Principals' Perceptions of Professional Development and Caring Communities for English Learners

Sunny Sue Chang Jonas
sunnysuejonas@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations

Part of the Adult and Continuing Education Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, and the First and Second Language Acquisition Commons

Recommended Citation
Jonas, Sunny Sue Chang, "Principals' Perceptions of Professional Development and Caring Communities for English Learners" (2019). Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations. 7233.
https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations/7233

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research & Artistry at Huskie Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Huskie Commons. For more information, please contact jschumacher@niu.edu.
ABSTRACT

PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CARING COMMUNITIES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Sunny Sue Chang Jonas, EdD
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Northern Illinois University, 2019
Laurie Elish-Piper and Sally Blake, Co-Directors

A growing population of English Learners (ELs) have unique challenges when navigating the American educational system. In fact, there is an achievement gap such that EL students lag behind their native-English peers in school outcomes. Accordingly, there is increased demand for professional development (PD) led by principals to address the needs of the changing population of ELs. To support effective PD aimed at improved achievement for ELs, principals need to embrace transformative thinking in their work. Although PD has the potential to be the driving force of change, traditional approaches to PD have limited impact on academic success of ELs. To meet societal demands, PD content needs to drive instructional practices and school norms to support ELs. However, principals often have limited training and are underprepared to most effectively impact change for ELs. The purpose of this descriptive case study was to examine principals’ perceptions of implementing EL-focused PD and establishing a caring community for ELs after intentional training through a grant-funded PD focused on ELs. The current study investigated the following two research questions:
1. What are principals’ perceptions of the challenges associated with implementing PD focused on English Learners in their school communities after participation in a professional development on English Learners?

2. What are the perceived challenges for principals in developing a caring community for ELs to support academic and career success in school settings?

Data were gathered throughout a one-year period after principal participants had attended a one-week summer academy where they were introduced to laws, policies, pedagogical implications, and other relevant topics regarding K-12 English Learners. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven principal participants who were intentionally selected from the pool of principals who participated in the summer academy. Constant comparative analysis was conducted on a total of ten interviews from seven principal participants. Analysis revealed emergent themes regarding principals’ perceptions of challenges associated with implementing EL-focused PD and creating caring a community for ELs. These themes included the following challenges associated with implementing EL-focused PD: access paradox (despite increased need for EL-focused PD, principals rarely had access to it), conflicting priorities (principals had many and varied responsibilities), shifting paradigms (considering PD to be empowering rather than rote), and budget demands (challenges in allocating limited budgets). Further, themes regarding creating caring communities for ELs included: communities within communities (challenges for fostering multiple communities), student cluster facets (decisions on how to group students into communities), scattered focus (too many demands on principals’ time), social-emotional dimensions (need to address social-emotional dimensions of community), budget allocations (limited funding to develop communities), and authentic application (disconnect between PD and practical applications). Each of these themes are
discussed in depth and the study concludes with implications and suggestions for future research. Principals’ perceived challenges emphasize the complex nature of facilitating educational experiences for ELs and suggest that it is imperative to provide continued and varied support over time for principals and teachers alike.
NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DE KALB, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2019

PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CARING COMMUNITIES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

BY

SUNNY SUE CHANG JONAS
© 2019 Sunny Sue Chang Jonas

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Doctoral Co-Directors:
Laurie Elish-Piper; and Sally Blake
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“We can always make a difference if we can muster the courage to think critically, to care for others and to sustain hope, and mobilize with others.” –Cornel West

I would like to acknowledge an array of recent and longitudinal (but of great depth) friends and contributors to this dissertation writing process. First, Mark Jonas, you have been my best friend since ’99. Since our time as college sweethearts, we are now a bit grizzled, but still hopeful and principled about life, work, and our family of four. Thank you for dissertating first and for being the best teacher I’ve ever observed… and for countless meals, transportation logistics, walk-n-talks, emails, and hugs, & forevermore... we have two beautiful children who will be sweet, smart, stronger than we are.

My (Chang) family—we almost lost our patriarch multiple times (ahbbah!), our matriarch slugged through as full-time caregiver, and my baby sister emerged/grew into my heroine as a wife, mother, daughter, worship leader, and worker-leader. I have a strong work ethic and a happy-fun spirit because of you three. I love you and am so proud of each of you. Honored to call you my family.

My church family o’er the places and spaces: Hyde Park Vineyard Church/Rand and Aimee, Portland Vineyard, Elm City Vineyard/Maskells, Croasmuns and Williamses, and now Wellspring/Moksahneem Mitch and Sahmohneem Eunsil: These places were the cultivation of my centered grounding in ethics, prayer, life rhythms, singing/music, and friendships/community.
My “frolleagues” at work, now at CPS: preK-8 schools, non-profits, and colleges in IL, OR, CT/NY, providing fodder for ongoing, informal and formal research, and friendships of sustenance and inspiration. I love being “…surrounded by my betters” (C. S. Lewis).

Mehret, Keiko, Betsy, and Meliss, our talks and walks lasted throughout my coursework and writing process. Through highs and lows, and always with too many plates in the air, you tracked with me but also shared of yourselves. You four are my “among” within my inward-outward-upward-among.

In the four-legged stool of positional, relational, inspirational, and functional leadership, I have learned so much from the leaders in my work, home, school, and church lives. And/ala Proverbs 31, the both/and outstretched vs. drawing-in hands of the woman of noble character: both yad and kaph were exercised by my dissertation committee+ of Dr. Blake, Dr. Elish-Piper, Dr. Lopez, Dr. Walker (and Dr. Cohen, Dr. Flynn, Dr. L’Allier, and C.Burkett, editor). We all know I couldn’t have done this without your careful vetting and help (and hundreds of emails).

To the principals I interviewed/studied, the teachers who are the real workers, and the students and families we serve, I am grateful to be both an insider/emic and outsider/etic to the work we do every day in pre-K-12 public schools.

Thank you so much—it takes a village to raise a dissertation.

I am so glad to be done. –Sunny Sue Chang Jonas, AB’99, MAT’02, MEd’07, EdD’19
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my Imagined and Real Communities at work, home, and church.

And to my parents, Sue/Seung-Joo and Kee Nam Chang, and my family: Mark Edward, Henry Kee-Nam, and Pearl Choon-Hee Jonas.

Grateful to have loved and been loved through it all.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

| LIST OF TABLES | xi |
| LIST OF FIGURES | xii |

Chapter

1. OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY............................................. 1
   Introduction.......................................................................................... 1
   Background of the Study......................................................................... 2
   Statement of the Problem....................................................................... 9
   Research Questions................................................................................ 10
   Significance of the Study...................................................................... 10
   Overview of the Methodology............................................................... 11
   Delimitations ......................................................................................... 12
   Summary ................................................................................................ 12

2. LITERATURE REVIEW............................................................................... 14
   Introduction............................................................................................ 14
   Professional Development: Best Practices ......................................... 16
     Facilitators ......................................................................................... 19
     Teacher-Administrators as Participants .............................................. 20
   Professional Development: Content/Program ..................................... 20
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development: School Principals</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development: English Learners</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities of Learning to Support ELs</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting Theory and Practice</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Space</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagined Communities</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethic of Care</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Design</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling Strategy</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Sources</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Data</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Procedures</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. STUDY CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of the Study</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project DREAMS</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Background</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Experience with Project DREAMS</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bracketing the Researcher’s Experience</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ School Demographics</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Descriptions</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Description Summary</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTING PD</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge One: Access Paradox</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing the Challenge</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Access to EL-focused PD</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combining Methods</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>EL Training Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Two: Conflicting Priorities</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing the Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD as an Opportunity for Realignment</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including ELs in Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Three: Shifting Paradigms</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing the Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-constructing Knowledge</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong Learners</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Four: Budget Demands</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing the Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reframing</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish Partnerships</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: CREATING CARING COMMUNITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Challenge One: Communities Within Communities</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leveraging Staff Community</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Community</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Two: Student Cluster Facets</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Three: Scattered Focus</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Four: Social-Emotional Learning/SEL</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Five: Budget Allocations</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Six: Authentic Application</td>
<td>116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>122</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION</td>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges to Implementing EL-focused PD</td>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access Paradox</td>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting Paradigms</td>
<td>125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicting Priorities</td>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget Constraints</td>
<td>127</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges in Developing a Caring Community for ELs</td>
<td>127</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities within Communities</td>
<td>127</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Cluster Facets</td>
<td>129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scattered Focus</td>
<td>129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Application</td>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-Emotional Dimensions</td>
<td>131</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget Allocations</td>
<td>132</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of Findings</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>137</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>139</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>140</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>143</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL</td>
<td>156</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Conceptual Foci of DREAMS Training</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Demographics for Principals' Schools</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Information About Participants</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Emergent Themes with Descriptions and Examples</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Emergent Themes About Caring Community with Descriptions and Examples</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Theoretical Underpinnings of Current Study</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

Education has long been identified as the system from which our socio-cultural norms are reflected, where we socialize our children to fit into the accepted political, social and cultural expectations of a society. It is through this system that we reflect what our values, beliefs and ruling political system represent. This system has changed drastically in the past decades. Historically, education was considered a privilege, not a right, and only the children of the wealthy received a formal education. Despite progress, even now groups of children in the United States have marginalized access to a quality formal education (“Equity of Opportunity”, n.d.). This can be especially true for English Learners (ELs), who have unique challenges when navigating the American educational system.

A key element in enacting change in education is the way in which we train teachers. In fact, how we train teachers has moved to the forefront of accountability in education. The workforce expectations are drastically different from years past. As these global connections, economic norms, rapid pace of technology and communication change so must our approaches to teacher training. As initial teacher training programs struggle with the new skills teachers need, a large percentage of our workforce in place in schools rely on professional development (PD) to guide school personnel to meet the challenge of change. Due to the continuing and rapid change in global economic advancement, population shifts, and sociocultural systems, PD will be even
more important in the future than it has been in years past, as it has the potential to be a primary venue to keep teachers and schools current and moving forward. Principals and administrators play a pivotal role in the development and success of PD, yet they are frequently underprepared to maximize the effectiveness of PD to benefit ELs. The focus of the current study is to understand experiences and perspectives of K-12 public school principals’ and administrators’ professional development on English Learners (ELs) directed towards building caring communities in their schools.

Background of the Study

The background for this study emerged from a growing concern and demand for professional development to address the increasing need for new approaches to serve the changing school population of ELs. The newest American immigrants do not speak English as a native language. The growing segment of children living in non-English-speaking households creates an increasing demand for teachers prepared to serve English Learners. Unfortunately, state and federal policies and teacher preparation programs have not sufficiently prioritized training teachers for this growing segment of the student population, and teachers are, therefore, left unprepared in the classroom (Quintero & Hansen, 2017). To further compound the challenge, administrators’ role in and understanding of the practical effectiveness of PD for school administrators regarding teaching and supporting ELs are not well understood.

