

2018

# Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners in Mississippi Through Professional Development

Delore Nelson  
*Walden University*

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Delore Thomas Nelson

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners in Mississippi  
Through Professional Development

By

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MA, Jackson State University, 1997

BS, Jackson State University, 1984

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education  
Administrator Leadership

Walden University

April 2018

## Abstract

The problem addressed in this study is that Native American and Hispanic English language learners (ELLs) in a rural Mississippi school district are not performing at the same level as non-ELLs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the perceived causes of ELL failure and low academic performance on district and state assessments and in general education classes. Guided by Vygotsky's theory of development, which supports teachers and students remaining active in the learning process, research questions focused on what instructional practices general education teachers use to provide instruction for Spanish/Choctaw-speaking ELLs. General education teachers' use of professional learning communities (PLCs), instructional and assessment practices, knowledge of ELLs' instructional needs, and perceptions of professional development (PD) were examined. The purposeful sample for surveys included 33 Kindergarten through 12 general education teachers who met the criteria of having the experience of providing instruction to ELLs. Teacher participants completed an online anonymous survey through SurveyMonkey. Six English Language Arts (ELA) teachers and 1 administrator participated in face-to-face interviews. The responses were open coded then analyzed using NVivo 11. Seven themes emerged from the data: differentiation is critical for ELL instruction, assessment should drive instruction, ELLs benefit from evidence based instructional strategies, PLCs support general education teachers, PD is inadequate to support ELLs and teacher needs, PD is needed on ELLs background, and administrators' support PLCs for ELLs' instruction. A 5-day PD project was designed and positive social change promoted by providing staff with evidence based ELL instructional support, resulting in improved ELL learning and achievement.

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## Dedication

I dedicate the entire document to my precious granddaughter, Jana Lizabeth, who has taught me a new meaning of perseverance and dedication as she sat many nights in my lap for the past few years as I typed and reviewed articles, books, and magazines. Your seemingly understanding demeanor helped me to push a little harder for a little while longer knowing that you were there waiting for me to give you “your” turn in my continuous set of activities and writings.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

The need to provide culturally-sensitive public education for English Language Learners (ELLs) in Mississippi is a pressing and complex issue. General education teachers are obligated to provide content-specific education for all students regardless of the high number of ELLs in their classes. However, teachers are being challenged in districts to provide instruction with little or no advanced pedagogical knowledge in second language acquisition.

Teachers should receive professional training in order to be able to work with ELLs using student assessment data to enhance instruction for minority language students, which includes adapting grade-level content to fit with the specific language proficiency level of ELLs, an imperative feature of second language acquisition and literacy (Richards-Tutor, Aceves, & Reese, 2016). Literacy in a second language (L2) depends on how much and what kind of schooling is provided, as well as the teaching methods and the length of instruction (Preble, 2011). Equally important, a student's literacy level may be a result of whether or not instructional accommodations and classroom modifications have been provided at appropriate times. Educators should also receive professional development regarding all new standards and research based instructional practices being used in their individual classrooms (Arechiga, 2012; Fives & Buehl, 2016).

No one correct path to academic success for all ELLs has been addressed, but one critical factor does contribute to the success of ELLs in general: Professional

development (PD). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) 2013, has defined PD as it applies to ELLs as training in English language development, leadership, linguistic and cognitive needs, standards based instruction, collaboration, communities of practice, and systematic, ongoing assessment with the use of data to guide instruction and reformation in that area. PD on rules, educational placement, and guidelines for ELLs can help general education teachers, counselors, and administrators implement what is legally correct (Pereira & Oliveira, 2015). It can help to strengthen community awareness, home school partnerships, and proper legal guidelines pertaining to immunization, residency, and legal status.

According to *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982), ELLs must be allowed to attend school, even if they fail to present immigration status, birth certificate, or social security card. ELLs cannot be denied admission because they do not have a social security number. Proof of residency in the district and required vaccinations are the only requirements for registration. Districts should not inquire about their legal status. Neither should they attempt to serve in the place of immigration by gathering information not necessary for enrollment.

As a result of the findings of *Plyler vs. Doe*, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) made the following guidelines for identification and placement of ELLs. All students are given the home language survey. If any indications are given on the survey, the student is given the state mandated language proficiency test. After the language proficiency assessment, the ELL student must be placed in a sound research-based language development and instructional education program in addition to

mainstream classes. Also, the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL, 2013) stated that ELLs should be placed at an age-appropriate K-12 grade level for sociocultural and educational reasons since national researchers indicate that ELL students seem to progress faster and work harder when they are with their peers.

In Mississippi, classroom teachers are organized to teach students of PreK-12 and therefore have educational expectations appropriate for students of that age or grade level of their students. The MDE (2011) noted that in accordance with federal guidelines, ELLs should never be placed in special education classes due to low English proficiency levels and the belief that the lower teaching level and materials offered by special education would be better for them than the general education classrooms where they may fail to understand the instruction. Placing ELLs in special education or alternative classrooms violates the student's rights that allow the exploration of their basic grade specific educational opportunities.

Opportunities for ELLs granted through grade and proficiency levels are also protected. Under Title III of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) Act, all ELL students in grades K-12 within a school district must take the language proficiency assessment in the domains of listening speaking, reading and writing. Mississippi public schools were mandated by MDE to use the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS). ACCESS for ELLs' language proficiency test in the domains of speaking, listening, reading, writing, and comprehension was used to exhibit any growth made within that school year. Individual growth is then paired with other assessments and measured

academically to see if appropriate language acquisition has taken place. Title I also required an annual assessment in the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

### **Definition of the Problem**

The problem was that ELLs in a rural school district in Mississippi were not performing at the same levels as non-ELL counterparts. A high percentage of ELLs were failing to meet required passing levels on district and state mandated tests (MDE, 2013). This problem was particularly visible in English/language arts classrooms. Results from the 2013-14 *No Child Left Behind District Report Card* noted that only 41% of ELL students scored proficient or above on the English II assessment.

The majority of the ELLs in this district are Native Americans whose primary language is Choctaw, as well as Hispanic students whose primary language is Spanish. Although the district administrators were constantly seeking strategies that were effective in teaching and reaching new ELL students who entered the district, gaps in their education, significant language and communication barriers still existed, and exemplified gaps in their education, significant language and communication barriers still existent. Despite the changes in curriculum, assessment, and standards, general education teachers who provided instruction for ELL students needed to change their traditional instructional strategies so that the needs of ELLs were met (de Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013).

As the number of linguistically diverse students in Mississippi and across the nation rose, so did the need to provide both content and English language instruction for ELLs. Educators in the Mississippi's public school system experienced dramatic demographic changes (Aud, Wilkinson-Flicker, Kristapovich, Rathbun, Wang, & Zhang,



2013). From the school years 2000-2001 to 2010-2011, Mississippi had a 158% increase in the ELL PreK-12 public school population, with no state funding available to assist in the education of ELLs (Horsford, Mokhtar, & Sampson, 2013). Only federal funds were available. This study examined general education teacher instructional modes, training, support, and expertise in second language theory and practice focusing on meeting the needs of ELLs across the district.

Thompson (2015) urged teachers to incorporate strategies which help ELLs develop the same core academic skills and competencies as native English speakers. This study, which investigated instructional strategies and professional development for general education teachers through qualitative methods, provided some remedy for the problem of providing instruction to children in this district who have insufficient English skills. Knowledge of the causes of poor achievement and failure could lead to more ELLs becoming proficient and advanced on the Mississippi English/Language Arts subject area tests. It is hoped the results of this study will help this population develop the same core academic skills and competencies as native English speakers, a requirement for high school graduation.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local**

The research site's rural ELL demographic population consists of Hispanic and Native American students. The target study site is close in proximity to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, which means that American Indians whose residence falls within the school district lines are eligible to attend public schools. Less than 4% of the

overall student body population has been identified as an ELL in this Mississippi school district, yet overall, ELL students were not meeting the required district and state standards for the end of year (EOY) high school assessments in the areas of English II, Biology, and Algebra I. Consequently, the ELLS were at risk of failing to meet the required 21 or 24 credits for graduation as set by the Mississippi Department of Education (2014). Although most students do eventually pass before graduation, as reported by district teachers, some ELLs do not. The MDE does not retain specific reporting data due to the small size of the ELL subgroup in the target district. However, according to MDE, the performance of ELLs on the state assessment test showed a gap of 20-50% when compared to students not classified as ELLs for the years 2012 through 2014. Additionally, MDE prepared district subgroup reports revealed in that in 2012-2013, and 2013-2014, the number of ELL students needing to retake the state assessment grew due to larger discrepancies between the ELLs' performance compared to the performance of non-ELLs, which were reported to be 40% to 60% discrepancies (MDE, 2014). These data indicated that all ELL students needed to have specifically designed lessons and assessments in order to close the gap between the ELLs' student performance and the non-ELLs student performance. In addition, providing supportive instruction to meet ELLs' needs could lead to improved graduation rates and transition to post-secondary training or schooling options (Li, 2013).

Select teachers on each school campus offer ELL students personalized instruction prior to retesting opportunities. Additionally, teachers expressed the point that many of these students have been in classrooms in other states where a dual language is

spoken, and minimum writing is expected. In other cases, the mathematics levels at out of state schools where ELLs previously attended may not have been on the grade level, but on a specific proficiency level (Henry, Baltes, & Nistor, 2014). When ELLs come to this state and district where College and Career Ready State Standards (CCSS) mandate multiple forms of grade level reading, writing, and mathematical expression, they fail due to the lack of exposure to required curriculum standards.

### **Description of the Research Site**

The geographical context for this qualitative case study was a centrally located distant rural school district in the state of Mississippi. The rationale for addressing this problem was the urgent need for general education teachers to gain knowledge regarding collaborative instructional strategies needed to provide instruction for ELLs. Klein (2015) said that federal law mandates requiring schools to teach English to students whose native language is not English. However, the cost associated with educating ELLs was large because the largest ELL subgroup at the research site was Native Americans and there were no available academic resources to use as a foundation in their tribal language. Because of the lack of materials, general education teachers found it hard to build on their native language using printed resources.

As of the 2011 school year, the ELL enrollment in Mississippi had grown to over 5,000 (MDE, 2011). The most common language spoken outside of English was Spanish, representing over 50% percent of ELLs in the state and 80% nationally (MDE, 2011; NCES, 2011). There were more than 100 languages spoken by ELLs in Mississippi, and a variety of national and regional vocabulary differences made it increasingly important

that general education teachers were accomplished in teaching ELLs. In the district under study, approximately 60 ELL students were served in the 2013-2014 school term. District administrators reported in district data reports that 35 of these students were Native Americans, 20 were Hispanic, and five were of other origin. In the 2014-2015 school year, approximately 70 ELLs were being served with approximately 44 of these students being Native Americans, with 20 Hispanic and six of other races (District Data Performance Report, 2014). These numbers do not include those students who were language deficient but whose parents opted out of ELL services and were in the regular classroom with teacher accommodations. Teachers were already struggling to provide educational services to over 6,000 ELLs and to the approximately 200 limited English proficient (LEP) immigrant children new to the district in 2014 and 2015 and added to Mississippi's student enrollment which created a need for more funding, additional teacher preparation, additional free lunches, and other support services for this specific population of students (Federation for American Immigration Reform [FAIR], 2015).

All of Mississippi's institutions of higher learning require preservice candidates to take courses specifically relating to the education of immigrant, migrant, ELL, and other diverse students before graduation. The Mississippi Institution of Higher Learning (MIHL) course guidelines identify courses dealing with ELLs usually as electives that can be selected only after teachers have fulfilled the necessary credits for graduation (MDE, 2013). However, teacher education programs were not preparing regular education teachers with the skills needed to serve culturally and linguistically diverse students (Renner, 2011; Yoesel, 2010). As a direct response to general education

instructors' inability to deal with ELLs, there was an academic performance gap between ELLs and non-ELLs that was addressed at this research site.

In Mississippi, services to ELLs were either content or pull-out based services. Content services included those teaching activities for ELLs that took place in general classrooms. Pull-out based services are those that consist of methods where the students are placed in a separate area for instruction outside of the general classroom. Teachers in the content areas are facing substantive challenges to provide prescriptive services to ELLs while maintaining service to those who are not ELLs (Ward, 2013). According to the United States Department of Education's Office of Technical Assistance [DOE], (2012), districts served by the MDE failed in 2009-2011 to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP).

AYP is based upon the mastery of annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAO) identified through Title III of the NCLB Act in which each state has to assess and report the linguistic and academic progress and linguistic proficiency of ELLs (MDE, 2014). If states are unsuccessful in meeting these objectives annually, that state has failed to make AYP and must, in turn, produce a plan of improvement or change to rectify the problem (MDE, 2011). This same technical report revealed there was little or no curriculum and instructional support for teachers of ELLs in the MDE's ELL realignment corrective plan. The suggestion was made by the USOE that Mississippi should create an implementation plan that would enhance teacher preparation programs and scaffolding of ELL instructional strategies. This current study will assist in the creation of such plan.

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

Kanno and Cromley (2015) reported that ELL students are the fastest growing

K–12 population in the United States. Furthermore, over 5.5 million ELLs are currently in the U.S. public education system. Nineteen states have experienced a 200% ELL population growth rate in the past 10 years (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA], 2011). However, the Office of English Language Acquisition (2010) reported that 43% of all public-school teachers in the nation have at least one LEP/ELL student in their classrooms and only 17% of all teachers instructing ELLs meet the requirements of a highly-qualified teacher. In response, many professionals have lowered expectations for ELLs as a means of educating these students (Gil & Bardack, 2010). The presence of ELL students in mostly English-speaking students' classrooms today has challenged teachers to recognize linguistic and cultural differences in the classroom. Across the nation, ELL students are failing, being improperly educated, and pushed out of the system (Decker, 2014). These challenges in Mississippi and across the nation may lead to other issues that will have to be addressed at some point in the future.

In 2010, the number of ELLs had grown to 25.2 million (Batalova & Lee, 2012). As a subset of this large number, the total number of ELLs in U. S. public schools exceeded 5.3 million. Of that number, 66% or 16.5 million of the total LEP population's first language is Spanish followed by Chinese-speaking individuals at 6% and Vietnamese-speaking individuals at 3% (Batalova & Lee, 2012). Approximately 85% of the ELL students were born in the United States, and that majority percentage speaks over 150 different languages (Logan, 2012). With that growth comes the challenge to increase instructors' knowledge of culture and diversity, enabling them to impart the

skills and knowledge to that population in order to graduate from the educational system.

Approximately 440 different languages are spoken among the native born and immigrant U.S.'s ELL students (Shin & Kominski, 2010). Almost 80% are students whose native language is Spanish. The percentage of Hispanic students leaving school before graduation has historically been among the highest rates of all high school student subgroups across the country (NCES, 2013). These ELL students have a lesser chance of graduation from high school than their Caucasian peers (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Not only that, the instructional methods that secondary school teachers have typically used have failed to facilitate learning or provide adequate literacy instruction for language minority students (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000). The methods of instruction and assessment that teachers use for ELLs impact subject area knowledge and language at the same time, consequently resulting in higher failure performance rates and outcomes. These rates are exceptionally higher if the students are migrants, non-English speakers, homeless, or exhibit other at-risk characteristics (NCELA, 2011). No matter what program design is chosen, or what plan is developed for diversity in the school systems, the leadership and instructional practices used to address students' backgrounds, culture, and content knowledge are must be addressed (Pascopella, 2011).

Gaps in achievement between language minority students and native English speakers are evident mainly in English and language arts (Logan, 2012). Of greater concern, are the gaps between ELL students and White students. This problem existed in a broader context because general education teachers lacked training in second language acquisition theory and practice, as well as instructional practices for the general education

classroom (Bell, 2010; Benavides, Midobuche, & Kostina-Ritchey, 2012; Samson & Collins, 2012). The ELL population is constantly growing; nevertheless, less than 13% of individuals who provided instruction to these students have been involved in any professional development (NCTE, 2008). Likewise, despite the growing numbers of ELLs, only four states (Arizona, California, Florida, and New York) mandated all teachers, regardless of subject area, to have some training or expertise in teaching ELLs effectively (Johnson & Wells, 2017). The aforementioned gaps in achievement were evident across districts and states. To date, schools with large ELL populations still struggle to meet their needs.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the perceived causes of ELL failure and low academic performance on district and state assessments and in general education classes. I examined what was needed to reduce the academic failure of Native American and Hispanic ELL students in a rural district in Mississippi. I looked beyond previous studies in urban education to uncover causes unique to Native American and Hispanic ELL students in a rural K-12 setting. By doing this, other small rural districts can be better informed and equipped to provide a productive education for both Hispanic and Native American ELL students. It was essential that this rural district strengthen the connection between poor ELL student performance in content classes as well as district and state assessments.

### **Definition of Terms**

*English language learner (ELL)*: An active learner of the English language who may benefit from various types of language support programs. This term is used mainly



in the U.S. to describe K–12 students. It also describes students who have a native language that is not English and communication in that language in an academic setting has a significant impact on their English language proficiency (Arechiga, 2012; NCTE, 2013; NCLB, 2002).

*Literacy*: Being proficient in reading and writing, listening, speaking, and viewing words in at least one language. It is the ability to use language fluently in daily situations. It may involve grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competency (Arechiga, 2012).

