the issues of validity, transferability, and reliability are addressed.

## **Research Design**

### **Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative researchers ask questions about research problems found in daily experiences (Merriam, 2002a). Creswell (2007) explained that qualitative research focuses on the meanings participants hold about an issue. A qualitative approach was used to gather information about the experiences of ELD teachers as they make sense of instructional policy and implement policy in their lesson plans. A quantitative approach was initially considered but rejected, as quantitative studies seek to test theories and hypotheses using numerical data—aims that were not applicable to this study (Creswell, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). A qualitative approach better aligns with the purpose of the current study which is to explore and describe the shared experience of high school ELD teachers making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. Specifically, qualitative methods were used to identify the processes ELD teachers use to interpret and implement exit exam instructional policies. Specific methods will be discussed in greater detail later in the discussion.

### **The Constructivist Theory**

The current study was based on constructivist theory. The research topic of the study is teacher sensemaking: how teachers construct knowledge and interpret policy through both formal and informal conversations and interactions (Bielenberg & Fillmore,

2004; Coburn, 2005; Louis et al., 2005). Therefore, a constructivist theoretical base was appropriate for the study. Hatch (2002) explained that constructivist researchers are interested in how individuals construct reality relative to a topic. The purpose of the current study was to explore how ELD teachers construct their personal and collective knowledge and understanding of instructional policy. Additionally, constructivism allows for participant involvement with the researcher in the research process (Hatch, 2002). The participants were actively involved in the research process as they contributed data and reflected on their personal and collective sensemaking processes. More specifically, a phenomenological methodology based on constructivist theory focuses “on the essence or structure of an experience” (Merriam, 2002a, p. 7). The study focused on the structures through which ELD teachers, individually and collectively, construct reality relative to instructional policy.

### **Phenomenological Approach**

A qualitative phenomenological tradition was used in the current study. A phenomenology describes the lived experiences of several individuals who share the same experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006). More specifically, I sought to reveal the essence of the shared experience of sensemaking (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002a). The shared experience, or concept, in the study was the sensemaking of common instructional policies among the participants.

A hermeneutic phenomenology approach was used considering the study was based on constructivist theory. Hermeneutic research is oriented to the lived experiences of the participants and interprets and views the data as texts of life (Creswell, 2007;

Hatch, 2002). Hatch (2002) explained that hermeneutic phenomenology "assumes that multiple, socially constructed realities exist and that the meanings individuals give to their experiences ought to be the objects of study" (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). Hermeneutic research also attempts to discover the interpretive processes used by participants in a situation (Simon, 2006). In the study, I explored the processes of interpreting instructional policy through the perspectives of the ELD teachers.

### **Other Likely Designs**

A variety of designs were considered for this study. One possible design was a case study. A case study focuses on one issue and examines one bounded case to study the issue (Creswell, 2007). However, I considered more than one case to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. A grounded theory research design was also considered to generate a new theory (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006). This option was dismissed because of the previously developed theoretical framework of sensemaking in which the study was based (and hence, negated the need to create a new theory). Additionally, an ethnographic research study was contemplated but rejected as a design because the study did not focus on an entire cultural group (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006).

### **Appropriateness of the Design**

The purpose of the phenomenological research study was to explore and describe the experiences of high school ELD teachers making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. A phenomenological research study contributes to the literature of sensemaking and provides insight into how ELD teachers make sense of instructional

policy. The research findings benefit secondary education and educators in California as they strive to improve teacher quality and student achievement, especially the achievement of English learners. The study also provides helpful information used to educational administrators and teacher trainers as they implement instructional policies and the resulting curriculum and form professional development programs.

### **Research Questions**

In qualitative research, the research problems are found in daily experiences and a qualitative researcher will "ask questions about it, be curious as to why things are as they are or how they might be better" (Merriam, 2002a, p. 11). The current study addressed the disconnect between the intent of instructional policy and the implementation of a policy as evidenced in the achievement gap in CAHSEE pass rates between English learners and English-only students. As such, the research question of the study dictated the need for a qualitative study: How do high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? Two subquestions were also asked to address why instructional policies are interpreted and implemented the way they are by ELD teachers:

1. How do ELD teachers interpret and implement the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies?
2. What are the underlying themes and contexts that influence the ELD teachers' sensemaking processes?

Hatch (2002) recommended to continually refer back to the research questions to keep the study on track and focused. Hatch also suggested beginning with a broad focus

on the data and narrowing it as information pertaining to the questions are gathered and analyzed. Rubin and Rubin (2005) explained that a researcher should examine a specific problem and identify significant themes as they emerge during the study. It is through the narrowing of information from a broad focus to narrower significant themes that data were analyzed in relation to the research questions (Creswell, 2007). The analysis of the data and the process for identifying themes will be explained in more detail later.

### **Context and Participants of the Study**

The selected population of the study was members of the professional organization, California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL), who reside in California. CATESOL (2009) was founded in 1969 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to the education of English learners and the professional development of their teachers. CATESOL's membership of approximately 2,500 includes classroom teachers, university instructors, university students, and administrators in California and Nevada. It is the largest U.S. affiliate of the international organization, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The context was accessible and familiar to me and made it possible to answer the research questions (Hatch, 2002).

Permission to conduct the study with teachers who are members of CATESOL was requested from and approved by the general manager of CATESOL (See Appendix A). Names of potential participants were gathered from a list of secondary level teachers supplied by the general manager of CATESOL. Potential participants, chosen from the



list of teachers, were invited to participate with an e-mailed letter of invitation (see Appendix B) followed by telephone calls and e-mail.

### **Selection of the Participants**

A purposeful sampling strategy was utilized. Purposefully sampling the group of teachers in this study provided the needed information about the research problem, and it ensured the participants have experienced the same phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). The population for the study was eight high school teachers in California of English learners who have not yet passed the CAHSEE. This purposeful sampling strategy ensured that the participants had access to similar curriculum and policy guidelines. More importantly, the participants were able to provide information concerning the research questions about preparing high school English learners for the CAHSEE. The participants were members of CATESOL. This requirement increased the chances the participants had similar professional development opportunities pertaining to English language acquisition. Curriculum implementation and professional development opportunities are potential sources for sensemaking activities (Coburn, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). The participants were from eight different schools representing seven different school districts. The participants' length of teaching experience was not a consideration for participation because the interaction among novice and experienced teachers has been identified as a possible means of teacher sensemaking (Buysse et al., 2003; Gatbonton, 2008).

### **Ethical Protection of the Participants**

A research ethics review application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University, approval number 12-18-09-036988, requesting approval to conduct the proposed research study. Each participant signed a written consent form describing the title, purpose, nature, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality of the research project (see Appendix C). Participants were informed throughout the study of their rights of voluntary participation in all or part of the research study. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Transcribed copies of interviews and copies of the findings were given to the participants to comment on the accuracy of the transcripts as well as the credibility of the findings and interpretation of the data. The confidentiality of the participants was assured. To ensure confidentiality, the names of the participants were replaced with unique identifying codes. Data were secured in password protected databases with access only by me. Data resulting from the study, such as recordings, transcripts, and communications, will be destroyed after 5 years.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I have served on the board of directors of CATESOL in various positions. Currently, I am on the editorial advisory board of *The CATESOL Journal* and a high school English teacher in a school district in Southern California. I had no supervisory influence or role over any potential participants. I had access to data and participants as a result of previous and ongoing relationships with members of CATESOL.

My role in this phenomenological study was that of a research instrument that collected and analyzed the data (Hatch, 2002). Rubin and Rubin (2005) argued, "Qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied" (p. 15). The objective of qualitative research is capturing and presenting the perspectives of the participants on the given issue (Hatch, 2002). Considering the constructivist paradigm of the current study, the participants were encouraged to coconstruct the research findings and interpretations (Hatch, 2002). Methods were developed in which participants were given the opportunity to help with the collection and analysis of data, and participants were able to give feedback on the findings before they were finalized (Hatch, 2002, p. 49).

The phenomenological research study may have been subject to my personal biases. I have been both an ELD and CAHSEE high school teacher as well as an exit exam specialist for a school district. Additionally, I have served on the board of directors of CATESOL and am currently a member of the editorial advisory board of *The CATESOL Journal*. As such, I have various professional experiences as a teacher, presenter, and consultant in the areas of English language acquisition and exit exam preparation.

Measures were taken to minimize the influence of my biases on the study. The influence of bias was minimized by setting aside or *bracketing* my preconceived notions, perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Husserl, 1927; Merriam, 2002a). I began the research process by exploring and describing personal experiences in relation to the phenomena of the study before studying the experiences of

others (Hatch, 2002). The process of bracketing continued throughout the course of the study through the use of protocols that separate personal reflection notes from objective descriptive notes (Creswell, 2007; Janesick, 2004).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Rogers (2004) argued for the systematic collection and analysis of data to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs. Crawford (Canter & Associates, Inc., 2004) outlined a systematic procedure for the collection and use of data. The first suggestion was to begin by collecting data and narrowing it down by determining the most important data. Crawford then recommended identifying themes that would guide the data analysis. It is important researchers explain the system and intentions of how data is to be collected (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003, p. 114). Such a systematic approach to collecting data increases the validity of a research study by ensuring a clear and specific purpose. The purpose of the current study and the research questions informed the data collection procedures (Creswell, 2003). The data collection procedures of the phenomenological study were accomplished through interviews and the collection of artifacts. In addition, protocols were used for the interviews and the collection of artifacts (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Janesick, 2004).

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation is the collection of data from multiple sources (Merriam, 2002b). Creswell (2003) identified four basic types of qualitative data: observations, interviews, documents, and audio and visual material. Examples of qualitative data may include field notes, reflections, notes from conversations and interviews, taped and transcribed

interviews, and documents (Nocerino, 2004; Rogers, 2004). Gleaning data from many sources may confuse a research project. However, a large amount of information may actually be beneficial in certain contexts by exposing novel trends and patterns. A researcher may develop a theory based on the emerging patterns and trends within the data (Briggs, 2007; Creswell, 2003). As such, data from multiple sources provide insight into how a topic of inquiry is viewed by the stakeholders (Nocerino, 2004). Data from multiple sources also create a stronger case for results and recommendations (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). The information gleaned from interviews and the collection of artifacts was triangulated in the current study.

### **Interviews**

Hatch (2002) suggested data collection strategies should flow directly from research questions (p. 53). Considering the research questions lend themselves to a qualitative study, an interview approach was beneficial. Interviews are a major type of data collection within the qualitative tradition (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002a). Interviewing was the primary data collection strategy in the phenomenological study. Key words, ideas, and themes were identified and follow-up questions asked in order to understand the work lives of the teachers and collect in-depth descriptive answers to the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

After obtaining permission from the participants, each interview session was recorded and analyzed. The purpose of the in-depth interview was to ascertain the main phenomenon being researched in this study: What are the lived experiences of high school ELD teachers making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies?

Through the use of in-depth interviews, insight regarding the phenomenon was obtained, and new bodies of knowledge formed the output from this study.

The interview protocol was designed around the theoretical framework of sensemaking (See Appendix D). There are similarities across the contexts of sensemaking. First, people construct an understanding of a situation by finding and soliciting information related to the situation. Second, they identify problems and possible solutions through the sharing and application of information. Finally, they may draw conclusions about potential changes to their practices as they evaluate the effectiveness of the information as a whole. These similarities were the basis for the categories in which the interview questions were organized. The interview questions were written based on the research questions and organized around the sensemaking processes described in previous literature. The idea was to elicit responses that directly relate to the research problem, purpose, and theoretical framework through a series of questions answerable by the interviewees (Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The questions were also meant to be guiding questions that were written in anticipation of the probable way the conversation would take place (Hatch, 2002). Additional follow-up questions were asked during the interviews, as well as subsequent follow-up interviews, for clarification and the addition of more detail.

The validity of the items in the interview protocol was increased through content analysis by an expert panel before the interview process began. The panel, who were not participants in the study, consisted of a high school ELD specialist, ELD teachers, and a counselor of ELD students. The panel of experts reviewed the constructed interview

protocol and provided feedback concerning the readability and clarity for average high school ELD teachers. They also provided recommendations for the improvement of the instrument to ensure the gathering of information that accurately addressed the research questions. The interview protocol and items were revised based on the recommendations of the expert panel.

The first set of questions was used to gather background information from each participant: current teaching position(s) including courses taught and grade ranges, years of teaching experience, and years of experience teaching English learners. The second set of questions was used to discover how the teachers construct their understandings of ELD and CAHSEE instructional policy. The next set of questions was used to explore how ELD teachers identify problems and potential solutions in ELD instruction especially as the instruction connects to CAHSEE preparation. The final set of questions was used to investigate how teachers perceive the effectiveness of current ELD and CAHSEE instruction.

Each participant was given the choice of whether the interview was to be face-to-face or over the telephone. Every attempt was made to conduct face-to-face interviews, but circumstances arose necessitating some telephone interviews. There are drawbacks to a telephone interview such as having a more formal feel and the answers may be less detailed as a face-to-face interview (Creswell, 2007; Janesick, 2007). On the other hand, the advantages of telephone interviews may be the ability to work around scheduling conflicts and direct access issues (Creswell, 2007). A current technological option for the phone interview that addresses some of the concerns is the use of the online program,

Skype which enables people to call and video call for free through the computers. Regardless of the type of interview, extensive notes were taken during the interview process. I recorded the interviews with the permission of the participants and I wrote detailed notes.

A copy of the interview questions was sent to the participants prior to each interview (Janesick, 2004, p. 73). The reason for sending a copy of the interview questions beforehand was to put the participants more at ease and assist them in providing descriptive, detailed, and thoughtful answers. An interview reminder was sent to the participants confirming the time and location of the interview (see Appendix E).

### **Collection of Artifacts**

Artifacts relating to the research purpose were collected throughout the course of the study. Artifacts included lesson plans and outlines of units of study. Hatch (2002) explained the main advantage to artifact collection is that it does not influence the social setting of the study. The participants were asked to submit ELD lesson plans and unit outlines that address CASHEE topics and skills (see Appendix F). In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, the participants were asked to submit any other artifacts they felt would contribute to the research study (e.g., photographs, videos, e-mail, and minutes of meetings). The artifacts were delivered in person, e-mailed, or mailed.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of a phenomenological study was not to show causalities or correlations but to discover the meanings behind the experiences of the participants by allowing the participants to speak for themselves (Dukes, 1984). Moustakas (1994)



explained that phenomenological research analyzes significant statements to uncover the essence of the experience. Creswell (2007) outlined data analysis steps for a phenomenological study. The steps include developing a list of significant statements taken from the personal experiences of the participants with the phenomenon. I developed a list of significant statements and grouped them into themes that arose from the data in the current phenomenological study. The themes were identified through the process of coding to organize the data into manageable categories (Creswell, 2007; Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). Preexisting themes and concepts found in prior literature on sensemaking were used to guide the coding process, but the process remained flexible enough to identify additional codes that emerged from the data (Creswell, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Some of the themes and concepts may have included those described in the review of literature such as collegial interactions, reflective practices, constructivist approaches, and English language acquisition strategies.

Hatch (2002) argued "the more open the research questions, the more important to have analysis built into the data collection process" (p. 56). The protocols for data collection in the phenomenological study included open-ended items that were developed to collect open-ended data. The coding procedures for the data were done as the data were collected. Coding was an iterative process of forming and naming categories (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). That is, the data analysis and coding processes began during the data collection process and repeated as new data were collected. The data analysis process also included the development and use of matrixes. Creswell (2007) explained that a researcher may use a matrix to create a visual image of the data. It may also be

used to compare data in terms of themes and categories. The data for the study were collected, organized, managed, and analyzed using the software program, NVivo 8. With NVivo 8, I was able to identify categories and themes while examining relationships among data. The program also allowed for the coding of data, the creation of matrices and visual diagrams, and the efficient organization of data within a secured password protected computer.

### **Validity, Transferability, and Reliability**

Creswell (2007) argued that triangulation strengthens qualitative research. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods to collect data (Merriam, 2002b) and was used to increase the validity of the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002b). I triangulated the data gleaned from interviews and the collection of artifacts in the phenomenological study.

Another strategy to promote internal validity was the use of member checking in which the participants were asked to comment on the credibility of the findings and interpretation of the data before the study was finalized (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002b). Additionally, the study's validity was strengthened through the saturation of data; that is when the same information is repeatedly seen and heard throughout the data (Merriam, 2002b). Bracketing was also used to diminish the influence of my biases and preconceptions (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Husserl, 1927; Merriam, 2002a). Specifically, my personal interpretations, evaluations, and prior knowledge were separated from the data (Janesick, 2004).