Due to the demand for change and the challenges facing education systems, administrators and teachers today continue to intensify. In modern knowledge-based economies, where the demand for high-level skills will continue to grow substantially, the task in many countries is to transform traditional models of schooling, which have been effective at
distinguishing those who are more academically talented from those who are less so, into customized learning systems that identify and develop the talents of all students (OECD, 2009). This will require the creation of “knowledge-rich,” evidence-based education systems in which school leaders and teachers act as a professional community with the authority to act, the necessary information to do so wisely, and the access to effective support systems to assist them in implementing change.

The challenge of developing the talents of all students in our current educational systems is compounded by the changing demographics of our schools and the need for administrator and teacher training on effectively supporting diverse learners. Immigrants have begun to move beyond historical immigration gateways in major cities. They are now moving to traditionally White areas, including suburbs and rural areas, and as a result, more than half of all English Learners (ELs) in public schools are now outside of city centers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). According to Mitchell (2016), EL students lag far behind their native-English peers in school outcomes. The achievement gap between EL and non-EL students in fourth-grade reading and in eighth-grade math is about 40 percentage points. In addition, EL students take fewer advanced courses than non-ELs, and only 59% of EL students graduate from high school in four years (Mitchell, 2016). In addition to the achievement gap, rapidly changing demographics have created a gap between teacher preparation and academic support of students moving through the educational system. Teacher education programs are working to develop new pathways to address this increasing population of ELs; however, the existing teaching force has little experience or training to meet the needs of these students.
The burden of change among the existing population of practicing professionals has fallen on schools and professional development (PD) coordinators and some federal education funding reflects this trend. Nearly half of $3.0 billion in federal funding under Title II, Part A, and billions more in other federal funds goes to the professional development of teachers and leaders in our schools, yet there is little evidence that these expenditures produce an increase in the overall or individual effectiveness of teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). In fact, according to a recent study of three large school districts in the United States, $18,000,000 is spent annually on PD, with no evidence of impact on teacher effectiveness (The New Teacher Project, 2015). This stark reality can be a springboard for adjustment and re-calibration towards content and context for teacher and principal PD to improve. Teacher effectiveness as defined by individualistic measures such as content knowledge as well as communal and relational ones such as building caring communities and school climate allow for two strands of focus for improvement in PD. In an attempt to assess PD focus on much-needed change and transformation in schools, rubrics are being developed that not only assess effectiveness of PD but also its power towards community-oriented school change and transformation (Kelcey, Spybrook, Zhang, Phelps, & Jones, 2015).

Curriculum and content experts have traditionally been the leaders in PD development. While it is logical to assume the need for PD lies in content and curriculum and that trainers should come from these fields, findings that show a lack of PD impact on teacher effectiveness suggest there may be a missing link to developing and supporting effective teaching for ELs. Administrators are typically responsible for determining what needs should be addressed in PD sessions and often make the decisions about which curriculum and content experts lead the PD
sessions. Rather than “cast blame” for ineffective PD on curriculum and content experts, there is another possible explanation for the disconnect between PD sessions and effectiveness of teaching. This disconnect may come from administrators’ lack of training and understanding of socio-cultural variables that impact learning among diverse populations.

It is possible that K-12 administrators do not have access to professional development related to their changing roles as school leaders or that administrators do not take the same PD training as their teachers. While most K-12 administrators receive extensive training in administration, variables that influence learning are rarely investigated and responsibilities of administrative leadership in these areas are frequently not clearly defined. In fact, some claim that American schools tend to create non-collaborative environments for individual, isolated work (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe & Orr, 2009) with segregated roles between administration and teachers.

Although there currently exists a strong body of literature and research regarding best practices for PD for teachers (e.g., see Darling-Hammond, & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Moon, 2013; US Department of Education, 2015), there are clear gaps indicating little or no PD for K-12 administrators regarding optimizing learning support for all children. Although the process varies from state to state, most states require administrator coursework on budget management, systems operations, human resources, instructional leadership and curriculum development, and special education, but little or nothing on English Learners (Teachers College, Columbia University, 2016; US Department of Education, 2016). The Illinois State Board of Education recently added required coursework for the administrative endorsement to be a principal that included coursework in teaching cross-categories such as
special education, methods of reading, reading in the content area, and instructional strategies for English Learners (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2016). The challenge is to cultivate shared ideology and community across classrooms, which are closed ecosystems and microcosms of learning, with administrators who can translate, communicate and implement change. The development of shared ideology through PD, as well as shared practice through application of the PD, are both challenging and intersecting goals. However, ideology and application are both important elements necessary for actionable PD.

The models of PD must be theoretical in nature while addressing practicalities in how PD is planned and conducted (Thomas-Brown, Shaffer, & Werner, 2016). The juxtaposition of theories and best practices must inform the instruction of students (Richards & Renandya, 2002) and likewise for teachers, administrators and their professional development. If educational systems do not find a way to better communicate, translate and create supportive environments for ELs’ learning, we are continuing to marginalize children’s access to academic success, which could have dire consequences for the economic and intellectual growth of this country. Even more important is that the trust placed in our educational systems will fail a generation of learners needed to move into the 21st-century global community. The current climate of valuing PD but not yet aligning the PD to the student population and student needs (e.g., ELs) indicates a need for reconceptualization of how we approach PD to represent and reflect the needs of our schools and our students.

School and district leadership both receive and lead PD opportunities, sometimes by choice, but also by mandate, as policies and laws dictate PD requirements according to school, district, and/or state regulations. As a result, PD can sometimes lack relevance and function as
merely obligatory rather than genuinely beneficial and educative. To address this, intentionally and contextually relevant plans for PD can be developed through coordination with institutions of higher education to expand learning - both for the school leader and the school community (Gumus & Bellbas, 2016; Peterson, 2002).

The field of education operates from a performance culture perspective that uses school and district mandates that place priority on student achievement. To support effective PD aimed at improved achievement for all students, including ELs, principals need to promote a collective school culture and embrace transformative thinking in their work (Zepeda, Jimenez & Lanoue, 2015). Such mandates call for a connection between PD and community development. Part of the reason for the unique challenges is that the needs of each teacher and each student are varied and are intertwined with context. Contextual factors including teacher-student instruction as well as the judgment and assessment of that instruction are rich sources of information that should provide meaning and context for PD.

Through involving administrators with different backgrounds (e.g., knowledge, learning modality strengths, motivations, etc.), principals can engage with varying levels of ability and identity through each other (High & Achilles, 1986). The challenge with serving K-12 teachers and students, especially English Learner (EL) students, is to always direct the inherent variation toward effectiveness, excellence, and engagement (Pew Hispanic Center, 2008). However, to further complicate such endeavors, effectiveness and academic acquisition (especially language) are notoriously difficult to quantify and thus are hard to measure (Culicover, 1999). Importantly, the structure and platform of PD marks dual intentions for transforming schools as well as improving academic achievement for all students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).
When PD takes a collaborative approach, it can provide a platform through which transformation can take place, especially because educators often lack time and opportunity to develop their skills, observe each other’s classes, and/or work collaboratively during a standard work day. However, according to DeMonte (2013), the PD and training educators receive are often episodic and disconnected, with little benefit or relevance to students’ learning or teacher practice. PD, in this way, can be the fulfillment of mandates and regulations rather than the collaborative teacher and pedagogical development intended. Further, traditional PD often does not allow teachers the time for serious, deeper, cumulative study of the given subject matter nor for genuine change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

In episodic PD trainings, which can be the norm, educators often have trouble with connecting new knowledge to their actual school practices (Nuthall, 2004). In order to be maximally beneficial, therefore, theories and trainings should have a strong focus on practical applications, and participants should receive hands-on experiences along with theoretical frameworks (Moon, 2013). An intensive and ongoing PD approach is most appropriate to allow enough time for the participants to figure out ways to apply the learned knowledge to their practice and to test the results in the context of the school community that they serve (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005).

Transitioning from the content of PD to the collaboration and community development aspects of PD, American schools tend to create non-collaborative environments for individual, isolated work (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). There exists a challenge to cultivate work environments that are collaborative, with shared planning blocks, time to share instructional strategies and decide on administrative or managerial matters with each other. The challenge is
to cultivate shared ideology and community across classrooms which are in themselves closed ecosystems and microcosms of learning. These co-existing but separate microcosms of learning and culture also mean that scheduling matters-- shared, practical times of availability and connection-- can and should be included. For truly effective PD, we must consider the structural-logistical means and places through which we can connect distinct classroom spaces in schools to promote shared, communal professional practice and development. It is clear that creating these collaborative work environments is difficult in the field; therefore, it is not surprising that it can be challenging to create such a space in PD sessions. However, the development of shared ideology through PD, as well as shared collaborative practice through application of the PD, are both challenging and intersecting goals. Collaboration has been proven to be an effective strategy in improving school practices. “The benefits can include greater consistency in instruction, more willingness to share practices and try new ways of teaching, and more success in solving problems of practice” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 11). Again, PD as a springboard for shared ideology as well as shared practices happens with the cultivation of collaboration and building a sense of school community.

Statement of the Problem

The problem is twofold. First, traditional approaches to professional development have limited impact on academic success of students, especially for EL students in the classroom. Second, there are various disconnects among the PD goals of administrators and teachers and the practical applications in the classroom. The current global changes demand changes in the educational system and PD has the potential to be the driving force of that change process. To meet societal demands, PD content needs to drive instructional practices and school norms to
support ELs. Historically and currently, the teachers and administrators who work with ELs often have limited training and are underprepared to most effectively impact change in the classroom. The lack of quality PD will impede not only the success of the growing school population, predominantly ELs, but also the non-ELs as well.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the principals’ perceptions of implementing EL-focused PD and establishing a caring community for ELs after intentional training/PD through the USDoe Project DREAMS grant to develop community that supports EL teachers and students in school sites. This study was conducted to begin to better understand the perceived role of principals in PD that effectively considers the unique needs of ELs and the challenges associated with translating that PD into their respective school communities. Accordingly, the current study investigated the following two research questions:

3. What are principals’ perceptions of the challenges associated with implementing PD focused on English Learners in their school communities after participation in a professional development on English Learners?

4. What are the perceived challenges for principals in developing a caring community for ELs to support academic and career success in school settings?