*Professional development (PD)*: Any ongoing training that a professional educator receives to improve in areas of deficiency to gain new knowledge or insight, or to be refreshed in a content or skill area as needed (Meadors, 2014).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it may maximize opportunities to show how students could gain a higher level of grade level mastery as well as optimum learning experiences by examining a rural Mississippi school district's general education teachers' perception of possible causes for low ELL student performance in their individual classrooms. Through the examination of teacher perceptions related to ELLs' instructional progress and needs, there were data collected, which have yielded findings to support further action to support ELL learning in the target school district site. According to the MDE (2013), ELLs had a deficit range of 25% to 50% lower in overall performance to demonstrate proficiency on the state reading and math assessments compared to peers in the target site. Examining similarities and differences between causes of low ELL student performance can determine what additional information is

needed to increase student performance. Social change, as defined by Walden University (2014) is “a deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies.” (p. 5). As a result, ELLs can attain a higher mastery level in the general education classroom, thereby supporting Walden University’s vision for social change.

The process of investigating causes of ELLs’ lack of achievement regarding the general education classroom second language acquisition, assessment, and support systems was the focus of this study. According to the USOE, less than 60% of ELL students graduate from high school due to many factors relating to students’ low academic mastery and minimum assessment proficiency levels (Skinner, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

Although there were many studies on Hispanic ELLs and effective teaching strategies, there was little research on effective instructional practices involving American Indian ELL students in Mississippi. There are few studies that focused on ELLs who have the first language of Choctaw and/or Spanish. The results of this study will serve as a way of addressing the professional training needs of teachers in Mississippi and other state education agencies undergoing the same challenges, thereby facilitating needed change. Academic instruction used in the correct manner at the appropriate time can make the difference in high school graduation, career placement, and college attendance for ELL students (Ward, 2013).

The following three questions guided the study:

*RQ1:* What instructional practices do general education teachers use to provide instruction for Spanish/Choctaw-speaking ELLs?

*RQ2:* How do teachers with varying types of experience and training make instructional and assessment decisions concerning struggling Choctaw and Hispanic ELLs in the general education classroom?

*RQ3:* How does participating in a professional learning community (PLC) in this district influence general education teachers' decisions regarding ELLs in the classrooms?

### **Review of the Literature**

The topics and keywords that were used to conduct this study were in search engines: *Vygotsky*, *English Language Learner*, *successful teaching strategies*, and *professional development for general education teachers*. I also entered those same keywords into EBSCOhost, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), SAGE Journals, ProQuest, and several other electronic databases that were available through the Walden University Library. I also entered the names of leading advocates in the areas of *differentiated instruction*, *cultural diversity*, *PLCs*, *ELLs*, and *professional development* along with the authors, including Kagan, Lin, Marzano, Haynes and Darling-Hammond. The review centered on Vygotsky's theory of learning as it relates to ELLs, themes of successful instructional strategies, effects of PLCs, and professional development (PD). Over 85 relevant peer-reviewed and reputable sources were identified for the literature review and topics under study.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that guided this qualitative case study was Vygotsky's theory which shows the need for children to actively engage with others who can develop their potential. A second aspect of Vygotsky's theory is that students' academic achievement, influenced by potential for cognitive development, depends upon the zone of proximal development (ZPD): A level of development attained when children engage in social behavior. Full development of the ZPD depends upon full social interaction. The range of skills that can be developed with adult guidance or peer collaboration exceeds what can be attained alone.

The MDE reported ELLs were the fastest growing group of students in U. S. public schools. From 1995 to 2005, the ELL population doubled in 23 states (National Education Association [NEA], 2011). Of those documented ELLs, 76% speak Spanish. Approximately 5.3 million students in the United States were LEP (NCELA, 2011). The NCES (2013) described the percentage of ELL students in public schools in the United States as 10% higher in 2010–2011 than in 2002–2003. The NCES further stated that these statistics held true for most of the states in the United States. Three-fourths of all elementary aged ELL students in the United States were native-born citizens, while 56% of ELLs in high school were native born citizens (WisKids Count, 2011). This research exposes challenges being experienced in schools and classrooms in the larger educational field.

## **History of English Language Learners**

This increase in immigrants and refugees to the U.S. has been cause for national

concern both educationally and economically. The foreign-born ELL population has tripled in the past 30 years; more than 14 million immigrants moved to the United States during the 1990s, and another 14 million arrived between 2000 and 2010 (MDE, 2011). Because of these new arrivals, the ELL population has increased in U.S. public schools from 4,118,918 to 4,693,818 ELL students in 2011. Chao, Olsen, and Schenkel (2013) reported 5.3 million ELL students attended U. S. Schools in 2013. Chao et al. also revealed the count for 2011 proved lower when compared to 2012-2014, indicating a 3-year leap. These new arrivals have caused states to initiate their own laws to govern the education of ELLs in their state. Each group of ELLs comes with varying degrees of education, language, and skills. No one profile fits and there is no single solution or program to meet all their diverse educational and social needs (Samson & Collins, 2012). The languages spoken have varying degrees of dialects. For example, although several hundred new ELL students in a state speak Spanish, there may be 15-20 different variations of the language.

As of the 2015-16 school year, Mississippi's schools were home to more than 11,000 English language learners (ELLs), which marks a 129% increase from the 2005-2006 school year (Migration Policy Institute, 2015 ; NCES, 2013). Nationally, terminology used to identify students who are in the process of learning English as a second language varies from a person whose home language is other than English (Florez, 2012; NCES, 2013; Romero, 2014; Wright, 2012) to language minority, English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) to ELL. Federally, the commonly used term to identify these students is limited English proficient (LEP). The MDE has chosen to refer

to these students as ELLs, so LEP and ELL will be used interchangeably.

### **Legislation**

There are conflicting beliefs, practices, and policies about language instruction and rights of minority individuals which have influenced legislation and litigation. For the past 30 years, two types of programs, inclusive and separate, have been used in schools to bridge the gap between English proficiency and academic achievement (McMahon, 2013; Sullivan, 2011). From 1970 through the 1980s, teachers who specialized in second language acquisition utilized a practice where students were pulled, in a fashion like special education, from mainstream classrooms to receive small group or individual services and extra help with English (Crawford, 1999). This was later termed *pull-out* and is the most common method used in Mississippi's schools. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 remains the foundation of the legal rights of ELLs. It stated that:

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color or National origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. [42 USCS § 2000e (1964)].

The first federal law relating to bilingual education, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, amendments 1974 and 1978, became the Title VII Education and Secondary Education Act. Its original goal was to train teachers and teacher assistants and develop and disseminate instructional materials. The Bilingual Act of 1968 was reauthorized in 1974, 1978, 1984, and 1988. Each reauthorization created more freedoms and rights for ELL students and their right to a proper education. The historical and legal aspects of the

remaining three cases have had detrimental effects on how ELLs are enrolled, taught, assessed, and treated in all public education K-12 educational settings.

*Lau v. Nichols* (1974), a landmark decision for ELLs, ruled that just because a local education agency gave students the same type of curriculum, facilities, and other resources, it does not mean that equality has been met because of the students' unique language needs. Even so, the Supreme Court did not propose a solution at that time, but suggested that students receive bilingual education and support in English (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). While no suggestions were made for specific education for these students, the judge ruled the students did not learn English, so they had not received a proper education with the resources given. This case resulted in a group of Chinese students in California being given the same educational opportunities as their English-speaking peers. [414 U.S. 563, 564].

*Castaneda v. Pickard* (1981) emphasized three criteria for ELL programs. First, the programs must be research based. Next, they should be carried out effectively by personnel trained in the specific areas. Last, to be truly effective, all programs should have ample resources in which to operate effectively in overcoming language barriers [USDOE 648 F.2d 989 (5th Cir., 1981)].

*Plyer v. Doe* (1982) ruled that the 14th Amendment prohibited states from denying a free public education to undocumented immigrant children. According to this law, undocumented children are given the same right to a free public education as those children who are residential citizens. These children, like all others, must attend school until they reach the age mandated by state law [22 Ill. 458 U.S. 1131, 103 S. Ct. 14, 73 L.

Ed. 2d 1401 (1982)].

Public and legislative opinions were driving forces behind changes and reform for ELL education. From 2001-2002, schools across the nation were required by the NCLB Act to create a learning environment that enabled LEP students to have the opportunity to achieve academic success by initiating reform tactics (Shirvani, 2009). This learning environment must be appropriate, and research based. The tactics included establishing language programs and providing professional development to all stakeholders who were responsible for the success of ELL students (Arechiga, 2012). Although the challenges and struggles of training and holding content teachers accountable for ELL instruction have escalated, teachers are still in need of assistance (Turkan & Buzick, 2015). Additionally, teachers failing to provide needed instruction at the proper time for ELLs have initiated major changes that have and will continue to cause educational institutions and governments to make better data-driven decisions.

### **States with High ELL Populations**

Nearly one in every 10 public school students (roughly 4.5 million of 50 million total students) were classified as ELLs during the 2010-2011 school year (USDOE, 2013). Academically, the majority of ELLs have consistently clustered in eight states: California, Texas, Oregon, Hawaii, Alaska, Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada (California Department of Education, (CDOE), 2010; NCES, 2013). These educational personnel with the highest ELL populations in the nation are working hard to educate these students, but data suggest that a large number of students are not performing well and are not achieving the standards set by the states and districts (Dinan & Miller, 2014).



Challenges in these states that are trying to educate large numbers of ELLs range from teacher shortages, space, and transportation to appropriate identification and assessment. Each state shares some or all these challenges and state and district administrators have had to analyze and problem-solve the issue of ELL academic performance through personalizing the plan to the district and state resources and the vision that the stakeholders had to bring ELLs to the proficiency standards as their non-ELL peers. through various means.

According to MPI, (2014) California was home to 25% of the nation's immigrant youth and educates 33% of all ELLs in the United States in 2012. The number of ELLs enrolled in California in 2007-2008 was greater than Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, and Arizona combined (Migration Policy Institute [MPI], 2010). As a result, the California State Board of Education, (CSBOE), was forced to determine what ELL students needed at varying levels and how those services should be rendered. Its education budget is stretched to the limits, and ELL students are the main area of focus due to the critically high levels of retention and dropouts (MPI, 2014). The state is striving to produce college ready adults, but ELLs who are mostly immigrant offspring students still lag behind their peers at every stage in education. To remedy the problem, the state has redesigned its professional development, increased ways to enter the adult education and college system, and increased learning time for ELLs statewide.

Texas is another state with a high number of ELLs. Nearly 1,000,000 students in Texas are challenged with mastering a new language. Goldston (2013) said the number of ELLs increased from 13% in 2001 to 16.2% in 2012, numbering about 838,000 children.

These students are also the poorest of all subgroups. Shirvani (2009) concluded that ELL students in Texas did not graduate from high school and were ignored. Additionally, these students were held in the same grade to prevent scores from being included on the upcoming state tests. Texas, like other states, cannot control all factors related to ELL student achievement, but is revising and incorporating new strategies and plans.

In Wisconsin, 78% of children who do not speak English are native born. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2011), school districts are required to establish, maintain, and improve learning environments. These requirements attempt to alleviate anything that may stop LEP students from attaining a proper education. ELL students must be allowed to participate in major educational programs without bias of any kind (MDE, 2011).

Georgia is another state that has experienced large numbers of immigrant children in the past two decades. Hooker, Fix, and McHugh (2014) asserted that U.S.-born children of immigrants accounted for nearly 20% of youth in Georgia in 2012. These first and second-generation youth, especially those who are ELLs, are behind academically when compared to their nonimmigrant peers. When compared to non-ELL students whose graduation rate is 70% for a 4-year period, only 44% of ELL students are shown to graduate. ELL students may fail to graduate from high school on time and are therefore unable to continue to college or postsecondary opportunities. Language learning is time consuming and complex regardless of the state. The acquisition of a second language varies with each individual student, but the resource needs across states are similar in nature.

## **Effective ELL Teaching**

Assertiveness, opinions, and expectations that teachers bring to the classroom are as significant as their skills, knowledge, and lesson plans because through rigorous instruction, teachers impart knowledge that energizes and directs ELL students and ensure that they make steady progress (Allington, 2012; Gomez, 2012). These attributes help cultivate effective relationships between colleagues and stakeholders. Effective teachers figure out how to relate to all students in unique and linguistically appropriate ways (Anderson, 2009). ELLs with varying English proficiency levels are being placed in general education classrooms with native English-speaking peers and this has created the need for teachers in all content areas to search for resources and assistance to support these new students in an equitable manner (Li, 2013). In some cases, no support or resources are available. Nevertheless, educators, specifically teachers in urban areas, need more effective instructional techniques to teach academic language to ELLs and other struggling students (Keiffer & Lesaux, 2010; Ramirez & Jimenez, 2014). Likewise, rural educators are struggling to have the appropriate resources, facilities, support, and instructional materials for ELL students. Coady, Harper, and DeJong (2013) and Tran (2015) insisted that school leaders and teachers should be trained to use students' background knowledge to build academic content knowledge. Additionally, Tran believed that providing this type of research-based instructional support is dependent on understanding the nature of both the child's cultural background as well as the curriculum challenges encountered by diverse students in many classrooms.

Quality instructional practices geared toward meeting each student's academic needs, adjusting instruction based on reliable data, and monitoring progress are the main foundations for enhancing student outcomes (Bender & Shores, 2007). Changing demographics of ELLs and immigrants in the education system have led many educators to rethink instructional abilities and teacher education program preparation. Teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in Mississippi and across the United States are challenged to meet the required accountability standards, as they attempt to provide an adequate education for ELLs and their parents.

The main components that bind culture, language, and academic achievement in the context of education are the learning that takes place, the instruction that promotes learning, and the policies that govern schooling (Turkan & Buzick, 2014). All of these components combined can guide general education teachers regarding their use of learning practices and policies for ELLs. Because teachers' attitudes influence the quality of the education ELLs receive, teachers are urged to become familiar with what students of diverse language backgrounds believe, what they already know, what they value as important, and what their preferred learning method might be (Williams, 2011). Classroom instruction should not be based on personal ideologies, nor should teachers be biased or quick to label stereotypical behaviors and practices. Biases, and stereotypical behaviors could lead to hearsay or other unfounded information (Gil & Barack, 2010). Rather than base instruction on a personal belief, instruction should answer the question of what is proven to be true and needed for each child (Cummins, 2014). Academic learning activities for ELLs should be research-based and rigorous with frequent

opportunities to practice, think, and learn (Allison & Bencomo, 2015; Haynes & Zacarian, 2010).

Gay (2000) identified five strong trends in general education teacher expectations as described in this paragraph. Initially, the trend looked at how the quality of student learning is influenced by teacher expectations, with the opportunity to learn in a situation heavily depending upon the teacher. Second, Gay noted that some teacher expectations are derived from myths that suggest that students from specific ethnicities are more intelligent than others, so expectations are higher for that group and lower for all others. Thirdly, Hispanics and Blacks are all held at a lower level than European-American students. The last two trends identified by Gay, teacher's expectations for students and their sense of professional efficacy are interdependent. Teachers who have low expectations for students are unconfident they can teach those students and as a result attribute students' failure to lack of intellect and deficient home lives (Kraut, Chandler & Hertenstein, 2016). In contrast, teachers with strong self-confidence and in their teaching, abilities have high expectations for all students. The strategies that teachers use to engage their students and foster academic growth must include higher order thinking skills and incorporate the students' home language skills.

Prior research conducted by Hill and Miller (2013) has pinpointed the outcomes of effective teaching, regardless of children's socioeconomic status or language background. Haycock (1998) noted that good teaching makes a difference for all children regardless of race and language barriers. In earlier research, Tikunoff (1983) and Garcia (1997) found that effective teachers of second language learners use active, cooperative

approaches to student engagement and curriculum organization. Garcia also identified key dispositions of effective teachers, including dedication, confidence, and a lack of complacency. Effective teachers for ELL students hold all their students to high standards. In contrast, Sharkey and Layzer (2000) found that many teachers had low expectations of second language learners, and they expressed the idea of “trying” as success for their students.

### **Culture**

Culture consists of all the beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and symbols that are characteristic of that organization (MDE, 2011). McLaughlin (2013) defined *organizational culture* as the philosophies, ideologies, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, expectations, attitudes norms and values that are shared by a particular group within that culture, is inclusive of more than the habits and beliefs of the teachers and students, it is also inclusive of daily schedules and activities that promote some students but stifle others. These inclusive practices require teachers of ELLs to be diverse in materials and instruction. A foundation of cultural awareness is needed for educators in order to shape schools to the unique needs of multicultural students (Cole, David, & Jiménez, 2016).

Some cultural patterns of schools and classrooms fail to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to succeed (SEDL, 2011). Although the fact regarding culture is a part of the educational process it has been inconspicuous, but can no longer continue to remain hidden (Allison & Bencomo, 2015). A school’s culture, positive or negative, affects the way and rate a child learns by changing the way that a student feels about him or herself and his or her heritage (Montero, Ibrahim, Loomis, & Newmaster, 2012). The

importance of including a student's home culture in the classroom is extremely important and is a fundamental concept in instruction of English minority students (Quinton, 2013). According to Allison and Bencomo (2015), culture and all its components form the basis of family, education and the individual student's place in society. However, working together for a common goal can be very productive and motivating, especially when the goal is the success of a child.

### **Communities of Practice and ELLs**

*Communities of practice* are defined as groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Tobia & Hord, 2012). A community of practice is sometimes called a professional learning community (PLC). A community of practice is a new way of solving complex educational problems. Effective communities put students first while meeting their unique and individual needs. These practices have become a cornerstone for leading organizations towards new directions to fulfill the requirements of a population (Norman, 2012). Even so, incorporating and understanding the actual operating procedures and components present other challenges for many educational organizations. However, without a thorough understanding of the true dynamics collaboration as recommended of communities of practice, the implementation will be totally ineffective and meaningless (Norman, 2012).