The results of a qualitative study are reliable when the results are consistent with the data (Merriam, 2002b). The reliability of the phenomenological study was addressed through the development of detailed field notes, recordings, and transcriptions (Creswell, 2007). The reliability of the study was also enhanced by triangulating unobtrusive data with other sources (Hatch, 2002). The transferability of the study was increased through the use of thick and rich description (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002b). Finally, peer reviewers examined the study's process, the congruency of the findings with the data, and the interpretations (Merriam, 2002b). Three educators with doctorate degrees and backgrounds with qualitative research served as peer reviewers.

### **Limitations**

The potential limitations of the study included my influence on the study and the population sample. First, my biases and preconceptions of ELD and CAHSEE instruction may have influenced the findings and interpretations of data. The influence of such bias and preconceptions were addressed through the strategies of bracketing and member checking (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002a). Another limitation was the relatively small number and purposeful sampling of participants which may have affected the transferability of the study's findings. Regardless, the sample size allowed deeper inquiry and more time with each participant (Hatch, 2002). The deeper inquiry and increased time with each participant resulted in deeper and richer descriptions that increased the validity of the study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002b). The purposeful sampling limited the perspective to members of CATESOL residing in California. The expectation, however, is that the participants still represented diverse backgrounds such

as teaching experience, age, ethnicity, and school demographics. Finally, the way the participants think about instructional policy may have been influenced by their participation in the study, because they may have thought more specifically about their experiences than they normally would. However, this outcome could be desirable since the purpose of the study was to discover specifically how the participants make sense of instructional policies and how this understanding may be incorporated into a professional development program.

### **Summary**

In this section, I outlined and described the qualitative research methods for the phenomenological study. This phenomenological approach allowed for in-depth interviews and the collection of artifacts. The data collected from the multiple sources provided rich descriptions and a deeper understanding of the sensemaking processes through the perspectives of high school ELD teachers. A coding process was utilized to analyze and organize the data. Common themes and concepts were identified and organized into categories that related to the research questions. Specifically, the information was analyzed to determine how high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies.

## Section 4: Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to provide an understanding of the shared experience of how high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. The study was based on the theory of sensemaking. Sensemaking in education is the processes, in both formal and informal settings, through which teachers interpret, evaluate, and make decisions about a policy that result in the implementation of a policy (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Parris & Vickers, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). Data gathering included interviews with participants and the collection of artifacts as indicated in Section 3. This phenomenological study generated themes from the lived experiences of eight high school ELD teachers.

The intention of this section is to explain how the data built on the problem that was investigated, and how the research questions were addressed. To these ends, the processes that were used to generate, gather, and record data for the study is described. Data, in the form of interviews and artifacts, were collected and analyzed for common themes to describe how ELD teachers make sense of exit exam instructional policy. This section also shows nonconfirming and discrepant data in the study with the focus on the quality of evidence in the study.

### **Process of Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data**

Interviews and artifacts were collected from eight high school ELD teachers as a means to generate data. Names and e-mail addresses of potential participants were gathered from a list of secondary level teachers supplied by the general manager of CATESOL. Forty potential participants, chosen from the list of teachers, were invited to

participate with an e-mailed letter of invitation (see Appendix B) followed by telephone calls and several e-mails. Of the 40 potential participants who were extended invitations, 9 responded that they were interested in participating. Then, I sent each interested potential participant a consent form and the preliminary interview questions. Each potential participant's availability for an interview was also established. One of the potential participants responded through e-mail sharing concerns about her lack of familiarity with the terminology and the subject area of the interview and chose not to participate in the study. Three of the participants were interviewed in person while 5 were interviewed over the phone. Each participant was interviewed initially for a minimum of 15 minutes each for a total of two hours and 45 minutes of interviewing. The transcriptions of each interview were sent to each participant to check for accuracy. Each participant was also asked to submit artifacts that addressed CAHSEE preparation. As interviews were checked by participants and data were being analyzed, follow-up interviews were conducted for the purpose of clarifying their statements as well as adding more detailed information and comments.

The 8 participants included 4 female and 4 male teachers. Three of the participants have been teaching for 10 years or less, 3 have been teaching for 12 to 30 years, and 2 have more than 40 years of experience. Three had 10 years or less of experience as ELD teachers, 4 have had 12 to 30 years of ELD teaching experience, and 1 has had more than 30 years of ELD teaching experience. All of the participants were high school teachers in California. Table 2 shows the gender, years of teaching, and years of ELD teaching for each participant.

Table 2

*Gender and Years of Experience of the Participants*

Teacher Code	Gender	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of ELD Experience
Teacher 1	Female	10	8
Teacher 2	Female	2 ½	2 ½
Teacher 3	Female	21	21
Teacher 4	Male	27	27
Teacher 5	Male	44	19
Teacher 6	Male	40	31
Teacher 7	Female	12	12
Teacher 8	Male	10	10

At the beginning of each interview, the consent form was completed and the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences and informed of the right to answer only those questions in which they felt comfortable. Seven participants granted permission to have the conversations recorded. One participant chose not to be recorded, so more detailed notes were taken during that interview.

Each participant was asked the same set of questions (see Appendix D). These open-ended questions allowed the participants to answer each question in as much detail as they wished, thus allowing each participant to speak for him or herself (Dukes, 1984). During each interview, I took notes as a means to track the flow of ideas and ask follow-up questions as needed. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were

informed that a transcribed copy of the interview would be e-mailed to them to check for the accuracy of the transcription, and that a follow up call or interview might be needed.

The data from the interviews were recorded by transcribing each interview into a Word document using a laptop computer, headphones, and the Express Scribe transcription software. During the transcription process, the participants' comments were labeled with bold typeface while my questions and follow-up questions were not bold (see Appendix G for a sample transcript). The names of each participant were kept confidential by replacing each name with the word, Teacher, and an assigned number. From this point forward in the study, only the numbers were used to refer to each of the participants. After each transcription process, member checking was used by sending the transcriptions to the participants to check for accuracy.

### **System for Keeping Track of Data and Emerging Understandings**

The password protected software program, NVivo8, was used to collect, organize, manage, and analyze the data for the study. The interviews were recorded and saved as mp3 files on a password protected computer and stored in NVivo8. The interviews were transcribed and artifacts were entered into NVivo8. My personal thoughts, perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs about the interviews and artifacts were bracketed using the annotation and memo features in NVivo8.

Coding was an iterative process of forming and naming categories (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). That is, the data analysis and coding processes began during the data collection process and repeated as new data were collected. First, each transcription and each artifact was analyzed and coded based on the research subquestions. For



example, statements were identified and coded that revealed how participants interpreted or implemented instructional policy (subquestion 1) while others were identified that revealed influences on their sensemaking processes (subquestion 2). Then, each of these statements was further analyzed for more discrete statements and themes were identified through the process of coding to organize the data into manageable categories (Creswell, 2007; Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). Each time the process was conducted, a hierarchy of units of meaning was developed to form dynamic visual models within NVivo8 that illustrated the association of each unit as they related to the each other and the research questions. Ultimately, the models were used to uncover the essence of the phenomenon shared by the participants (Moustakas, 1994) and answer the general research question.

### **Research Problem and Design**

A phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of several individuals who share the same experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006). A phenomenological qualitative methodology was chosen for this study because the research questions focused on the lived experiences of ELD teachers as they experienced the shared phenomenon of making sense of instructional policies. Specifically, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to reveal the meanings underlying the experiences of the participants (Dukes, 1984).

I sought to explore and describe the shared experience of high school ELD teachers making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies in this study. This task was accomplished through conducting in-depth interviews and collecting artifacts from high school ELD teachers in California. During the interviews, the ELD teachers

shared their lived experiences of how they interpret and implement CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies.

The findings from this phenomenological supplied answers for the general research question: How do high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? Data were analyzed in relation to two subquestions that address how and why instructional policies are interpreted and implemented the way they are by ELD teachers:

1. How do ELD teachers interpret and implement the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies?
2. What are the underlying themes and contexts that influence the ELD teachers' sensemaking processes?

The two subquestions were used to provide a more detailed answer for the general research question. The data from the interview finding and artifact findings were triangulated to provide a more valid answer to the general research question.

### **Interview Findings**

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for emerging themes related to the research subquestions. Common themes among all or most of the interviews emerged and are presented. Additionally, themes that are discrepant and nonconfirming, meaning they emerged in only a few of the participants' interviews, are presented. The significance of each of the themes will be discussed and interpreted in Section 5.

### **Subquestion 1**

The first subquestion of the study was, How do ELD teachers interpret and implement the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? The interviews were analyzed and coded for themes related to the subquestion. That is, the data were analyzed first for evidence of how the participants interpret the instructional policies. Then, the data were analyzed for evidence of how the participants implemented the instructional policies. Seven themes emerged from the interviews that related to the first subquestion: (a) interpreting by collaborating with colleagues; (b) interpreting by evaluating; (c) implementing by focusing on reading, writing, and academic language; (d) implementing by differentiating the instruction; (e) implementing through direct test preparation; (f) implementing by using ELD and SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English) strategies; and (g) implementing by using content learning standards.

**Interpreting by collaborating with colleagues.** A theme that emerged from the interviews was the role of colleagues and collaboration as the participants interpreted the policies. All participants discussed collaboration with their colleagues. Teacher 1 mentioned a couple of times how she used to collaborate with the district CAHSEE specialist who was also an ELD teacher. She later discussed more recent collaboration with the English department teachers, “But, now, I work with the English 10 grade level team. They are working on how to prepare their students for the CAHSEE, upcoming CAHSEE in March.” Teacher 2, a relatively new teacher, described collaborative experiences with colleagues as well as frustrations with the collaboration:

With the exit exam, not a lot of collaboration there. I may ask the 10<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, my first year, a couple of questions on how to prepare. Um, but more how to prepare for 10<sup>th</sup> grade and what they are doing, but that's it. I haven't asked too many questions or collaborated on the CAHSEE.

Teacher 3 mentioned how teachers are grouped for collaboration at her school according to content, grade level, cross curricular or special programs (ELD, GATE, Skills, etc.).

Teacher 4 commented about some collaboration with colleagues and how it is not coordinated due to the small size of the school. Teacher 5 described the collaboration in his department:

The teachers in our department, it is the smallest department in the school for people; we are a very chummy group. Some departments are rivalries and have different camps. We like each other personally and professionally. We are very chummy. We share. We talk about individual students.

Teacher 6 highlighted collaborative efforts with colleagues through the venue of CATESOL, "CATESOL is a statewide organization that brings together many disparate groups who work together to foster better education for ELs through dissemination of research on second language acquisition."

Teacher 7 described collaboration with a special education teacher with whom she was teamed to teach a class and later briefly commented that she worked with other ELD teachers to make sure students are being pushed up through the levels of ELD classes.

Teacher 8 described the limited collaboration on ELD issues at his school:

Well, at our school I would say that there isn't a whole lot of discussion of ELD.

In general, most teachers don't really see the distinction between ELD and non-ELD because most of our students are second language learners and they wouldn't make the distinction between ESL students and mainstream students.

Although all of the participants discussed their collaboration with colleagues, some differences emerged in relation to the topics, amounts of time, and the specific types of colleagues. For example, 4 of the participants talked about collaboration with instructional coaches and department chairs while others discussed collaboration with full departments, ELD teachers, and Special Education teachers. One participant, Teacher 6, was the only participant to focus on collaboration within a professional organization. Also, 4 participants discussed their limited amounts of collaboration.

**Interpreting by evaluating.** All of the participants evaluated situations and conditions related to the implementation of ELD and CAHSEE instructional policies. Three areas of concern emerged from the theme of interpreting by evaluating: (a) evaluating the need for committed ELD teachers, (b) evaluating the need for CAHSEE training focused on ELD, and (c) determining when English learners are ready to pass the CAHSEE.

***Evaluating the need for committed ELD teachers.*** Five of the 8 participants brought up and described their perspectives on the need for committed ELD teachers and how they would like to see changes in policy related to the issue. It is important to note that none of the interview questions solicited responses concerning this topic. These participants brought up the issue when asked what improvements they thought were

needed in terms of ELD instruction and preparing English learners for the CAHSEE.

Teacher 1, during a follow-up interview, made it a point to share her view:

I'm tired of new teachers coming in, putting in their time, and moving out as soon as they put in their 3 years. ELD classes are considered the lower classes and the regular classes are considered to be the so-called real and better classes. I am really in favor of the state requiring a teaching credential for ELD so that we can get teachers who are committed to the ELD students and classes and really want to be there.

Teacher 2, although a novice teacher, discussed the concern for new teachers being placed in ELD classes:

First of all (pause) for improvement you need the higher qualified people teaching those language learners. I don't know why they want to take the first year teachers and the new teachers of the language learners, but I think the problem is we need the educated professionals, truly educated in that area.

Later, when asked what advice she would give a new ELD teacher, she explained:

I would tell them to really stick it out with the class and not give up on it and start doing their research on what strategies should be done and try to be that teacher, because if they don't stick it out with those kids then it's going to be another new teacher and then another new teacher. We need educated professionals in that area teaching the kids.

Teacher 3 explained:

Typically, new teachers are hired to teach ELD. They agree to teach it to get the job. However, when they reach tenure, they stop teaching ELD to teach mainstream courses. There does not seem to be a strong commitment to being an ELD teacher. We need teachers who want to be ELD teachers and will continue to be ELD teachers.

Teacher 5 described his viewpoint as a veteran ELD teacher:

Most people don't want to teach ELD. They tried it and were probationary or temporary and said it was hard, oh my gosh. But the reputation about ELD teachers is that it's fun and games and making posters.

He then explained how the ELD department was able to achieve academic success although teaching ELD was challenging. He continued:

We are a professional department. We have research. We have degree programs. We deserve to be accepted in our own light, not treated as people sent to the back of the bus....So, I would say it's professional respect and we've achieved success in the subject other people don't want to teach, don't know how to teach, tried it and gave up in disgust and frustration. We have a place at the table.

Teacher 7 shared her view that some ELD teachers really do not want to teach ELD and who "are waiting to retire or that have retired mentally and haven't left." She added that committed ELD teachers need to learn to work with around this situation.

*Evaluating the need for CAHSEE training focused on ELD.* All of the participants brought up the need for more focus on ELD issues and strategies within their professional development related to the CAHSEE. Teacher 1 described the trainings in which she has been involved:

With the exception of working with the district CAHSEE specialist, who happened to be an ELD teacher and also had a Masters in TESOL, other than that his was effective; but, the others really did not touch upon teaching English learners in any way. They really need to be more directed towards English language learners.

Teacher 2 shared concerns about CAHSEE training as a new teacher:

They give very limited information. They just give the basics about language learners. You know, they'll say something like teach cognates, but you don't get an actual list of cognates and you have to find them on your own....They have all these ideas and strategies, but it's too general. I don't see enough examples. I don't see enough teachers modeling it for me. With the really low English levels, I think that the training needs to be just about language learners.

Later in the interview, she added, "I've seen one of my biggest challenges of English language learners are reading problems. I don't know how to teach them or where to start. I have no training or education in reading for ELD."

Teacher 3 simply stated, "All CAHSEE specific trainings I attended were very superficial or vague." Teacher 4 commented on ELD training in some workshops that were not geared toward the high school level:



Some of the workshops were geared more towards university students, so I think there needs to be more emphasis on younger students. My school, our high school level students, we have approximately 50% of them are international students and so there doesn't seem to be enough out there in terms of workshops for these younger students.

Teacher 4 also added:

When I finally started working at the high school level about 12 years ago in my current position. So, in terms of that, I haven't had any special training other than teaching courses that might lend itself towards an exit exam. I taught TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] classes, grammar classes, and composition classes, but nothing formalized toward the state recognized exit exam.

Similar to Teacher 4, Teacher 5 shared that the professional development was not appropriate for his students' grade levels or levels of English and further explained personal philosophical differences with the professional development:

I'm not impressed by the professional development. It's one size fits all, they like to claim professional development is good from grades K-12 for all subjects but it's not....I told you that I have all four grade levels in a class, so, out of 27 students, maybe eight 10<sup>th</sup> graders, what am I supposed to do? Prep them for the CAHSEE and ignore everyone else, pass out the booklets and tell them the test is in a month and study on your own time? I don't mind telling you this; I'm philosophically opposed to having my class turned into a test prep institute, that's

not the purpose of education to fill in bubbles. The purpose is to get them to think and express themselves.

Teacher 6 gave thoughts about the lack of CAHSEE specific training from a political perspective:

No one got any preparation. They just figured the kids, you know, they'll pass it (laughing). They are worried more about the CST than the CAHSEE. The CST, money comes to the school, so you have to look at that. Politically, you have to look at that. People put their energy into what's most important.

Teacher 7 shared how the professional development has been a waste of time:

You go to this stuff, like sheltered English. They start off with this thing like you know several of the kids in your class don't speak English well. And you're sitting at the table and some of the teachers say, "No shit." And you go to mainstreaming training and they say stuff like not all of your kids are not white middle-class Americans. And it's like, really, you took me out of school for a full freaking day to tell me that. I teach in a school district with 80% Hispanics, no shit Sherlock; come up with some good stuff and strategies. Give me something I can use.