Significance of the Study

The current study is significant for three reasons. First, in order to successfully meet the needs of this country’s rising population of ELs, transformation is required in the traditional educational system. PD is the platform on which such transformation can take place. PD, when implemented effectively, can serve as the link between theory and practice and be the driving
force for transformation within communities of teachers and learners. Second, the role of administrators in traditional PD for educators is somewhat limited, and in order to ignite sustainable change, the connections among administrators, educators, and school communities must be facilitated. PD has the potential to be the platform through which these connections are initiated, strengthened, and maintained. Finally, there is currently a gap in the research investigating the perspective of administrators on PD related to the needs of ELs. PD opportunities for principals and administrators with content focused on ELs so they can build a collaborative community in their schools is necessary for this subgroup of students to succeed, achieve, and thrive (August, Shanahan, & Escamilla, 2009; ISBE, 2016).

Overview of the Methodology

Data for the current project was gathered throughout a one-year period. All the participants had attended a one-week summer academy where they were introduced to laws, policies, pedagogical implications, and other relevant topics regarding K-12 English Learners. As part of the summer academy (held each June over a five-year time period as part of the US DoE grant, but only one year of the project was the focus of this dissertation study), principals were required to return to the group at the end of October to provide a 10-minute presentation on what they had learned during the PD and how they were able to infuse that new knowledge into their daily practices in their respective positions as administrators in the PK-12 school system. Each of these participants was subsequently interviewed several months later for approximately an hour by the internal evaluator of the grant. The original principals who participated in Project DREAMS, totaling 40, were interviewed early on in the project. These interviews are not part of the current data set because the researcher did not have access to them. Additional, final semi-
structured interviews were conducted with seven principal participants who were intentionally selected based on a specific set of criteria (further discussed in Chapter 3; Creswell, 2015; Mertens, 2010). Principals who remained in their positions at their respective schools and within their district for the full five years of the project are the focus of this descriptive case study. At the time of the study all principals and administrators were employed within 18 school districts in the state of Illinois. Three of the principals were interviewed an additional time to get further information on their perceptions. Therefore, a total of ten interviews from seven principals make up the data set for the current study. The interviews from the seven participants were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo software (2015). In order to gain such an in-depth understanding of principals’ perceptions, the interviews were then analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Emergent themes are reported in Chapters 5 and 6.

Delimitations

The intentional scope and range of research questions and research participants serve as the delimitations of this particular study. Specifically, the current study investigated the perceptions and experiences of K-12 principals’ professional development with a focus on ELs. As aforementioned, choosing to research principals’ participation in PD on ELs serves to fill a gap in the research literature. Namely, there is a lack of research about the perceived role of principals in EL-focused PD and what can be done to promote the translation of PD into practical classroom applications.

Summary

Professional development (PD) has the potential to be the platform through which sustainable change is ignited in the educational system. This change is necessary in order to keep
pace with the continuing and rapid shifts in global economic advancement. In addition, population and sociocultural system shifts mandate a focus on the unique needs of EL learners in school communities. Principals and administrators are key to the effectiveness of PD and yet are frequently underprepared to maximize PD to benefit ELs. Accordingly, the focus of the current study is to better understand experiences and perspectives of K-12 public school principals’ and administrators’ professional development on English Learners (ELs) towards building caring communities.

Beyond this initial chapter as an introduction, subsequent chapters of this dissertation will involve a review of the literature (Chapter 2), methodology (Chapter 3), study context and participants (Chapter 4), findings (Chapters 5 and 6) as well as implications and possibilities for further research (Chapter 7). Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, a preview of the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, significance, overview of methodology, delimitations, and conceptual and operational definitions. Chapter 2 will include a literature review as well as a theoretical framework for PD, including the three theories of social constructivism, third space, and imagined communities, with an overarching theory of ethic of care, as relevant ideological concepts that informed the dissertation research questions. Chapter 3 contains a detailed explanation of the methodology, including research design, participant selection criteria, procedures, data sources, data analysis, and bracketing the researcher’s experiences. Chapter 4 gives detail about the context of the research and participant profiles. Chapters 5 and 6 will detail the findings from the qualitative analyses for this descriptive case study based on the research questions addressed. Finally, Chapter 7 will conclude the study with a discussion of the implications and future directions for research to build upon the current study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The foci of this chapter are to explore the literature on: (a) the function of professional development (PD) in educational environments, (b) the role of the K-12 administrators (the principal) relating to PD, (c) aspects of professional development that are unique to teaching English Learners, (d) communities of learning to support ELs and (e) connections among theory and practice that should inform administrator PD training to focus on ELs. The four sections of the literature review related to PD are: (1) PD general best practices, (2) the content or program of PD, (3) PD for school principals, and (4) PD regarding English Learners (ELs). Each of the four sections will review and provide context to and history of this research as pertaining to different portions of the research. The chapter will provide a theoretical framework for the study as well as the driving force for PD to train professionals working with an EL population.

Introduction

Although the term “professional development” (PD) has existed technically since 1857, the usage of it as being a specific practice of continuing education for educators is gaining importance, with regulations for teachers situated within particular state and local contextual regulations (Borko, 2004). Structures to promote ongoing professional learning are not unique to the field of education. Typically, by the five-year mark in professions requiring ongoing education requirements (e.g., education, nursing, technology, and engineering) full-time
employees (FTEs) have logged over 15,000 hours of experience within the classroom/professional setting (Russell & Korthagen, 2013). Although in different fields with differing content and goals, most PD has dual aims to juxtapose good theory with good practice. Accordingly, facilitation of PD requires both an understanding of good andragogy as well as background knowledge of the experienced professionals who are participating in the PD.

Currently, literature on teacher PD can cover a broad range of topics such as trends, demographics, and qualifications (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), in-service education and development (Peterson & Kelley, 2002), principal standards (Rowland, 2017), and use of Title II funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Further, schools and school districts must reflect state demographics, regulations and laws to meet teachers’ “continuing education” or “PD” requirements (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). As with all newer policies and regulations, prioritizing a certain cadre of constituents (in this case, teachers) is important before the mandates are extended to other groups (i.e., principals, paraprofessionals, auxiliary staff like nurses, psychologists, and social workers; Schroeder, Travers, & Smaldone, 2016). There exists a large body of literature about principal certification program training, but little about post-certification PD (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007); however, the body of literature for the intersection of teacher PD and principal PD has been steadily growing. Continued PD outside of formal degree programs has become an important goal of the reform of the K-12 educational system and the curriculum system in America (Lv, 2014). Some indication of this reform in the state of Illinois includes a mandate of 40 PD hours every five-year renewal term for principals to continue their license beyond the initial five-year licensure term (ISBE, 2016). In addition, as of 2015, principal licensure is not attached to a teaching
credential; rather, it is a stand-alone certificate (ISBE, 2016). Although PD that is specific to English Learners (ELs) is not yet required by the state for K-12 public school principals, the ESL or Bilingual endorsement is now required of preschool and pre-kindergarten teachers (ISBE, 2015). In order to keep up with the continuing societal changes, PD specific to ELs should become a focus in teacher training and, therefore, an important element in principal PD as well. Before considering the future of PD, first this chapter will investigate the current state of PD, including what is involved in best practices.

Professional Development: Best Practices

According to Darling-Hammond et al. in her longitudinal studies tracking teacher and principal PD (2009), there are four major elements of training for educators: (1) intensity and continuity, (2) focus on practice with specific content, (3) alignment with school improvements and goals, and (4) strong working relationships between the educators. The first two goals are individualistic because they refer to an absorption of the content knowledge as shared in the PD by individuals. Intensity and continuity are structural and programmatic and refer to characteristics of the practice-oriented, specific content. To be maximally effective, the directors and creators of PD can and should design the PD so that both qualities are present for the content. The focus of the first two goals is on the individual--how to structure PD so that it is maximally effective for the principals. The latter two goals are communal because they are whole-school oriented and relational. The focus of these two goals is to align with the goals and relationships between individuals in schools. Alignment of PD with school improvement and goals ensures that the PD is anchored to an overarching and rooted, data-driven orientation. The PD is not only subject to contemporary issues and context, but it is rooted to school-specific
improvements and goals. The PD is oriented with school improvement and goals, but the means towards those goals is relationship and connection with the educators themselves. The elements that are as both communal and individual leader driven have an inherent checks and balances structure that combines individual leadership with group/community orientation and implementation. Individually oriented intensity, continuity, and content are important insofar as they are also coupled with communal and whole-school improvement goals and are effective only as such. However, PD classes given to teachers and administrators often fail to keep these elements at the forefront. Rather, they tend to prioritize convenience, or even when the appropriate elements are prioritized, PD can easily lose focus due to budgetary and time constraints (Shiawassee Regional Education Service District, 2010). Therefore, PD that focuses on strategic, intentional, and continuous learning has the potential to genuinely benefit not only teachers but also principals and other administrators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) as well as the school community as a whole.

Although many school districts encourage ongoing PD, each district and state provides a mandate for a minimal number of hours annually to keep accreditation and certification up-to-date (Coggshall, 2015). PD can include contexts such as the following: (a) state, regional, national or international conferences; (b) ongoing PD models that track a cohort or cluster of participants over time; and (c) seminars within a school or district catered to that school’s or district’s specific needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Although the particulars of PD can be varied, generally speaking, PD seeks to develop the professional needs and knowledge gaps of its participants (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). Because PD is designed to meet the needs of the participant-educators it serves,
best practices in PD can and should fit within the culture and political climate and needs of each school and/or district (T. Sobol, pers. comm., 2007). Best practices require intentionally planned topics, time allotments, and engaged participants, who see a need for PD topics in their work in order to maximize the training. Social affordances for each school community must involve variability and intentionality regarding time and size allotments and constraints when planning and executing excellent PD (Glover & Law, 2005).

Borko (2004) developed a model of PD identifying a context and ecosystem of three elements: facilitators, participants and content/program. For maximally effective PD, not all three elements have to be at peak performance. As with all ecosystems and teaching contexts, when one element is particularly strong, other elements in the system can be less strong without impacting the overall success of the PD. For example, if the facilitator lacks strong expertise and charisma, but the participants or the PD program are excellent, the PD experience within the ecosystem and school can still function well. Further, if the PD has strong participants willing to learn, desiring to benefit and grow, and connected interpersonally with each other, even with weaker facilitators or PD programs, the ecosystem can remain functional. The elements, when combined, are dynamic and interconnected within the Borko model of professional development, which includes interaction among the three components. It is not imperative that each element be maximally effective. However, what it is imperative is that each element positively contributes to the sum total of the experience and effectiveness of the PD. In order to gain a better understanding of effective PD, this chapter will now consider each of the three elements individually.
Facilitators

Facilitators are one of the three core components involved in PD (Borko, 2004). The facilitator serves as the andragogical lead of the PD experience. There exists within andragogy, not unlike K-12 teaching pedagogy, “best practices” that can create an experience of excellence. Although nothing in the literature is so straightforward as to assert a binary breakdown of “good PD” vs. “bad PD,” there are many critical components identified as crucial to the facilitator’s role that contribute towards “good PD” and decrease the likelihood that an experience is considered “bad PD.”