Through professional development, communities of practice can become actively translated, where groups of like-minded individuals learn how to do their jobs better, as they continuously interact with each other. The educators within that community know

their impact on ELL and all students' achievement and strive for excellence among them accepting nothing less than the best that everyone involved has to offer. All stakeholders believe that student achievement is of utmost importance. These individuals have vision, and the opinion and contribution of each member is just as important as the other. When administrators listen to their teachers, they have some ownership in the school, instead of just following orders. Therefore, teachers will be motivated and will keep working hard and trying new things (Poekert, 2012). Successful distributed communities have to learn to address cultural differences without minimizing or stereotyping people (Tobia & Hord, 2012).

### **Leadership and ELLs**

Leaders are people who take charge of the school culture agenda. Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, and Darling-Hammond (2010) explained that teachers and the teacher leader should first examine the present culture before looking ahead. Leaders can support communities of practice by helping teachers and other stakeholders understand their own knowledge bases, examining how other leaders address the issue, listening to scholar practitioner's dialogue, and practicing the decision-making process for themselves in in their own learning environment. Organizational structure in educational settings, as defined by Bush and Middlewood (2013) and Ward (2015), is the pattern of beliefs and assumptions shared by organizational members. To be productive in the academic setting, it is an important part of the structure that ELLs participate in meaningful interactions with both instructors and peers (Bunch, Kibler, & Pimentel, 2013). All members can then inquire about observed behavioral regularities, norms, dominant values, philosophy,



rules, and feelings. Data-driven instructional leaders and administrators read and interpret measurable instructional goals, to enhance student learning, and outline teachers' practices of collecting and analyzing summative data (Long, 2012). After that, the leader can also understand the importance of using multiple assessment measures when assessing school and student success. Even though test data is only one part of assessment, these assessments can reveal cultural implications and needs of ELLs across disciplines and modalities (Bunch et al., 2013) within the local school and district.

Culturally competent and effective leaders in a diverse environment share leadership, accountability measures and responsibility to help those who are culturally different than themselves. These leaders pride themselves because effective leadership in a diverse setting is about personal work and not about changing others (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbell-Jones, 2005). The personal work of one individual can influence an entire staff. Effective leaders are followers with a message. Several studies (Lucas, 2000; Norrid-Lacey & Spencer, 1999) are important in understanding how policy makers have played key roles in establishing effective programs with teachers and leaders for English language learners.

### **Overview of Professional Development**

Historically, professional development generally refers to ongoing learning opportunities available to teachers and other education personnel through their schools and districts (NEA, 2011). Professional development is sometimes referred to as workshops, conferences, staff development, training, communities of practice, content area learning or grade level training (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Halsam, 2010;

Hirsh, 2009; Lee, Zhang & Yin, 2011; Nathan, 2008). All references to the term should serve as a network to promote continued improvement in teaching and learning.

Regardless of the terminology utilized regarding training, professional development should be job-embedded. (Long, 2012). Trainings for teachers should be job embedded; therefore, having a direct relationship to the jobs they currently perform or should perform daily.

**Professional Development and ELLs.** New teachers will need extensive training in second language development as well as appropriate teaching strategies. Only 35% of elementary school teachers who taught ELL students in 2010 reported they received at least one hour of professional development training in second language development (Russakoff, 2011). Poorly delivered training could cause a child who desperately wants to learn to be limited in their mastery of content (Van Roekel, 2011). This lack of teacher training could lead to improper placement or even academic failure for ELLs.

While only 20 states currently require that teachers receive preparation for working with ELLs, teacher preparation for ELLs is extremely important in the general education classroom (NEA, 201; Quintero & Hansen, 2017). In the past, traditional PD as the result of a teacher's completion and result of an individual needs assessment in which each teacher described areas of weakness or categories in which the teacher felt that he or she needed further instruction. From this approach, professional development should be sustained, coherent, take place during the school day and become part of a teacher's professional responsibilities, and focus on student results (Tran, 2015; Wei et al., 2009). Effective professional development is often seen as vital to school success and teacher

satisfaction. In contrast, according to the literature professional development training has also been criticized for its expensiveness, often-vague goals and objectives, as well as for the lack of data on reporting teacher and school improvement efforts (Young, 2013).

Moreover, because some educators have different learning needs than others professional learning must engage each educator in timely, high-quality learning that meets his or her particular learning needs (Learning Forward, 2011).

Research-based professional development will provide the basis to train content area teachers to become better responsive to the needs of English language learners in their classrooms. Literacy development depends heavily on the amount and quality of the schooling provided (Arlington & Gabriel, 2012). Staff members should also ensure that students, who are ELLs, are being provided appropriate English language instruction by highly qualified staff that has been trained in culturally responsive practices (Cummins, 2014; Gay, 2010). Having knowledge of instructional models, performance descriptors and proficiency levels can affect an ELL student's performance in the general education classroom. Educational administrators and instructional coaches must ensure that teachers who work with ELLs have access to ongoing professional development linked to academic growth for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Because oral language proficiency is crucial, professional development about state specific and research-based acquisition practices and policies is needed (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009a; Renner, 2011).

Provisions that are a function of what is taught, teaching strategies, intensity of instruction, appropriate accommodations and modifications, and level of teacher

preparation, is expected through extensive professional development (Bailey & Pransky, 2014). Specific instructional demands for meeting the needs of English language learners through professional development have been challenging for many schools across the United States (Chin, 2008). The NEA declared that teachers who serve ELLs must have appropriate, ongoing professional development/training in order to ensure their academic success (2011). These sessions should not be random but planned and specifically assigned.

### **Implications**

Schools need curriculum adjustments that provide authentic learning opportunities and support the achievement of students from diverse backgrounds so that they can pass high stakes tests (Chao & Schenkel, 2013). Personnel in the district in which this study was conducted, have witnessed an increase of over 50% in their ELL population based on the 2008 and 2014 accountability reports (MDE, 2009; MDE 2014). According to teacher observation, LEP students enter the district behind in overall student achievement and standardized test scores of 60% in English and more than 30% in other academic areas that require a high level of reading due to the possible lack of English skills at home as well as their initial point of English acquisition (personal communication, May 23, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the perceived causes of ELL failure and low academic performance on district and state assessments and in general education classes. Additionally, the study examined teacher perceptions of different ways in which district general education teachers incorporate, organize and plan instruction in their respective classrooms to determine what methods may be the most effective in

helping ELL students experience academic success. With the possibility of the initiation of a professional development training plan on the topic of teacher perceptions of specific successful instructional methods, and strategies, some of the best practices of effective ELL instruction that might reduce student failure such as cultural awareness sessions, flexible grouping, tiered activities, extended time, and different modes of teaching were highlighted (Ramos, 2013).

Additionally, this project study created an opportunity to discuss illustrated instructional strategies that other teachers can implement in their classrooms in order to increase overall student achievement among language minority students (Swanson, Bianchini & Lee, 2014). The results of this study will be shared with district school administrators as well as state departments of education.

By understanding how ELL students see the different aspects and attributes of language acquisition and academic instruction as it relates to the new standards, general education teachers are able to collaborate using data from assessments tied in their respective area of expertise to enhance their teaching methods and strategies to prevent classroom failure (WIDA, 2014). As teachers begin to understand the relationship between ELL student's language development and their instructional methods and begin to integrate teaching, learning, assessment techniques, and standards, a higher percentage of ELL students, regardless of native language, may meet the expected standards on mandatory assessments (Santos, Darling-Hammond, & Cheuk, 2014).

### **Summary**

One of the greatest challenges for educators is to be able to address the wide

range of learning needs for language–minority students and at the same time move them toward high levels of achievement. Having common goals helped individual teachers to focus on what the faculty has agreed to work on while catering to the specific needs of his/her classroom (Langley, 2015). It is crucial that all educators support themselves with research-based assessment procedures and instructional techniques needed to empower ELLs to reach their maximum learning potential, thereby facilitating their success in school and beyond (Hart, 2009). In order to make effective decisions, teachers of ELL students must be trained. Teacher training must involve the entire faculty and be based upon existing research methodology (Sherer, 2012).

Section 1 served as an overview of the problem. Section 2 describes the research and results for this qualitative project study of general education teachers' perceptions of instructional models, strategies and training that may be helpful in ensuring ELL academic success. All components of the methodology will also be discussed in that section.

## Section 2: The Methodology

The presence of many linguistic and ethnic minority students in Mississippi has challenged educators to rethink basic assumptions about educating ELLs in the general education classroom. If schools in Mississippi are expected to meet the needs of ELLs as described by the MDE, several key elements must be addressed: Pedagogy, culture, communities of practice, leadership, and legislation. This section provides the methodology used for this study, including the purpose of a qualitative project, types of data, participants, and selection process of the participants, as well as a discussion of mandated protections and participants' rights and results. The final part of this section includes the findings, evidence, outcomes, and the project description (see Appendix A). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the perceived causes of ELL failure and low academic performance on district and state assessments and in general education classes. Due to the failure rate on district and state assessments, there was a need for teachers and administrators to investigate barriers in ELL student practices and processes that prevented these students from being successful learners at the target site (MDE, 2013). Educators needed to adapt the curriculum so that the backgrounds of minority students were an integral part of the daily instructional and learning techniques in the general education classroom. PD strategies that provided insight to instruction that promoted the success of ELL students were examined.

### **Research Design and Approach**

This study was a single district qualitative case study of general education teachers' perceptions of instructional methods, models, and strategies used to provide

instruction to ELL students in the target district. Several other qualitative designs were considered but not selected for this study. Grounded theory was not used for this study because the purpose of the study was to investigate one K-12 district and then identify themes as the data were collected and analyzed. A qualitative research design was selected for this study because it captured the perspectives and experiences of general education teachers. Qualitative research is used to interpret, describe, and explain rather than generalize (Maxwell, 2013). The qualitative methodology was the most commonly used research methodology to address ELLs in rural general education classrooms since this method provided informative data relating to the reasons that ELLs were unsuccessful in the general education classroom setting. Qualitative case study research investigations provide the opportunity to include other methods of looking at real life situations.

A case study can be defined as a method that is used to investigate an individual, group of people, or event and is used to examine and understand complex phenomena. A case study was used because the researcher wanted to investigate topics of study that had rarely been studied. Case study research was an appropriate and popular approach in qualitative studies and provided narrative detailed descriptions of the case being studied. One major strength of this type of data collection was that the case study gave the researcher the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence. Therefore, case studies did not have to be limited to a single source of evidence. In fact, most of the respectable case studies relied on a wide variety of sources (Morgan, 2012; Yin, 2012). Case studies are thorough but do not necessarily have to take a long time.



Interest in this study and more specifically this population became evident because I had previously worked with ELLs but not as a general education teacher. I have seen firsthand what ELL teachers do during pull-out time to help students who were not successful in the general education classes. I was curious to learn what general education teachers do to teach ELL students how to read, write, and speak during grade level content instruction.

Phenomenology was not chosen for this study because the purpose was not to focus on the essence or structure of a personal experience or phenomenon. Because quantitative research requires experiments and numerical data to study sample populations and mixed methods inquiries use data that are both quantitative and qualitative in nature, neither of the two approaches are appropriate for this study, and a qualitative study will be used. I chose the qualitative method of inquiry because there was a scarcity of qualitative inquiries available regarding ELL academic instructional strategies in Mississippi. Qualitative research allowed district volunteer general education teachers the opportunity to openly express their ideas on teaching methodology, assessment, and strategies for ELL students. As Hatch (2002) said, this design allowed the gathering of needed data in a format that could be readily collected and analyzed because of its hermeneutic nature.

Qualitative data consisted of information gathered from surveys and interviews. Interviews were conducted after IRB approval and focused on K-12 general education teachers' lived reflections and perceptions regarding educating ELLs (see Appendix B). To ensure adequate information, only those teachers with ELL student representation

were invited to participate. Yin (2011) said that qualitative research allows the researcher to study “the meaning of people’s lives under real-world conditions” (p. 8). Creswell (2015) described this type of study as one that describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, topic, or concept for several individuals.

Although narrative or focus group approaches could have been used, the survey was more suitable due to the personal stories from the narratives. Other participants in a focus group could have influenced the information provided by the participants. A qualitative study was appropriate because open ended surveys were used with interview discussions regarding ELL teaching models, strategies, and methods. This type of survey allowed participants within the district the opportunity to say what type of instruction had previously been used as well as type and sequence of training, if any were needed. Additionally, instruction could become more rigorously geared toward proficiency level, resulting in an improvement in passing levels on district and state tests..

The second source of data was semistructured interviews. Interviews are important in qualitative studies, especially when a group cannot be readily observed (Creswell, 2012b; Stake, 2010). I selected the interviewees based on their ELL teacher status, my professional judgment, and the need to enforce the purpose of the research by looking for qualified volunteers.

My focus was twofold. First, I explored through purposive sampling perspectives regarding the problem of why ELLs were failing to meet required passing levels. Second, I gathered information and opinions from general education participants regarding the most effective instructional strategies and other components necessary for a PD training

program for those teachers interfacing with ELLs in their classrooms. Within this focus, the presentation of specific PD opportunities gave insight into what teachers wanted collectively or individually. Likewise, the study gave me the opportunity to discuss successful and unsuccessful programs, instructional modes, and technology that has been used by teachers while trying to communicate academically with ELL students in the general education classroom. The following section outlines the location of participants, participant selection, data gathering methods, data storage, and explication of the data.

### **Participants**

The setting for this study was a diverse rural district in central Mississippi. The target school is set in a small school district, which consisted of one elementary school campus and a middle/high school campus governed by a local board of directors consisting of area citizens, business people, and parents of the students. The school district is accountable for meeting CCSS state standards and ESSA federal mandates as well as fulfilling the guidelines. The standards inform educators and other stakeholders on what the students need to learn and the mandates inform the educators and stakeholders on the expectations for learning in terms of proficiency. The student population is approximately 69% White, 22% Black, and 4% Hispanic or Latino (MDE, 2016). There are approximately 1800 students enrolled in the school district and 67% of the students receive free lunch. More specifically, there are approximately 950 students enrolled at the elementary grade levels (K-5), approximately 965 middle and high school students (6-12), enrolled in the district. Using a qualitative heterogeneous single case study design, I focused on each school site collectively in the district,

Neither of the two closest districts have any ELL students. While the state of Mississippi has 152 school districts, 1,087 public schools and serves approximately 6,000 English language learners in grades K-12, the district studied had a small enrollment of ELLs but because the majority were Native Americans with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, an abundance of printed resources were not available. At present no known case studies on the education of Native American ELL students in Mississippi's public schools exist. For the purpose of this study, school levels of elementary, middle and high school were used to ensure that interviewees were from different school site locations in the district. This section discusses the criteria used for selecting participants for this study, gaining access to the participants, and the protection of participants' rights after permission was granted to do so.

### **Criteria for Selection of Participants**

Convenience sampling of participants was used to gather individuals as participants because they were volunteers who provided information to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2012a). Initially, an invitation to participate was emailed to 70 general education teachers district-wide and 10 administrators across the district seeking permission to conduct a study utilizing school e-mail systems and databases. This method, sometimes referred to as snowballing, is often used to recruit participants and use their social networks to identify other people who could provide needed information on a particular subject (Creswell, 2012b). The main criterion for participation was having provided prior instruction for at least one year to ELLs in the general education classroom from a public school in Mississippi.

### **Justification for Number of Participants**

Ary, Jacobs, Razavich, and Sorensen (2006) suggested that a normal number of participants in a qualitative study can be between 10 and 25. My goal was to have at least 25 general education teachers out of approximately 70 invitations complete the survey and one administrator out of approximately 10 invitations via email. This number met a sufficient rate that allowed variances in percentage of response rates and is thus assumed to be reasonable for a qualitative case study since qualitative studies do not set a specific number but use enough participants to get the information needed (Creswell, 2015; Hatch, 2002; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Yin, 2014).

### **Access to Participants**

After permission was granted to collect data from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I met with the school district superintendent. Following communication with me, the superintendent of the study site approved access for me to invite this participant group to engage in this project study as long as the district nor participants were identified. I obtained a letter of cooperation from the site, verifying the permissions given by the district to support this project study. I created an invitation email to participate in the survey for all district general education teachers and administrators. Then, I created a letter of invitation to general education English/ language arts teachers to participate in the interviews. The data review of information collected in the questionnaire provided a means to make decisions about identifying which staff positions would offer the best opportunity to clarify and investigate deeper into the instructional areas of ELL. It helped me in the purposeful district-wide selection

of interviewees so that any gaps of information could be filled, and further investigation occurred in developing emerging themes. This purposeful sampling allowed for the gathering of rich, informative data to help develop next steps for increasing the ELL student achievement in the general education setting. Prior to gathering any data from participants, I received Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. I sent out a mass email invitation and a follow up email invitation to all certified staff members with general information about the anonymous questionnaire. The email introduced me as the researcher in my role as a doctoral student and, also as a staff member in the district. The invitation included information about the degree program and Walden University, the purpose of the study, a description of the procedures to be used in the study, the topic of focus, and the time commitment for completion of the questionnaire. I also included any part of the research that might cause risk or inconveniences to participants. I also included an explanation of how the study would benefit students and teachers in our school district. In addition, I included the steps taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity during the questionnaire, a reminder that participation is voluntary, and information about how to reach my advisor or Walden University's IRB if there were questions about their rights as a participant of the study.

Informed consent protocols were attached, indicating that completion of the anonymous questionnaire was indicative of the participant's understanding of the informed consent. At each phase of the data collection, participants were reminded that they were not obligated to participate in this study. Creswell (2015) suggested a minimum response rate of 25% as adequate for analysis. Seventy general education

teachers in the district were contacted to participate, I hoped at least 50% of the 70 general education teachers would complete the questionnaires to minimize bias. Participants completed the questionnaires using the SurveyMonkey website; the data collected were anonymous. At no time were participants identified or asked to provide personally identifying data. Both the invitation emails as well as the questionnaire included a reminder that, due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire, once the survey was submitted, there would be no way to remove the data from the questionnaire results.