Teacher 8 commented:

At the high school level that I'm in now, there has not been a whole lot of formal training in terms of passing the CAHSEE. All teachers are basically expected to teach grade level materials and there are CAHSEE test prep classes that are offered after school, but I have not participated in that. So, basically I haven't

really participated in formal training or participated in professional development at the high school level over the past year.... As I said, I haven't had any training at my school related to the CAHSEE. I would say that unfortunately the school hasn't given me any training specific to the CAHSEE.

*Determining when English learners are ready to pass the CAHSEE.* The participants were asked how they know when English learners are prepared to pass the CAHSEE. Four of the eight participants stated they didn't have a clear idea of how to determine the readiness of their students. Teacher 1 explained she looks at their writing, but clarified that this is not necessarily an accurate determiner:

I can see that they're approaching readiness when I see them using information that we've worked on in class and they incorporate it into their writing.

Ultimately, it comes down to their scores. Unfortunately, I don't know until after the fact and then I see their score. But even then, it doesn't always help me because I see students that I just look at their writing and look at their English and think, wow they didn't pass. So, I don't entirely have a 100% picture.

Teacher 2 answered, "I don't (pause). I have no idea; I'm not able to answer that. Again, I don't know a lot about the CAHSEE. Umm...yeah, I don't know." In a follow-up interview, she added that she didn't know whether or not the CAHSEE included an essay portion. Teacher 4, like Teacher 1, looks at the writing of the students. He judges their success based on entrance rates into universities:

I begin with the writing of compositions as I explained before. The proof that what I'm doing is benefiting the students is the fact that they are able to get into

fairly um advanced universities, UCI even Berkeley and other schools. So, again I think it's just having a need to acknowledge the students' writing progress and um getting a sense of their own confidence in taking the test. Again, very, very subjective, but I think that the fact they're getting into these universities is proof that what I'm doing is having a positive effect.

Teacher 8 described his methods of assessing, but still stated he is not sure if the students are ready to pass:

You know, I don't really do a whole lot of assessment that's geared specifically to the CAHSEE. I do have two language lab classes that I teach on an informal basis that basically prepares students for the CAHSEE. And, I don't do a whole lot of ongoing assessment per se, but I do track the historical information of when they've passed the CAHSEE and what parts they have done well on and what parts they have struggled with. So, I don't necessarily have a good feel for when they're ready to pass the CAHSEE.

The other 4 teachers shared ways in which they determine the readiness of their students to pass the CAHSEE. Teacher 3 constantly administers mock tests and essay prompts to monitor the students' readiness. Teacher 5 does not necessarily determine the students' readiness until after they have taken the CAHSEE at least once before:

I look at the results. I judge the score, even the kids who didn't pass. Now I'm dealing with my level two kids. They come close, they get 340 something, 341. I figure in time in their Junior and Senior years, if they come close I know they are learning something.

Teacher 6 referred to the students' proficiency levels of English to determine if they are ready to pass the CAHSEE, "Students at the Intermediate level may be ready to challenge the test, and definitely if they are at the Early Advanced or higher stages they should be tested. If they are Early Intermediate or below, they shouldn't be put through the experience because of lack of skills." Teacher 7 answered definitively by explaining how she evaluates the students' responses to writing prompts:

I can tell they will do well when the minute they see the prompt, they t-graph it, they outline it, and they have their examples prepared, and they come up with an introduction and what they are going to write about in the body paragraphs. I walk around the desks to see them and they're going through the process. That shows me they have a level of confidence. If they aren't confident and they don't know what to do on the essay, it isn't going to happen. The CAHSEE is set up that you have to have the essay.

The participants evaluated information and contexts related to CAHSEE and ELD instructional policy by identifying problems, suggesting solutions, and drawing conclusions. The interview data revealed that all of the participants suggested more focus on ELD issues and strategies during CAHSEE trainings. Five of the eight participants argued for the recruitment and retention of committed ELD teachers. Half of the participants identified the problem of not clearly knowing when their students are prepared to pass the CAHSEE.

**Implementing by focusing on reading, writing, and academic language.** All of the participants reported preparing their students for the CAHSEE by focusing on reading, writing, and academic language. They mentioned focusing on vocabulary that are commonly found in the exam and academic texts. Seven of the eight participants mentioned teaching academic reading comprehension skills. Three participants specifically focused on reading nonfiction and informational materials. Six of the participants also pointed out the importance of writing skills. Two teachers, in particular, emphasized the importance of writing in order to pass the CAHSEE. Teacher 4 stated, “Most of my classes emphasize writing. So test preparation is basically going over key concepts of writing: five-paragraph essay and how to develop a thesis. So the test preparation comes in the form of them doing compositions.” Teacher 8 explained the mathematical reasoning behind the importance of teaching writing:

The essay’s worth 20%, which means they get everything correct on the 72 multiple choice, they can technically still pass, except the writing strategies component, which has about 20 questions in it. So, if you can’t write the essay, chances are you can’t identify everything in the questions previously.

The data show that the participants focus on academic reading, academic language, comprehension skills, and writing skills. However, there was one discrepant case. Teacher 8 was the only participant to express specific knowledge of the CAHSEE in relation to writing skills.

**Implementing by differentiating the instruction.** Five of the eight participants discussed how they differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of their students.

Teacher 1 described the use of differentiation based on the students' levels of English:

It's part of what I would imagine triage to be, especially with the newcomers. I try to maximize the effect that one lesson can have and go after the area that needs the most attention. When you look at each student it's really important you know how to differentiate for each student's level of English.

Teacher 4 discussed meeting with students to guide them through the writing process and provide individual feedback. Teacher 5 explained how his school differentiates by the levels of English to decide in which ELD classes to place each student. Teacher 6 described how he provides differentiated lessons based on the same readings to be able to meet the needs of the English learners within a class of mixed proficiency levels.

Teacher 8 explained how he differentiates based on the students' levels of academic language:

The information that I would, particularly the information that I would think important is first of all to understand what is the level of the students' academic language development, what sorts of learning strategies the students already feel comfortable doing. And then, I try to design a lesson over a period of two weeks, that is student (pause) gives all students an opportunity to be successful using something akin to Universal Design.

The participants discussed how they differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of their students based on the students' proficiency levels of English and the

students' reading levels. Teacher 4, a discrepant case, was the only participant to speak specifically of providing individual feedback on students' writing.

**Implementing through direct test preparation.** Five of the participants use direct test preparation instruction by providing test preparation materials to their students and explaining what is tested on the CAHSEE. Specifically, 3 of the participants utilize the CAHSEE and California Standards Test (CST) released test questions. Four of the participants also discussed the use of previous exam and pretest scores to decide on what areas of the CAHSEE to focus in their instruction. Teacher 1 explained, "I can look at their CAHSEE scores and CST scores. I can look at their individual strengths and weaknesses. Then, I can work on their strengths and bolster the areas that they are weak." Teacher 2 simultaneously prepares her students for the CAHSEE and CST:

So, any preparation we may do that may help them with the CAHSEE is the RTQ, release test question practice, we do for the CST. I know they are similar. I do a lot of work to prepare them with the CST which I think helps with the CAHSEE. Teacher 6 stated, "Consider your learners. What their skills are, so you know...um...you have to preassess first. The idea of knowing where your students are, you know, the proficiency they have." Teacher 7 starts off instruction by explaining the CAHSEE and what is on the exam.

Five of participants spoke about how they directly implement test preparation by using released test questions and explaining the CAHSEE to their students. Four of the 5 use previous exam scores to determine the areas of focus in test preparation.



**Implementing by using ELD and SDAIE strategies.** Only 3 of the eight participants referred to using ELD and SDAIE strategies in their interview responses. Teacher 6 discussed the development of collaborative and interactive strategies that enhance English learning including peer tutoring, vocabulary and word study, writing workshops, and reading for pleasure and comprehension. Teacher 7 talked about picking strategies that work with English learners such as repetition and clarification. She continued by describing a specific word study strategy using cognates:

And we would go over, and we would do word origins...I give them huge words like “malapropism” and pretty soon they recognize quite a few word parts. I would say probably two to three hundred and any word with “mal” it was “bad”. You know, the fundamental basic test taking strategies combined with you know, and they readily admitted in the beginning if they saw a word like malapropism they would skip it and move on. I would say no, look at it a little bit. Look at “mal” and look at the choices down there. These test taking strategies are quite simplistic. They do work on the CAHSEE.

Teacher 8 talked about the importance of ELD instruction as it relates to CAHSEE and other test preparation:

I think that ELD lesson planning is probably very important above and beyond the CAHSEE. I think it can be very helpful. I mean, if a student needs instruction to prepare for the CAHSEE, they’re working below grade level and if that is the case then obviously they need a lot of scaffolding and supports to be successful to have experiences when developing their academic language. So, I would say that what

would be very important is to understand that it's not just something specific to the CAHSEE, but it's a frame or perspective that a teacher is not only teaching concepts but also a language if it's preparing for the CAHSEE or the CST or the EAP or the SAT or whatever it happens to be.

Although only 3 participants discussed using ELD and SDAIE strategies, making this a nonconfirming theme, the data is important in light of previous researchers highlighting the effectiveness of such strategies. This theme also emerges in the artifacts.

**Implementing by using content learning standards.** Four of the eight participants directly referred to using content learning standards to inform their instruction. Teacher 1 explained she mainly uses the English 10 standards in conjunction with the ELD proficiency standards because most of her Intermediate ELD students are also in an English 10 class. Teacher 3 also looks at the content standards in conjunction with the ELD proficiency standards. Additionally, she refers to the CAHSEE blueprint that lists the content standards that are represented on the exam. Teacher 6 explained using Backwards Planning, which is beginning with the learning standards addressed in the CAHSEE and “then decide on how you will know when you get there, and then decide on the best route to arrive at that destination.” Teacher 8 discussed focusing lessons on the specific content standards related to the grade level and subject area of his students but not necessarily related directly to the CAHSEE:

It is activities that help make the material accessible but at the same time I try to structure in such a way that I do activities that lead up to reading in the textbook

so that they have success in reading grade level academic material. That, I believe, helps prepare them for the CAHSEE in an indirect sort of way.

Half of the participants talked about using content learning standards.

Specifically, the data suggest that the participants refer to different types of learning standards. As such, discrepant cases emerge. Three of the teachers use content learning standards that are not directly related to the CAHSEE, only 2 refer to the ELD proficiency standards, and only 2 reference the standards that are related directly to the CAHSEE. Only 1 participant, teacher 3, refers to all three types of learning standards.

### **Subquestion 2**

The second subquestion of the study was, What are the underlying themes and contexts that influence the ELD teachers' sensemaking processes? The interviews were analyzed and coded for themes related to the subquestion. That is, the data were analyzed for evidence of influential factors affecting the participants' sensemaking processes. Three themes emerged from the interviews that related to the second subquestion: (a) influence of professional training, (b) influence of administrators, and (c) influence of colleagues.

**Influence of professional training.** A common theme that emerged was the influence of trainings on the teachers. The participants described the training and professional development in which they participated to prepare them to teach ELD and CAHSEE skills. Teacher 2 discussed the credential program which was part of her Bachelors Degree:

I guess the main training that I got was in the credential programs. Every single class I took we talked about language learners. So, there weren't any extra classes, everything was just incorporated. Often times they would have an assignment that would have me observing students. We needed to pick a language partner to focus on. Just sharing strategies in all of my credential classes, that was the main training I got.

In a follow-up interview, she clarified a concern about the classes in the credential program:

Although we talked about ELD and SDAIE strategies, they were not modeled. All the professors assumed we knew SDAIE and assumed the previous professor taught it to us. I didn't even know what the acronym, SDAIE, was until one of my last classes in the credential program. I was too scared to ask earlier, because I assumed the other students knew.

Teacher 7 also discussed her credential program as well as her current certificate program which is in addition to a Masters Degree:

I went to San Diego State for my credential. We had a lot of different classes. We had scaffolding, ELD, SDAIE curriculum and strategies, things like that. Right now I'm going back and getting another certificate to teach English language learners how to read because there are so many different levels.

It is important to note that, unlike the other participants, Teacher 7 specialized in the CAHSEE in a Masters program. She explained that she has been teaching a CAHSEE preparation course and wrote a Thesis on preparing students for the CAHSEE.

In addition to their college degrees and credentials, other common influential factors were conferences and workshops. Five of the 8 participants discussed their participation in conferences and workshops. Teacher 1 stated, “I also attend the CATESOL conferences, California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, both the regional and state conferences.” Teacher 3 mentioned her involvement in workshops through professional organizations and school district in-service trainings. Teacher 4 stated:

I’ve had some workshop experience with Steven Krashen, taking his workshop. I’ve also been to NAFSA [National Association of Foreign Student Advisers] in Washington. I attended that in 2008. That was a four-day conference and I took some workshops there. I’m trying to think (pause). I took one early on around 1987, a two-day workshop in Osaka, Japan.

Teacher 5 discussed his involvement in many professional organizations:

But, realistically I’m a member of dozens of organizations in respect to language learners. I go to about 15 conferences a year, I see you all the time, you’re aware that that is the best professional development.

Teacher 6 listed various trainings in which he participated: Kagan Cooperative Learning, ELD workshops and MTTI (Multidistrict Teacher Training Institute) at LACOE (Los Angeles County Office of Education); UCLA Literature project for ELD, and USC training for the Language Development Specialist Exam. He also added that he has led district trainings for the Beginning Teacher and Support Assessment (BTSA) program

and Cross cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) certification program.

Seven of the eight participants discussed their college degrees as the main source of their training for ELD. Five of the teachers stated they received Masters Degrees specializing in English language learning.

**Influence of administrators.** Seven of the participants described the influence from their school administrators. Three of the teachers mentioned that they are required to meet on a weekly basis with other teachers in department meetings and PLCs. One of the participants, Teacher 6, shared the positive influence from a principal:

I like my principal. You give an idea, and his first question was, How will it help the kids? If you couldn't answer that, then forget it. It had to help the kids, otherwise, you know, that was to me the right way to look at it, what's good for the kids. That's why we're here as educators. A good teacher puts himself or herself out of a job, at least for these kids.

Conversely, 2 of the participants provided criticism of the influence from their administrators. Teacher 5 pointed out that an assistant principal in charge of curriculum distributes CAHSEE preparation books. During a follow-up question he commented on how he views the administration's perspective of CAHSEE preparation:

The administration, of course, wants to look good on tests, so they may give you a handout or something. If I get 40% to pass, that prepping them, they figure I'm doing my job and most kids are learning. They probably fail to realize that a test

is a byproduct, it's not the goal. If I do a good job teaching they will learn the necessary skills and information to pass the test.

Teacher 7 also described the frustrations with administrators in terms of CAHSEE preparation and instruction:

This curriculum that I created, you know, I'm still fighting the district. They want me using a canned prepackaged program so everyone can do it the same. But, I tell them everyone has a 35% pass rate and I've never had below 60 on any one test. Why would I do that? Well, because we all should be doing the same thing.

Seven of the participants described the influence from their school administrators referencing requirements such as meeting regularly with other teachers and departments as well as the expectation to provide direct CAHSEE instruction. However, the data suggested two discrepant cases. Two of the participants criticized the influence of their administrators citing disagreements in instructional philosophy.

**Influence of colleagues.** Only 3 participants directly referred to the influence of colleagues. Teacher 1 mentioned working with a district CAHSEE specialist, who was also a teacher. She explained that the specialist influenced her teaching by leading workshops and giving presentations about the CAHSEE. Teacher 2 also referred to an instructional coach and other colleagues; yet, she shared concerns about the lack of effective influence from colleagues:

For ELD, we have our instructional coach on campus. She helped me in the beginning with strategies and she would come to the class to model the strategies and come back and watch us do them and I did speak with her a couple of

different occasions about specific ELD strategies. But, again she doesn't give us anything new I didn't already learn in the credential program or not any more depth. That's it; we don't have on this campus very many people that are real well educated with English language learners and what their needs are. I haven't asked too many questions or collaborated on the CAHSEE.

Teacher 5 touched on the influence from a department chair, "What it amounts to is that our department chair says that the CAHSEE is coming up and you might want to emphasize a certain skill. It is just a suggestion, it's not a mandate."

The interviews show that only 3 participants discussed the influence of colleagues such as instructional coaches and department chairs. This is a nonconfirming theme. Yet, it is worth considering because of the role of collaboration and collegial interaction play in the processes of sensemaking.

### **Artifact Findings**

The participants were asked to submit artifacts, mainly lesson plans and activities, related to English learning and the CAHSEE. Seven of the 8 participants submitted artifacts. The artifacts were analyzed and coded for data that related to the evidence from the interviews for the purpose of triangulation.