According to Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001), two key factors needed for an effective facilitator are being strong in both knowing required teachers’ competencies and being able to translate and connect this information into the participants’ worldview of teaching practice. Teacher competencies are more cognitive in nature because they refer to teachers’ learning, understanding, and memory for skills or content. Pedagogy/teaching practices, on the other hand, are more situational and contextually bound as they are highly dependent on individual, socially co-constructed context. When combined, teacher competencies and pedagogy/teaching practices provide the framework for strong PD that supports and strengthens the educators being served (Kaiser et al., 2017). The effective facilitator uses the combined end goals of strengthening teacher competencies and strengthening teacher pedagogy/teaching practice rather than one of the goals in isolation (Coggshall, 2015). Although the facilitator has an important role in PD, the participants and the program are also components that are consequential to the execution of excellent PD for educators.
Teacher-Administrators as Participants

When exploring the variables of PD to identify commonalities within identified best practices, participants are as important a feature to consider as the facilitators themselves. The teacher-administrator participants’ context (background knowledge) is brought to the learning process because as participants they come to PD training with beliefs, already acquired ideas, knowledge, and aptitudes (Timperley & Robinson, 2001). Although these preconceptions may be inaccurate, they are deeply ingrained in professional educators and, therefore, play a pivotal role in the PD experience. It is, therefore, vital that the dynamic between the facilitator and the teacher-administrator participants acknowledges that the others’ schema and background knowledge are both unique and valuable to co-constructing an effective PD experience. The relationship between facilitator and participants is a mentoring relationship that is structured, institutionalized, and obligatory (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Palepu et al., 1998). In other words, the teacher-administrator participants may be required to be there to fulfill professional responsibilities and regulations; however, for PD to be effective, the teacher-administrators also need to want to be present and actively engaged.

Professional Development: Content/Program

In addition to the facilitator and the participant, the actual PD content/program is the third element recommended for best practice PD. As previously mentioned, according to Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), there are four major elements of such training for educators: intensity and continuity, focus on practice with specific content, alignment with school improvements and goals, and strong working relationships between the educators. However, rather than efficiently coordinating the four elements, PD content/development often takes the form of episodic
trainings. In the episodic trainings, or one-shot approaches, educators often have trouble with connecting new knowledge to their actionable school practices (Garet et al., 2001). When relevant school practices and hands-on, actionable activities are utilized for the participants, then ideas can be directly “translated” into the language of practice (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). In order to be maximally beneficial, theories that facilitate trainings should be ultimately practical and immediately applicable to the classroom. It is therefore important for participants to receive hands-on, actionable and relevant experiences along with the theoretical frameworks. Intensive and ongoing training allows enough time for the participants to figure out ways to apply the learned knowledge to their practice and to test the results of practice (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Ongoing training should focus on the ultimate goal of building participants’ knowledge bases to enhance students’ achievement (Piggot-Irvine, & Youngs, 2011). The training is successful when themes and goals are explicit and introduced through specific contexts that are closely related to building upon and increasing knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2006). The effective PD must be built around content that is closely connected to the school’s goals and improvement plans. Research indicates that training content that is weakly connected to school-site goals will have very little impact on educators and their practices (Huffman, Hipp, Pankake, & Moller, 2001). The educators must believe that the training provided gives them a unique opportunity to play a role in improving the learning and community of their particular students and the schools they are representing.

One characteristic of successful PD programs, collaboration, is often contrary to the typical American school system that tends to create an environment for individual, isolated work.
In typical school environments, educators can lack opportunities to co-plan lessons, share instructional strategies, and decide on administrative or managerial matters with each other (Bakkenes, De Brabander & Imants, 1999). Collaboration, often excluded from training, is recommended as an effective strategy for improving school practices. “The benefits can include greater consistency in instruction, more willingness to share practices and try new ways of teaching, and more success in solving problems of practice” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 11).

Due to the variability among different educators’ situations, it is difficult to know exactly what makes an effective professional development program. Speck (1996) proposes that adults will commit to learning when the goals and objectives of PD have immediate and real-world applications, are relevant to personal and professional needs, and when learning is connected to day-to-day activities. Further, PD content should be focused on building knowledge bases and connected to the overall goals of the educational community: classrooms, departments, schools, and districts. Finally, PD should be a collaborative community where educators can co-construct knowledge and practices in ongoing training sessions.

Professional Development: School Principals

While the majority of research and recommendations focus on teacher PD (Kose 2007; Yu & Prince, 2016), there is some research on PD for principals, usually addressing operational training like policy or budgeting and resources (American Institute for Research, 2017). Historically the focus of PD in schools has been on teachers rather than principals, due in part to the perception that the role of teachers is more important and comes first in the field of education, probably influenced by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future
(1996) seminal report “What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future”. This report included recommendations to reinvent teacher education programs, establish teaching standards, implement teacher mentor programs, and reward systems for teacher knowledge and expertise. It focused on the role of teachers first, bringing their training to the forefront of educational priority.

Another reason PD may have been traditionally focused on teachers instead of principals is that teachers outnumber principals and teachers are the direct facilitators of students’ learning. Principals are often considered managers rather than the direct connection to student learning. However, evidence suggests that principals can play an important role in reaching our national goals of high achievement for all students and are vital to include in PD. There is a growing body of evidence that indicates principals themselves are seeing a need for more comprehensive PD. A recent report about principal attrition reported one of the top reasons principals left their jobs was inadequate preparation and professional development. Several elements of professional learning opportunities are associated with principal retention: high-quality preparation programs that carefully select and deeply prepare principals for challenging schools; access to in-service training, mentoring, and coaching that continue to support and develop principals; and collaborations between professional learning programs and school districts (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

School leaders can be powerful agents for change when given the right training and support. But most of our nation’s school principals do not have access to professional learning that reflects what is happening in schools today (e.g., changing demographics, large-scale reform initiatives, changing technology, evolving instructional strategies) and what we know are
effective practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, & Davis, 2014; School Leaders Network, 2014). However, principals and administrators rarely have access to effective professional training that is connected to everyday classroom practice. Even more concerning, this is not a recent trend. As early as 2001, Garet et al. suggested that principals have too few opportunities to hone their craft and focus on improving key practices for teaching and learning, and this remains the case in the current educational climate.

To address this concern, researchers and practitioners have made a number of suggestions to connect principal training and practical classroom applications. For example, LeFloch, Garcia, and Barbour (2016) recommend that professional learning plans should emphasize what takes place in the classroom for both teachers and principals. Principals need to understand not just instructional practice but also recommendations for support of teachers’ and children’s learning. The strategic, intentional, and continuous learning that genuinely benefits district staff is applicable not only to PD for teachers but also to that for principals, administrators, and auxiliary staff (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; George W. Bush Institute, 2016).

Evans and Mohr (1999; see also Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 1999) suggest seven elements for effective PD for principals: (1) group learning contexts, (2) opportunities to focus on their own learning, (3) transitions towards present and changing assumptions, (4) intentional time for focused reflection, (5) strong leadership, (6) rigorous planning, and (7) protected learning. When combined, these seven elements help support principals’ work in schools as well as bring together the contexts, learning, transitions, and time to elicit effective learning for school leaders. All seven elements should be deliberately structured and planned to honor a principal’s dual roles as a learner and a leader within a learning context (Young, Crow, Murphy, & Ogawa,
2009). Evans and Mohr (1999) further propose that a focus on content knowledge, opportunities for active learning, and coherence with other learning activities are also key for effective PD for principals. The content knowledge, active learning, and coherence then allow the school leader to bring the knowledge and experience gained from the PD back to the students, staff and families.

Although principals’ PD affords opportunities for personal gains, the purview and scope of influence extends and affects the principals’ constituents and other stakeholders. Ultimately, principal PD has the potential to affect the students themselves by established instructional expectations, developing communities to enhance learning, and setting a climate of cultural celebration. However, without focus and vision for PD that is based on goals and improvement, even the perfect mix of content knowledge, active learning, and coherence results in a lack-luster experience. PD should radiate into the classroom setting and genuinely influence student learning and growth. Research about the importance of school leaders for teaching and learning is compelling. But for principals to be effective and continue to grow, they need access to ongoing, high-quality professional learning (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP] & National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2013; Sorenson, 2005). Principals’ continuous improvement and learning are important for student and teacher learning, policy implementation, and cultivating healthy and supportive school communities.

The role of the public school principal is to create a learning environment that provides high-quality educational programming and instruction for students, regardless of their economic circumstances and in spite of strong correlations between socioeconomic status and academic performance (Gottfried, 2003). But schools in the most challenging environments are the least
likely to have effective principals (Beesley & Clark, 2015; Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010). This is due, in part, to the high attrition rate of principals in these schools. A recent report on principals attrition found the relationship between principal turnover and declines in student outcomes is stronger in high-poverty, low-achieving schools—the schools in which students most rely on education for their future success (Levin & Bradley, 2019). This is disturbing in light of the possible marginalized access to quality formal education for some groups of children, particularly ELs. The attrition of U.S. principals in districts perceived to have challenging working conditions, such as large populations of impoverished or minority students, low per-pupil expenditures, and below-average academic achievement, often leaves schools with poor leadership (Forsyth & Smith, 2002).

Professional Development: English Learners

The teacher quality gap is greater for teachers of English Learners than for low-income students. Gándara and Santibañez (2016) assert additionally that neither preservice teacher education programs nor in-service PD efforts are adequately preparing teachers to teach ELs. Not only is this a compelling case for the need for excellent PD regarding ELs, but it also highlights the continued gap that exists for quality of education for children (K-12) and quality of adult learning (higher education/college as well as professional learning and development contexts). PD is a forum with great potential to impact preparedness for working with ELs. Not only does PD have the potential to facilitate understanding the most efficient ways to work with ELs, there is also the potential that PD can help boost teacher confidence. In fact, a study by Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll (2005) found that teachers who had received PD on working with English Learners rated themselves significantly more able to teach these students across all
categories of instruction than teachers with no such training. Although this was found to be more applicable for teachers participating in “in-service” PD within their school district rather than in the context of coursework at a college or university, data and current research indicate that PD or instruction makes a positive difference overall in teachers’ confidence levels to meet the challenge of teaching ELs (Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Current research conducted on PD supports and overlaps research on PD aimed at how to teach English Learners.