Following receipt of the questionnaire data, I sent emails to six district teachers and to 1 district administrator, inviting them to participate in interviews. While the data from the questionnaire were anonymous, they provided overall themes and direction, allowing the scheduling of purposeful interviews to explore deeper and gather clarifying information. I also incorporated the snowball method, as some interview participants suggested other potential participants when they thought the person would have background and experience to add to the overall information representative of the district. As I work in one of the local schools, but not as an administrator or general education teacher, two staff members from the school where I work were invited to participate in these interviews. Inclusion of this group of educators did not impact the diversity of the interview participant sample.

Each interview opened with a review of the invitation letter noting the purpose and nature of the study. I provided informed consent protocols and collected a signed consent form from each interview participant. Prior to the session, I sent participants a

list of interview questions. An example is included in Appendix D.

### **Researcher-Participant Relationship**

At each stage of data collection, I used strategies that were designed to promote a safe environment where participants felt respected and valued for the information they brought to the study. The letter of invitation was clear about the purpose and nature of the study, why they had been invited to participate, and how the data analysis results would be shared back with all participants. The letter of invitation also provided a rationale for the use of the qualitative research method to highlight its collaborative nature and the importance of the participant voice (Lau & Stille, 2014). The protocols put in place for the interviews were respectful of the time and expertise of each participant. The nature of purposeful district-wide sampling was to gather the richest collection of data using a sample that provided key data for the project study (Merriam, 2009). This process ensured that participants understood that their knowledge and background was relevant and important to the topic being studied. I used protocols to ensure anonymity to all participants who completed the questionnaire and to ensure confidentiality for all questionnaire and interview participants.

### **Methods for Ethical Protection of Participants**

Ethical consideration, rights, and privacy of the participants was of high priority in this study. Yin (2015) has asserted guidelines that researchers should take to protect human subjects who are participating in a study. Prior to making surveys available, an overview and purpose of the research study, as well as a copy of an explanation of the participant's rights, protection, and anonymity as well as directions for the completion



and return of surveys through SurveyMonkey, was explained via email. By consenting to take the survey, participants electronically gave consent to participate. No personal information was collected from any of the survey or interview participants in order to guarantee anonymity in research in a small district. I maintained confidentiality in surveys as they were anonymous, and interviews were conducted using pseudonyms. No participant's personal information was, nor will be provided to anyone outside of the chief researcher. An organized, step-by-step plan to make sure that every ethical protection was in its perspective place was designed and followed. Consent forms for interviews were sent and retrieved electronically via email. All responses from surveys and interviews were typed on a MS Word document, stored electronically, and then locked in my personal filing cabinet. All data collected will be destroyed after 5 years.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. Instruments designed by the researcher using open-ended questions are most often used (Creswell, 2012b). In other words, qualitative researchers have no intention to borrow, use, or depend on instruments developed by other researchers. Qualitative data consisted of surveys and semi structured interviews. Both tools were used gathered experiences and opinions (Creswell, 2012b). An alignment of interview and research questions can be found in Appendix E.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The data collection methods were customized to meet the needs of this case study to deliver descriptive information about the perceptions of teachers and administrators

regarding the instruction of ELLs in the general education classroom. Creswell (2013) noted that case study research requires a variety of methods and sources to gather in-depth, comprehensive information. As the researcher, I decided how, when, and where information would be collected so that a rich understanding could be established as to the perceptions, expertise, and views, of the teachers and administrators regarding ELLs in the general education classroom (Creswell, 2015). Merriam (2009) distinguished data collection as not passive in nature but rather as a task that is seen as an active cycle that included action and reflection.

The data for the project study were collected via online questionnaires and seven semistructured interviews. The invitation for the questionnaire contained an informed consent page providing information regarding the purpose and benefits of the study and background of the researcher. The invitation and consent form noted that, if the participant felt they understood the study well enough to make a decision about it, to please indicate his or her consent by clicking a link at the bottom of the page to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained a note reminding participants that, due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire, once a participant clicked the done button there would be no way to remove data from the survey. A similar informed consent was included at the beginning of each interview.

### **Surveys**

A self-constructed open-ended survey (Appendix C) was posted on the SurveyMonkey web link. The questions contained in the survey helped to answer Research Question 1. Questions 1-4 described types of instructional strategies being used

with ELL students. Question 5 described needed professional development. Question 6 named successful research-based strategies that had been used in the general education classroom. Question 7 examined how teachers modified test to reduce cultural bias. Question 8 examined how the incorporation of the Common Core State Standards helped ELL students make continuous progress as was measured by state tests. Survey Question 9, described non-school factors that affected ELL achievement. The online survey instrument also contained participants' implied consent by placing the consent at the beginning of the survey.

### **Interviews**

I conducted one-on-one interviews (Appendix D) with six general education teachers and 1 administrator who consented to participate. Interviews were conducted in each teacher's classroom as requested. I obtained permission to record interviews at the beginning of each interview session. The recordings were used to keep as a reference and as data collection tools for transcribing and coding. The participants were six English/language arts teachers who work directly with ELLs and one district superintendent.

These teachers were purposely selected because in most cases, English language arts teachers have first-hand knowledge of the content language challenges that require more specialized instruction to meet the academic needs of ELLs. As well, administrators are responsible for disseminating data and initiating professional learning opportunities for all groups to MDE (Turkan & Buzick, 2014). Six English/language arts teachers from three levels, (two each from elementary, middle and high school), were selected from the

invitation to participate in the interviews (Appendix D) ensuring that participants from various back grounds, school populations, and geographical areas were voluntarily selected (Creswell, 2012a). No personal identities were revealed. Interview participants were named Participant 1-6 and while Participant 7 was the administrator and was named as such. Each interview was recorded on a separate thumb drive and will be stored in my personal filing cabinet for 5 years. Each thumb drive was labeled with the appropriate code and date. After each interview was complete, I listened to the recording and made notes. Then the recordings were transcribed to identify key words, statements, and phrases that were projected by the participants. Audacity coding software was being considered but was not used. I recorded each interview using a Sony ICD-PX333 recorder, then coded results personally.

For the purpose of this study, school levels of elementary, middle and high school were used to ensure that interviewees were from different school site locations in the district. Only the code names were used. The participating administrator interviewee was selected from among 10 possible district administrators.

Each interview question served to guide data collection needed in meeting the needs of each ELL student (Appendix D). Each question was related to a response category. Research Question 1 and Interview Question 3 dealt with cultural backgrounds, and Interview Question 6 looked at differentiated instruction. Research Question 2 and Interview Questions 1, 4, and 5 examined the role of data collection, assessment, the reasons for lack of success, and the most difficult aspects of teaching ELLS. Research Question 3 and Interview Question 2 investigated professional learning communities.

These questions and responses assisted in forming teachers' perceptions as they identified ways to better instruction, assessment, and ELL success. In addition, the complete analysis of the data revealed the exclusion of instructional practices or strategies not being used consistently across the district in the general education classroom.

I developed an interview protocol to ensure that consistent procedures were used in each interview (Creswell, 2015). I forwarded a timeline and list of the interview questions I intended to ask each participant before all interviews (Merriam, 2009). I scheduled each interview for about 45 minutes. The interview opened with a review of the informed consent. The review of informed consent was followed by more specific questions generated to better understand the participant's perception of the current instruction of ELLs and what specifically was needed to create the necessary change. I recorded and transcribed each interview. I used the interview transcripts to form an electronic database. Then, I transcribed each interview as I listened to the interview recording and typed the information into a Microsoft Word document. The following 6 interviews were entered into the computer using the same manner. Then, I made edits to that document. In addition to the use of an audio recording as a method to minimize ethical issues, I asked each participant to review the transcript to his or her interview to ensure accuracy. No participant responded with any discrepancies or changes for the transcripts.

I took notes during each interview. Field notes collected during the interviews were reflective in nature; allowing inclusion of any thoughts or feelings that may have occurred during the interviews (Creswell, 2013; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010;

Rohde, 2012). This activity intensified awareness of how any personal biases may have been influencing collection of data in the interview while acknowledging the role of the researcher as an instrument within the research with capability to shaping the results (Berger, 2015; Thoresen & Ohlen, 2015). The use of field notes allowed me to take a quick note and then get back into my role as an active listener and not distracted from my interviewer role.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am licensed as an English as a Second Language specialist, and special education inclusion/transition teacher in the state of MS. I also serve in the unpaid position as one of the Mississippi's Committee of Practitioners for English Language Learners. Although I also hold a degree in K-12 school administration, I do not serve in any administrative or supervisory-type role in this district. I only interviewed general education teachers and my position did not appear to threaten the validity of this study, as the participants from my work place were asked to participate in this study. The participants in the survey were anonymous and will never be asked to reveal teaching sites or identity. The teachers were invited to reply by electronic mail or hard copy. I was extremely cautious while interpreting data through personal and professional perspectives and did not allow for an analysis and coding of the data to be personally influenced by professional experience rather than the natural emergence of themes and codes from data. I kept hand-written notes and a journal constantly checking my perception.

My relationship with the actual interview participants was professional. I did not hold any supervisory position in the district. My colleagues and I were only individuals

working in the same district and state. I have never worked as a general education teacher and I did not hold any relationship with any of the interviewees. However, I did understand that because we share the same place of employment the participants might not have been totally honest in their response.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is organized to allow the researcher to seek relationships in the data, make predictions, provide interpretations, and present findings through documentation from the data (Creswell, 2012b; Saldana, 2009). Research in ethics requires that all respondents be provided with informed consent (Hatch, 2002). Data analysis began as soon as data from the surveys were collected. Survey data were coded as they are received via SurveyMonkey. Interview questions were emailed ahead of time to all participants who signed the consent forms. Responses to interview questions were documented as they were received. Continual transcribing took place until all interviews were completed. Themes were identified and coded as they surfaced using (Creswell 2012a). Validity was established through triangulation and member checking. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtler (2010) stated that using a variety of sources to support and confirm each other or triangulation could be used as a method of validation. Results from surveys and interviews were compared as well as instructional methods and acquisition theory.

I used qualitative analysis to gain clarification and understanding into how interviewees made sense of their experiences while using and learning instructional modes and methods (Creswell, 2012b). The information gathered from the research

questions triggered such codes as successful instructional strategies, effects of PLC, professional development suggestions, and teaching culture in the classroom.

NVivo 11, a computerized software program was then used after themes and codes were identified by hand. Microsoft Word documents were uploaded into the software program. Modes or themes were identified instantly from the conversion of the information. The analysis of the codes/themes revealed the same themes that had previously been identified by hand. The themes that were identified in the NVivo11 textual analysis of qualitative data validated the findings from the first coding phase.

To ensure respondent validation, a summary of the responses was presented to all interviewees by telephone and or e-mail, asking them if they concurred with any or all the information gathered attesting to the fact that they can see their personal perspectives in print in any or all the transcription report (Creswell, 2012a). Member checks were also used as a means of confirming the given data. This process allowed me to have the opportunity to review the study's findings to the participants giving me the opportunity to review and comment on whether they believed that their true perspectives were correctly portrayed. On the other hand, the participant could have disputed the findings when incorrectly produced either in written or chart form.

I gathered data from on-line surveys, created coding form for themes in interviews, and participants' answers to identify similarities and differences among participants. Triangulation of data was completed at the end of all interviews. An analysis of data was written into a Microsoft word document. No discrepant cases were found or modified accordingly via member checks of data by any of the respondents and



documentation for no discrepancy was recorded.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the perceived causes of ELL failure and low academic performance on district and state assessments and in general education classes. It was my desire to build a rich, detailed understanding of teachers' and administrators' perceptions as to the causes of these gaps in the general education classroom settings. I used data from the online questionnaire and face-to-face interviews to build an understanding of existing beliefs and understanding regarding teacher's experiences with training before during and after providing instruction to Choctaw and Hispanic ELLs in their respective classrooms.

Yin (2014) suggested that the first step to organizing data was to develop a strategy or plan. I used Creswell's (2015) six steps to analyze, interpret and present to present qualitative data: prepare and organize, code data, develop themes from codes, present findings through narratives and visuals, interpret findings based on literature, and establish validity of the findings. Details of the data analysis strategy is included in the following paragraphs.

I began organizing the data through transcription. Online data from SurveyMonkey and interview data were synchronously transcribed. At the end of each interview, I listened to the audio recording and precisely transcribed each interview into a Microsoft Word document. After transcribing the data, I re-read each interview transcript while listening to the recording and adjusted as necessary to make sure each word was precise. Each interview was saved on a portable storage drive.

I printed survey results by question from SurveyMonkey at the end of 10 days. After downloading the survey results and pre-coded data, I submitted the responses to Nvivo 11 and received nodes comparable to previous data already gathered from online results. I made side notes on each sheet indicating their likenesses. The node sheet was stored with other survey group data on my pass-word protected computer and in print and stored in a locked file cabinet in my home.

I used 9 x12” vinyl pockets with pre-punched holes to store and to organize the data for each interview participant. I wrote the participant pseudonym on the outer covering of each pocket and sealed the pocket. Each pocket included the consent form, interview protocol, transcript, and storage drive.

Saldana (2013) asserted that coding has five stages: preparation, coding, member checking, interpreting results and presenting data. First, I used colored highlighters to circle, draw, and underline words and phrases. I grouped all of the colors using a Word document. I entered the highlighted data on the right and wrote the code name on the left side of the page. Then I divided the Microsoft Word documented using two columns, I organized the codes as they had appeared in the questions. Next, I reviewed the first set of codes to find words that were repeated or synonymous and deleted those codes. I began with 13 preliminary themes and ended with seven final themes.

The themes were obtained from two main sources, survey data and interview data. During data analysis, I studied the PD needs, instructional strategies the teachers reported they used, and their desires for something different. I compared the findings by examining my data to research based best practices presented in the literature review. I

repeated this process of data analysis until all other data confirmed that the research questions had been answered.

**Accuracy and credibility.** An imperative part of research is to ensure that findings are valid. Creswell (2015) specified triangulation, member checking, and the external audit as three means of validating the accuracy of data. To ensure credibility and validity of the data and its interpretation in this study, I utilized triangulation and member checks. Triangulation consisted of analyzing and comparing all the interview data (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, I used triangulation between the two types of data, interview and survey (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, upon the completion of the transcriptions of each interview, member checks were used by providing a copy of the transcripts to the respective participant to confirm accuracy (Creswell 2015). These member checks were completed in order to ensure credibility and to determine whether or not the data support the findings (Yin, 2015). No discrepant cases were identified.

## **Findings**

This section contains a summary of findings for each of the three central research questions. Themes emerging from the findings are noted in Tables 1-3. Overall, I found 7 major themes and five minor themes in the data analysis process. Detailed information for each research question is included following Table 1.

The causes of ELL failure and low academic performance on district and state assessments were investigated. It also examined what was needed to reduce the low performance and failure of Native Americans and Hispanic ELL students. A total of 70 survey invitations were sent to general education teachers via district email, but only 33

participated in the survey, and 6 general education teachers and one administrator were interviewed.

Data from the surveys were coded as they were gathered from SurveyMonkey. Interview questions were emailed ahead of time to all participants who signed the consent forms and interviewees were given pseudonyms. Responses to interview questions were transcribed as they were completed. Continual transcribing took place until all interviews were completed. Themes were identified and coded as they surfaced using (Creswell 2012a). Validity was established through triangulation and member checking (Lodico et al., 2010). Instructional methods and results from surveys and interviews were compared. I used qualitative analysis as a means to gain clarification and understanding into how interviewees made sense of their experiences while using and learning instructional modes and methods (Creswell, 2012b). The information gathered from the research questions triggered such codes as successful instructional strategies, effects of PLCs, professional development suggestions, and teaching culture in the classroom.

To insure respondent validation, a summary of the responses was presented to all interviewees by telephone and or e-mail, asking them if they concurred with any or all the information gathered attesting to the fact that they can see their personal perspectives in print in any or all the transcription report (Creswell, 2012a). Member checks were also used as a means of confirming the given data. There were no discrepant cases noted.

The study was guided by the following three central questions: (1) What instructional practices do general education teachers use to provide instruction for Spanish/Choctaw-speaking English language learners? (2) How do teachers with varying

types of experience and training make instructional and assessment decisions concerning struggling Choctaw and Hispanic ELLs in the general education classroom? (3) How does participating in a professional learning community in this district influence general education teachers' decisions regarding ELLs in their classrooms?

Table 1

*Major and Minor Themes for Research Question 1*

Research question topic	Major (M) and minor (m) themes
(Instructional strategies)	PD on student backgrounds (M) Effective collaboration (m)
(Professional Development)	ELL teacher support (m)

**Research Question 1.** What instructional practices do general education teachers use to provide instruction for Spanish/Choctaw-speaking English language learners?

Survey Questions 1-9 and Interview Questions 3 and 6 were used to answer Research Question 1. The responses were collected and transcribed, then coded under headings such as instructional strategies used with ELLs, professional development, and nonschool factors that affect ELLs. The top responses to each question are discussed in this section. The survey responses for Question 1 revealed that 57% the teachers felt that their training for providing instruction for ELLs was insufficient. Only 36% of respondents however, felt that their training was adequate while 7% had no training at all. In Question 2 the majority of the respondents felt “that help from the inclusion/ESL teacher, individual instruction based on language ability and differentiation were the most helpful in

trainings that had been provided to them.” The results of Question 3 noted that trainings could be improved by offering teachers more ELL trainings and teaching more about the Choctaw students’ life, and language. In Question 4 the practices that had most improvement after receiving training were “providing accommodations, utilizing help from ELL teacher/tutor and differentiating instruction.” Two people said “none” and two other respondents failed to answer the question. Question 5 revealed that teachers reported they “needed training in five major areas: classroom accommodations, assessment, laws, legal mandates and legislation as well as cultural expectations.” In Question 6 the research based instructional strategies mostly used were oral presentations, Kagan’s cooperative learning strategies, and scaffolding instruction. For Question 7 all respondents felt that “modifying content area tests to reduce linguistic complexity and cultural bias was critical, extremely important or very important.”