#### **Subquestion 1**

The artifacts were analyzed and coded for themes related to the first subquestion. Five themes emerged from the artifacts that related to the first subquestion and also emerged from the analysis of the interviews: (a) implementing by focusing on reading, writing, and academic language; (b) implementing by differentiating the instruction; (c)



implementing through direct test preparation; (d) implementing by using ELD and SDAIE strategies; and (e) implementing by using content learning standards.

**Implementing by focusing on reading, writing, and academic language.** Six of the teachers submitted artifacts showing their focus on reading, writing, and academic language. Teacher 1 used nonfiction magazines and utilized various reading techniques and strategies such as predicting, identifying main ideas and details, and vocabulary development within a unit of study. Additionally, Teacher 1 included the writing of a biographical analysis essay based on a person from the reading in the unit of study. Teacher 3 focused on the teaching and review of literary and grammar concepts within the lesson plans. Teacher 4 included an explanatory statement with the lesson plan in which he explained the decision-making process for what to teach:

As you can see, the topic is essay writing, not literature. This was because their initial thesis on comparative literature showed a deficiency in thesis development. I felt it important to spend a few days off the planned curriculum and on this topic before letting them loose on their comparative literature essay assignment on *The Pearl* and another story of their choosing which we have read this school year. It is based on handouts from three different sources on thesis development.

Teacher 5 submitted artifacts dealing with reading and writing such as paragraph graphic organizers, photos of the students sharing posters that describe the books they have read, and photos of bright colored cards on the classroom wall displaying academic reading vocabulary (i.e., foreshadowing, mood, climax, flashback, setting, and theme). Teacher 6 submitted a thematic unit based on a specific book of historical fiction. The

unit included vocabulary and literary devices that are used in the book. Teacher 8 submitted a lesson plan based on the Progressive Movement of United States history in which, “Students interpret and write about past events and issues within the context in which an event unfolded rather than solely in terms of present-day norms and values.”

**Implementing by differentiating the instruction.** Only 2 of the participants submitted artifacts showing evidence of differentiating the instruction. Teacher 5 developed a handbook of SDAIE strategies in which common problems and complaints expressed by teachers of English learners are listed with corresponding suggestions and solutions based on the students’ individual needs. Teacher 5 also cited the book, *Seven Ways of Knowing: Teaching for Multiple Intelligences* by David Lazear (1991). Teacher 6 submitted a unit of study that showed differentiated instructional strategies based on the ELD proficiency of students at the Intermediate and Early Advanced levels of English proficiencies.

**Implementing through direct test preparation.** Three of the participants submitted artifacts that referred to direct test preparation. Teacher 3 included the use of CAHSEE test preparation books in the lesson plans with step-by-step lessons that focus on test taking strategies and scaffolding essay prompts. Teacher 4 submitted a multiple choice quiz that was given to ELD students in an American Literature class. Additionally, Teacher 4 submitted a quiz on developing a thesis for essay writing. Teacher 6 included an assessment section within the lesson plan to assess the students’ knowledge of vocabulary and literary devices as well as their abilities to write an essay defending an opinion based on the text.

**Implementing by using ELD and SDAIE strategies.** Five of the participants submitted artifacts showing evidence of using specific ELD and SDAIE strategies. Three of the teachers used graphic organizers within their lesson plans. Teacher 1 also included pre-reading predictions, vocabulary development, graphic organizers, Cornell note taking, and a jigsaw reading activity within the unit of study. Teacher 5 also used a gallery walk of student posters in which students shared posters describing the books they have read. Teacher 6 included the strategy of activating prior knowledge of the students and the use of student oral reports. Teacher 3 listed scaffolding techniques to help students understand the writing prompts. Teacher 8 included the use of a movie and corresponding note taking activity related to the unit of study. Additionally, Teacher 8 allowed students to work in groups to prepare oral presentations.

**Implementing by using content learning standards.** Only 2 of the participants listed content learning standards within their lesson plans. Teacher 2 listed the grade level English content standards with the corresponding ELD standards within the lesson plan. Teacher 6 listed the English reading standards in the lesson plan.

## **Subquestion 2**

The artifacts were analyzed and coded for themes related to the second subquestion. That is, they were analyzed for evidence of influential factors affecting the participants' sensemaking processes. Three themes emerged from the artifacts that related to the second subquestion and that also emerged from the analysis of the interviews: (a) influence of professional training, (b) influence of administrators, and (c) influence of colleagues.

**Influence of professional training.** Teacher 5 was the only participant to submit artifacts highlighting the influence of professional training. First, he included a list of 30 professional organizations in which he is a member. He also receives their newsletters and journals as well as attends their conferences. Additionally, he submitted a photo of a book on which his class is working that came from the National Association of Bilingual Education national conference.

**Influence of administrators.** Teacher 2 submitted a lesson plan that utilized a lesson plan template used within her school district. She explained that all the teachers are required to submit weekly lesson plans to their principal. The template requires citing the content standards, ELD standards, and how the lessons will prepare students for the CSTs.

**Influence of colleagues.** Two participants submitted artifacts showing some evidence of influence of colleagues. Teacher 5 submitted a SDAIE handbook that he coauthored and has shared with staff members. It includes techniques, strategies, and suggestions for teachers of English learners. Teacher 6 included an e-mail with the lesson plan in which he collaborated with a colleague about developing and presenting the lesson plan at a conference.

### **Making Sense of CAHSEE and ELD Policies**

The general research question of the study was, How do high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? The general research question was answered by focusing on the two subquestions and by triangulating the interview findings with the artifact findings. The participants of this study, high school

ELD teachers, presented evidence through interviews and artifacts of how they make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. All of the participants discussed collaboration at various degrees with their colleagues. Four of the participants talked about collaboration with instructional coaches and department chairs. Yet, the other 4 participants discussed their limited amounts of collaboration. The participants also evaluated information and contexts related to CAHSEE and ELD instructional policy by identifying problems, suggesting solutions, and drawing conclusions. All of the participants suggested more focus on ELD issues and strategies during CAHSEE trainings. Five of the eight participants argued for the recruitment and retention of committed ELD teachers. Four of the participants identified the problem of not clearly knowing when their students are prepared to pass the CAHSEE.

The participants also shared evidence suggesting how they make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies through instructional implementation. All of the participants implement reading, writing, and academic language instruction in their classes. Six of the participants' artifacts supported these interviews by showing their focus on reading, writing, and academic language evidenced by lesson plans and instructional activities. In addition, 5 of participants spoke about how they directly implement test preparation by using released test questions and explaining the CAHSEE to their students. Three of the participants submitted artifacts demonstrating how they utilize test preparation. One of the 3 participants did not mention direct test preparation in the interview, but did submit a multiple choice quiz that is used as a test preparation

activity. So, 6 of the 8 participants brought up direct preparation through the interviews and artifacts.

Five of the 8 participants discussed how they differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of their students based on the students' proficiency levels of English and the students' reading levels. Two of those participants submitted artifacts showing evidence of differentiating the instruction. Only 3 of the eight participants referred to implementing ELD and SDAIE strategies in the interviews. Yet, 5 of the 8 submitted artifacts showing the use of ELD and SDAIE strategies such as graphic organizers, jigsaw and gallery walk activities, activating prior knowledge, use of visuals, and structured note taking. Finally, instructional implementation by using content learning standards was mentioned by 4 of the eight participants in the interviews. Only 2, including 1 who did not bring it up in the interview, submitted artifacts referencing content learning standards.

The participants discussed factors affecting how they make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. Seven of the participants described the training and professional development, mainly through college degree programs and professional conferences, in which they participated to prepare them to teach ELD and CAHSEE skills. Yet, only 1 of the participants supplied a list of specific organizations to which he is a member. Seven of the participants described the influence from their school administrators referencing requirements such as meeting regularly with other teachers and departments as well as the expectation to provide direct CAHSEE instruction. Yet, 2 of the participants criticized the influence of their administrators citing disagreements in

instructional philosophy. Only one of the artifacts showed the influence of administrators in that it was a lesson plan following a required template. Another influence brought up in the interviews was that of the participants' colleagues such as instructional coaches and department chairs. Two artifacts did show some evidence of influence of colleagues in that the participants both influenced and were influenced by colleagues through the collaboration on projects and presentations.

### **Quality of Evidence**

Several procedures were employed to address the quality of evidence in this study. Triangulation was used to increase the validity of the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002b). I triangulated the data gleaned from interviews and the collection of artifacts in the current study (see Appendix G for a sample transcript and Appendix H for a sample artifact). The transcriptions of the interviews and the artifacts were gleaned for emerging themes related to the research questions. The identification of themes was accomplished through the coding and analysis of significant statements using the NVivo8 software. The data were then compared to identify emerging themes that appeared among the various interviews and artifacts. Data not related to the research questions was not considered.

Member checking was used to promote internal validity in which the participants were asked to comment on the credibility of the findings and interpretation of the data before the study was finalized (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002b). Bracketing was also used to diminish the influence my biases and preconceptions (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Husserl, 1927; Merriam, 2002a). Specifically, my personal interpretations,

evaluations, and prior knowledge were separated from the data (Janesick, 2004). Bracketing was accomplished through the use of the annotation and memo functions in NVivo8.

The reliability of the phenomenological study was addressed through the development of detailed field notes, recordings of the interviews, and transcriptions of the interviews (Creswell, 2007). The reliability of the study was also enhanced by triangulating unobtrusive data with other sources (Hatch, 2002). Specifically, the collection of artifacts was triangulated with the interview transcriptions. Finally, peer reviewers examined the study's process, the congruency of the findings with the data, and the interpretations (Merriam, 2002b). Three educators with doctorate degrees and backgrounds with qualitative research served as peer reviewers.

### **Summary**

In Section 4, I presented the findings of a phenomenological study while exploring the lived experiences of high school ELD teachers in California making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. The study's general research question was, How do high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? The study was guided by the theoretical framework of sensemaking. In an educational setting, sensemaking is a process by which educators interpret policies and make decisions about how they respond to the policies (Louis et al, 2005).

A phenomenological methodology was used as the design for this study. In this phenomenology, I described the lived experiences of several individuals who share the same phenomenon of sensemaking (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006) and sought to reveal



the essence of the shared experience of sensemaking (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002a).

Interviewing was the primary data collection strategy in the phenomenological study. In addition, artifacts, such as lessons and photos, were collected throughout the course of the study.

The data analysis method described by Creswell (2007) was used in this phenomenological study. The steps included developing a list of significant statements taken from the personal experiences of the participants with the phenomenon and grouping them into themes that arose from the data. The themes were identified through the process of coding to organize the data into manageable categories (Creswell, 2007; Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). Initially, 148 significant statements were categorized into 26 themes. Through the process of combining similar ideas and grouping statements, ten final themes emerged from the data: (a) interpreting by collaborating with colleagues; (b) interpreting by evaluating; (c) implementing by focusing on reading, writing, and academic language; (d) implementing by differentiating the instruction; (e) implementing through direct test preparation; (f) implementing by using ELD and SDAIE strategies; (g) implementing by using content learning standards; (h) influence of professional training; (i) influence of administrators; and (j) influence of colleagues.

Section 4 showed the data collected and the finding resulting from the data of this phenomenological study. In Section 5, I will summarize the findings, draw conclusions based on the findings, and offer commentary regarding the findings. I will also present an evaluation of the research presented in Section 4, discuss the limitations of the study, and make recommendations for further research.

## Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This section includes an overview of the study and an interpretation of the findings drawn from the analysis of interviews and artifacts presented in Section 4. The implications for social change resulting from the study are presented. In addition, recommendations for action and recommendations for further study are described and supported. Finally, a reflection on my experience including an evaluation of the research is presented.

### **Overview of the Study**

The achievement gap found in accountability exams throughout California and the nation (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Thompson, 2007) implies instructional practices are insufficient in closing the academic achievement gap for English learners. It is not known what support systems are in place to help ELD teachers make sense of and effectively implement accountability exam instructional policies. For that reason, stakeholders need a better understanding of utilizing sensemaking strategies when implementing instructional policies. Researchers of prior studies (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Coburn, 2005; Louis et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2002) have identified processes of sensemaking to improve the interaction between humans and information. Yet, there is a lack of understanding regarding how sensemaking could be incorporated into a professional development program to improve teacher quality and student achievement. Research has also suggested instructional practices mandated by state and national policy are not always implemented as intended by the policy makers (Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). To address this problem, a phenomenological study was

needed to obtain a better understanding of how sensemaking is practiced by ELD teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the shared experience of high school ELD teachers making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies.

The general research question guiding the study was, How do high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? I addressed the general research question by focusing on the following subquestions:

1. How do ELD teachers interpret and implement the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies?
2. What are the underlying themes and contexts that influence the ELD teachers' sensemaking processes?

I used a qualitative phenomenological tradition in this study. A phenomenology describes the lived experiences of several individuals who share the same experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Simon, 2006), and seeks to reveal the essence of the shared experience of sensemaking (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002a). The shared experience, or concept, in the study was the sensemaking of common instructional policies among the participants. Specifically, a hermeneutic phenomenology approach was used in that the research is oriented to the lived experiences of the participants and interprets and views the data as texts of life (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). It also attempted to discover the interpretive processes used by participants in a situation (Simon, 2006). In this study, I explored the processes of interpreting instructional policy through the perspectives of ELD teachers. A purposeful sampling strategy was utilized to

ensure the participants have experienced the phenomenon of making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies.

The population for the study was eight high school teachers in California of English learners who have not yet passed the CAHSEE. They were also members of CATESOL, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the education of English learners and the professional development of their teachers. This requirement increased the chances the participants had similar professional development opportunities pertaining to English language development. Names of potential participants were gathered from a list of secondary level teachers supplied by the general manager of CATESOL. Forty potential participants, chosen from the list of teachers, were invited to participate with an e-mailed letter of invitation (see Appendix B) followed by telephone calls and e-mails. Eight of these teachers participated in the study. Interviews and artifacts were collected from the ELD teachers as a means to generate data.

Each interested potential participant was sent a consent form and the preliminary interview questions. Each potential participant's availability for an interview was also established. Three of the participants were interviewed in person while 5 were interviewed over the phone. The participants were also asked to submit artifacts that addressed CAHSEE preparation. As interviews were checked by participants and data were being analyzed, follow-up interviews were conducted for the purpose of clarifying their statements and adding more detailed information. The transcription of each interview and each artifact was analyzed and coded based on the research subquestions. Then, a list of significant statements was created and categorized into themes which

provided the lived experiences of ELD teachers as they made sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies.

The general research question was answered by focusing on the two subquestions and by triangulating the interview findings with the artifact findings. All of the participants discussed collaboration at various degrees with their colleagues. Four of the participants discussed collaboration with instructional coaches and department chairs. Yet, the other 4 participants discussed their limited amounts of collaboration. The participants also identified problems, suggested solutions, and drew conclusions related to CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. All of the participants suggested more focus on ELD issues and strategies during CAHSEE trainings. Five of the 8 participants argued for the recruitment and retention of committed ELD teachers. Four of the participants identified the problem of not clearly knowing when their students are prepared to pass the CAHSEE.

The participants also shared evidence suggesting how they make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies through instructional implementation. All of the participants implement reading, writing, and academic language instruction in their classes. Six participants directly implement test preparation by using released test questions and explaining the CAHSEE to their students. Five differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of their students based on the students' proficiency levels of English and the students' reading levels. Three of the 8 participants referred to implementing ELD and SDAIE strategies in the interviews, while 5 submitted artifacts showing the use of ELD and SDAIE strategies. Finally, instructional implementation by

using content learning standards was mentioned by 4 of the 8 participants in the interviews. Yet, only 2 submitted artifacts referencing content learning standards.

The participants discussed factors affecting how they make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. Seven of the participants described professional development through college degree programs and professional conferences. Seven of the participants described the influence from their school administrators referencing requirements such as meeting regularly with other teachers and departments as well as the expectation to provide direct CAHSEE instruction, while 2 of the participants criticized the influence of their administrators citing disagreements in instructional philosophy. Another influence was that of the participants' colleagues such as instructional coaches and department chairs.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

This study was conducted to investigate the lived experiences of high school ELD teachers as they make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. Specifically, I sought to answer the general question by focusing on the two subquestions. The interpretation of the findings and the conclusions were based on the outcomes reported in Section 4 and linked to the review of literature in Section 2 of this study. The interpretation of the findings begins by answering the general research question with an overview of the findings. A more detailed interpretation of those findings is presented by answering the two subquestions.

### **How ELD Teachers Make Sense of CAHSEE and ELD Policies**

The general research question was, How do high school ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? The findings of this study indicate that ELD teachers make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies in the same manner as described in previous studies (i.e., Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Parris & Vickers, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). The previous studies provided the conceptual framework of sensemaking through which the general research question was addressed. Specifically, teachers may construct a better understanding of an organization or situation as they share reactions and responses. They may subsequently link their learning to their own experiences and practices as they identify problems and possible solutions. Finally, teachers may draw conclusions about potential changes to their practices as they evaluate the information and the organization as a whole.