However, there is still evidence of a greater quality gap for teachers of English Learners than for PD and teacher quality overall (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). This may be influenced by the lack of special preparation to empower teachers to meet the needs of ELs. When No Child Left Behind was mandated there was no consideration for teachers of ELs as to where they belonged in the required core academic subjects and no discussion of what constitutes a highly qualified teacher of ELs.

The school-aged population in the United States is becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse (Pizzo & Paez, 2017). However, achievement gaps across content areas persist despite efforts for instruction to reflect multiple modalities and linguistic flexibilities that transcend a need for English to be a student’s primary language (Linebarger & Norton-Meier, 2016). Consequently, more rigorous academic linguistic demands are being placed on all students, including ELs (Roessingh, 2016). Teachers of ELs face the double challenge of promoting English language and literacy development as well as academic achievement across subject areas (Lee & Buxton, 2013). PD for and about teaching ELs must also reflect all of the challenges placed upon teachers of ELs (Johnson & Golombek, 2016). As the changing demographics in our educational systems continue, the need for English Learner PD is
increasingly essential across urban, rural, and suburban communities for schools, districts, and the teachers within. We now, more than ever, face the challenge of providing a quality education for increasingly diverse student populations in both race, ethnicity, and language (Karabenick & Noda, 2004).

There are five identified features of effective PD in the general literature that can also describe key insights regarding PD for effective instruction with ELs (Lee & Buxton, 2013). Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoor (2001) described core features of these crosscutting effective PD recommendations as including (1) content focus, (2) active learning, (3) coherence, (4) sufficient duration, and (5) collective participation. Integration of these features into English Learner PD is evolving as the increasing need for more effective applications moves across all educational environments. Historically, PD specified to target ELs has been directed at schools with high percentages of this population. However, this trend is changing as educational environments across rural, urban, and suburban schools have an increase in EL students and therefore need for PD specified to target ELs. PD and university coursework can increase confidence levels of teachers working with this population. However, there is still much to be learned about preparation of professionals to best serve this group of students. The focus of any training that has been focused on ELs has consistently been directed to teachers or preservice teachers. There remains a lack of consistent and reliable PD for principals and other administrators that is focused on ELs and EL community building.

Communities of Learning to Support ELs

English Learners, along with other ethnic minority students, have traditionally been treated differently from mainstream students, in part as a result of forces both within and outside
of school that promote and sustain the perspectives of the majority (Ogbu, 1978; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Societal forces have contributed to socialization and acculturation patterns that influence these students’ academic achievement. A report from the National Research Council (1997) stated that “these students are overwhelmingly from families with low incomes and lower levels of formal education. Thirty years ago, these students were expected to ‘sink or swim’ in a school environment that did not pay much attention to their linguistic background” (p. 124). The focus with regards to ELs was more on issues of mismatch between social rules these children brought from home and those obtained in a classroom.

Many things have changed since then. The number of ELs in some states and districts is now positioned as the majority. North American culture tends to emphasize individualistic goals and an individualistic self-construal that prioritizes unique traits, abilities, and accomplishments tied to the self rather than to the community. Recognition that learning is not an isolated process that occurs solely in the individual learner’s mind has focused researchers’ attention on the classroom environment as a learning community and on how students’ interactions among themselves and with their teachers influence learning (Brown & Campione, 1995; Cole & Packer, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; McCaslin & Burross, 2011). Moll and his colleagues (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) found that utilizing community-based knowledge in classroom settings, the students’ community, represents a resource of enormous importance for educational change and improvement. A consensus study from the National Academies of Sciences concluded that effective instruction depends on understanding this complex interplay among students’ prior knowledge, experiences, motivations, interests, language, and cognitive
skills and the cultural, social, cognitive, and emotional characteristics of the learning environment (National Research Council, 2018).

From the schoolhouse to the statehouse, we have emphasized the academic skills our students need. But overwhelming evidence demands that we complement the focus on academics with the development of the social and emotional skills and competencies that are equally essential for students to thrive in school, career, and life (The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). Most learning occurs in a social context in which individual actions and understandings are negotiated by the members of a group (National Research Council, 2018). We know now that learning trajectories are greatly influenced by the expectations and training practices within a community, and more important, learning is influenced in fundamental ways by the context in which it takes place; schools and classrooms should be learner and community centered (National Research Council, 2018).

McKinney’s (2017) assertion that community building is of highest import also challenges the school day and schedule to reflect this value. By having classroom morning meetings and having the school’s morning announcements reflect communal, school-connected and classroom-connected values, there is the opportunity to build community intermittently throughout the day. Children transition from passive participants to being engaged and actively involved in their learning by first having established a sense of belonging.

Penn State’s College of Education (2019) includes a welcoming environment (e.g., community building and belonging) as one of their top 15 most important strategies for supporting EL literacy development. Alongside other best practices such as focused reading, writing, and vocabulary development and instruction, explicit literacy development juxtaposed
with implicit, relational foci work together to develop the literacy of EL students. Not only can we acknowledge that relationship and community are precursors to learning and language development, but we can also acknowledge the actual learning process as relationship based.

Learning is a “dialectical process in which participants’ interactions both shape and are shaped by a range of contextual forces” (National Research Council, 2018, p. 89), one salient feature being that the community development that takes place in the students’ classroom. Morton and Guerin (2017) assert that learning being a socio-cultural phenomenon makes student relationship and community, as well as cultural context, key components to student learning and language development. Learning is not relationally primarily between student and text; it is relationally embedded within a complex ecosystem and culture of relationships, norms, and ongoing interactions.

Community is identified as an important component of learning for ELs and diverse populations. However, community is complex and can come in many forms. There can be communities within communities, and these can be fluid with one student belonging to several communities depending on context. In the next section of this chapter I will provide three important theoretical influences on community in relationship to ELs, schools, and climate.

Theoretical Framework

Framing PD as a collaborative endeavor in which teachers and administrators co-construct best practices for their community is driven by the theoretical framework of social constructivism with a focus on social cultural theory credited to Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky’s theories stress the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition, as he believed strongly that community plays a central role in the process of “making
meaning.” In terms of effective PD, the community of participants must engage in collaborative meaning making that results in practical applications driven by theory that are most effective for their communities of practice. Within this overarching social constructivist framework, two major constructs or schools of thought intersect: 1) third space (Bhabha, 1994) and 2) imagined communities (Anderson, 2006).

Initially coined by Homi K. Bhabha (1994), “third space” is a concept that falls within the sociocultural framework of Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues (Lantolf, 2000). As people communicate, they produce and reproduce culture in the context of relationships. It is through the very process of our communication with friends, neighbors, colleagues, etc., that our reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed (Kayode, 2013). Our reality is co-constructed based upon interactions in groups with the groups’ cultures, unique values, communication, and curriculum. Our interactions construct our realities, and our realities inform our culture. Patterns of interaction are the salient variable in culture development rather than individual characteristics or mental models. Meanings, roles, rules, and cultural values are worked out in these interpersonal relationships and interactions. The interpretive process of communication is important in actual situations and with specific individuals affecting the process. Berger and Luckmann (1991), referencing this phenomenon as the social construction of reality, also reference this co-created space of learning, called third space.

Third space (Bhabha, 1994) involves the space of challenge and safety in which learners learn best. This space, carefully crafted by the teacher/instructor/leader, allows for students/participants to engage with new ideas and challenges in ways in which they can meet measurable and desired outcomes. The objectives are challenging, and the bar is set high, but
with engagement and diligence, goals and outcomes can be met. Third space has roots in social constructivism and has applications to a number of domains and epistemologies. Ultimately, the theoretical underpinning of third space is that all people (individually and communal) exist in separate spaces. In an educational setting, one “space” that exists in the community is domestic/real-world knowledge and goals, while a second “space” is academic knowledge and goals. The classroom is a place where these two spaces collide and fuse together (both for individuals and as a community) to create a “third space” that is co-constructed. When applied specifically to PD, third space can refer to the fusion of individual needs and goals as educators and as learners that are driven by the needs and goals of students in a community.

Imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) also has roots in social constructivism and refer to the communities that we engage in within and apart from our physical and geographical limitations. Although Anderson’s imagined communities included nation-states, it also included ideologies and language and concepts shared through oral history as well as written words. He also asserted that sometimes these imagined communities could create stronger ties and relationships with others than those of the nuclear family or proximate physical geography and spaces. Anderson, credited as developer of the term, originally referred to a nation as “an imagined political community” and called it imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 2006, p.6).

Although traditionally applied to nationalism, imagined communities have strong implications for educational settings. Imagined communities are co-constructed by people who imagine themselves to be a part of those communities (Anderson, 2006). These communities can
vary in grain size as the idea of a co-constructed community applies to individual classrooms, departments, schools, districts, and beyond. In an imagined community, affections and shared ideas bind together unique and disparate individuals into a community of one mind. The very act of verbal or written discourse, conversation between teacher and student or student to student, both take in and give out input and ideas through shared language: grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Verbally this is considered the oral and aural components of language development; written language is considered the reading and writing components of language sharing and development (WIDA, 2019). PD addresses this idea of imagined communities and leverages this theory to make the planning and experience of PD one in which community is cultivated for the purpose of cultivating other communities (i.e., individual schools or classrooms). As teachers and administrators engage with topics of importance in their PD experiences, they are engaging in community with each other as well as non-physical imagined communities of other students and educators.

As students, leaders, and educators work to co-construct these communities of practice, there is an additional theory working in the background. Normative ethical theory (Gilligan, 1982) as interpreted by Nel Noddings as the ethic of care (Noddings, 1988) acts as a motivator and guiding force for the work that is done both in the PD and beyond. Normative ethical theory holds that moral action centers on care or benevolence as a virtue and applies to the actions of a community of interpersonal relationships. This philosophical argument has been the topic of debate for centuries, and there are offshoots of the theory that focus on internal character only, actions only, or a hybrid of the two. The work of Carol Gilligan (1982) is the foundation of normative ethics and argues that androgyny, or integrating the masculine and the feminine, is the
best way to realize one’s potential as a human and that ethics are strongly linked to empathy and compassion. An interpretation of this ethic of care (Noddings, 1988, 2013) is both an overarching and undergirding ethos that is prevalent in strong PD. Care and passion for the content, for the participants’ and students’ learning, as well as the participants and students themselves, are the driving ethic in the theory of ethic of care. An ethic of care is the antidote to the often sterile and obligatory nature of PD and to the false notion that excellence in content is devoid of an ethic of care.

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical underpinnings that drive the current study. The figure represents that ethic of care is the driving force that is working in the background and is the foundation of all other activities. Social constructivism is at work in the co-constructed PD community, which in turn impacts the co-constructed communities of the classroom within a co-constructed community of a school and a district. The model further represents that what occurs in the classroom, school, and district should impact what happens in the PD. Each of these (PD, classroom, school, and district) is based on principles of imagined communities and act as third spaces in which the co-constructed knowledge is a fusion of knowledge from individuals and communities.