Answers for Question 8 outlined the how CCSS helped ELLs make continuous progress as measured by state tests. Many of the respondents noted that “the CCSS are what the students will be evaluated on at the end of the year.” Others answered that “it will not help them make progress.” One surprise answer to this question was that they were “unsure because the MDE cannot seem to decide what tests to give because there has been a different Algebra I and English II state test for the past 3 years.” The respondent was also “unsure where this helps any students especially ELL students.”

The final survey question, Question 9, looked at culture, parental involvement, home language and economic status/poverty as non-school factors that affect ELL student achievement. Appendix F notes survey responses for each question.

Interview Question 3 looked at how and why teachers incorporate English language learner students' cultural backgrounds into their teaching. The third theme derived from interview data was incorporation of student background. Participant 1 said that "teachers need to become familiar with the students and their cultures. Various holidays and important events are often discussed within the classroom, to incorporate the ELL student's culture." Participant 2 "incorporated ELL's cultural background by assigning short stories, novels, and plays pertaining to their own culture thereby making students feel more comfortable and interested because of familiarity." Participant 3 said that "incorporating the ELL student's culture in the classroom helps everyone have a clear view of where all our families derived." Participant 3 further stated that "the way teachers act and think can be explained through singing and reading about each other." Participant 4 "incorporated ELL cultural backgrounds into teaching through various texts." Participant 4 continued by stating, "Sometimes students can choose, but most of the time I purposefully select different readings and writing from multiple cultural backgrounds so that the students can really relate to the activity or lesson." Participant 5 added that "students were given a list containing choices of things to read, but that the teacher also chooses news stories and selections from many family backgrounds and countries." Participant 6 reported using "prompts for short readings that are used for inquiry and discussions as well as to help students in their writing skills because they can read then write about people that look familiar."

Interview Question 6 examined the strategies do teachers use to differentiate instruction for their English language learner students. All the participants reported that

they “used some type of differentiation in their classroom with ELL students.” Data presented under this theme varied but was greatly utilized. Participant 1 used “peer-tutoring, small grouping, ELL tutors, computer-based programs, and charts/visuals.” Participant 2 noted she “differentiated by reading instructions, allowing the use of dictionaries, giving extra time to complete assignments, using PowerPoints for visual learners and hands on for kinesthetic learners, breaking assignments into manageable chunks, providing one-on-one instruction, and requiring students to rewrite assignments.” Participant 3 stated she used “a lot of activities that showed comprehension through drawing, character portrayal or acting with other students.” Participant 4 noted “small group activities where peers could help with note taking and revisions, and explained that using the CCSS method makes learning less threatening.” This participant, like Participant 1, stated that they also “used a variety of charts, graphs, and display information for ELL students.” Participant 5 stated that “English is a complex language to learn,” but always tries to “use some type of technology based software program each year so that ELL students can work on their own level and make necessary gains in class.” Participant 5 also stated that “Doing this also assisted the student in learning important vocabulary on an age appropriate level.” Participant 5 explained that in the elementary school this is extremely important when building their English vocabulary.” Participant 6 used “cooperative learning as much as possible but preferred using inquiry-based learning where ELLs on the middle and high school levels can learn to summarize different texts; ask questions and build their speaking and listening too.”

Administrator Interview Question 1 looked at three instructional



methods/strategies that instructional leader would like to utilize with the ELL students in their school/district?

Participants noted differentiation, scaffolding, and evidence-based teaching strategies.

Table 2

*Major and Minor Themes for Research Question 2*

Topic of RQ2	Major (M) and minor (m) themes
Instructional practices	Differentiation (M) Prior knowledge(m) Data driven instruction (m) Interventions (m)

**Research Question 2.** How do teachers with varying types of experience and training make instructional and assessment decisions concerning struggling Choctaw and Hispanic ELLs in the general education classroom? Interview Questions 1, 4, and 5 answered Research Question 2. Information gathered from data recorded in each of these questions showed that teachers made instructional and assessment decisions by being guided by student data that they have collected from classroom, state and district assessments. Teachers also make decisions based on prior knowledge, data-driven instruction, remediation, and interventions.

Interview Question 1 examined the role of the teacher in data collection and ongoing assessment in instruction for English language learners. All six participants gave their perception of the role of the teacher in data collection and assessment. This was the first theme to emerge from the interview transcript with the first interview

question. Participant 1 stated that “the role of the teacher was to provide data-driven and differentiated instruction based on results from classroom assessments.” Participant 2 stated that “all students benefit when data are collected, but the teacher must set goals, conduct ongoing assessments from many sources, and make sure that ELL students are grasping what is taught. She noted that teachers should assess only what has been taught.” Participant 3 said that “a teacher’s instruction must be guided by data taken by the teacher to use to guide instructional decisions for all students.” Participant 4 believed that “teachers should use data from state and district tests to see where the student is and then look at the goal.” Participant 5 explained that “data collection for ELL students can be challenging, but the role of the teacher is to let the data taken be examined and lead instruction and assessment all year since data reveals what is taught, how, to whom and how long.” Participant 6 said that “the role of the teacher in data collection is to make sure that every ELL student is assessed by a tool(s) that really reflects what he or she knows.”

Interview Question 4 discussed related factors that contribute to the lack of success for English language learners. The third theme to be identified from the interview transcripts was factors that contributed to the lack of ELL success. Participant 1 responded that “someone *not* providing the following: data- driven instruction, remediation, intervention, and ample time for assignment completion contributed to the lack of student success.” Participant 1 added that, “Many times lessons are daunting even for students whose native language is English but being unfamiliar with the language used in the instructions or the wording of the sentences exacerbates the difficulty leading

the student to fail.” Participant 3 explained that “some students have not been exposed to literacy material in any language, a factor that can have a lasting effect for many years.” Participant 4 elaborated about “fear factors and how many ELLs are afraid of teacher expectations, entering the educational setting or its process.” Additionally, Participant 4 thought that “sometimes teachers and other educators are afraid that they cannot realistically meet the ELL student’s needs.” Participant 4 also stated that “when the students begin to struggle in the general education classroom without the teacher’s help, they become embarrassed. At that point, many of the students will not stay at the school, they quit.” Participant 5 stated that “sometimes teachers provide instruction above the student’s proficiency level. I know I did before I learned what I was supposed to do. Then, I found other programs for the Spanish-speaking students, but nothing for the ones who spoke Choctaw. So, I guess to answer the question; it would be to have available teacher resources and training.”

Participant 6 provided a different view by stating that “some ELLs cannot read and write any language fluently.” Participant 6 alluded to Participant 4’s opinion that ELLs are afraid of failure. “Teachers do not know when or how to modify or assess ELLs. There is also a lack of technology programs for them to learn with others.” Participant 6’s answer caused another theme to be considered, lack of appropriate technology programs geared just for ELLs.

Table 3

*Major and Minor Themes for Research Question 3*

RQ themes	Major (M) and minor (m) themes
Professional Learning Communities	Look at data (m) Shared responsibilities(m)
Administrative	Administrative decisions (M)

**Research Question 3.** How does participating in a professional learning community in this district influence general education teachers' decisions regarding ELLs in their classrooms? Transcribed responses to Interview Question 2 for both general education teachers and the administrator provided answers to Research Question 3. This category or theme was evident as Participants 1-7 gave a rich overview of how participating in a PLC influences general education teachers and district administrators' decisions regarding ELLs. In PLCs, teachers can receive more ideas and strategies that their colleagues are using which might be helpful. Collectively the teachers can even find new strategies that as a group that need to be incorporated.

The English/language arts teachers described how beneficial it was to be able to gain ideas and set goals for ELLs and how one teacher may have insight or could possibly have an invaluable strategy. The participants expressed how general education teachers can jointly make decisions for ELL students allowing everyone to have input in all areas of their education. They all agreed that it helps when teachers can plan together about ELLs and make instructional decisions. The participants discussed "how PLCs are

a time to look at data and instruction together in particular program areas or departments so that everyone can see what needs to be done.” They stated that “participating in PLCs affords general education teachers an opportunity to look at what strengths and gains were made by each student.”

Interview Question 2 helped to explain how PLC participation affects ELL student performance and was the second theme derived from the interview transcripts. Each teacher elaborated positively about PLC participation. All participants referred to being involved in PLC as a means of learning from each other. Participant 1 said that “in PLCs, teachers can receive more ideas and strategies that their colleagues are using, which might be helpful or that as a group, need to be incorporated.” Participant 2 saw “PLC teacher collaboration as vital when it comes to ELL students because when teachers can make comparisons of the successes as well as the struggles of students, it is very beneficial.” Participant 2 said that “one teacher may have insight or could possibly have discovered a good strategy, which has been invaluable; therefore, it is essential that teachers meet with one another on an ongoing basis.” Participant 3 agreed that through PLCs teachers can jointly make decisions for ELL students allowing everyone to have input in all areas of their education. Participant 4 revealed the fact that it helps when “teachers can plan together about ELLs and make instructional decisions. PLCs, give us time together to look at data and instruction.” Participant 5 viewed participation in a PLC “as a time when the group can set goals, see what was good for teachers that had the same ELL student or even share research-based strategies that work.” Participant 6 described PLCs as a time that, “allow teachers to specifically look at our program area or

department and see what we need to do better for ELLs or even look at what strengths and gains were made.”

Administrator Interview Question 2 helped to explain how participating in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) influence decisions regarding ELLs in this school/district. The administrator believed that almost any instructional challenge that can arise in providing instruction to ELLs could be solved or minimized by participating in PLCs. The administrator explained that if teachers utilize PLCs fully, there are no limits to what can be accomplished through their team. “PLCs can influence how teachers plan, teach, look at data, assess, grade, choose instructional resources, make parental contacts and much more.” Participant 7 elaborated further by stating that “participating in a PLC helps leaders see what teachers’ goals are for the ELL students and how they plan to reach them.” Participant 7 As a department, PLCs help the administrator see the shared responsibilities the teachers have for these students and the shared responsibilities they have for teaching and learning. Administrators can see the togetherness as they collaborate to analyze data and plan instruction. Participant 7 explained that “this also helps to see how faculty and staff deal with their challenges and difficulties and overcome obstacles. Just being a part of a PLC helps make decisions on curriculum, teacher choice, as well as planning and budgeting less complicated.”

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the perceived causes of ELL failure and low academic performance on district and state assessments and in general education classes and plan training for teachers of ELLs in Mississippi to

increase the language minority students' academic achievement and classroom success. The conceptual framework that guided this qualitative case study was Vygotsky's theory which shows the need for children to actively engage with others who can develop their potential (Lee, 2015).

Six English/language arts teachers and one administrator were interviewed to examine their perceptions of the ELL instructional strategies in the general education classroom and insight as to why these students are not performing at the same level as their English-speaking peers. Stakeholders offered recommendations on what was needed to increase ELL performance on Mississippi state test scores. After the questionnaires and interviews, I analyzed the data to determine the perceptions of the importance of professional development, culture, the participants' recommendations or suggestions to ensure that overall instruction in the content areas meets the academic needs of the ELLs, the participants addressing the existing and needed PD that allow for increased student success, and the challenges that ELLs have in that has resulted in not meeting district and state requirements each year. In the following section I will describe the project and explore needed professional development to assist teachers in planning instruction for ELLs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to plan training for teachers of ELLs in Mississippi to increase the language minority students' academic achievement and classroom success.

The research unveiled needed professional development training areas (2017). It was clear from interview data that the majority of the general education teachers in this small rural district had had to some extent, ELL training. Additionally, transcribed data

revealed that most the teachers were providing some type of research-based instruction in all the English/Language Arts classrooms. Based upon these results, a professional development training plan was constructed to address the problems and training needs and requests of the general education teachers and administrators in this district.

As the population of ELLs continues to grow in the United States, it is crucial that states like Mississippi and local education agencies focus more concentration on effectually preparing teachers to meet the distinct needs of ELLs better. Providing a high-quality education for students in the United States whose native language is not English is urgently calling for increased attention on the part of educators, administrators, and community leaders. The number of ELLs in some schools across the U.S. has increased as much as 610%.

Data results revealed a need for more research on how best to train general education teachers and administrators through professional development to implement practices and processes effectively into the current curriculum for Native American and Hispanic students. Additionally, trainings on adapting the curriculum so that the backgrounds of minority students remained to be an integral part of general education classroom's daily instructional and learning techniques of listening, reading, writing, and speaking (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). The participants' revelation of instructional methodology and assessment knowledge were crucial in constructing and informing the outcome of this project study. High-grade technology such as audio recorders for transcribing data and Survey Monkey for conducting questionnaires significantly enhanced the data collection process. Data collected from this study will be used to



design a training plan for general education teachers' professional development sessions.

### **The Project Deliverable as an Outcome of the Results**

As an outcome of the results, I created a 5-day professional development (PD) program as my final project (Appendix A). Other deliverables were examined, but not chosen. The project needed to emerge from the data. A policy or white paper was not chosen because many of the teachers view handouts as something else to do or read and then throw it into the trash. I wanted to this PD to be active and as much hands on as possible. A curriculum plan would have been inappropriate because based upon the results of the data, the teachers required the training, and were active learners. The PD plan reveals the perceptions and recommendations of teachers and administrators exposed during interviews or in response to questionnaire. This PD could encourage all teachers to implement instructional strategies for Native American and Hispanic ELL students to help increase state test scores and enhance overall student success district-wide. Professional development helps teachers infuse effective elements into their teaching and increases expertise and skills that can be tremendously rewarding to educators on many levels (Brink et al., 2012; Porche et al., 2012). Based on the identified needs this type PD will help to promote teacher collaboration and teacher mentoring.

Section 3 is a description of the project that has resulted from the above data. This section includes the rationale, the review of the literature, the discussion of the project, the project evaluation plan, and the implications of the project.



### Section 3: The Project

This section will present a thorough overview of this project study and describe goals and rationale for conducting this project study. I will present the details and results of the study in a 5-day PD session in the district prior to the 2017-2018 school year.

After recounting the description and goals, I will explain the literature review and the process of implementation. As stated in Section 2, the study was guided by the Vygotskian theory of development, which is that teachers and students are active parts of the learning process. This PD will help educators and administrators better understand the changes required for ELL success in instruction, assessment, and curriculum for implementation of Career Ready State Standards. The PD will help ELLs in K-12 general education classroom teachers by providing strategies to improve active engagement of the ELLs helping close the gap between ELLs and their English-speaking peers.

#### **Description and Goals**

This presentation model was chosen based on the participants' responses to past and needed training. This PD presentation will assist in resolving current gaps in achievement between ELLs and non- ELLs within the target school and other district schools. In addition, the PD will serve as a resource for teachers and administrators as a model for overall improvement in teaching and learning as it relates to ELLs. Knowing that there is no one single solution to ELLs' lack of achievement, adequate PD is a key underlying factor to raising student achievement in all facets of education (Fisher et al., 2012). This PD will include research-proven instructional strategies and methods that have been proven to help raise ELL student achievement. Teachers will be able to

identify the main components of their school's culture and practice its incorporation into their lessons. Teachers' instructional methods are the most effective factors in language acquisition and academic proficiency (Arghode, 2013; Freeman, 2017; Maftoon, & Sarem, 2012). Another component, the use of technology as a resource, will also be discussed so that teachers and administrators have resources and understand when to use them. The following topics will be discussed: Identification of ELLs, school culture, accommodations, instructional strategies, PLC collaboration, data sharing, and assessment of ELLs.

The project was created as a result of the findings of this study. It is a PD program for district administrators and instructional teacher leaders that will focus on the teacher instructional components and strategies necessary in the general education classroom focused on the instructional learning of ELLs. The purpose of the PD is to build on the strengths currently present in the district, such as collaboration, while creating learning opportunities for administrators and teams of teachers regarding ELLs regarding the research based strategies needed to support ELL instruction and achievement. By growing in these areas, administrators and their teams will be better prepared to build teacher competence in the district regarding ELL instruction in the general education classroom.

The general education teachers and administrators will be provided with 5 days of face-to-face, PD during the summer relating to the reconsideration of the instructional approaches, tools and change processes, and opportunities significant to ELL academic success in the general education classroom for Choctaw and Hispanic ELL students.

Finally, a variety of practical modes and resources for providing research-based instruction for ELL students will be highlighted. The 5 days of PD will be scheduled for one week in the summer of 2018 and will serve to facilitate the continued communication, collaboration between teachers and administrators to better serve ELLs throughout the 2018-2019 school year.

This PD will allow each participant an opportunity for collaboration, reflection, and leadership in their respective content areas. As a result of the participating in the PD, each participant will have an opportunity to increase their own understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses as it relates to providing instruction to Choctaw and Hispanic ELLs in their classroom, school, and district. Individual teacher needs at the different schools in the district, and opportunities to develop personalized PD for school staff can be accomplished by using strategies and suggestions presented at the 5-day sessions. Goals for the PD are:

1. The main goal of the project is to provide an overview of all stakeholders' responsibility to ELL education.
2. Teachers and administrators will identify, develop, and incorporate ELL instructional strategies in the classroom.
3. This project will provide PD for faculty to review, analyze, share, and reflect on individual and group data regarding ELL students to determine patterns and inform instruction.
4. School teams will draft and understand the importance of the ELL Language Service Plan.