First, the ELD teachers construct an understanding of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies as they share reactions and responses with their colleagues. All of the participants discussed collaboration with their colleagues, albeit at various degrees. Following that collaboration, the ELD teachers link their understandings of instructional policies to their own experiences and practices as they identify problems and possible solutions. The participants evaluated information and contexts related to CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies by identifying problems, suggesting solutions, and drawing conclusions. The common areas of concern were the lack of focus on ELD issues and strategies during CAHSEE trainings, the recruitment and retention of committed ELD teachers, and the lack of clarity knowing when their students are prepared to pass the

CAHSEE. Finally, ELD teachers make decisions about their implementation of instructional policies. ELD teachers draw conclusions about their own practices as they evaluate policies and draw conclusions about how the policies are implemented in the schools as a whole. Based on their understandings of the instructional policies, the ELD teachers indicated that they implemented the policies by including the following into their instruction: (a) reading, writing, and academic language; (b) direct test preparation; (c) differentiation of instruction; (d) ELD and SDAIE strategies, and (e) content learning standards.

The general research question was also addressed by focusing on the concept of sensegiving. Sensegiving, according to Maitlis (2005), is an attempt “to influence others’ understanding of an issue” (p. 21). Factors influencing ELD teachers’ sensemaking processes were explored. The findings of the current study indicate the ELD teachers’ interpretation and implementation of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies are influenced by their professional training, especially through college degree programs and professional conferences. Additionally, their interpretation and implementation of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies are influenced by school administrators and professional colleagues.

On the surface level, the general findings seem to suggest that ELD teachers have an accurate understanding of the CAHSEE instructional policies and are appropriately implementing the CAHSEE instructional policies. Also, the findings seem to suggest an appropriate amount of sensegiving as the ELD teachers make sense of the instructional policies. Yet, as indicated in previous research (Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Spillane et



al., 2002), the ELD teachers are not implementing the policies as intended by the policy makers. This lack of implementation becomes clearer as the current study's subquestions are addressed. The findings of the study show that some of the ELD teachers' interpretations and implementations of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies are not in line with the intentions of the policies. The findings also suggest that although there are influences on their interpretation and implementation of policies, the quality of the influences may not be adequate or effective.

### **Subquestion 1**

The first subquestion of this study was, How do ELD teachers interpret and implement the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? The findings of this study, presented in Section 4, indicated that high school ELD teachers interpret CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies by collaborating with colleagues and by evaluating situations and conditions. The findings further suggest that they implement the instructional policies by focusing on reading, writing, and academic language, by using ELD and SDAIE strategies, and by providing direct test preparation. On the other hand, the findings suggest that high school ELD teachers do not implement instructional policies by differentiating the instruction and by using content learning standards.

**ELD teachers interpret instructional policies by collaborating with colleagues.** Glickman et al. (2004) argued that successful schools have teachers who enjoy working together as they accomplish their goals through collective action and shared purpose. Teachers are also more likely to internalize learning when there is collaborative experimentation, inquiry, and discussion (Levine & Marcus, 2007). The

collaborative efforts of teachers focusing on instruction and student achievement are important to teacher sensemaking, because sensemaking requires the sharing of information through formal and informal interactions (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Louis et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). Four of the participants discussed collaboration with specific colleagues such as instructional coaches and department chairs. Teacher 1 explained the collaboration with a CAHSEE specialist who was also an ELD teacher. Teacher 5 described ELD department collaboration as professional, friendly, and a time to discuss individual students. Also, Teacher 6 described ELD collaboration through the venue of CATESOL where groups work together and there is the dissemination of research on second language acquisition.

Although all the participants discussed collaborative efforts with colleagues, most do not collaborate regularly with other ELD teachers. Five of the participants described their collaborating mainly with other subject area groups such as English departments and Special Education departments. This factor may be contributing to the problem in which the implementation of policy does not match the intent of the policy (Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002,) because the shared purposes of other department members may not be the same as the purposes of ELD teachers. For example, Teacher 2 described how she collaborates with a grade 10 teacher but without much collaboration about the CAHSEE. Teacher 8 also commented that “there isn’t a whole lot of discussion of ELD” at his school.

**ELD teachers interpret instructional policies by evaluating situations and conditions.** Parris and Vickers (2005) argued that members of an organization use

sensemaking processes to understand the nature of an organization, identify problems and possible solutions, and evaluate whether or not an organization is doing well. Spillane et al (2002) concluded teachers view reforms through the lens of personal practice. This perspective is evidenced in the current study by how the participants evaluated situations and conditions by referring to specific problems in relation to policy and instructional practices. For example, 5 of the participants brought up the need for committed ELD teachers and how this need affects their teaching environments. All of the participants also discussed the need for more focus on ELD issues and strategies at CAHSEE trainings. This apparent lack of training in teaching CAHSEE skills may have influenced the teachers' abilities to determine whether or not their students are prepared to pass the CAHSEE, which is another problem situation brought up by all of the participants.

**ELD teachers implement instructional policies by focusing on reading, writing, and academic language.** Lee and Krashen (2002) argued that better writers focus on content and organization during revision and that reading contributes more to improved writing competence than the process of writing. All of the participants focus on reading, writing, and academic language to prepare English learners for the CAHSEE. This finding was further supported with the submission of artifacts by 6 of the teachers showing evidence of utilizing various reading and writing strategies as well as academic vocabulary in their lesson plans.

Spillane et al. (2002) noted, "Even teachers who used the same language (e.g., reading strategies) did not have the same ideas about revising reading instruction" (p. 397). Similarly, there are differences among the participants of the current study in how

they view the writing component of the CAHSEE. For example, Teacher 8, who focused on the CAHSEE in graduate studies, explained that the essay is worth 20% of the overall CAHSEE score and that about 20 of the multiple choice questions are based on writing strategies. Teacher 4 prepares the students by teaching the basic components of the five-paragraph essay and developing a thesis. Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 use writing to determine the students' levels of preparedness for the CAHSEE, although Teacher 1 did mention that it does not always help. Teacher 2 mentioned during a follow-up interview that she was not sure whether or not the CAHSEE included a writing component.

**ELD teachers implement instructional policies by using ELD and SDAIE strategies.** Although only 3 of the participants referred to using ELD and SDAIE strategies in the interviews, 5 of the eight submitted evidence of using ELD and SDAIE strategies in their lesson plans. The ELD and SDAIE strategies included using graphic organizers, employing jigsaw and gallery walks, activating prior knowledge, utilizing visuals, and using structured note taking, and employing scaffolding techniques.

Krashen and Terrel (1983) described the skills of language as being acquired as opposed to learned. They also stressed the use of comprehensible input. Comprehensible input is information which is presented in a way that is meaningful or makes sense to the learner such as presenting information through pictures and gestures. For example, Teacher 8 included the use of a movie with a note taking activity related to a unit of study. Participants' artifacts also showed the use of graphic organizers and the scaffolding of writing prompts. Students also acquire a language through meaningful communication rather than just through textbooks and lectures (Krashen & Terrel, 1983;

Wink, 2004). Güvenç and Ün Açıkgöz (2007) posited that cooperative learning promotes the better use of learning strategies more than traditional teaching. Participants in the current study showed evidence of promoting meaningful communication with gallery walks, sharing and presenting of student projects and oral presentations. They also discussed and showed the use of cooperative learning through the use of jigsaw and gallery walk activities as well as peer tutoring.

**ELD teachers implement instructional policies by providing direct test preparation.** McTighe and O'Connor (2005) recommended teachers use assessments through which students apply their learning and demonstrate their understanding of the learning standards. Teachers should also use strategies that identify problem areas and show the thinking processes of each student (Herman & Baker, 2005). Half of the participants refer to previous exam and pretest scores to inform their instruction. They also mentioned using the scores to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their students. For instance, Teacher 1 looks at previous CAHSEE and CST scores to identify the students' strengths and weaknesses, and Teacher 6 uses preassessments to determine the proficiency levels of the students.

Most of the participants also spoke of and submitted artifacts showing how they directly implement test preparation by utilizing CAHSEE preparation booklets, using released test questions, and explaining the details of the CAHSEE to their students. However, providing direct test preparation using preparation booklets and released test questions does not necessarily adequately prepare students for the CAHSEE. Lewbel and Hibbard (2001) argued that “the goal is not to teach students to pass tests but to teach

them to apply deep conceptual understanding of content” (p. 18). They further argued the use of textbooks, prepackaged lessons, and skill-and-drill do not work without true student engagement. Additionally, WestEd (2003) warned that using only rote practice approaches with exam remediation has not proven successful.

**ELD teachers do not necessarily implement instructional policies by differentiating the instruction.** The *California Standards of the Teaching Profession* (CDE, 1997) requires teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of students. Haworth et al. (2006) argued, “Skilful teaching of English learners requires the ability to modify the teaching environment to allow the acquisition of language” (p. 307). Zhang and Sternberg (2002) suggested rather than change students’ thinking processes, teachers may have more success changing the instructional approach to capitalize on students’ backgrounds and strengths. Most of the participants in the current study discussed in their interviews how they differentiate and adapt their instruction to meet the needs of their students by providing instruction geared toward the students’ levels of English and by providing individual feedback. Yet, only 2 of the participants, Teacher 5 and Teacher 6, submitted artifacts showing evidence of differentiating the instruction. This discrepancy between the interviews and the artifacts is similar to the conclusion of Picklo and Christenson (2005). They suggested that teachers do not necessarily utilize a wide variety of instructional strategies to better meet individual needs of struggling students and for students who do not pass the tests.

**ELD teachers do not necessarily implement instructional policies by using content learning standards that are related to the CAHSEE or ELD.** The *California*

*Standards of the Teaching Profession* (CDE, 1997) explains that teachers establish and communicate learning goals for all students through the use of subject matter standards. Stiggins and Chappuis (2006) contended that assessment is successful when it is standards based and integrated into daily classroom instruction. Nichols (2003) emphasized that a standards-based approach to learning with clear benchmarks is essential to the success of students on high school exit exams. Half of the participants discussed using content learning standards in their instruction. Yet, only 2 of these 4 participants mentioned the use of ELD proficiency standards, and 2 mentioned the specific focus on the content standards that are represented on the CAHSEE. As far as the submission of artifacts, only 2 of the participants submitted artifacts showing the use of content learning standards. Even then, Teacher 2 was the only participant to list ELD learning standards within a lesson plan.

### **Subquestion 2**

The second subquestion of this study was, What are the underlying themes and contexts that influence the ELD teachers' sensemaking processes? This subquestion may be viewed through the lens of sensegiving. Maitlis (2005) defined sensegiving as an attempt "to influence others' understanding of an issue" (p. 21). The findings of this study, presented in Section 4, indicated that high school ELD teachers sensemaking processes are influenced by their professional training, their school administrators, and their colleagues.

**ELD teachers are influenced by professional training.** Seven of the 8 participants described college degree programs and professional conferences as the main

source of professional development specific to ELD and CAHSEE instruction. In fact, 5 of the participants received Masters Degrees specializing in English language learning. Yet, the participants do not view all of the training as positive. As previously mentioned in the current study, all of the participants discussed the need for more focus on ELD issues and strategies at trainings. For instance, much of their professional development was not based on the prior knowledge and experience of the teachers as recommended by Hatch et al. (2005) and Siegel (2005). Teacher 2 highlighted this need when she explained that ELD and SDAIE strategies were not modeled and professors incorrectly assumed that she had previous knowledge and experience with SDAIE strategies. She also shared that there is not enough modeling of effective instructional strategies in her school district's trainings. Other teachers explained that their school and district level trainings are vague and are not appropriate for their specific instructional needs. Teacher 5 shared, "I'm not impressed by the professional development. It's one size fits all, they like to claim professional development is good from grades K-12 for all subjects but it's not." Teacher 7 drove this point home when she discussed how her district's professional development has been a waste of time in that they present information that is already common knowledge. She made the suggestion to "come up with some good stuff and strategies. Give me something I can use." Teacher 8 even went so far as to state that "there has not been a whole lot of formal training in terms of passing the CAHSEE."

On the other hand, 5 of the 8 participants discussed the positive aspects of participating in conferences and workshops offered through professional organizations that offer training specific to their instructional needs. Some of the specific workshops



and conferences included CATESOL conferences, Steven Krashen workshops, National Association of Foreign Student Advisers workshops, Kagan Cooperative Learning training, Multidistrict Teacher Training Institute at the Los Angeles County Office of Education, UCLA Literature project for ELD, and the San Diego Writing Project. Teacher 5, who attends about 15 conferences a year through dozens of organizations, stated that they are the best sources of professional development.

**ELD teachers are influenced by school administrators.** Coburn (2005) contended that administrators affect instructional practices through their influence on the teachers' interpretations of policy. More specifically, Anderson (2004) found there was more influence by the principal over teacher leaders than there was with teacher leaders on principals. Seven of the participants described the influence from their administrators in that they are required to meet on a weekly basis with other teachers in department meetings and PLCs. Teacher 2 also submitted a lesson plan using a template that all the teachers are required to submit to the principal on a weekly basis. The template requires citing the content standards, ELD standards, and how the lessons will prepare students for the CSTs. Teacher 6 specifically shared that his principal influences his decision making by asking "How will it help the kids?" He later shared a criticism when he spoke about CAHSEE trainings when he mentioned that the focus of the district trainings is more on the CST than the CAHSEE because of the monetary consequences.

Klein et al. (2006) explained that the perspectives of sensemaking may differ between administrators and teachers in that the teachers may interpret data based on the perspective of classroom instruction, while administrators may interpret the data based on

the perspective of textbook or program use. This type of difference is seen in the criticism of 2 participants. Teacher 5 explained that he thinks his administration wants the students to look good on tests, and this will be done through test preparation handouts. Yet, he argued that good test scores are a result of effective instruction rather than on handouts, “They probably fail to realize that a test is a byproduct, it’s not the goal. If I do a good job teaching they will learn the necessary skills and information to pass the test.” Teacher 7 also disagreed with her administration’s directives to use prepackaged instructional programs. She stated that they wanted teachers to use the same prepackaged program across the district. She then argued that she should not and would not because of her students’ high pass rate on the CAHSEE as compared to other students in the district. The teachers’ arguments to implement instructional practices that are effective rather than use instructional programs that have not proven effective in their classrooms is supported in previous literature. Hatch et al. (2005) advocated for change in instructional practices to meet the needs of English learners rather than change in the students’ practices to fit the prescribed curriculum.

**ELD teachers may be influenced by and may also influence their colleagues.**

Teachers construct knowledge and interpret policy through both formal and informal conversations and interactions (Bielenberg & Fillmore, 2004; Coburn, 2005, Gabriel, 2005; Louis et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). The findings of this current study indicate various levels of effectiveness in terms of interaction among colleagues. Three of the participants discussed the sensegiving of colleagues but at various degrees of influence and effectiveness. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 discussed the role of instructional coaches.

Teacher 1 explained that a district CAHSEE specialist lead workshops and gave presentations about the CAHSEE, but Teacher 2 stated that an instructional coach only taught her what she already learned in a credential program. Teacher 5 mentioned the influence from his department chair in that his department chair gives suggestions, not mandates, concerning CAHSEE instruction.

The influence of veteran teachers is another aspect of collegial influence.

Teachers at all levels of expertise can learn and be transformed through their own actions and the actions of the other teachers (Buysse et al., 2003). Also, novice teachers may acquire more advanced learning processes and leadership skills through collaboration with experienced teachers (Gatbonton, 2008). The findings of this current study indicate veteran teachers may influence many of their teacher colleagues. For example, Teacher 5, who has 44 years of teacher experience, provides sensegiving by sharing a SDAIE handbook with fellow staff members. The handbook, which is made available online, includes techniques, strategies, and suggestions for teachers of English learners. Teacher 6, who has 30 years of teaching experience, provides sensegiving when developing and presenting workshops for the Beginning Teacher and Support Assessment (BTSA) program workshops and Cross cultural , Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) certification trainings.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study is significant for several reasons. First, the results of the study may help local educators develop concrete applications of sensemaking that can improve the interpretation and implementation of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policy. For

example, the study provides insight on the possible utilization of Coburn's (2005) recommendations for shaping teacher sensemaking by defining the reforms and framing the boundaries as teachers interpret and construct understanding of the policy. The participants of the current study brought up the need for more focus on ELD issues and strategies within their professional trainings related to the CAHSEE. Framing CAHSEE professional development around ELD issues and strategies may help ELD teachers better understand the CAHSEE and specifically prepare their English learner students for the CAHSEE. It may also lead to the identification of processes that will enable ELD teachers to have a better understanding and more control of policy implementation as they consider exit exam instructional strategies. This type of focus may also provide the catalyst needed to close the CAHSEE achievement gap for English learners.