Connecting Theory and Practice

Limited research addresses the role of the principal in relation to PD for teaching and supporting ELs. The principal must acknowledge that creating a culture of academic achievement for all students cannot be done in isolation or left on the shoulders of teachers. Principals must create capacity to lead, as they cannot lead alone (Drago-Severson, 2009). Capacity should be fostered in the development of community to support ELs. Building
community is not an easy task, as this requires a mind shift among key personnel to include attitudes, behaviors, and commitment across all groups (Aleman, Johnson, & Perez, 2009). A community of learners and educators requires a level of positive relationships among all stakeholders, which implies trust, respect, and common understanding of how to support ELs. Professional development is the forum in which such a community can be built.

![Diagram](attachment:image.png)

**Figure 1.** Theoretical underpinnings of current study. This model represents Ethic of Care operating in the background of all aspects while various levels of co-constructed communities interact.

There are many variations on who facilitates and what is used as professional development in educational environments. One goal to build capacity and create community through quality professional development is to create positive instructional improvements to meet the needs of ELs (Alford & Niño, 2011). Current practice in PD is not meeting this need as neither preservice teacher education programs nor in-service professional development efforts are adequately preparing teachers to teach ELs (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). It is speculated
that by training principals in the same or similar sessions as teachers on topics such as pedagogy, culture, socialization, and climate, a common community of learning could be built.

As discussed in the theoretical framework section of this chapter, Bhabha’s third space (1994), Anderson’s imagined communities (2006) and Noddings’s ethic of care (2013) are all relevant ideas that help to provide a guide to develop a community to support ELs’ learning. Each of these components can contribute to the participants’ learning processes as practitioner-leaders and encourages all participants to affect positive change in their respective schools and classrooms, for all students.

Third Space

Initially coined by Homi K. Bhabha (1994), “third space” is a concept that falls within the sociocultural framework of Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues (Lantolf, 2000). As people communicate, they produce and reproduce culture in the context of relationships. It is through the very process of our communication with friends, neighbors, colleagues, etc., that our reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed (Kayode, 2013). Patterns of interaction, rather than individual characteristics or mental models, are the salient variable in culture development. For example, the patterns formed between student and teacher, as well as inter-student dialogues and communication, form a classroom culture. The third space is formed while engaging in conversations during a PD with the presenter-teacher as well as within the classroom where students themselves form a culture. According to Bhadha (1994):

The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot ‘in itself’ be conscious. (p.53)
Our reality is co-constructed based upon interactions in groups with their cultures based on unique values, communication strategies, curriculum, etc. Our interactions construct our realities, and our realities inform our culture (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). These realities are built on interactions and depend on the tone set through climate in any community. Meanings, roles, rules, and cultural values are worked out in these interpersonal relationships and interactions. Berger and Luckmann (1991), referencing this phenomenon as the social construction of reality, thereby acknowledge this co-created space of learning as third space. Third space can be intentionally challenging, dialogical, and potentially contentious because without some kind of intellectual threat, it is questionable if anyone is learning (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007). It can also be a place of conflict and disequilibrium that allows for learning and growth to occur. Effective PD is not a place of stasis, but a place of change, growth, and ultimately, transformation.

This third space can also involve an absence from existing and thinking about the present educational context in favor of presence in a future space of PD and learning. Third space not only cultivates a context of high challenge, high learning, and high growth, it also often involves a present and/or future community of learners in which the individual is able to engage and of which all can be a part (Bhabha, 1994). This third space can and should be filled by content and context-specific cultural milieu in which conditions can and should be carefully acknowledged and prepared. If the third space is co-constructed by both teachers and principals with a focus on EL learners, it has the potential to be transformative in the classroom as well.
Imagined Communities

According to Anderson (2006), the concept of imagined communities applies to even very small social groups in which not all members have face-to-face contact. An important factor of this notion of imagined communities is that it can strongly affect the learning process of students (Kanno, 2003). The term finds an especially strong application in the area of second language acquisition. Imagined communities can have both positive and negative impacts on opportunities to learn, especially for English Learners.

Imagined communities hold the power to impact learning goals, which then impact learning opportunities. One example of this is highlighted in a study on four high school immigrant students in their ESL classes (Cohen, 2012). All four students were participants of the “community [they] aspire to join once they have mastered the target language” (p. 2) and this is “a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future” (Cohen, 2012, p. 12). The students’ view on these communities influenced their learning and how they perceived the learning process itself. The students often stated that they would like a more challenging classroom, more challenging activities or learning outcomes. They believed that this would create a faster way to achieve their goals (testing out of the ESL program) and to become members of the imagined future community of English speakers.

Imagined communities can impact the process of learning. Kanno (2003) argues that schools and their visions for students’ learning outcomes represent a type of imagined community that influences the learning process of students from yet another angle. Schools, just like students themselves, “envision imagined communities for their students: what kind of adults the students will grow up to be and what communities they will join in the future” (Kanno, 2003,
Schools have the power to navigate students’ accessibility of tools, programs, and outcomes which directly impact the process of learning for ELs. Schools’ policies and general approaches create another imagined community for the students in which they can be successful or not in achieving their language learning goals. As Cohen (2012) indicates, “The school … is preparing the students to fit the role of specific imagined communities” (p. 267). As in Kanno’s study (2003), “depending on the purpose of the school, the imagined community advocated by the school leaders and teachers played a heavy role in how ‘bilingual’ the children became…, They were being prepared for ‘different kinds of bilingualism’” (Kanno, 2003), which “ultimately affects their identities” (Cohen, 2012, p. 285).

Imagined communities have the potential to impact students’ learning through interpersonal experiences. Students belong to imagined communities consisting of ethnic and social groups. For example, in a college classroom, one student could be a former teacher while another is a salesperson. Belonging to different imagined communities such as these would have effects on students’ learning and interpersonal experiences within the same classroom. Because of these imagined communities, students may interact with different people, ideas, or beliefs that ultimately impact their learning opportunities differentially. Students could also belong to a future imagined community that is different from their current imagined community in which the students will be able to use newly gained skills. For instance, “individual second language (L2) learners have images of the communities in which they want to participate in the future” (Kanno, 2003, p. 287). Ultimately, Norton (2001) claims that “different learners have different imagined communities, and these imagined communities are best understood in the context of a learner’s
unique investment in the target language and the conditions under which he or she speaks and practices it” (p.165).

Finally, viewing the environment and teaching techniques from an angle of a particular imagined community may have negative consequences as extreme as dropping a course (Norton, 2001). Norton gives an example of two female students who dropped out of their ESL course only because of the comments that the teacher expressed, where she, for example, did not acknowledge the country of one of these two students and indicated that the other student speaks an “immigrant English.” In this case, the teacher failed to acknowledge and/or minimized the ethnic communities of the two learners, and this led them to withdraw from the course. “This imagined community was not accessible to the teacher, who, in each case, focused her energy on practices of engagement, rather than on practices of the imagination” (Norton, 2001, p.165).

Focusing on pedagogical best practices such as student engagement and student understanding is a teacher’s professional responsibility. However, to do those things well, the teacher must focus on the imaginative elements of the pedagogical relationship, such as the imagined communities of the students’ current and future and communities. These boundaries of inclusion and exclusion can be as salient and real to the students as the bounded community of the classroom. In fact, cases where students’ withdrawal (physical, mental, or emotional) from the course can indicate that the physical, engaged, prescient community of the classroom is less true to them than the “imagined” community that is not present in their physical space.
Ethic of Care

Both as a goal and as a fundamental aspect of education, Noddings (2013) asserts the need for a pervasive “ethic of care” as a learning climate conducive to growth, safety, and individual and group health. The ethic of care within education allows teachers and administrators to make decisions based on a moral foundation of caring for the well-being of students. In the combination of a demanding accountability system and current emphases on standards-based education, instructional leadership, and organizational systems, there is a drive to center educators with an ethic of care as the core and driving force of schools (Noddings, 2013). In other words, care for students can and should be integrated with school goals and learning objectives. Caring is suggested both as a moral orientation to teaching and as an aim of education (Noddings, 1988). An ethic of care involves creating a communal value of care (and in some social justice educative contexts, care alongside advocacy) as a driving force with ethical parameters within which decisions, actions, and values are encompassed.

When combined, each of these three components (third space, imagined communities, and ethic of care) has the potential to transform classrooms into a co-constructed community in which maximal learning opportunities can be achieved for all students and teachers. Incorporating these three components into PD sets the stage for transformation in the classroom. PD emphases on content knowledge and pedagogy (Jacob, Hill, & Corey, 2017) can be strengthened by the inclusion of each of these three components. Noddings’s interpretation of ethic of care (2013) can be present not only within PD but also in the action steps and bridge that participants make from PD into their classrooms and schools. An ethic of care helps educators ground their decision making and pedagogical practices within the climate and community of
schools. Noddings charges educators to keep caring at the core of what they do, with ever-increasingly complex transactions and responsibilities. As the relationships among teacher, student, and concepts in a classroom translate into the relationship among teachers, facilitators and PD program, Bhabha’s third space is engaged and allows for learning to occur and thrive—the relationships are neither formal nor informal, neither distant nor intimate. This third space elevates the learning conditions for teacher and student to be at their best and learn within their relationship. Anderson’s imagined community is the place of the learner’s group which brings the learner into a context for joining a community of learners in the present and future of which the learner desires to be a part. Noddings (2013), Bhabha (1994), and Anderson (2006) speak to contexts and particularities in which educators and principals in particular can be empowered to serve and care for ELs in their schools through high-quality professional development.

Summary

There were nearly 5 million English language learners in U.S. public schools in fall 2015, which, according to data from the Pew Research Center (Bialik, Scheller, & Walker, 2018), represented 9.5% of U.S. public school enrollees, an increase from 8.1% in 2000. These students vary in socioeconomic levels, levels of oral proficiency in their home language and English, as well as academic and literacy in both their native language and English (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2010). The challenge for all teachers and schools is the limited training to support these learners.

There is evidence that current approaches to teacher preparation and training are not meeting the needs of our fastest growing school population. The PD implemented in our schools must become a major concern and focus if we are to keep up with the rapid changes in socio-
cultural norms, increasing access to communication, and global connections to learning.

Research about the importance of school leaders for teaching and learning is compelling, but for principals to be effective and continue to grow, they need access to ongoing, high-quality professional learning (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP] & National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2013). Today’s principals have too few opportunities to hone their craft and focus on improving key practices for teaching and learning. Yet leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning (NASSP & NAESP, 2013).