## **Rationale**

I chose this project to address the problem because I wanted each teacher in the district to be able to adjust their instruction and resources to accommodate the ELLs in their particular classroom and school. General education teachers need clarification regarding how to help ELLs acquire the English language skills needed to be successful in general education classrooms (TESOL, 2016). By presenting the findings and information district wide, each teacher will be able to see how to customize their instruction to fit the specific ELL students in their classes. This district-wide presentation will help teachers meet ELL students' academic needs and be prepared to close the existing performance gap between ELLs and their English-speaking peers. Shokouhi, Moghimi, and Hosseinzadeh (2015) suggested the use of PDs along with PLCs as PLCs have been found to help teachers reflect on their knowledge and teaching practice from a sociocultural perspective.

Because of the incorporation of these standards, educators are evaluating and overhauling their assessment and accountability systems, which involves incorporating additional PD and strategies for ELLs who in the past have scored than their English-speaking peers. By using a case study, I was able to study one or more individuals in this district as well as their academic activities and processes in depth. In this qualitative case study, I interviewed teachers and collected teachers' perceptions regarding the instructional, and assessment strategies, and professional development provided and needed in order to answer the research questions and address the local gap of ELLs' learning needs compared to non-ELLs learning needs. The use of open-ended interview

questions I was able to listen to the participants to talk freely on the targeted topics and not be bound by one or two-word answers. As a result of the data collected, a PD plan emerged from the interviews and survey data as the project deliverable to support the needs of educators and students in the target school.

### **Review of the Literature**

An intensive search of the literature was conducted to uncover the information regarding the design and development of the accompanying project. The topics and keywords that were used to conduct this study were in search engines: *Vygotsky, English Language Learner, successful teaching strategies and professional development for general education teachers*. After performing that extensive online search of keywords and phrases, I also entered those same keywords into EBSCOhost, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), SAGE Journals, ProQuest, and several other electronic databases that were available through the Walden University Library. I also entered the names of leading advocates in the areas of *differentiated instruction, cultural diversity, PLCs, ELLs, and professional development such as Kagan, Lin, Marzano, Haynes and Darling-Hammond*. The review centered on Vygotsky's theory of learning as it relates to ELLs, themes of successful instructional strategies, effects of professional learning communities (PLCs), and professional development (PD). Research books were also used in preparing this review of the literature.

### **Vygotsky's Theory of Learning**

Vygotsky (1978) theorized that a child learns best while intermingling with others in his environment to help him solve a problem. At first, the adult interacting with the

child is the leader, then as the child becomes more skilled the child begins problem solving and guiding his own learning tasks after tasks have been scaffolded (Mori, 2014; Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997), giving students the framework to extend their knowledge. So, it is with ELLs. Vygotsky, as stated by Lee (2015) argued that development occurs externally from social interactions and internally. Like language, as the adult initially talks to the child then, eventually, the child learns to respond to the adult moving with time from babbling, to baby talk to complete sentences. According to Henschel (2012), when faced with learning English as a second language, the student is essentially an infant and cannot communicate with the teacher except through nonverbal communication. Consequently, it is up to the teacher. He or she is responsible for communication until the student becomes familiar with the English language. Ryan (2013), like Vygotsky (1978), stated that the teaching of English to the large number of ELLs that have recently been classified as ELL is challenging at all points in the language system. However, these ELLs will be able to acquire language through caring adults who work to improve language development skills. By conducting this type PD that is based upon the results of data research, teachers can increase their knowledge by learning new instructional methods and participating through team effort. Teachers who have had collaboration, continuous training and model language and socialization in English appropriately in their classrooms will increase state test scores in ELA for the ELLs.

### **Successful Instructional Strategies**

According to Cervetti, Kulikowich, and Bravo (2015), many ELLs do not often



perform as well academically as native English-speaking peers. Therefore, teachers need to use many strategies to assist their students in bridging this gap (Cervetti et al., 2015). When asked specifically in the survey about the perceptions of their teaching abilities as it relates to their knowledge and implementation of research-based effective instructional strategies beneficial for ELs, only 3 participants responded that they were fully confident in their training to provide instruction to ELLs. Rather, teachers who perceived themselves as being effective in their abilities to support ELs in the content area, reading word knowledge and vocabulary development are detrimental for ELLs in the initial phases when attempting to learn English. The instructional strategies used to teach ELL language use across different contexts is equally important (Braker, 2013; Carger & Koss, 2014; Madrigal-Hopes et al., 2014; Marulis & Neuman, 2013; and Roe, Kolodziej, Stoodt-Hill & Burns, 2014).

### **Professional Development**

The professional development plan project was created to enable K-12 educators and administrators to identify and develop instructional strategies that would help close the gap between ELLs and their English-speaking peers. It will also address the second language and content area needs of ELLs, in a manner that is consistent with District, State and federal regulations. The results of this study prove that when given the opportunity, input from the survey, interview questions, educators, and practitioners in the field of first and second language acquisition unleash new ideas and solutions to problems and concerns.

Survey and interview data reveal major areas in which teachers feel they need the

most training. Table 4 presents desired ELL training topics as expressed by the respondents as a group.

Table 4

*Desired ELL Training Topics and Percentages of Teachers Interested in Them*

Topics	Percentage of Teachers Interested per Training Topic
Accommodations/Modifications	91
Instructional Strategies	93
Professional Development	85
PLC Collaboration	61
Assessment	90
Data sharing	72
Technology as a resource	89

Data in the table suggest that teachers highly want and need varied trainings. The training on accommodations/modifications, instructional strategies, professional development, PLC collaboration, assessment, data sharing, and technology as a resource will be discussed in the following paragraphs and sections.

### **Accommodations and Modifications**

Accommodations and modifications are totally different. Although used together in some classroom situations, they are not to be confused or used synonymously. Accommodations change how a student learns, but not the curriculum. Modifications can change what the student learns, its method and rate of delivery (Abedi, 2013). Clark-Gareca (2016) states that accommodations must be used during regular instruction time and not just during assessments. ELLs are a diverse group with varying assessment needs. Burke, Morita-Mullaney, and Singh (2016), suggested that teachers and

administrators look closely at which testing accommodations are most appropriate for each student at different English proficiency levels and make choices on individual levels. Accommodation changes how a student learns, but not the curriculum.

Appropriate accommodations for ELLs may be in the form of extra time to complete tests or activities, the use of dictionaries or the student may be placed in a study carrel to accommodate an attention deficit, but the student receives the same instruction as the rest of the class (Burke et al., 2016). Accommodations may be assistive in nature such as using specialized a computer, or magnifier. Abedi (2013) agreed that accommodations help the ELL child be able to learn classroom material and further states that teachers should continue to have high expectations for all children the classroom who require accommodations.

However, a modification changes what an ELL student is expected to learn and alters the curriculum and or type instruction for that student. Shorten or adapted tests, and simpler assignments are examples of modifications. When used inadequately both accommodations and modifications can have detrimental outcomes because students may not fully understand directions or materials (Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014). ELL students who receive modified assessments or materials are not held to the same standards as his or her general education peers because of the varying degrees of differences in instructional and assessment needs.

### **Instructional Strategies**

Responses in Interview Question 3 indicated that teachers wanted more training in providing instruction for ELLs. When asked specifically about the perceptions of their

instructional preparedness as it relates to their knowledge and implementation of research-based effective instructional strategies beneficial for ELLs, all 6 participants responded that they were not fully confident. Since ELLs have specific and unique needs that differ from their English-speaking peers; they require specialized English language development instructional approaches (Hopkins et al., 2015; Short, 2013). However, there were teachers competent in their respective content areas, but not with ELLs instruction.

According to Cervetti et al. (2015), many ELLs do not often perform as well academically as native English-speaking peers. Therefore, teachers need to use as many various strategies as possible to assist their students (Cervetti et al., 2015). Regardless of native language Akbari and Tavassoli (2014), suggested improving teacher effectiveness to have the largest positive impact on student achievement.

In contrast, Hopkins et al. (2015) noted subject-specific demands in classes such as mathematics can be viewed as free of language that might be unique to students that were learning English. Instructional strategies in these classes should be carefully selected and guided by appropriate accommodations and modifications.

### **Professional Development**

PD can be described and used in many ways. Kose and Lim (2013) suggested that PD be offered in a variety of ways, such as study groups, mentoring, observation, peer planning and workshops. Whether onsite off-campus or online teachers desire to have the information they need. Researchers do not agree on what constitutes effective PD nor do they agree on any all-inclusive set of components (Bayar, 2014).

Holm and Kajander (2015), described PD as a means of helping teachers gain new knowledge and support through continued training and support and is used by administrators to increase teacher competencies. Although PD varies from school to school and district to district because of the demographics, age of students and instructional needs, PD is still an important factor in teacher effectiveness. Researchers do not agree on what constitutes effective PD (Bayar, 2014). Seventy-five percent of the survey and interview respondents in the study described professional development on ELL instruction as inadequate. Inadequate professional development was consistent with those found in studies from professional literature (de Jong et al., 2013; Richards-Tutor et al., 2013; Turkan & Buzick, 2016).

Research (Davis, Yssel, McConnell & Hardin, 2014; Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015; Lin, Cheng, & Wu, 2015) reiterated the belief that productive professional development is critical for teacher growth and school success (Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015). Other researchers support that professional development for teachers not only improves their classroom instruction through increased knowledge, but also through the use of research-based pedagogy practices, collaboration and self-confidence (Dixon et al., 2014; Krasnoff & Education Northwest, 2015; Lin et al., 2015). It is necessary that teachers receive PD that provides the opportunity to learn the skills pertaining to assessment, instructional approaches, and knowledge required to positively impact student learning (Dixon, 2014; Murray, 2013).

Approximately 25% of teachers surveyed expressed interest in learning the other dominant L2 language, the Choctaw language. Many have participated in the classes

offered in Spanish for the educators in the school, but the Choctaw language and culture had never been offered or taught, thus supporting Denver and Lash's (2013) idea that PD must be meaningful, relevant. Learning about students' cultures and backgrounds helps educators become more aware of the level of background or native language and barriers to a L2 (Doran, 2014). Learning the basics of a language can help teachers plan instruction with an understanding of basic words and meaning that can be incorporated into that particular class.

To be effective, teachers need PD that is job embedded, specific, ready to implement in their classrooms (Parise, Finkelstein, & Alterman, 2015; Sanders, Parsons, Mwarumba & Thomas, 2015). Brown and Militello (2016) described best PD practices as those that are:

- continuous and ongoing professional growth opportunities that offer the opportunity to collaborate with peers
- address conceptualized needs
- present a sustained examination of student learning
- measure outcomes by more than one means
- focus on instructional matters
- incorporate monitored trial implementation
- allow the opportunity to practice

Four recurring qualities of effective PD that were found in the literature are that PD should be hands on, what the teachers need, allow for teachers to collaborate with colleagues, and include multiple sessions over the course of a school year (August et al.,

2014; Bayar, 2014; Lowenhaupt & Reeves, 2017; Polkinghorne 2013). Participants also stated that PD is often designed without input from teachers. To maximize its effectiveness, it is important to gain insight from teachers when designing PD (Byar, 2014). Teachers perceived PD to be most effective when it was long term, hands on, included knowledgeable trainers/presenters and teacher input, and addressed existing teacher and school needs (de Oliveira & Shoffner, 2016)

PD is the genre of my project. Brown and Militello (2016) stated that PD is the most common form of continuing education for teachers. The project for this study is a 5-day professional development training guide. The PD genre is most suitable for my project because it is research-based, relevant, professional development that can present teachers with strategies to close the academic gap of ELLs in the district. According to (Cummins, 2014 ; Heritage, Walqui, & Linqianti, 2015; King 2016; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2017), professional training is the major factor that promotes ELL literacy achievement, content academic development and skills, quality instruction. In the paragraphs that follow, I have provided a review of current literature on PLC collaboration.

### **PLC Collaboration**

Data results showed that participants in the study already participated in PLCs to some extent. However, collaboration must be improved. According to Clay, Soldwedel, and Many (2011) collaboration in PLCs is detrimental the mission, value and goals of the entire learning community. Members of PLCs must work together to share and interpret data, compare instructional strategies and successes. Teachers must meet regularly with

student work and common assessments to determine the next steps in their instruction. In any case, teachers and administrators must be committed the practice (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

### **Assessment**

Assessment may be formal or informal. Most complications of assessment for ELLs can be accomplished by using the accommodations and modifications expressed in the section. Assessment must be based upon the linguistic needs of each student according to his proficiency levels (Mitchell, 2017). Whether formative or summative, assessment can be modified if needed to ensure ELL student success.

### **Data Sharing**

Data sharing is especially important in PLCs. Participants in the survey wanted to know what ELL data to use, when and why. Perez (2016) stressed that data analysis provides a snapshot of what students know, and what teachers need to do to meet their academic needs. This type of sharing is vital to student improvement and helps teachers focus on areas of need so that student growth and development can be closely monitored throughout the year. Clay et al. (2011) stated that data must be trustworthy, openly shared with others, promote understanding, monitor improvement and reflect results. The following section will address technology use for ELLs.

### **Technology**

Computers, iPads and Promethean Boards are used by most teachers to provide instruction to ELLs in grades K-12. Survey data suggest that teachers lack ample supply of iPads and computers in each classroom to provide needed interactive instruction.



Additionally, teachers are not knowledgeable of appropriate software and nor have they been trained to use websites appropriate to content areas and ELL's proficiency levels. Instead, general education teachers are forced to participate in weekly rotation schedules for computer labs when students could benefit from daily exposure and practice to complete independent work, to construct word walls, conduct whole group games, and story/writing presentations.

According to Yildirim and Torun (2014) and Rivera, Mason, Moser, and Ahlgrim-Dezell (2014), integrating technology into the classroom and daily lessons has a direct positive impact on ELLs. Cutter (2015) stated that technology allows the teacher to differentiate lessons for every student based on their needs and understanding of specific information and motivates the student to learn. Once a student is successful his or her desire to learn new material escalates and expands so learning is not limited to one content area (Burns, 2014). Cutter (2015) further stated that to properly support all ELLs, it is imperative for teachers to participate in specialized PD opportunities, so that they will be knowledgeable and competent enough to not only use computer applications but be able to integrate iPads, iPods and other technology also into daily lessons.

### **Project Description**

In Mississippi, ELLs are required to learn the content area curriculum, meet the mandated learning objective standards and, pass four state mandated exams. Therefore, exposure to demonstrations showing how to implement strategies that simultaneously mix language acquisition, language development, assessment and academic achievement using multiple models was designed in this project (Rodriguez,

Abrego, & Rubin, 2014; Van Roekel, 2011).

The PD project was designed to continue with other content PLCs for the remainder of the year. Teachers attending the summer presentation will train other PLCs using data and research. This PLC will meet again in one month and then monthly on the first Wednesday. Teachers will continue to hold PLC meetings with the same group of content teachers 2 times per month as assigned by principal. Teachers will keep track of their students' progress and be prepared to discuss it with the PLC group at each meeting. Teachers will be prepared to discuss what worked well and what strategies were not successful. All teachers will be asked to bring should bring a sample lesson of one of their instructional strategies to discuss with the group as well as in their content area meeting. Teachers will be encouraged to continue researching ELL instructional strategies and share any out of the ordinary or motivating strategies with their PLC group.

After the 5-day sessions, this PD will serve as an ongoing process in this district for one year to assist help educators, especially administrators and general education teachers, identify and initiate research-based assessment and instructional reform.

### **Implementation**

#### **Needed Resources**

The continuing PLC PD will be included in the annual August 2018 professional development presentations. With the new fiscal budget beginning on July 1, 2018, I have asked for a requisition for funding from the federal programs Title I and II funds in the amount of \$1,500.00. That amount will cover \$1,200 for teacher stipends and \$300 for materials.

**Existing Supports**

Each year, the district has 3-5 days of professional development prior to beginning of the school term. The district has recently remodeled a building to conduct meetings and serve as a computer lab. This allows district personnel to conduct multiple PD sessions at the same time, which will make it easier for me to have conduct breakout sessions. This professional development will be approved by the district administration in May. The 5-day session will be added into the district July onsite teacher trainings calendar.

**Potential Barriers**

One anticipated barrier would be the time needed to complete this PD plan. During school hours does not seem to be an option. Many after school days are already taken in content areas. PD time restraints may make it impossible to implement. Another potential barrier is the funding for teacher stipends to attend this PD. The district does not have the required number of ELL students to receive Title III funding, therefore my request for federal programs funding through Title II may not be granted. Even though I requested the funding through Federal programs it may already be earmarked for other things.

**Potential Solutions to Barriers**

One potential solution to the payment of stipends is not to offer any but offer CEU credit. Teachers are always searching for credits for license renewal. Many teachers will need to renew their licenses in a few years and this PD opportunity will allow for CEUs for teachers and SEMI credits for administrators.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The training plan will be approved in May for initial implementation in July with English Language arts teachers. Each school administrator would then include it on both the school calendar and the building level professional development plan. The project would be presented collectively over the course of one school year with the first 5 days consisting of an English Language Arts summer train-the-trainer/peer coaching PD.

Each of the 5 days of training will consist of morning and afternoon sessions. In July, each day's session will include PLC small group activities, PowerPoint presentations, cooperative learning and whole group participation (Appendix A). Beginning in August, the ELA teachers trained will share information learned with other content area teachers. The teachers will then turnkey PLCs once per month to gather data and measure growth and change with ELL students after assessments and instructional strategies have been implemented.

**Timetable.** The specific timeline is listed below:

- The project study findings and supporting literature will be presented to the building level principal at the school where the professional development will initially take place. The objectives/goals for schools and participants will be presented. (May, 2018).
- Get confirmation of financial administrative support for scheduled PD. (May, 2018).
- Reserve training lab and presentation equipment for PD on calendar in school office. (May, 2018).