Second, the current study shed light on some of the resources ELD teachers use to make sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies as they interpret it and put it into practice. It also provided a better understanding of the processes teachers use to interpret the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies, how teachers make decisions about the implementation of the policies, and the underlying themes and contexts that influence the teachers' sensemaking processes. For instance, the participants participate in collegial collaboration at various degrees as a means to interpret CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. They also evaluate information related to CAHSEE and ELD instructional policy by identifying problems, suggesting solutions, and drawing conclusions. Additionally, the participants implement the instructional policies by providing instruction in reading, writing, and academic language as well as provide direct test

preparation to their students. Most of the participants also discussed how they differentiate their instruction based on the students' proficiency levels of English and reading. The participants also discussed their professional training, school administrators, and colleagues as influences on their sensemaking processes. On the other hand, the results also indicated that ELD teachers are not necessarily implementing differentiation in their lesson plans nor are they necessarily basing their lesson plans on specific content learning standards. This information may lead to the creation and reformation of professional development programs that utilize effective processes of sensemaking focused on the contexts and needs of ELD teachers and their students. Possible reformations of professional development that utilize the effective processes of sensemaking are discussed later in the recommendations for action.

The implications for positive social change include a better understanding of teacher sensemaking and its potential to transform professional development, improve teacher quality, and increase student achievement, especially for English learners. The results of the study provide information which may help education policy makers and administrators gain an understanding of how to better communicate and facilitate the implementation of instructional policy as related to the achievement gap in exit exams. Further, staff developers and teacher trainers may also gain a better understanding of how to effectively facilitate the sensemaking processes of teachers based on the insights and recommendations of the participants of this study.

### **Recommendations for Action**

A review of the previous literature showed teachers construct knowledge and interpret policy through both formal and informal conversations and interactions (Bielenberg & Fillmore, 2004; Coburn, 2005, Gabriel, 2005; Louis et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2002), and it highlighted the need for professional development programs that utilize effective sensemaking processes (i.e., Coburn, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). Additionally, Louis et al. (2005) contended if teachers have more control in the formation and implementation of policies they will be less resistant to the policies. Yet, none of the previous studies indicated applications of sensemaking processes that may be replicated in school sites. The purpose of these recommendations for action is to promote effective sensemaking processes that may be utilized in the creation or reformation of professional development programs as related to ELD teachers and the achievement of their students on exit exams.

The implications of this study have lead to the following recommendations. Some of the recommendations are directly related to the implications, while other recommendations are considered for the improvement of the sensemaking processes of ELD teachers in the context of a comprehensive professional development program. The recommendations for action are based in the cognitive framework developed by Spillane et al. (2002). The authors argued that failure in policy implementation may be avoided by creating clear policy outcomes, adequately supervising the implementation toward the outcomes, clearly defining responsibilities, and building capacity for the teachers to change behaviors. The recommendations for action are also based on the theoretical

framework of sensegiving, factors influencing ELD teachers' sensemaking. Coburn (2005) contended that administrators affect instructional practices through their influence on the teachers' interpretations of policy. Coburn also argued that school leaders mediate teachers' connections to policy and that principals should be trained to better collaborate and participate in sensemaking with the teachers.

### **Create Clear Outcomes**

A successful professional development program should have clear outcomes based on standards for the teaching profession as well as on data analysis that will be used to differentiate the instruction for English learners. Effective professional development is driven by results, based on teaching standards, and embedded in the job (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005b; NSDC, 2008). Providing clear outcomes in a professional development program will help teachers identify the significance of instructional policy and supply concrete reasons for the time spent in professional development.

**Create clear outcomes based on professional standards.** It is evident that a desired outcome is raising the achievement rate of English learners on the CAHSEE. However, this student outcome may be more effectively met by focusing on the outcomes of the teachers. Focusing on what teachers should know and be able to do should help teachers identify the significance of instructional policy. Professional development aligned to professional standards of teaching promises to improve teacher quality and student achievement. Teacher learning may be enhanced through the integration of the *California Standards of the Teaching Profession* (CDE, 1997) into PLCs. Hirsh

(Laureate Education, Inc., 2005b) and the National Staff Development Council (2008) discussed teaching standards as a necessary attribute of effective professional development. The following recommendations on creating clear outcomes are directly related to the *California Standards of the Teaching Profession*. Little (2002) argued that teachers' capacity for reform and the significance of those reforms as viewed by the teachers should be considered. Focusing on what teachers should know and be able to do, the teaching standards should help teachers identify the significance of reforms and instructional policy. The *California Standards of the Teaching Profession* promotes the use of assessment data to inform instruction and encourages a variety of strategies to meet the diverse needs of students.

**Create clear outcomes based on data analysis.** Administrators and teacher trainers should provide professional development on effectively collecting and analyzing assessment data on an on-going basis. Researchers of previous studies recommended that teachers receive support and training in collecting, accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and interpreting data (Pulliam, 2005; Valli & Hawley, 2002). Subsequently, decisions about instructional practices may be made through collaboration about the data. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) argued that the use of data, as it relates to professional development, is an on-going iterative process. This perspective is quite different from the traditional professional development plan of setting a definitive goal and finished product within a set time period. The traditional paradigm does not allow for ongoing inquiry and reformations. Thus, data analysis should be a sustained inquiry toward the reformation of education within the contexts of the teachers' experiences and classes. Specific to the



current study, training should be an on-going process of using data to inform instruction related to CAHSEE instruction. This training will address a need that arose from the current study's results, the improvement of the teachers' ability to determine when English learners are ready to pass the CAHSEE.

**Minimize administrative sensegiving during data analysis.** The analysis of data will be more effective if data is chosen and procedures are developed to ensure the process is efficient enough for educational decision making. Klein et al. (2006) argued that researchers must be able to explore and analyze data without the influence of someone else's interpretations (p. 71). With this argument in mind, teachers should be allowed to explore data without preconceived interpretations or sensegiving from administrators; otherwise the sensemaking of teachers may be hindered. For example, 2 of the participants shared their frustration with the sensegiving efforts of their administrators. Both of them shared their perspectives of how their administrator's diminish the importance and effectiveness of their teaching abilities. Teacher 5 described how administrators want the students to look good on tests by using test preparation handouts without much consideration of teaching abilities. Teacher 7 also disagreed with an administration's directives to use prepackaged instructional programs like the other teachers in the district, although her students' pass rates on the CAHSEE are higher compared to other students in the district. The issues of appropriately using administrative sensegiving and allowing more teacher sensegiving from teachers will be discussed later.

**Use the data to differentiate the instruction.** The results of the current study indicate ELD teachers do not necessarily implement instructional policies by differentiating the instruction. Although most of the participants discussed differentiating and adapting the instruction to meet the needs of their students, only 2 of the participants, submitted artifacts showing evidence of differentiating the instruction. In the interviews, the participants described differentiation as providing instruction geared toward the students' levels of English, reading, and writing. The assumption is that these levels are in comparison to the general student population of English proficient students. However, Ramirez and Carpenter (2005) concluded that generalized assumptions based on differences between subgroups are neither valid nor helpful. The authors suggested teachers should focus more on the differences of subgroups within a major group, such as the English learner group, much more than differences between major groups because what works for one group may not necessarily work for another. This suggestion is yet another reason why it is important to provide CAHSEE training focused specifically on ELD instruction as suggested by the participants of the current study. ELD teachers may subsequently learn and utilize a wider variety of instructional strategies to better meet the unique individual needs of the students as was recommended by Picklo and Christenson (2005).

### **Supervise the Implementation Toward the Clear Outcomes**

Coburn (2005) contended that administrators affect instructional practices through their influence on the teachers' interpretations of policy. Coburn also argued that school leaders mediate teachers' connections to policy and that principals should be trained to

better collaborate and participate in sensemaking with the teachers. School administrators may effectively guide sensemaking processes to achieve positive outcomes in English learner achievement on the CAHSEE by administering specific approaches. Maitlis (2005) defined guided sensemaking as sensemaking that is controlled and animated (p. 32). Coburn recommended shaping teacher sensemaking by defining the reforms and framing the boundaries as teachers interpret and construct understanding of the policy. So, administrators may effectively guide and shape the sensemaking processes of ELD teachers by ensuring standards-based approaches to instruction and ensuring the use of appropriate ELD and SDAIE strategies.

**Ensure the use of standards-based approaches.** The current study's results indicate that teachers are not necessarily basing lessons on the appropriate learning standards. Half of the participants discussed the use of content learning standards in their lesson planning. Yet, only 2 mentioned the use of ELD proficiency standards, and 2 mentioned using specific content standards that are represented on the CAHSEE. As far as the submission of artifacts, only 2 of the participants submitted artifacts showing the use of content learning standards. Even then, Teacher 2 was the only participant to show ELD learning standards within a lesson plan. An approach to learning developed from state content standards is essential to the success of students on high school exit exams (Nichols, 2003). In other words, the lesson plans and instructional strategies must focus on the standards that are represented in the exit exam. The lesson plans of ELD teachers should also link with ELD learning standards.

Most of the participants spoke of and submitted artifacts exhibiting how they directly implement test preparation by utilizing CAHSEE preparation booklets, using released test questions, and explaining the details of the CAHSEE to their students. However, providing direct test preparation using preparation booklets and released test questions does not necessarily prepare students for the CAHSEE. WestEd (2003) warned that using only rote practice approaches with exam remediation has not proven successful. Lewbel and Hibbard (2001) argued the use of textbooks, prepackaged lessons, and skill-and-drill does not work without true student engagement. True student engagement may be encouraged with the use of authentic performance tasks that are represented in the learning standards. For example, authentic performance tasks use verbs “that represent critical thinking skills such as *sequence, infer, classify, predict, compare and contrast, evaluate, and judge*” (Lewbel & Hibbard, 2001, p. 18, italics in original). Teachers and students may identify these standards-based, performance task terms in the released test questions and test preparation booklets. As such, authentic performance tasks are represented in the content learning standards of the CAHSEE.

**Ensure the use of ELD and SDAIE strategies.** Three of the participants in the current study referred to using ELD and SDAIE strategies in the interviews, and 5 submitted evidence of using ELD and SDAIE strategies in their lesson plans. However, administrators and teacher trainers should not assume an ELD teacher knows all about ELD and SDAIE strategies simply because they completed a credential program. Teacher 2 shared an experience of how professors incorrectly assumed that she had previous knowledge and experience with SDAIE strategies. Administrators and teacher

trainers should also ensure the ELD and SDAIE strategies are appropriate for CAHSEE preparation. Participants explained that their school and district level trainings are vague and are not appropriate for their specific instructional needs, especially as they relate to CAHSEE instruction for English learners. Administrators can ensure the appropriate use of ELD and SDAIE strategies in CAHSEE instruction by requiring the submission of specific, detailed lesson plans, as is currently required at the school of Teacher 2. This requirement will also help ensure teachers are implementing the instructional policies as originally intended.

### **Clearly Define Roles and Responsibilities through PLCs**

The working definition of a PLC for this study is individuals coming together as a group to reflectively collaborate, inquire, and learn around a shared purpose. Including PLCs in a professional development program may positively impact the sensemaking of ELD teachers by providing various types of collaboration focused on shared purposes and by defining the roles and responsibilities of the members in a PLC based on their areas of expertise. Supovitz and Christman (2005) expressed the importance of clarifying the authority and roles of all members while allowing teacher autonomy and authentic collaboration.

### **Promote formal and informal collaboration among teachers through PLCs.**

Effective sensemaking requires the sharing of information through both formal and informal interactions (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Louis et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). Furthermore, teachers construct knowledge and interpret policy through both formal and informal conversations and interactions (Bielenberg & Fillmore, 2004; Coburn, 2005,

Gabriel, 2005; Louis et al., 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). PLCs may be developed and utilized to achieve these purposes. It is important to note that PLCs should be more than just reviewing and analyzing the data and much more than completing formalized training sessions. Klein et al. (2006) depicted sensemaking as more of a social activity than an individual activity. Glickman et al. (2004) also argued that successful schools have teachers who enjoy working together as they accomplish their goals through collective action and shared purpose. The informal collaborative efforts may increase the levels of honesty and depth of discussion in a more relaxed and safe environment. It may also lead to, as Teacher 5 described, a “chummy group” of teachers. For example, simply providing coffee to teachers and allowing them to discuss issues over coffee develops a safe and effective space for community collaboration (Laksov et al., 2008). Providing food and drinks also encourages and facilitates group interaction (Yukl, 2002).

**Develop PLCs around shared purposes.** The results of the current study indicate collaboration as an area of needed improvement. The participants discussed collaborative efforts with colleagues. Yet, most do not collaborate regularly with other ELD teachers. For example, 3 of the participants described how they rarely participate in collaboration on CAHSEE and ELD issues. This factor may be contributing to the problem in which the implementation of policy does not match the intent of the policy (Picklo & Christenson, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002) because the shared purposes of members from other departments may not be the same as the purposes of ELD teachers. Teachers need the opportunity to work together through collective action and shared purposes (Glickman et al., 2004). The apparent disconnect among purposes may be one

reason why there are differences among the participants of the current study in how they view the writing component of the CAHSEE including 1 teacher who did not know if the CAHSEE included a writing component.

The differences in shared purposes may have also led to the frustration of the current study's participants about the lack of focus on ELD issues and strategies in respect to CAHSEE trainings. This apparent lack of training in teaching CAHSEE skills may have influenced the teachers' abilities to determine whether or not their students are prepared to pass the CAHSEE, which is another problem situation brought up by all of the participants. Providing PLCs with shared purposes focused specifically on ELD and CAHSEE instruction will ultimately improve instructional practices and the achievement of English learners on the CAHSEE. Grogan (2001) argued there must be the capacity of the teachers and buy-in of the teachers to skillfully prepare students for an exit exam. Teachers should be integrally involved in the planning of instruction and come to an understanding of the reasons and research behind the instructional strategies. Buysse et al. (2003) expressed a "need for more effective methods of translating research findings into useful policies and practices" (p. 263). Also, Thompson (2007) suggested providing ongoing professional development to teachers focusing specifically on test taking strategies, test anxiety and stereotype threat. Such a focus in a PLC could assist ELD teachers in clarifying the significance of the achievement gap and generating solutions to the problem. Providing a PLC focusing on both ELD and CAHSEE instruction will provide opportunities for teachers to buy-in to policy, collaborate on effective ELD and

CAHSEE instructional practices, and develop their capacity to prepare students for the CAHSEE.

**Utilize the expertise of veteran ELD teachers.** Teachers of various levels of experience can benefit from collaboration. Buysse et al. (2003) argued that teachers at all levels of expertise can learn and be transformed through each other's actions. For instance, veteran teachers may actually be doing more sensegiving than many formal leaders. The data of the current study shows that participants who are the veteran teachers provide training through various venues such as district trainings, professional conferences, universities, and county offices of education. The veteran teacher participants also have graduate level training and are active members of professional organizations that are specifically geared toward English language learning. So, veteran teachers may be effective sensegiving influences, especially considering their length of experience and amount of training. Gatbonton (2008) pointed out that novice teachers may acquire more advanced learning processes and leadership skills through collaboration with experienced teachers. It should also be noted, if veteran teachers are to be utilized, there must be a pool of veteran teachers from which to recruit them. As such, there must be the retention of committed ELD teachers as was highlighted in the results of the current study.

One way to utilize and retain veteran ELD teachers is to use them as instructional coaches. As suggested by the data, veteran ELD teachers tend to be more trained and participate in professional organizations that are geared specifically for teachers of English learners. Utilizing veteran ELD teachers as instructional coaches will better



guarantee that instructional coaches are up to date on instructional research and policies, especially in the area of ELD instruction. Using veteran teachers as instructional coaches is important given the comments by 2 of the current study's participants who both have less than 10 years of ELD teaching experience. Teacher 1 discussed the positive training and collaboration she received from a CAHSEE instructional coach who was also an ELD teacher. Teacher 2, on the other hand, mentioned how an instructional coach did not teach her anything new or in more depth than what she learned in a credential program. Specific recommendations for building leadership capacity of veteran teachers are presented later.

### **Build Capacity for ELD Teachers to Change Behaviors**

Building capacity for positive change among ELD teachers will enable ELD teachers to have a better understanding and more control of policy implementation as they consider exit exam instructional strategies. Developing a better understanding of policies and giving more control of policy implementation to teachers will result in teachers being less resistant to policies and more active in the implementation of policies. Building this kind of capacity can result in positive educational change and promote higher levels of student achievement.