Although there currently exists a strong body of literature and research regarding best practices for PD for teachers in general (Darling-Hammond, & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey, 1995; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Moon, 2013; US Department of Education, 2015), existing gaps are documented for PD for principals and PD on ELs. Principal endorsement in Illinois only recently began to require coursework in cross-categorical special education, methods of reading, reading in the content areas, and instructional strategies for English language learners (ISBE, 2016). Although the process varies from state to state, most states include coursework on budget management, systems operations, human resources, instructional leadership and curriculum development, and even special education, but nothing on English Learners (Teachers College, Columbia University, 2016; US Department of Education, 2016).

Current programmatic resources for schools and school leaders serving K-12 ELs include PD on topics such as extended-day programs and instructional time spent on explicit literacy and numeracy skill development (Chen, 2015; Dooley, 2015). The lack of attention and PD given to the complex needs of ELs may result in significant gaps within measures of academic and
psychosocial needs for healthy youth development (Colucci et al., 2015; Posselt et al., 2015; Welch-Mitchell & Wheller, 2015).

As professional development (PD) gains momentum and moves forward as a venue for practicing professionals to keep pace with rapid change in global educational systems, a reconceptualization of PD is needed. This is particularly crucial for equity issues related to the changing population of English Learners (ELs) and other diverse populations. Teachers and principals will need to be comfortable with cultural complexities in order to maximize student learning, and high-quality PD is the most promising pathway to make this happen in schools.

A recent study by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research found that principals influence school achievement primarily through changes in the school climate (Olson, 2018). Community cannot be sustained without the understanding and support of the principal. PD for principals should go beyond management and include climate, relationships, and the complexity of community to support ELs.
Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in this study. It is divided into the following sections: the study design, research questions, sampling strategy, data sources, data collection procedures, and data analysis. These sections combine to give an overview of the methodology used to conduct the current study. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Study Design

The current project used a qualitative descriptive case-study approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceived challenges faced by administrators in implementing EL-focused PD and developing a caring community in their schools. A qualitative approach is predicated upon a lack of a “true answer,” as is the case for the current study. As opposed to searching for the one true answer, connections and interpretations are explored for the purpose of exploration and/or explanation. In order to explore a phenomenon, field notes, document analyses, and interviews are common tools within qualitative research (Creswell, 2015; Mertens, 2010). For the current study, I analyzed principal interviews using a social-science, person-oriented, question-driven methodology in order to reflect the principals’ perspectives on EL-focused PD (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

A qualitative case-study approach is also appropriate for this project because “the variables are so embedded in the situation as to be impossible to identify ahead of time” (Merriam, 2007, p. 32). In this study, the principal perceptions associated with implementing PD and building a caring community around ELs were not known ahead of time. Each of these
variables is deeply embedded within each administrator’s unique situation, and the current study used a case-study methodology that allows for appreciation of the uniqueness of each situation while also looking for cross-cutting themes. Further, as is consistent with qualitative case studies, the current data is “particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (Merriam, 2007, p. 29). In other words, the data from the current study is particular to the participants and events, provides a rich description of principals’ perceptions, and gives insight to the phenomenon of challenges faced by administrators in implementing EL-focused PD and caring communities.

Research Questions

The purpose of the current study is to examine the challenges associated with implementing EL-focused PD and caring communities by K-12 principals after intentional training/PD focused on developing community to support ELs in schools. As a part of this overall purpose, the study examined the following two research questions:

1. What are principals’ perceptions of the challenges associated with implementing PD focused on English Learners in their school communities after participation in a professional development on English Learners?
2. What are the perceived challenges for principals in developing a caring community for ELs to support academic and career success in school settings?

Sampling Strategy

The seven principals who were interviewed for this study had varying EL and PD experiences according to their district and educational backgrounds. The principal participants were drawn from an original pool of 40 principals who were part of a week-long, grant-funded, PD called Project DREAMS Summer Academy at Northern Illinois University.
DREAMS was a Title III federally funded grant (2012-2015) providing PD to preservice and practicing teachers and administrators.

Principals were recruited through an e-mail invitation to participate in the study. E-mails were sent to approximately 16 principals who lived and worked within two hours of my home or workplace. Selection of participants included the following six criteria:

1. Participants were principals who participated in a Project DREAMS Summer Academy who had the ability to implement changes in their school at the time of the study.
2. Participants were principals with varying EL populations in their district and/or school. Principals had to have an EL population of 5% or above in their school and/or district.
3. Principals had to give permission to be interviewed.
4. Principals had to be at the same school for a minimum of two years.
5. Principals/administrators expressed a desire to care for their EL population through instruction, staffing, structures, etc., even if it required changes.
6. Principals/administrators had to represent a mixture of urban, suburban and rural districts to represent possible differences in implementation for the schools and students involved.

Principals were chosen using a purposive sampling strategy based on the above six criteria. Although this is a non-probability sampling strategy, which means the sample is not guaranteed to be representative of the intended population, steps were taken to ensure that the principals represented a wide variety of school settings. I was sure to include a mix of elementary, middle, and high schools as well as schools from rural and suburban locations. A variety of school types were selected because different types of schools require different types of implementations. Participants included both males and females and principals from schools with
varying percentages of ELs who spoke multiple native languages other than English. In addition, all principals interviewed were monolingual and the majority were White. This demographic is particularly important to explore for implementing EL-focused PD because they may have unique perspectives on the challenges associated with building a caring community for ELs.

Data Sources

The data collection was an “immersive process” (Merriam, 2007, p. 161) because I, as an insider, engaged with participants and their communities multiple times and in multiple ways for data collection. The data sources for the current study were: a) demographic data on the participants’ schools and/or districts and b) ten semi-structured interviews from seven principals spanning one school year after the PD participation.

Demographic Data

Records and demographic information were collected prior to the interview process in order to gain insight into participants’ unique situational contexts (Mertens, 2010). Demographic data included items such as vocational information, location of school (urban, suburban, rural), size of school/district, etc. This data was collected using pre-interview questionnaires and were confirmed using the Illinois Report Card. Demographics are reported in Chapter 4, where the participants and study context will be described.

Interviews

Verbal, in-person interviews were implemented because they are a way for the researcher to better understand participants’ subjective experiences in a more personal and in-depth manner (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Hour-long interviews also allowed for internal validity checks for verification and consistency in communication (Creswell, 2015). The interviews were
focused mainly on events and processes and were broadly focused in scope as to be appropriate for a qualitative case-study approach to data collection (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The research used a semi-structured interview approach that used both open-ended and theoretically driven questions to allow for a more complete picture of the principals’ experiences as well as their stances on EL-based PD (Galletta, 2013). According to this approach, I constructed questions so that they did not pay “excessive attention to [the] search for converging and diverging thematic trends,” but rather tried to “elicit from the participant the meaning he or she gives to the focus of the study” (Galletta, 2013, p. 77). The structured interview questions are included in the Appendix.

In addition to the structured questions, additional questions and probes were asked during the interviews to offer each principal a chance for a unique contribution to the mutually constructed space of dialogue. In cases where principals mentioned something that seemed fruitful or important to them that was not a part of the structured interview, the conversation went “offscript” to fully capture the complexities of the principals’ perceptions and experiences. An example of an off-script question was probing about one principal’s building project when he indicated he saw it as foundational to his work to create community for ELs. Probes were questions like, “Could you say more about that?” In addition to probes, a follow-up question to Steve’s building initiative was, “The building project at first glance, does not necessarily seem like an EL student or community-building-related project. Can you tell me more about how it was indeed representative of these intentions?”
Data Collection Procedures

All participants signed consent forms prior to the interviews. First, I utilized school district websites and the Illinois Report Card to confirm school demographics and data regarding ELs for principals who engaged in the summer academy. This provided the demographic data on the schools. Next, I invited administrators to participate in the interviews to better understand their perspectives on implementing EL-focused PD and requested follow-up interviews, nine months (one school year) after the initial PD. Interviews were conducted by myself in each participant’s school or workplace. All ten interviews were approximately 60 minutes long and were digitally audio-taped. Following each of the ten interview sessions, the dialogue exchanges were transcribed verbatim from the audio files to allow for coding. The data was then prepared for analysis.

Data Analysis

This study was designed within what Nunan (1992) coined as an “exploratory-interpretive” paradigm utilizing a “non-experimental method, yielding qualitative data and providing an interpretive analysis of that data” (p. 4). Multiple steps were used in coding and interpreting the transcribed data from the interviews. Prior to coding the interviews for the current study, one example interview was coded using a consensus coding procedure at a group research meeting (solitary extant data source). Researchers present at the meeting included the following: the primary investigator for the Project DREAMS grant, a senior researcher on the grant, and four research assistants on the grant. The meeting involved developing a coding strategy and going through an example interview. During the meeting, the researchers present reviewed an interview transcript line by line by reading aloud. Team members verbally inserted
comments and repeated themes identified throughout and to the end of document. A designated note taker (research assistant) used the track comments feature in a digital document to mark team notes. Finally, themes were clustered together to identify evidenced phrases and quotations fitting each theme. The primary researcher for the current study then followed a similar process to independently code the ten interviews that constitute the data for the current study.

Coding was done using constant-comparative (akin to grounded theory) methods. These methods were first conceived by Glasser and Strauss (1967) and can be used on multiple sources of data to form a theory of a social, relational process. In constant comparative analysis, data is coded line by line, both open and axial coding, and is meticulously given multiple codes and categories. Using this methodology, coding happens through multiple rounds of iterative labeling of ideas, theories, or processes represented in the data. During and based on the multiple rounds of coding, theories emerge from the data which are “grounded” by verbiage/codes according to the purview and analyses of the researchers.

Transcribing and coding were completed in NVivo (2015) qualitative analysis software. I used multi-layered coding to identify recurring themes that emerge related to my theoretical framework as well as the interview questions and research questions. Following the constant-comparative approach, I engaged in line by line coding, then open coding, then axial coding to determine categories and relationships among those categories. Coding done in multiple layers allowed for themes and subordinate themes to emerge across participants and across districts and was tracked horizontally along multiple participants’ interviews. Emergent themes were continually re-evaluated and re-examined throughout the analysis process. In addition to the research team’s initial reading aloud of transcribed interviews and theme identification, final
codes and themes were clustered to then reflect interviewed participants’ thoughts as relevant to the research questions. Themes (e.g., challenges to supporting community for ELs) and subordinate themes (e.g., financial challenges to supporting community for ELs) were discussed as repetition across multiple participant interviews revealed data points salient to discussion around those themes. Interviews were coded multiple times and checked by a peer reviewer for the purposes of this research, but also as modeled by the initial research team meetings.