- Request copies of school district ELL Plan and presentation materials.
- Submit request for technical assistance to MDE Office of Student Assessment and Title III English Language Acquisition for specified dates in July. (May, 2018)
- Get an updated email list of all ELA teachers as participants
- Get a list of articles for case studies, reminders, and website link for July PD session.
- Make copies for participant and administrator folders (June, 2018)
- Conduct 5 Day on site professional development workshop sessions and collect daily evaluations on each day's topic. (July, 2018).
  - (a). The session on Day 1 will be informative in nature, providing a background of information for ELL students. I will present the purpose of research training, definitions, Choctaw tribal presenter, Guatemalan presenter, and overviews of the study.
  - (b). Day 2 would be a hands-on PLC group study on using student information and research to drive instruction and assessment by matching differentiated instructional strategies to ELL students with various weaknesses in ELA skills.
  - (c). On Day 3, the participants will use INOW demographic information, Language Assessment Scale (LAS), student assessment data to complete LSPs and lesson plan that includes specific student instruction.
  - (d). On Day 4 the ELA teachers will be presented with ACUITY data results,

instructional strategies, completed LSP and lesson plan with accommodations chart for ELL student(s).

(e). On Day 5 each PLC group will present compared assessment data, content based suggestions and at least 3 differentiated instructional tools based upon information from each PLC specific topic.

- Attend August train-the-trainer meeting as an observer.
- Collect monthly training updates from PLC meetings. Compile result data.
- After final PLC in May, 2019, email all participants a survey link to complete an online survey pertaining to year-long PD. The data will be used to inform instruction, professional development, assessment, and growth.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

I designed the 5-day professional development plan. My main role would be as facilitator. I would obtain permission from central office administration before May 25, 2018 to get my PD plan on the agenda for July/August 2018. I designed a 5-Day face-to-face professional development because of the data presented in my project study. Each step of the timeline will be enacted during each training session.

Face-to-face delivery of this 5-day professional training seems the most effective and cost-effective means of presentation (Lin et al., 2015). With a few adaptations and changes, the training could be presented as an online training course for general education teachers, grade level or PLC specific staff. (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). I will discuss any needed changes or adjustments with the building level site offices administrators and with each school's administrator. Each building level principal or his

designee will participate in the project encouraging and training with PLCs.

The role of each principal will be to fully commit to the execution and evaluation of the PD project for one full school year during PLC time. Their commitment will involve meeting with me prior to the trainings and providing directional feedback on evaluation and needs. Teachers at each site will commit to participating in the PLCs consistently and in a collaborative manner. I would secure the location to hold my professional development session on meeting the needs of ELLs. I would then ensure appropriate seating and audiovisual equipment. The presentation includes a PowerPoint, computer, case studies, collaboration, and hands on, which can be found in Appendix A.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

A professional development evaluation form (Appendix B) will be given to all participants after each day's session. This type of formative assessment will be used to give feedback and guide teacher instruction ideas on additional training sessions. The results of the formative evaluation will be used to determine growth, improvement, needs and additional training and support suggestions, if any. Each participant will be asked to rate each session and then list what they liked about the sessions, suggest ways to improve the session or other things they would like to include.

The PD will meet and present data and monitoring information. Monitoring of the effects of the program will be continuous throughout the year as the groups meet and disseminate growth data or what is needed by each PLC or administrator as grades observations and assessments are revealed. I will see if my plans are put into action as I work daily with the general education teachers and attend PLC meetings as they discuss

data and document progress monitoring or Tier II or Tier III documentation. If I fail to get the money requested as a lack of support, I will ask the district curriculum and testing office for financial support to carry out the face to face PD. I will also solicit other types of rewards for ELA participants like CEU's for their willingness to participate before the beginning of school. The MDE personnel and presenters will come on a voluntary basis and no pay will be involved for the technical assistance.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

**Immediate implications.** Locally, the implication for social change in this project would be to improve the performance of ELLs by enhancing teacher and administrator by enhancing teachers' and administrators' knowledge through self-examination and practice. The professional development model developed from the results of the findings of this study will contribute to teachers in three schools raising the academic achievement of students who are English learners (Kim 2013; Kim & Garcia, 2014). Ultimately, it is hoped that teachers will value the use of PLCs and differentiated instruction to make informed decisions including the decision including going beyond test scores, but also looking at students' overall performance (Lochmiller, 2016). The training plan provided will hopefully improve teacher practice and increase collaboration and impact ELL student learning. The PD plan can be followed up with future topics, such as portfolio assessment on the connection of professional development and student learning in different grades.

**Long-term implications.** Teachers will have the opportunity through training to increase instructional knowledge and skills concerning ELLs in different ways. One long



term implication of this study is that the ELL professional development that everyone received was content specific, relevant and, if heeded, will lead to a change in practice (King, 2014; Molle, Short, 2013; Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016). Additionally, the use of computers can assist teachers when newly arrived students come into the classrooms lacking sufficient academic and oral language (Amendum, Amendum, & Almond, 2013). ELA teachers in the district will be able to train others to use research-based strategies gained in the PD (Silva, Delleman & Phesia, 2013). Teachers can also use this PD to track effectiveness of remedial programs. ELLs will have a teacher who has been trained to use strategies needed to meet their unique and diverse academic needs (Baecher, Rorimer, & Smith, 2012). Teachers can use data to inform and adapt instruction and drive community resources.

### **Conclusion**

The essence of this study was to find a way by PD to meet the needs of American Indian and Hispanic ELL students in this district and Mississippi. This study can serve as a road map for teacher training and ELL student improvement in other locations where a similar problem occurs. The strategies, resources, and training will hopefully improve teacher performance and help bridge the gap between ELLs and their peers. The results of this study will help administrators facilitate instructional teams that promote resilience, coach each other, monitor, teaching practices, with the ultimate goal of reducing the achievement gap for ELLs.

#### Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In this section, I examined the strengths and weaknesses of this project study. I also provided a review of the project evaluation, defined scholarship, and provided an analysis of myself as scholar, practitioner, and project facilitator. I explained the role of leadership and its impact on change. I elaborated on the project's potential impact for social change at the local level and beyond. The project's implications, applications, and suggestions for future research were explained. I expressed my growth and struggles as a researcher and practitioner. I explained the need for PD to enhance the growth and collaboration that would lead to a stronger knowledge base and working relationship among teachers.

#### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The project case study design was the second strength of the study. By using the project case study, I was able to collect data through face to face interviews as well as anonymously through an online survey. Participants had the opportunity to express themselves, communicate their successes, discuss their needs, and elaborate on their failures. Then, I was able to use data from both to design PD based upon the findings.

The next strength was the relevancy to the teachers and other participants. The project was designed just for this district's demographics, culture, and requested training needs and instructional strategies. Next, the project will be conducted with ELA faculty in 5-day sessions, and then spread to all PLCs within the school year. Then, district PLCs will be established by grade level subject area and building level. Each PLC will identify and discuss strengths, concerns, and research-based solutions to problems related to

instruction and assessment of ELLs. As a group, the ELA will be able to identify effective instructional practices currently in use and pinpoint others that may be more feasible to use in their classrooms. Administrators who are already apart of PLC will be included in the next fall, allowing them the opportunity to participate as instructional leaders. The final strength of the PD is that the collaborative training concept that will be utilized by ELA teachers in the summer, will be expanded to include other content area teachers.

The organization of PLCs has been strongly encouraged by the MDE in 2016 for use in all public schools in Mississippi. Therefore, during the regular school term, all educators in this district, regardless of grade, will participate through PLCs and give feedback needed to make ELL education in the district strong and durable.

This project study also had several limitations. The problem of ELL students' lack of success will be addressed using research based training and instructional strategies to meet the academic needs of the Native American and Hispanic ELL students in the district. One limitation of the PD project is the selected members. It is a limitation because the 5-day session will consist only one content area. Only K-12 English/Language arts teachers will attend because ELA teachers are the core of learning to read, write and speak the English language. It is hoped that the ELA CCSS will spread to the other content area teachers through school and grade level PLC meetings.

The PD will be presented as a suggested requirement for all education staff. General education, special education, and ELL staff are collectively responsible for the academic success of ELLs in the district. A second limitation is that some

paraprofessionals and ESL teachers may not want to participate because they may feel that they already work with the students a large amount of time each day. To change the feeling, best collaboration practices for each individual group who provide services for ELL students should be included to address the limitations. The information from the 5-day PD sessions will be included in the PLCs for the upcoming school year.

This PD will be a part of a district-wide initiative to improve ELL student achievement. Therefore, PD assigned by the district is not optional. Once approved, it will become a district-wide PD. All teachers must be a part of one or more PLC teams. As the plans for initiation of PLCs are assigned, PLC attendance is mandatory throughout the district and Mississippi. Missed sessions will be made-up at a different time. The PD can in one way become a limitation because ELA teachers will train first, then they will train the other subject area teachers during grade level meetings during the regular school year.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

Three limitations were identified in this project study, all of which have at least one alternative solution. The selected participants were K-12 ELA general education teachers. ELA teachers are a focal point because ELA is used across the board in all general education subjects. This PD could be opened at a different training time to include all teachers and not just ELA teachers. Then, as an entire district, all teachers could learn the same thing on the same day and have the time allotted to work across content areas and grades to share data and instructional strategies.

A second limitation was the unwillingness of some paraprofessionals and ESL

teachers to participate. When PLCs were created in the district, everyone in the district was assigned a team. As part of the district policy, everyone must participate in assigned trainings. The ESL teacher and paraprofessionals could have a session on assisting in the general education classroom by providing small group and one-to-one instruction using shared strategies.

The third limitation is that the data for this study was gathered specifically from one school district. As a remedy, the study could be extended to other districts serving ELL students. Even though the district may have different demographics, the speaker and cultural information could be changed, but instructional resources can remain the same. It could also be used as a state model for the MDE to use to provide technical assistance and inform other schools and districts of the types of training that are needed.

### **Scholarship**

This project study was a learning experience. Scholarship allowed me to see a more in-depth view of what was needed to be successful. I have written proposals and grants, but I have never completed a writing project of this magnitude before. I have learned about scholarship, research design and overall ELL education. Each time I began to add to the literature review there was always something new in the resources that I had never seen or read before. I had to learn to look at learning both from a critical and a positive viewpoint. Learning to think this way was my first reward because this type of thinking made me a better researcher and analyzer.

The confidence I have gained through the search process of peer reviewed articles has been more meaningful than ability. I have learned so much about the research process

and its outcomes. I had written a masters thesis, grant proposals, and applications, but I was not prepared for the requirements. I have been continuously enrolled in seminary or graduate school for personal and professional growth but the process of completing this project research study has been daunting at times and then pleasantly reassuring as I neared the end and everything began to fit into its proper perspective.

In my job, I work with students in the English classrooms using MLA style. Then I had to learn APA and its guidelines. I felt that I was a very proficient researcher and knew my way around the libraries and databases. Notes, webinars, and the book *APA for Dummies* were extremely helpful in assisting me in my growth in a short amount of time. APA style made me focus more on my work. I made mistakes, but I had a support system through my committee and colleagues. My second reward was that even though I made mistakes, I knew how to correct them for myself and for my students. It became clear that what the data had revealed could not be accomplished fully during a 3-day PD. In order for the teachers to gain firsthand knowledge, I had to bring a professional into the session from the two main cultures in our district so that the information gained was given by someone who had been through the same educational struggles that the students in our district were going through.

Even though it became stressful in the early mornings as I was finishing work, I had to look back and smile and thank God for giving me people who were more knowledgeable than I in this process. I must admit that at one point I found myself overwhelmed but had to get back on track. Following the checklist, using the writing center notes and trusting my committee to guide me assisted me to accomplish this goal.

From selecting the research method, a third time, to naming the project, to developing the PD plan was my greatest award because I saw true progress.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

Many years ago, I knew that teaching and training others was my calling in life. My background in teaching started in a very diverse church at a very young age and has continued until today. As I began this project I felt that as the participants suggested various PD to meet their individual classroom needs I knew that multiple instructional and collaborative modes would be needed. How to teach and provide training for different people and for various reasons has been an encounter for me. The project development was a great undertaking. Based on the data gathered, I had to develop a PD based on the research findings, that would allow a group of teachers to express themselves, ask questions without feeling intimidated, share best practices, ideas, reflect and develop plans for ELL students.

The selection of each component became more and more complex as I progressed to each section. Although I have always had a love for teaching and conducting professional development, creating this plan for everyone was a challenge. Once I had a better understanding of information that I should and should not use in my qualitative project, the task became easier. I wanted to ensure that knowledge gained in the past about different cultures or languages in the past would overshadow the fairness and information included in this study where the focal students were Hispanic and American Indian. I used every professional development journal available and ELL instructional guide I could purchase to help me along the way. I wanted to make sure that I included

the newest and most recent information in my plan.

### **Leadership and Change**

The ability to guide others into positive life changing environment is a virtuous task for any individual. Good leadership requires the ability to change as needed and adapt to changes when given. Because of this PD study my doctoral degree has become more meaningful and precious because of the scholarly impact of the completion of this project. I am a better teacher. I am a better leader. I do not mind change if I can understand the reason and direction. Change in my research is what gave it the importance it has. Teachers need to change and adapt to meet the needs of the ELL students. I had to change my research and planning for research I order to be successful. In this PD, leaders actively initiate change in teacher led PDs and do not mind listening and learning from each other. Change comes in different forms from teaching to planning, to actively becoming engaged with the students' work. In this PD, all participants had the opportunity to work individually, in small and large groups, as well as in school and departmental PLCs to complete assignments. Most importantly, as a researcher, I have learned to use data to verify and support decisions and best practices. In the past, I would base answers on what I personally perceived the answer to be.

I planned it with the goal of helping ELL students achieve in mind. I carefully selected the audience and amount of days to ensure that topics were covered and requested based upon registration, survey, and interview data. When planning each day's training I was cautious not to plan too much or too little on any topic. I needed to make sure that the content was interesting, informative and doable so that when the participants



return to their respective places they would be able to apply their observer and /or response data collection methods positively and effectively.

After paying attention to the survey and interview data, different instructional practices being used and mandated, I learned that if I did not change or teach others to change our schools would be stagnant and our ELL students would continue to lag behind their peers academically. After a very careful look at best practices for instructional leaders and administrators I adjusted the way I had the PD planned. As a leader, I had to not only look at dates and times, but I had to consider what was best for the district, presenters, funding, and those in attendance. I had to become proactive so that my PD was acceptable to Walden University while still being culturally and professionally relevant to the students, teachers and other stakeholders.

As I move forward my life has been impacted with the ability to differentiate between qualitative data and quantitative data. I no longer use my opinion, I can now compare and analyze other researchers' opinions on the same topic. I know discrepant data and can identify compare and share findings in a narrative or chart form. I have learned how to conduct a study using student data and teacher participant without breaking the rules of the Walden Institutional Review Board.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

This work was important because I wanted change to take place in the educational setting for ELLs. It was my desire for all ELLs to be successful in the general education classroom and for all teachers to be properly trained in their respective areas. For change to happen, I put forth effort to encourage and professionally train others how to do and

what to do for the ELLs in their classrooms.

For me to train others properly, I had to learn more myself. The foundation courses gave me a great snapshot of what to expect later this journey. Learning about the theorists, philosophies and types of studies revealed an entire component to research that I heard about but never thought that I would have to learn or explain. I realized that every step led me closer and closer to the goal of attaining my degree. I could see the plan unfold with every stage that I finished.

Many ELLs are brought to this country as teenagers or younger and must face the dilemma difficulties of learning the English language. For those who arrive in high school without the ability to communicate in English, they have only a few years to earn a high school diploma. This is especially true if these students are refugees or immigrants who have never been exposed to the English classroom. As a professional educator, and advocate for young people who are underrepresented, I would like to see everyone making a collaborative effort to ensure that these individuals acquire English in public school education. General education teachers want to know best practices for these students but may be limited in professional development opportunities. I need to exhaust all my resources to show others how meet and overcome the challenges faced by teachers.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions Future Research**

A professional development plan is my project for this study. The PD plan, when utilized, will improve general education teacher's ability to select and use instructional strategies and methods to support ELL student learning. The PD project will equip

general education teachers with examples of the instructional strategies necessary to provide research-based ELL instruction and assessment in all content areas. This PD can improve instructional support strategies by suggestive websites, technology and other resources than when incorporated into the daily schedule will have the potential to bring about positive social change in the local school district and community. Teachers who are trained will be able to provide efficient instruction to ELLs. ELLs who develop proper language and assessment skills graduate from high school, go to college and obtain careers and find better paying jobs.

This project can be adapted and used in other schools and districts. The project can be used with any L2. The model includes instructional time, assessment, language service plan design and collaboration. The PD project implementation requires a small amount of financial support, uses space and materials readily available in most schools and districts. Future research could include a broader scope of participants. For example, only one small rural district was included in my study. The study could be expanded to other districts in the county or region. The study could also be expanded to include only high school students across the entire state who must pass all end-of-course exams to graduate.

### **Conclusion**

Two decades of national data clearly document the achievement gaps between ELLs and their English-speaking peers. However, data do not address the challenges of educating Choctaw speaking students and Spanish speaking students as the majority languages in a district. This project study was somewhat challenging. The challenges

outlined in the study revealed the teachers concerns and likewise made me more determined to evaluate myself as I tried to plan how to change others. I had to conduct a detailed evaluation of myself and my scholarly abilities to complete this project. From the beginning, I was steadfast in the belief that the study was too important to give up. The problem this study addressed was that Native Americans and Hispanic ELLs in a rural Mississippi school district were not performing at the same level as non-ELLs. The study's purpose was to examine and identify general education teachers' instructional practices and perceptions of their efficiency to implement effective pedagogical strategies to enhance ELL students in the general education classroom. The overall themes were centered on instruction, PLCs, assessment and teacher training. The findings of the study revealed that teachers perceive their teacher training for providing instruction, accommodations and modifications to ELLs was insufficient. Another finding of the study was that all teachers were providing some type of research-based instruction.