**Build the capacity for improved ELD and CAHSEE instruction through reflection.** Capacity should be built for teachers and buy-in of teachers developed to effectively prepare students for an exit exam (Grogan, 2001). Teachers should be directly involved in the planning of instruction and come to an understanding of the reasons behind instructional strategies rather than just going through the motions of

covering the curriculum as mandated by administrators. Building this type of teacher involvement may be accomplished by basing professional development on the prior knowledge and experiences of the teachers as suggested by past researchers (Dumbrabs, 2007; Hatch et al., 2005; Muir & Beswick, 2007; Siegel, 2005; Tillema & van der Westhuizen, 2006). Professional development programs should include opportunities for teachers to reflect on the past while assessing the underlying assumptions of their memories (Lambert, 2002). For instance, the participants reflected on the integration of reading, writing, and academic vocabulary into their CAHSEE instruction, the effectiveness of their prior training experiences, problems they encountered, and the influences that affected their decision making. Yet, the opportunity for this type of reflection was not necessarily planned or implemented during formal professional development.

Reflection is necessary to build capacity. SEMERCÍ (2007) pointed out that teachers connect theory with practice through the process of reflection. If teachers evaluate a situation by stating a problem and solution, they should be allowed the opportunity to link the problem and solution to their prior experiences. As the previous sensemaking research suggested, people make sense of a situation by offering problems and solutions while linking them to personal experiences (Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Parris & Vickers, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002). The participants of this current study did just that as they identified problems and offered possible solutions. Reflective activities facilitate the framing of teachers' thinking and learning as they converse and collaborate (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005a; Zimmerman, 2000). As such, teachers should be

allowed and encouraged to experience the reflective process as outlined by Schön, which is also similar to the processes of sensemaking: allow teachers to be surprised and confused, allow teachers to reflect on the situation or phenomena based on prior experiences, and allow them to carry out an experiment related to issues at hand (p. 68). Reflection may also lead to the implementation of instructional policy through operational learning and conceptual learning (Weinbaum et al., 2004, p. 23) in that the teachers may consider the procedures outlined in policy and reflect upon why the policy was written.

**Build leadership capacity among all ELD teachers.** Lambert (2002) defined leadership as “being responsible for the learning of colleagues” (p. 38). Spillane (2002) defined leadership as the practice of the individuals acting and interacting together, while Harris argued leadership is a shared entity (Laureate Education, Inc., 2005a). As such, all ELD teachers should be given the opportunity to share in and participate in leadership related to ELD and CAHSEE policy. Anderson (2004) studied the perceptions of teacher leaders and principals about teacher leadership and the influence between teacher leaders and principals. The researcher concluded that formal teacher leadership roles may impede other informal teacher leadership roles. Anderson also found there was more principal influence over teacher leaders than there was with teacher leaders on principals. As such, administrators should understand that leadership is not carried out by only those with official titles. Administrators should consider the possible roles and responsibilities of both formal and informal teacher leaders. Building teacher leadership requires the

participation of all teachers as they take on various roles and responsibilities in the quest of shared goals and purposes.

Teacher leadership should also include the opportunity to actively participate through dialogue, creativity, and vision development. Laksov et al. (2008) argued that teachers learn when they are allowed to voice their understandings, originate initiatives from within the department, formulate their own visions, and use dialogue. To encourage active teacher leadership, administrators should identify and utilize the best practices among their teachers as evidenced by Teacher 7 and her curriculum. As previously discussed, Teacher 7 described the frustration with administrators' requests to change her curriculum and instruction in order to be the same as the other ELD classes, although the CAHSEE pass rates of her students are higher than the other classes. As previously discussed, this also is a means of utilizing the expertise and leadership of veteran ELD teachers. Allowing teachers, such as Teacher 7, to voice and originate initiatives will build leadership and buy-in among the teachers, especially in terms of policy development and implementation.

### **Dissemination of the Results**

The results of the current study and the recommendations for action are meant to help education policy makers and administrators gain an understanding of how to better communicate and facilitate the implementation of instructional policy as related to the achievement gap in exit exams. Further, administrators and teacher trainers may gain a better understanding of how to effectively facilitate the sensemaking processes of teachers. There are multiple ways of how the results may be disseminated. Considering

CATESOL's willingness to participate as a community partner in the research study, the results will be presented at the statewide CATESOL Annual Conference as well as various CATESOL regional conferences. Summaries of the results will also be published in *The CATESOL News*. The results may also be submitted for publication to professionally refereed educational journals in which I have previously published articles such as *The CATESOL Journal*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, and *The Clearing House*. Additionally, the results may be presented to teachers and administrators at school and district level professional development events. I also plan on submitting an executive summary of the results and recommendations for action to my school principal.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

In this phenomenological study, I explored and described the shared experiences of high school ELD teachers making sense of CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies. A couple of themes emerged during the analysis of data that should be studied in more depth. The participants of the study were influenced by their credentialing and graduate programs. Some expressed positive perspectives of their program, while others expressed areas for improvement in their programs. The efficacy of teacher training programs in universities should be studied, especially in terms of preparing teachers to teach English learners. The role and influence of instructional coaches also emerged in the study prompting a research question for another study: How do instructional coaches influence ELD teachers and to what extent do they influence ELD teachers' instructional practices?

Another theme that emerged from the data was the use, including the mandated use, of prepackaged test preparation programs. Again, concerns were expressed by a few of the participants that bring up research questions for future studies: (a) How effective are prepackaged test preparation programs toward the achievement of English learners? and (b) How effective are prepackaged test preparation programs compared to teacher created test preparation curriculum? This issue also lends itself to another future study that identifies and describes the best practices of teachers whose English learners have demonstrated significant improvement in exam scores.

The research participants were limited to high school ELD teachers who taught in California and were members of the professional organization, CATESOL. This study may be expanded to include high school ELD teachers who are members of other organizations or who teach in states other than California. Expanding the study to a broader population will provide a greater perspective about how ELD teachers make sense of exit exam instructional policies. Additionally, this study may be replicated as a longitudinal study that tracks the perceptions and experiences of high school ELD teachers over an extended period of time. An additional future study along the same topic may be to explore and describe the role of professional organizations in the professional development of ELD teachers. All of the aforementioned recommendations for further study will add to the growing body of research on English language acquisition and instruction.

### **Reflection on the Experience**

I have been in secondary education for 18 years and involved in ELD instruction for 11 years. During that time, I have served as a teacher leader in various positions at high schools and as an assistant principal of a high school. Additionally, I have been actively involved with the CATESOL organization for 7 years. As such, I have professional experience as a teacher, teacher trainer, presenter, and consultant in the areas of English language acquisition and exit exam preparation. As a result, I had some preconceived ideas and biases about ELD instruction and the CAHSEE based on my experiences and professional training. To address this issue, I developed a list of possible codes and themes that I thought would emerge from the data before beginning the study as a way to identify preconceptions and biases. I also kept my opinions and comments to myself while conducting the interviews to allow the participants' personal experiences and perceptions to emerge. I accomplished this objective by bracketing my preconceived notions, perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs during the data collection and analysis.

I personally knew several of the participants through my participation in CATESOL. This participation made it easier to establish a good rapport with the participants, but it also created the challenge of bracketing my preconceived ideas about the participants and their involvement with CATESOL. As a result, I am now aware that members of the same professional organization do not necessarily receive the same type of training.

As the interviews were conducted and analyzed, I was surprised at the common themes that emerged that were contrary to my preconceptions. For example, I was surprised to hear the concerns of the participants that they were not receiving CAHSEE training that was focused on ELD instruction. I was equally astonished to learn how little collaboration some of the participants have with other ELD teachers. These findings astounded me considering the achievement gap in CAHSEE pass rates between English learners and English-only students and the mandates to close the gap. I was also surprised to hear some participants openly and honestly criticize their administrators and instructional coaches. As a teacher, I understand their perspectives. However, I also try to understand the perspectives of the administrators and instructional coaches because I have served in those positions. As each interview proceeded, I learned to become a better listener and ask follow-up questions to understand the perspective and personal context of each participant. I also realized while developing the recommendations for action that I was faced with the challenge of balancing the needs of the teachers and their students with the requirements placed on administrators and instructional coaches.

The experience of conducting this phenomenology made me more aware of the human factor involved in education. When I first began developing the study, I focused on the problem of the achievement gap in CAHSEE scores. At first, I thought the scores were mainly influenced by instructional strategies and curriculum. However, through the review of literature and especially through the analysis of the data, I came to understand that humans and human interactions greatly influence the achievement of students.



### **Closing**

Federal legislation (NCLB, 2002) mandated stronger accountability for assessment results (e.g., high-stakes testing) and mandated programs that are to help English learners academically. Specific to English learners, Title 3 of NCLB mandated the implementation of scientifically based programs that help English learners meet the same high academic standards as other students. This mandate resulted in California's requirement that all students, including English learners, in California public high schools must pass the CAHSEE before receiving a diploma (CDE, 2009a). Yet, the growing achievement gap found between English learners and English-only students implies instructional practices are insufficient in closing the academic achievement gap for English learners. This problem is the reason there is a need to understand how ELD teachers make sense of the mandated policies regarding exit exams and the education of English learners.

The significance of this phenomenological study was the development of a better understanding of teacher sensemaking and its potential to transform professional development, improve teacher quality, and increase academic achievement for English learners. High school ELD teachers face a challenging endeavor of simultaneously teaching the English language while adequately preparing students to pass the CAHSEE. Using a phenomenological approach for the research study provided a picture of the experiences, practices, and challenges from the perspective of high school English teachers.

The findings indicated that high school ELD teachers interpret and make decisions about CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies by collaborating with colleagues and by evaluating situations and conditions. The findings also indicated that high school ELD teachers implement the instructional policies by focusing on reading, writing, and academic language, by using ELD and SDAIE strategies, and by providing direct test preparation. The findings further pointed to areas of needed improvement such as High school ELD teachers do not necessarily differentiate the instruction or link their lessons to content learning standards, much less to the ELD learning standards. Additionally, I found through the study that high school ELD teacher's sensemaking are influenced, both positively and negatively, by their professional training, their school administrators, and their colleagues.

The recommendations for action presented in this study are based on prior literature about sensemaking, exit exams, and English language learning. They are also directly linked to the results and findings of the current study. That is, they are linked to the experiences and practices of each ELD teacher who participated. The recommendations promote positive social change by suggesting actions to improve the sensemaking processes of teachers through a comprehensive professional development program and ensure the teachers buy-in to and appropriately implement the educational policies. In turn, the academic achievement of English learners will increase.

A successful professional development program should have clear outcomes based on standards for the teaching profession as well as on data analysis that will be used to differentiate the instruction for English learners. Also, administrators should

remember to keep their influential role as sensegivers in check as not to inadvertently hinder the teachers' sensemaking processes. On the other hand, administrators should also supervise the implementation of instructional policy toward the clear outcomes by ensuring all ELD teachers are distinctly using standards-based approaches as well as specific ELD and SDAIE strategies. A comprehensive professional development program should also clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders through the formation of PLCs. The PLCs, in order to improve the sensemaking processes of ELD teachers, should allow for both formal and informal interactions, be developed around shared purposes, and utilize the expertise of veteran ELD teachers. Finally, to enable ELD teachers to have a better understanding and more control of policy implementation there must be the capacity for ELD teachers to improve ELD and CAHSEE instruction, and there must be the building of leadership capacity among all ELD teachers.

If educators are to close the academic achievement gap for English learners, professional development programs need to be thoughtfully designed to accurately train the ELD teachers to integrate the ELD and CAHSEE instructional policies into a meaningful and effective curricular program. Just as teachers need to know how students learn and process information, administrators, staff developers, and teacher trainers need to know how teachers learn and process information. Administrators and professional development organizers need to consider the messages, frustrations, and recommendations of the participants in this study as well as their own teachers. Professional development organizers should assess the efficacy of their current programs

and create learning atmospheres that are conducive to teacher learning and ultimately the academic achievement of the students. Only then will there be any hope of slowing and finally reversing the academic achievement gap for our English learners.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

Don Sillings, General Manager  
California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL)  
19881 Brookhurst St., Ste. C-133  
Huntington Beach, CA 92646  
catesoldon@gmail.com

November 20, 2009

Dear Mr. Forrest,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Making Sense of Exit Exam Policies: A Phenomenological Study of English Language Development Teachers* within the CATESOL membership and to identify potential participants from the CATESOL membership list. As part of this study, I authorize you to interview and collect artifacts from participants. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Sincerely,

Don Sillings, General Manager  
California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL)  
19881 Brookhurst St., Ste. C-133  
Huntington Beach, CA 92646  
catesoldon@gmail.com

## Appendix B: Letter of Invitation to Participate

Solicitation to Participate in Research  
*Making Sense of Exit Exam Policies: A Phenomenological Study  
of English Language Development Teachers*

Dear Colleague:

My name is Scott Forrest and I am on the editorial advisory board of *The CATESOL Journal* and an assistant principal at Marshall Fundamental Secondary School located in Pasadena, California. I received your name as a potential participant in a research study from the membership list of California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL). This letter is sent to you to solicit your participation in a doctoral study. Before you consider participation in this study, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

I am currently conducting a research study for my Doctorate Degree in Teacher Leadership through Walden University. As a requirement of this degree, I will be conducting a research study on how teachers of English learners interpret and implement instructional policies related to the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE).

I am contacting you to see if you would be willing to participate in this study. The study requires teachers who teach English learners at the high school level. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed and to submit a lesson plan. The interviews will take place at your convenience. Also, the interview will be recorded with your permission and will take approximately 30 minutes. I will send participants a copy of the interview questions prior to conducting the interview.

There are no anticipated physical risks for participating in this study. The only risk involved with is the possibility that your answers to the interview questions may be considered sensitive. Therefore, I will randomly assign a false name for all your responses and your lesson plan to maintain your confidentiality. I would greatly appreciate your help as I investigate how teachers of English learners plan and implement lessons to prepare English learners for the CAHSEE.

If you would like to participate, please read and complete the consent form and return it to me through the mail or e-mail. Also, feel free to contact me with any questions. I will then contact you to set up a time and location for the interview.

Sincerely,  
Scott Forrest  
PO Box 691508; West Hollywood, CA 90069  
scott.forrest@waldenu.edu

## Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM*Making Sense of Exit Exam Policies: A Phenomenological Study  
of English Language Development Teachers*

You are invited to take part in a research study of how teachers of English learners interpret and implement instructional policies. You were chosen for the study because of your membership in CATESOL and your geographic location. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Scott N. Forrest, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. Scott is on the board of directors of CATESOL and on *The CATESOL Journal* Editorial Advisory Board. Additionally, he is an assistant principal in the Pasadena Unified School District.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers of English learners make sense of instructional policy related to the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE).

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Read and sign this consent form.
- Participate in an individual interview, approximately 30 minutes, at a convenient location
- Submit a lesson plan and/or a unit of study outline
- Read and make comments on the accuracy of your transcribed interview

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at CATESOL, at your school, within your school district, or at Walden University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no anticipated physical risks to the participants in this proposed study. The only risk involved with this proposed study is the possibility that your answers to the interview questions may be considered sensitive. Therefore, the researcher will randomly replace your name with a code to all your responses to maintain your confidentiality. The benefit of participating in this study is the results gathered during this study will provide insights

into the experiences of teachers as they implement policy related to English learning and the CAHSEE. The study may provide helpful information used to guide educational policy makers and teacher trainers as they develop instructional policies and the resulting curriculum and professional development programs.

**Compensation:**

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher's name is Scott Forrest. The researcher's faculty advisor is Dr. Marilyn Simon. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via 310-289-1990 or [scott.forrest@waldenu.edu](mailto:scott.forrest@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **12-18-09-0369881** and it expires on **December 17, 2010**.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant	
Date of consent	
Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature	
Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature	

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

## Appendix D: Interview Guide

### *Title of the Study:*

Making Sense of Exit Exam Policies: A Phenomenological Study of English Language Development Teachers

### *Purpose of the Study:*

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore how English Language Development (ELD) teachers make sense of instructional policy related to the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE).

### *Research Question and Subquestions:*

How do high school ELD teachers make sense of the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies? Subquestions include:

1. How do ELD teachers interpret and implement the CAHSEE and ELD instructional policies?
2. What are the underlying themes and contexts that influence the ELD teachers' sensemaking processes?

### Background Information

Current teaching position, including courses taught and grade ranges:

---

Years of teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of ELD teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_

### Constructing Understanding of Instructional Policy

1. Describe any training and professional development in which you have participated to prepare you to teach ELD (a.k.a ESL).
2. Describe any training and professional development in which you have participated to prepare you to teach CAHSEE skills.
3. What was your impression of the effectiveness of the training(s)? What changes, if any, would you make to the training(s)?
4. Talk about the collaboration, if any, between you and other teachers related to ELD and the CAHSEE.



5. How do you decide with whom to collaborate?
6. What information do you consider when developing ELD and CAHSEE lesson plans.

#### Identifying Problems and Solutions in ELD Instruction

7. Explain how you decide what to teach to prepare English learners for the CAHSEE.
8. What challenges have you faced as an ELD teacher preparing students for the CAHSEE?