Focusing on the themes in this project study, and 5-day PD developed from final results, ELLs would be able to graduate from high school, go to college and/or obtain and maintain employment after graduation. Furthermore, proper instruction will give them the tools and skills necessary to be productive contributors to society and competitive in a global economy.

Gathering the research that I needed to complete this project and putting it into place helped me to analyze myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project manager. In this section, I discussed the strengths and weaknesses. I described limitations and implications and possible directions for future research.

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## Appendix A: The Project

## ELL Professional Development Training Plan

Project Name	Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners in Mississippi Through Professional Development
Session Date	Summer 2018 through May 2019

**1. Purpose:**

This project was designed as the result of findings from my qualitative research to address the impact of instruction and to promote shared responsibility for the education of English Language Learners

**2. Goals:** This project has several goals:

5. The main goal of the project is to provide an overview of all stakeholders' responsibility to ELL education.
6. Identify, develop, and incorporate ELL instructional strategies
7. This project will provide professional development for faculty to review, analyze, share and reflect on individual and group data on ELL students to determine patterns and inform instruction.
8. Draft and understand the importance of the ELL Language Service Plan

**3. Learning Outcomes:** Upon completion of this 5-day professional development series all participants will utilize the strategies, resources and materials presented throughout the training. In addition, the 7-12 educators will be able to improve, implement, construct and scaffold lessons appropriate for each student's proficiency level while being cognizant of his or her culture and norms.

**4. Roles and Responsibilities**

	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Teachers and Administrators</b>
<b>Roles</b>	The researcher will conduct trainings and serve as facilitator.	Be a positive and active participant with colleagues and others during training and planning sessions
<b>Responsibilities</b>	The researcher will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure meeting place from</li> </ul>	Collaborate and participate in all activities and discussions with a positive attitude and

	<p>administrator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Serve as PD facilitator</li><li>• Contact Federal Programs Director for funding of 5-Day Summer PD for ELA Teachers' stipend and materials</li><li>• Secure volunteer presenters from Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and County Hispanic Council</li><li>• Contact and schedule MDE technical support personnel for presentation on ELLs and student assessment data</li><li>• Provide copies of materials and handouts for each session.</li><li>• The researcher will present findings, research-based</li></ul>	response.
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	<p>strategies and best practices for ELL students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher will collect evaluations and answer questions.</li> <li>• Provide copies of needed PLC monthly meeting documentation materials</li> </ul>	
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- 5. Target Audience:** All K-12 ELA faculty (In August all staff and administrators responsible for providing instruction to ELL students year long).

### Schedule

Session	Agenda	Evaluation
<b>Day 1</b>		
<b>Who are Our ELLs?</b>	<p>8:00 a.m. Introduction/Objectives/Goals (Slide 1 -2)</p> <p>8:10 - 8:20 a.m. Icebreaker</p> <p>8:20 - 9:00 a.m. Study Findings</p> <p>9:00 - 9:10 a.m. Break</p> <p>9:10 - 10:10 a.m. Choctaw Culture, Language and</p>	

	10:10 - 10:30 10:30 - 11:00 a.m. 11:00 - 12:00 p.m. 12:00 - 1:30 p.m.  1:30 - 1:40 1:40 - 2:15 p.m. 2:15 - 3:00	Education Relations Public Relations Director Speaker/Presenter and Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Q & A Diversity in Education Lunch Guatemalans' Life and Education Garcia Alvarez Mateo Break Diversity and Biases in Education PLC Roundtable Discussion/Presentation Evaluation	Pen/pencil paper  Evaluation Survey
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Day 2  Planning for Instruction	8:00 a.m. 8:10 – 8:30 a.m. 8:30 – 9:30 a.m.  9:30 – 9:45 a.m. 9:45 – 11:45 a.m.  12:00- 1:00 p.m. 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.  2:30 – 3:00 p.m.	Introduction/Review Icebreaker Roles and Responsibilities MDE Office of English Language Acquisition Break Student Evaluation Team and the Language Service Plan (Slides 6-11) Lunch PLC Roundtable (LSP) Discussion/Presentation Evaluation	District ELL Handbook  LAS Data  INOW Demographic Information  Completed LSP  Evaluation survey
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<p>Day 3</p> <p>Data Collection and Assessment</p>	<p>8:00 a.m. 8:15 – 8:25 a.m. 8:30 – 9:45 a.m. 9:45-10:00 10:00 – 11:45 a.m. 12:00- 1:00 p.m. 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.</p>	<p>Introduction/Overview Ice breaker (Slide 12) Roundtable discussion and PLC data review/ planning (Slides 13-14) Break Roundtable Discussion/Summary Lunch ELL Student Case Study Development/Planning Lesson Plans Wrap Up <b>Evaluation</b></p>	<p>Completed Data Review ELL Lesson /Plan Case Study Scenario</p> <p>Evaluation survey</p>
<p>Day 4</p> <p>Research-based Instructional Strategies For ELLs</p>	<p>8:00 a.m. 8:15 – 8:25 a.m. 8:30 – 9:45 a.m. 9:45-10:00 10:00 – 11:45 a.m. 12:00- 1:00 p.m. 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.</p>	<p>Introduction/Review Ice breaker (Slide 12) Roundtable discussion and PLC data review/ Lesson planning (Slides 13-28) Break Roundtable Discussion/Summary Lunch ELL Student Case Study</p>	<p>Evaluation Survey</p> <p>Student information cards</p>
<p>Day 5</p> <p>Using Data to Drive instruction throughout the year</p>	<p>8:00 _ a.m. 8:15 – 8:25 8:30 – 9:30 a.m. 9:30 - 9:45 a.m. 9:45 – 11:00 a.m. 12:00 - 1:00 1:00 – 2:45 p.m. 2:45 – 3:00 p.m.</p>	<p>Introduction/Review Collaboration Activity PLC Collaboration Faculty will share Case study Information Break Discuss lesson plan documentation Lunch PPD Planning and presentation Questions Wrap Up</p>	<p>Completed Personal ELL PD Plan</p> <p>Faculty Evaluation Survey</p>

**Training:** Five-day professional development training preparing for year-long PLC work.



**Meeting the Needs of English  
Language Learners In Mississippi  
Through Professional  
Development**

**Delore Nelson**

**Walden University**



## Objectives

- The main objective of the project is to provide an overview of all stakeholders' responsibility to ELL education.
- This project will provide professional development for faculty to review, analyze, share and reflect on individual and group data on ELL students to determine patterns and inform instruction.
- Draft and understand the importance of the ELL Language Service Plan



## Study Findings

- Introduction
- Current instructional strategies
- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Proposed training based upon data analysis





# Define ELL

# ELL Vocabulary

- ELL
- ESL
- TESOL
- ESOL





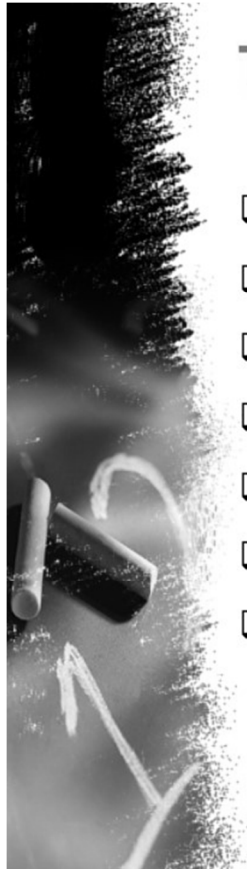
## ELL Vocabulary

- TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) is what teachers do
- ELL (English language learner) is a student.
- ESL (English as a second language) is what the student learns—English.
- ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), as an alternative to ESL, because for many.
- Sometimes English is a third or fourth language.

(TESOL, 2016)



## **Who are the ELLs in your School/District?**



## The Language Service Plan

- Student demographic data
- Migrant status
- Immigrant status
- Academic background
- Instructional language
- Formal/Informal schooling
- Assessment history



## How are ELLs identified in my district?

- Home Language Survey
- LAS Placement Test
- Other English Language Proficiency Test from Other Districts
- Teacher/Parent/Community Referrals



# What is the General Education Teacher's Role in the Development of the LSP



## Table Discussion






This is the value of the teacher, who looks at a face and says there's something behind that and I want to reach that person, I want to influence that person, I want to encourage that person, I want to enrich, I want to call out that person who is behind that face, behind that color, behind that language, behind that tradition, behind that culture. I believe you can do it. I know what was done for me. - Maya Angelou



## **Who is responsible for instruction for ELLs?**

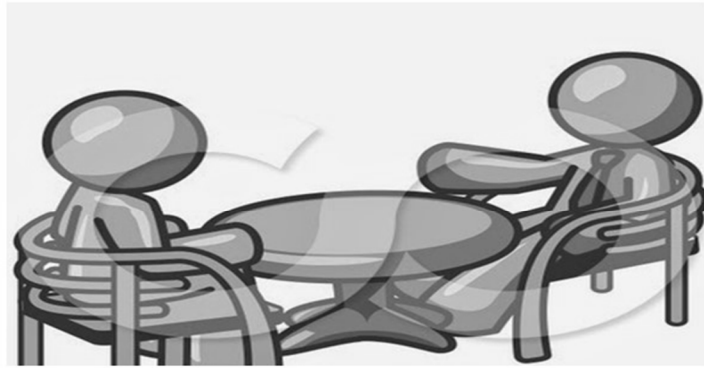
## Ice breaker



If we get too comfortable, we stop growing. Students can put pressure on us to work within their comfort zone. Let's be kind about that. Kind enough to let them learn to be uncomfortable.  
(Thelan, 1963)



## Definition of Culture





**What is the culture of your school?**



## Incorporating Student's Background/Culture into Classroom Activities



# PLC

Collaboration, ELL Data Sharing,  
Peer Modeling







## How Can We Use ELL Data To Guide Instruction?

## ELL Resources

- ELL resources have been compiled for use in planning, instruction, PLCs and evaluation.





## ELL Resources for Mississippi Educators

- Mississippi Department of Education
- English Language Learning  
(<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/>)
- LAS LINKS  
(<http://www.ctb.com/control/productFamilyViewAction?productFamilyId=454&p=products>)
- Mississippi Curriculum Test, Second Edition  
(<http://www.education.com/reference/article/RefMississippi/>)
- Office of Student Assessment's ELL Resources  
(<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/student-assessment/ell-guidelines-January-2011-final.pdf?sfvrsn=2>)

## Resources continued

- 
- Title III  
(<http://www.ncela.us/t3sis/state/Mississippi/>)
  - American Federation of Teachers (AFT)  
(<http://ms.aft.org/>)
  - Alabama-Mississippi Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)  
(<http://www.amesol.org/>)
  - Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE)  
(<http://www.nea.org/home/49838.htm>)





## Appendix B: Professional Development Presentation Evaluation

Title of this Session:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This session was well planned and organized.				
The facilitator demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the topic				
The session deepened my understanding of ELLs and/ or I learned something new.				
This session/workshop was relevant to my needs.				
I will be able to apply the content and/or strategies of the session in my classroom.				
Please add additional comments below:				
What will you take back to your campus or implement in your classroom in the coming weeks? List the first three (3) moves. 1.  2.  3.				
What suggestion do you have to make this content of the presentation more effective?				

## Appendix C: Survey Research Questions

- (1). How do you perceive the adequacy of your professional education training as it relates to English Language learners?
- (2). Describe what specifically in the trainings have been helpful.
- (3). Describe how the trainings can be improved.
- (4). What teaching practices have you improved as a result of having professional development in regard to ELLs?  
 In 2008, the Mississippi Department of Education adopted the World-Class

Instructional Design and Assessment to identify and assess the language proficiency level of ELL students in grades K-12. It is the only tool mandated for use in identifying and measuring growth in ELL students.

- (5). What specific training do you need as it relates to the instruction of ELLs. (Please check all that apply).
- Allowable Classroom and Test Accommodations
  - WIDA ACCESS for ELLs®
  - Assessment
  - WIDA ACCESS® Certification
  - The ELL Certification Process
  - WIDA Can Do Descriptors
  - Common Core State Standards
  - WIDA Standards
  - Cultural Expectations/family
  - WIDA WAPT®
  - Laws, legal mandates and regulations
  - Modifying instruction
  - Understanding the Language Tier Process
  - Identification and Placement
  - ELLs and the Response to Intervention Process (RTI)
- (6). Based on the grade/functioning level of your class, what are two research based instructional strategies you have used in a literacy lesson with ELL students?
- (7). How important is modifying content areas tests to reduce linguistic complexity and cultural bias?
- (8). How can the incorporation of the College and Career Ready State Standards help ELL students make continuous progress as measured by state tests?
- (9). What non-school factors affect student achievement?

#### Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What is the role of the teacher in data collection and ongoing assessment in instruction for English language learners?
2. How can participating in a professional learning community affect English language learner student performance?



3. How and why do you incorporate English language learner students' cultural backgrounds into your teaching?
4. In your opinion, what are the educational related factors that contribute to the lack of success for English language learners?
5. From your experience, what is the most difficult aspect of educating English language learners?
6. What strategies do you use to differentiate instruction for your English language learner students?

#### Appendix: E: Correlation of Research and Interview Questions

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Research Question</b>
1	2
2	3
3	1

4	2
5	2
6	1

### Appendix F: Survey Questions and Responses

Question	Response
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<p>Q 1. How do you perceive the adequacy of your professional education training as it relates to English Language learners?</p>	<p>Well trained          Good not great          Better than nothing          I have not been trained          Very low          Insufficient          Moderate          Adequate          Excellent          Inadequate          Very little          Lacking</p>
<p>Q 2. Describe what specifically in the trainings have been helpful.</p>	<p>One-on-one training with an ELL instructor for several years now          The ESL/inclusion teacher helps us throughout the year          Helpful strategies for reading comprehension          Strategies for general grammar/writing.          Text book instruction while in graduate school.          Individual instruction based on language ability          Modifying tests          Choosing assessments for reading.          Help me to see growth in student skills          Differentiated instruction          How to use their home language to help plan introduction and activities.          Only that I need to follow their educational plan</p>
<p>Q3. Describe how the trainings can be improved.</p>	<p>More trainings and more frequently as things change.          We can train all year but if we do not need it for that set of students, it's worthless. They are not all the same.          Written documents that are easily accessible to teachers.          More in depth.          Free classes in another language          More intensive workshops needed.          Provide more for language arts teachers          Have more on Choctaw students          Teach Choctaw words/language          How to give instructions better to ELL students.          More training          Let somebody in our district train do the</p>

<p>Q 4. What teaching practices have you improved because of having professional development regarding ELLs?</p> <p>Q 5. What specific training do you need as it relates to the instruction of ELLs.</p> <p>Q 6. Based on the grade/functioning level of your class, what are two research based instructional strategies you have used in a literacy lesson with ELL students?</p>	<p>training. Not sure I never attended one ? Give training from people we know and who know our population. Something other than on Spanish speaking people.</p> <p>Hands on activities Accommodation Questioning techniques Utilizing the help of the ELL teacher/tutor Teaching CCSS Small group instruction Differentiation Reading directions None -No answer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural expectations</li> <li>- Laws, legal mandates and legislation</li> <li>- Identification and placement</li> <li>- Classroom accommodations</li> <li>- RTI</li> <li>- Assessment</li> <li>- Common Core State Standards</li> <li>- Other- LAS Links®</li> <li>- Cooperative learning</li> <li>- Project based learning</li> <li>- Oral presentation</li> <li>- Explicit skill instruction</li> <li>- Computer assisted instruction</li> </ul>
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<p>Q7. How important is modifying content areas tests to reduce linguistic complexity and cultural bias?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Buddy system</li> <li>- KWL/KWHL</li> <li>- Think Pair Share</li> <li>- Hands on Math</li> <li>- Hands on Science</li> <li>- Kagan cooperative learning</li> <li>- Culturally relevant instruction</li> <li>- Scaffolding</li> <li>- No answer</li> </ul>
<p>Q8. How can the incorporation of the College and Career Ready State Standards help ELL students make continuous progress as measured by state test?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very important</li> <li>- Critical</li> <li>- Extremely important</li> <li>- Very important because I want the students to understand but I don't want to insult them at the same time.</li> <li>- It is very important that the student understands what is being asked of him or her.</li> <li>- Modifying is very important but many of our teachers have not been taught how to do that properly.</li> </ul>
<p>Q9. What non-school factors affect student achievement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practicing the skills needed for a state test</li> </ul>

	<p>daily will ensure success on the test at the end of the year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- It will help them prepare for EOY test</li><li>- Those are the standards that they will be tested on.</li><li>- If they leave Mississippi they can still learn the same thing in another state.</li><li>- No answer</li><li>- It helps them understand that they can read at different levels and still be successful</li><li>- Help students make continuous progress by offering a variety of texts at different levels that are interesting and familiar.</li><li>- CCSS in reading and language arts can be based on everyday things that the students should be interested.</li><li>- It doesn't.</li><li>- Students are taught the same objectives as their peers and educated using the same skill at different levels.</li><li>- I am not really sure, because our state department can't seem to make up their mind what tests to give. We have given a different Algebra and English state test for the past 3 years. I can't see where this</li></ul>
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	<p>helps any of the students especially ELL students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Language proficiency level in English</li><li>- Culture</li><li>- Home environment</li><li>- Student desire to learn and do better</li><li>- Their previous country or hometown</li><li>- Parents</li><li>- Student willingness live and work for what they want</li><li>- Economic status</li><li>- Economic status</li><li>- Poverty</li><li>- Culture</li><li>- Parental involvement</li><li>- Language spoken at home</li></ul>