#### Evaluating the Effectiveness of ELD/CAHSEE Instruction

9. How do you know if English learners are prepared to pass the CAHSEE?
10. Now that you have been an ELD teacher for \_\_\_\_\_ years, what improvements do you think are needed in terms of ELD instruction and preparing English learners for the CAHSEE?
11. If you were asked to mentor a beginning ELD teacher, what would you be sure to tell her or him?

#### Conclusion

Are there any comments or information you would like to share about ELD lesson planning that was not covered in this interview?

Would you be willing to send me a lesson plan and/or a unit of study outline that addresses CAHSEE preparation?

I will transcribe your answers and give you a copy to review before I finalize the study. Remember, I will keep your name confidential.

## Appendix E: Interview Reminder

Dear (Participant's Name):

I just wanted to remind you of our interview date, time, and location.

My records show that we will meet (date) at ( time ) in (location). I am attaching a copy of the interview questions. Please look over each question before our interview. During our interview, I will use the Interview Guide to guide us through the interview.

After the interview, I will transcribe your answers and give you a copy to review before I finalize the study. Remember, I will keep your name confidential.

Thank you for your time and willingness to help with this study.

Sincerely,  
Scott Forrest  
PO Box 691508  
West Hollywood, CA  
scott.forrest@waldenu.edu

## Appendix F: Lesson Plan Submission Guidelines

### Submitting a Lesson Plan

Please submit at least one lesson plan or an outline of a unit that helps English learners prepare for the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE).

- The lesson plan does not need to be in any prescribed format.
- You may attach any materials (e.g., activity sheets, resource materials, etc.) that pertain to the lesson
- Provide a brief explanation of where you got the idea(s) for the lesson plan .
- You may mail or e-mail the lesson plan to Scott Forrest:

PO Box 691508  
West Hollywood, CA 90069  
scott.forrest@waldenu.edu

You may also submit other artifacts you feel will contribute to the research study (e.g., photographs, videos, e-mail, minutes of meetings/trainings, etc.).

Thank you for your participation, help, and support in the research study of how ELD teachers prepare English learners for the CAHSEE.

Scott Forrest  
PO Box 691508  
West Hollywood, CA  
scott.forrest@waldenu.edu

## Appendix G: Sample Transcript

Teacher 1

## Background Information

Current teaching position, including courses taught and grade ranges:

**I teach high school English Language Development. It's grades nine through 12. This year I teach the very beginning students and I also teach Intermediate students.**

Years of teaching experience : **This is my 10<sup>th</sup> year.**

Years of experience teaching English learners: **8 years.**

## Constructing Understanding of Instructional Policy

1. Describe any training and professional development in which you have participated to prepare you to teach ELD (a.k.a ESL).  
**I have a Masters in Literacy Education with a specialization in teaching English to speakers of other languages. I also attend the CATESOL conferences, California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, both the regional and state conferences.**
2. Describe any training and professional development in which you have participated to prepare you to teach CAHSEE skills.  
**Well, officially, I haven't participated in any trainings per se or professional development that's specifically geared toward English learners. But I have learned and been through other conferences or professional development experience activities. Then, I adapt what they use to my needs. For example, the San Diego Area Writing Projects conferences talked about how to teach students to break down a writing prompt for the SAT College Entrance exams. So, I adapted that to my needs to help students, English learners, learn to break down the CAHSEE writing prompt. I also worked with the district CAHSEE specialist. He also put on informational presentations about the CAHSEE. I guess those were actually professional development.**
3. What was your impression of the effectiveness of the training(s)? What changes, if any, would you make to the training(s)?  
**With the exception of working with the district CAHSEE specialist, who happened to be an ELD teacher and also had a Masters in TESOL, other than that his was effective, but the others really did not touch upon teaching**

**English learners in any way. They really need to be more directed towards English language learners.**

Follow-up: Please, give any examples of how they can better direct the training toward English language learners?

**I think, given the levels of English language acquisition, you know, what strategies would help students who were at the beginning levels who are just starting to acquire English. Students, who are perhaps at the Intermediate level of requiring English. Things like that.**

4. Talk about the collaboration, if any, between you and other teachers related to ELD and the CAHSEE.

**Previously, there was another ELD teacher that I worked with. He was the CAHSEE district specialist. We did a lot of our own PLC meetings where we discussed common test questions, vocabulary, how to break down the prompts, things like that. But, now, I work with the English 10 grade level team. They're working on how to prepare their students for the CAHSEE, upcoming CAHSEE in March. So, I sit in on those grade-level meetings, but there isn't anything specific going on right now with ELD teachers. We are all sitting with the English department.**

[I notice this teacher refers to the English 10 grade level team as "they" although this teacher meets with them.]

5. How do you decide with whom to collaborate?

**Right now, I'm working with the English 10 team because they're focusing on the CAHSEE prep. There isn't an actual ELD PLC. Now, everyone works on their own subject levels so I chose to work with the English 10. It was the option I felt would most help my students because my Intermediate students are also enrolled in the Sheltered English 10 class.**

6. What information do you consider when developing ELD and CAHSEE lesson plans?

**I look at basically two things. First, I look at my students. I look at their CELDT levels. Now that I have access to Data Director, I can look at their CAHSEE scores and CST scores. I can look at their individual strengths and weaknesses. Then, I can work on their strengths and bolster the areas that they are weak. I also use the English 10 power standards for most of my Intermediate students are in English 10. I also use AVID strategies. It's part of what I would imagine triage to be, especially with the newcomers. I try to maximize the effect that one lesson can have and go after the area that needs the most attention.**

### Identifying Problems and Solutions in ELD Instruction

7. Explain how you decide what to teach to prepare English learners for the CAHSEE.

**Well (pause) I don't have a real clear picture. I look at the ELD standards, but then I look at what I do know about the CAHSEE. For the newcomers, I focus a lot on vocabulary. The CAHSEE specialist created a list of commonly used question words. So throughout the year, leading up to the CAHSEE, we use those a lot. I focus on main ideas, detail activities, nonfiction reading, and writing summaries.**

[There seems to be a heavy focus on reading, writing, and vocabulary.]

[It's surprising she admits that she doesn't have a clear picture on the students' preparedness for the CAHSEE].

8. What challenges have you faced as an ELD teacher preparing students for the CAHSEE?

**I think, for me, all of the collaboration has been through the English department, and it focuses on students who are mainstreamed. The curriculum hasn't been developed for English learners and there's not really a whole lot of focus on what can I do as an English Language Development Teacher and what I can do to really prepare my students for the CAHSEE so they can pass it the first time.**

### Evaluating the Effectiveness of ELD/CAHSEE Instruction

9. How do you know if English learners are prepared to pass the CAHSEE?

**Well (pause) I can see that they're approaching readiness when I see them using information that we've worked on in class and they incorporate it into their writing. Ultimately, it comes down to their scores. Unfortunately, I don't know until after the fact and then I see their score. But even then, it doesn't always help me because I see students that I just look at their writing and look at their English and think, wow they didn't pass. So, I don't entirely have a 100% picture.**

[She doesn't sound especially confident.]

10. Now that you have been an ELD teacher for 8 years, what improvements do you think are needed in terms of ELD instruction and preparing English learners for the CAHSEE?

**I think just the real lack of curriculum and material for high school aged English learners. The material has to be high interest and relevant to student**

**interest, but it also needs to be tailored to English language acquisition. It cannot be reading intervention with an ELD overlay to be specific for English learners. And a lot of what I use, I pretty much had to adapt from I learned from other workshops and conferences.**

[Again, she referred to workshops and conferences].

11. If you were asked to mentor a beginning ELD teacher, what would you be sure to tell her or him?

**I think I would tell them first and foremost that you need to look at their students as more than the outcome of their test scores and their grades. When you look at each student it's really important you know how to differentiate for each student's level of English. Look at the department power standards and then the ELD standards and try to find a happy medium and see how you can serve both masters. But, ultimately it comes down to the kids themselves and the relationships you can build with them. Less is more with them, and to have fun. Don't be too serious.**

#### Conclusion

Are there any comments or information you would like to share about ELD lesson planning that was not covered in this interview?

**No, I'm fine. That pretty much covers it.**

Would you be willing to send me a lesson plan and/or a unit of study outline that addresses CAHSEE preparation?

**Sure.**

I will transcribe your answers and give you a copy to review before I finalize the study. Remember, I will keep your name confidential.

## Appendix H: Sample Artifact

## Teacher 6

**Unit Overview**

We will examine the 1920s, analyzing the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of this time period.

**Course Requirements**

Homework & Notes 33%: Outside of class, you will read Chapters 12-13 (pp. 412-460), then answer the MAIN IDEAS questions at the end of each chapter. You must take notes for each chapter (1 page, front & back, per chapter). You must also take notes on the in-class lectures.

*Use of Cornell Notes system is strongly recommended, though not required.*

In-Class Open-Note Exam 33%: You will take an open-note exam on March 22, 2010. The questions will be drawn from the readings (MAIN IDEAS questions), and will also include important points from the in-class lectures, “The Roaring Twenties” movie, and F.S. Fitzgerald.

The exam format will be 10 short-answer questions.

Project Newspaper & Presentation 33%: You will write one short article (min. 100 words) dealing with a topic of your choice, subject to instructor approval. Alternatively, students may create a newspaper advertisement for a product (but must also write a 100 word essay about it).

Students may work together on the same topic, however, only one news article and editorial per topic. Students will present their news item as a news cast to the whole class.

**Grading Procedures:**

All assignments are due on March 21. Late assignments will be lowered by 10% per day. In the event of a excused absence or true emergency please contact the instructor to discuss an extension without penalty. You are expected to attend all class sessions. In the event of an absence, it is your responsibility to obtain the information from another student or meet with the instructor during office hours.

**Grading Scale:**

- A Excellent 90%+
- B Very Good 80%-89%
- C Fair 70%-79%
- D Poor 60%-69%
- F Fail 0%-59%



## Curriculum Vitae

**Scott N. Forrest**

### Summary

I have been in secondary education for over 18 years. My areas of expertise are in English language development (ELD), exit exams (CAHSEE), and WASC accreditation. Currently, I serve on the editorial advisory board of the *CATESOL Journal* (California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages). Additionally, I am pursuing a Doctorate degree in education specializing in teacher leadership. I also have considerable experience in staff and curriculum development.

### Credentials

- California Professional Clear Single Subject: English
- California Clear Cross Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD)
- Preliminary Administrative Services Credential

### Education

#### Walden University

Ed.D. in Teacher Leadership, 2010

Doctoral Study: *Making Sense of Exit Exam Policies: A Phenomenological Study of English Language Development Teachers*

#### National University, San Diego, CA

Administrative Credential Program – Tier I, 2004

#### San Diego State University

Master of Arts in Education: Policy Studies in Language and Cross-cultural Education, May 2003, *Thesis: The Effects of an Extensive Reading Program on the Reading Comprehension of High School English Language Learners*

#### Grand Canyon University, Phoenix, AZ

Bachelor of Arts in English and Social Sciences May 1992 (Magna Cum Laude)

### Professional Experience

#### West Shores High School

2010 (Temporary Contract), Coachella Valley Unified School District, CA

Teacher: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts (Strategic), 8<sup>th</sup> Grade History, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade English, ELD I, CAHSEE

Other Duties: Scheduling Committee, WASC Leadership Team, ELD Curriculum Writing Committee

#### Marshall Fundamental Secondary School

2008-2010, Pasadena Unified School District, CA

Assistant Principal

Duties included but not limited to: Developed, coordinated, and implemented the site's *Excellent Middle School Operations Plan*; Supervised the Counseling Department; Coordinated the high-stakes exam administrations (e.g., CST, 7<sup>th</sup> Grade STAR Writing, PSAT, CAHSEE); Discipline.

#### Escondido Union High School District

2000-2008, Escondido, CA

Teacher: English Language Development, College Prep English, Exit Exam Intervention

Other duties: English, ELD, and CAHSEE curriculum committees; Exit Exam Specialist/Instructional

Coach (District-wide), Coordinator of Extended Year Programs (Site level TOSA), Summer School

Principal, Facilitator/Principle Author of the district *English Learner Master Plan*, Exit Exam District Task

Force; Project WRITE Lead Trainer (District-wide); Coordinated Programs Advisory Council; AVID Site Team

**WRITE Institute: San Diego Country Office of Education**

2005-2007 (Part-time), San Diego, CA

Trainer Consultant: Lead county wide WRITE curriculum workshops as needed; Contributed to Exit Exam curriculum for secondary English language acquisition.

**Pacific Beach Middle School**

1999-2000, San Diego, CA

Teacher (Temporary): Humanities – English/Social Studies

Other duties: Coordinated Compliance Review Team

**Mountain View High School**

1998-1999, Tucson, AZ

Teacher (Temporary): Composition and English; Other duties: Literacy Committee

**Elfrida Elementary School**

1995-1998, Elfrida, AZ

Teacher: 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading and Science

Other duties: Student Council Advisor, Head Track Coach, PTA Liaison

**Northwest Community Christian School**

1993-1995, Phoenix, AZ

Teacher: Language Arts, Communications, Honors College Writing

Other duties: Assistant Track Coach

**Western Sky Middle School**

1992-1993, Litchfield Park, AZ

Teacher: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Writing; Other duties: Assistant Student Council Advisor

**Additional Professional Activities**

**The CATESOL Journal**

2009-Present Editorial Advisory Board

**California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL) Board of Directors**

2009-2010 Nominating Committee Representative

2007-2009 Secondary Level Chair

2005-2007 Rick Sullivan Stipend Chair

2006-2008 State Conference Committee: Newcomers Orientation

2004, 2008 Regional Conference Volunteer Coordinator

**Western Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges (WASC)**

2005-present Member of Visiting Committee Teams

**California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) Community Committees**

2003-2008 Review test items for bias and sensitivity; Make recommendations regarding passing scores.

### Awards and Honors

#### **Tommy Trojan Award: Exemplifying Education Principles of PDK**

2008, Phi Delta Kappa, University of Southern California

#### **Leadership in Biliteracy District Honoree**

2006, Escondido High School District and San Diego County Office of Education

#### **Keepers of the Light: Leadership in Professional Development**

2005, Escondido Union High School District

#### **Outstanding Graduate**

2003, San Diego State University, College of Education, Policy Studies

#### **District Teacher of the Year**

1998, Elfrida Elementary School District

### Selected Publications

(2010, January). Achieving Student-Centered Success on the High School Exit Exam: Five Components of an Effective Remediation Program. *The CATESOL Journal*.

(2009, Winter). Generation 1.5 learners: Crossing the Academic Divide. *CATESOL News* 40(3)

(2008, Summer). We are Teachers and Learners: Guiding Our Students to Success, Together. *CATESOL News*, 40(1)

(2008, March/April). Ideas, Interactions, and Passing the CAHSEE. *CATESOL News*, 39(4), 20-21.

(2006, October). Three Foci of an Effective High School generation 1.5 literacy program. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 50(2), 106-112.

(2004, September/October). Implications of No Child Left Behind on family literacy in a multicultural community. *The Clearing House*, 78(1), 41-45.

(September/October, 2002). Reading the world: Integrating geography in an English language learner literacy program. *Journal of Geography*, 101, 191-198.

### Selected Presentations and Workshops

#### **CATESOL Annual State Conference**

(April, 2009, Pasadena, CA) Panel Member: *Generation 1.5 Students in the Composition Classroom: The High School and College/University Connection*

(April, 2008, Sacramento, CA) Panel Member, *Our Diverse Populations: Are all Our Students Linguistically Ready for Academic Success*.

(March, 2005, Long Beach, CA) *Promoting Biliteracy and Social Justice*.

(March, 2005, Long Beach, CA) Panel Member:  
*Current Practices and Trends in Technology Enhanced English Language Learning*.

(April, 2004, Santa Clara, CA) *Story Maps: Charting the Course to Literary Analysis*.

**College Board Western Regional Forum**, Newport Beach, CA  
(February, 2008) Panel Member, *English Language Learners in Challenging Curricular Programs: Success and Support*.

**Ed. Trust National Conference**, Washington, DC  
(November, 2006) Panel Member, *English Language Learners in Challenging Curricular Programs: Success and Support*.

**California Title 1 Awards Convention**, Anaheim, CA  
(May, 2005) *Three Foci of an Effective High School Generation 1.5 Literacy Program*

**AERA Annual Meeting**, San Diego  
(April, 2004) *Implications of No Child Left Behind on Family Literacy in a Multicultural Community*.

**National Council of Geographic Education Convention**  
(October, 2002, Philadelphia, PA) *Inclusive Strategies in Geographic Education*.  
(August, 2001, Vancouver, BC) *From Shut-up and Work to Speak-up and Learn*.

#### **Professional Memberships**

CATESOL – California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

TESOL – International Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

AERA – American Educational Research Association

ASCD – Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development

NSDC – National Staff Development Council

#### **References**

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