In addition to the researcher coding, peer review and editing of coding and themes were completed to allow for greater trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010). The peer reviewer was a colleague who is also pursuing a doctoral degree in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in bilingual/ESL education. The peer review process involved the review of all of the transcribed and coded interviews with special attention to accuracy of current codes as well as the possibility of codes absent that should be examined and noted. Each theme was coded to the corresponding research question it addressed and cross-checked by the peer reviewer. Any themes the peer reviewer found applicable that were not included originally by me were added to the results if there was ample merit to include them. Any disagreements were settled through discussion.

Summary

The current study was a descriptive case study conducted to investigate principals’ perceptions of the experience of implementing EL-focused PD and creating a community of caring in their respective schools. Data was collected from interviewing seven principals who participated in a summer PD session that was a part of a larger project, Project DREAMS, conducted at Northern Illinois University. Interviews were analyzed for emergent themes using a
constant-comparative approach with open and axial coding. Codes were validated by a peer reviewer as a measure of trustworthiness.
CHAPTER 4
STUDY CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

Chapter 4 outlines the context and participants in the current study. It is divided into two major sections: the context of the study and the description of the seven participants. The context of the study includes information about the overarching project this study was based on (Project DREAMS), the researcher’s background, experience with the project, and role in the study, as well as information about the schools in which the interviewed principals were employed at the time of data collection. The second part of the chapter includes descriptions of the participants as well as the researcher’s perceptions regarding the participants and their environments. These are included to represent that, although each principal can be described in a uniform way with particular demographic information, each of the principals has unique characteristics and is in a unique context.

Context of the Study

Project DREAMS

Project DREAMS (Development of Reading, ESL, eArly Childhood, Mathematics and Science) was a five-year, professional development project involving teachers, administrators, school nurses and auxiliary staff from school districts throughout nine counties in northern Illinois funded through the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) of the U.S. Department of Education. The funding supported training in the theory, research, and best practices of teaching English language learners for professionals in the education community
who have not had opportunities for integrated training in the past.

This was a three-prong Title III grant written to support the education of pre- and in-service auxiliary staff and administrative staff, with the administrative prong affording an opportunity for participants to receive professional development over the course of one week on topics such as bilingual education, laws and policies, psychology and education, as well as undocumented immigrant students. The summer academy aimed to introduce administrators and auxiliary staff to the world of English Learners. Each summer for five years there were two cohorts of 10 professionals participating in this training for a project total of 100 participants. These included superintendents, principals, special education professionals, curriculum directors, school nurses, teachers and school psychologists.

The project had three goals:

- to increase the number of general education teachers with an ESL and/or bilingual endorsement,
- to increase the number of NIU’s early childhood education pre-service teachers with an ESL and/or bilingual endorsement, and
- to increase the number of K-12 school administrators, psychologists, nurses, and other auxiliary school staff who have received intensive training that focuses on the needs of ELs.

The weekly schedule of events included 5.5 hours of focused training each day for five days. Casual discussions were encouraged over meals and breaks for participants to share interpretation of the training sessions. Broad general topics included immigrant populations, myths versus realities about ELs, dual-language research, parent involvement and advocacy, and
national and state laws. Targeted sessions of critical content introduced the concept of community through the topics of third space, imagined communities and ethics of care.

Table 1 provides the main conceptual focus of the DREAMS training by critical content. These sessions were approached through discussion of broad concepts with individuals encouraged to connect these ideas to their school populations.

Table 1
Conceptual Foci of DREAMS Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Focus</th>
<th>Definition and Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third Space</td>
<td>A sociolinguistic theory of identity and community realized through language or enunciation (Bhabha, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social construction of reality, co-created space of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As people communicate and learn, they produce and reproduce culture in the context of relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagined Communities</td>
<td>Benedict Anderson’s theory (2006) that begins conceptually with the initial mapping of “imaginary” geographical lines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current communities are contingent on non-physical, shared, and imagined affinities (rather than tribal/family geography or other physical-external features).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Our present communities are imagined but have as great an import to the ways we collaborate, socialize, work, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics of Care</td>
<td>Nel Noddings asserted that an “ethic of care” (1988) is of greatest import, rather than other factors of teaching and learning, especially in regard to classroom climate and the prerequisite of trust established between teacher and student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L. Vygotsky’s notion of a “competent other” (1978)—an ethic of care does not necessarily mean a personality trait of “niceness,” but rather an advocacy and care for the well-being of one’s students as a driving ethic and motivation for teachers’ instructional and relational practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The approach was used within the context of suburban and rural Illinois school districts. Staff role participation was diverse but limited to principals, superintendents, nurses, district directors and auxiliary staff. Classroom teachers were not included in this training set as they had similar training throughout the school year as part of the grant. The focus of my study was on the third goal, specifically K-12 school administrators who received intensive training on the needs of EL students and the ideas of third space, imagined communities and the ethics of care as community components of school systems.

Researcher

**Researcher’s background.** In the spirit of lifelong learning, my colleague Stephanie invited me to apply to a grant at her husband’s workplace, where he was a professor of mathematics education. The university had hosted a grant for teacher-educator professional development. She and I had been working primarily with Bhutanese and Burmese refugee youth for the five years prior, so a summer session to learn about English Learners and bilingual education would help me both professionally and personally.

I am the daughter of two immigrants, Kee Nam Chang and Seung-joo/Sue Kim Chang, who came to the United States in 1975. I was born in 1977 to my mom who worked as a night-shift nurse and my dad who was working retail during the day and bartending in the evenings. He liked to joke that as an aspiring East Asian history professor in Korea that these were tests for which he had no formal training but plenty of social-informal-personal training. They worked just enough to bring my halmuni [grandma] from South Korea, and once that happened, their work schedules became a bit more flexible.
Until age five, I was monolingual (Korean) and I was bilingual by age 10. Living in the Midwest United States, my life was mostly school, home, and church, with the various code-switching exercises between those ecosystems and communities. English as the lingua franca and the language of school and eventually the workplace meant that my Korean would have steadily declined, if not for the supplementary Saturday and Sunday Korean school and the monolingual Korean communication needs of my grandma and dad.

In college I studied sociology, with an emphasis on education at the University of Chicago. I wrote my honor's thesis on "chong"/we-ness, where I did a quantitative analysis of the ways that thinking on behalf of the group correlated with positive attributes elsewhere for adolescents, ages 10-18. I received a master's degree at Lewis and Clark College in science, math, and technology education and afterwards, taught music, kindergarten, and second grade. Then, I studied for my master’s degree in educational leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University, and I worked as a principal, assistant principal, director, and refugee youth education specialist. As a teacher, then as an administrator in schools and particularly for refugee youth, I saw that populations of "double exceptional" students needed intentional care and support. These highlighted populations of Title I/poverty and Title III/English Learner populations received funding and support and were "double-exceptional" because of the conditions of poverty and language learning that were challenges, but ultimately assets if strengthened by their communities, families, and teachers around them.

**Researcher’s experience with Project DREAMS.** I was first a participant in Project DREAMS, learning and absorbing so much about bilingual and dual-language education, undocumented immigrants, and psychologists' roles in supporting English Learners in K-12
public schools. Then, after I presented on my action/practitioner research on assets in refugee youth to my cohort in the fall after my Project DREAMS participation, I was invited to apply to the doctoral program in bilingual education within the Literacy Education Department (now Curriculum and Instruction) at Northern Illinois University.

As a research assistant on the grant, I attended as many of the interviews as my schedule would allow, and I also transcribed most of the interviews. As a member of the research team, I drove out to school and district work sites, interviewing principals and administrators about their experiences with Project DREAMS and their hopes for application to their learning. We also probed about professional development already in place for learning about their English Learner populations, as well as any training they had received formally or informally prior to their participation in Project DREAMS. The team met weekly for division of labor discussions and also to analyze the transcripts for themes that emerged from the interviews. The analysis work was collaborative, involving individual perspectives brought to the table, and then documented and shared with analyses line by line each week.

Bracketing the researcher’s experience. Within the field of social science, the strengths and limitations of research involving an insider are well documented (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 1992; Yin, 2015). As a part of bracketing my experience, it is important that I acknowledge my role as a researcher and insider. As the researcher for the current study, investigating a profession in which I am currently engaged, professionally and affectively, has inherent limitations. Mertens (2010) addresses multiple concerns about researchers being involved in the research context. Mertens (2010) addresses the insider phenomenon as legitimate but emphasizes that it can be addressed so as not to detract from the validity and reliability of the
research. Participating in, as well as observing and executing, PD about working with English Learners aligns with my personal teaching philosophy. My goal is to use research and inquiry to incite motivation and strength in a community of learners. The trajectory for doing so involves inciting motivation in staff, who in turn incite motivation and strength in their respective communities of learners.

Bracketing while also acknowledging my personal and professional bias and commitment to these questions and decidedly un-objective stance is part of my reaction to the data collection and analysis processes. It is likely that these biases influenced the research process and outcomes, especially because leading and probing questions that bend chance variation towards particular and expected responses are not “good” research (Creswell, 2013). Acknowledging the propensity for the researcher to become a non-objective ally and impassioned advocate helps to alleviate and bring forth consciousness of potential biases, but it cannot eliminate potential bias entirely (Cameron, 2011).

Because the researcher in this study is an insider, it is vital to recognize and address potential biases. It is for this reason it is important to bracket my experiences and include an open discussion of the ways in which my experience may bias this research. That being said, conducting research as an insider allows for a unique perspective that can be beneficial. It is important to note that this research takes place within particular contexts that are constructed of the unique personalities and experiences of multiple people. These contexts are not just limited to the researcher and the participants, but also the environments in which each party resides. Accordingly, we will now consider the demographics of the schools in which the principals worked at the time of the interviews.
Participants’ School Demographics

Table 2 shows demographics for each of the seven schools the principals worked in at the time of the interviews. It is important to consider these demographics because not only does the school context influence the mindset and goals for the principal, but they were also the contexts in which the interviews took place. Conducting the interviews in each principal’s school was a way to address the potential bias that can come from interviewer-interviewee power dynamic. Conducting the interviews in locations where the principals represent power reduces the perceived power of the interviewer to allow for an authentic discussion.

Table 2
Demographics for Principals’ Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>% Free Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>% ELs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North school</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Danielle)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayton school</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>PreK-6</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Wanda)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker School</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Bill)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden School</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sharon)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valin School</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Gary)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Dodds School</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Julie)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridge School</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Christina)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The school demographics listed in Table 2 represent a wide range of diversity (urban, suburban, and rural), age ranges (pre-K-12th grade), school enrollment size (249-660), percent of free or reduced lunch (9%-77%), and percent of ELs (4%-38%). Because the schools represent such a diverse range of environments, the principals came to the interview process with a diverse range of experiences and challenges associated with ELs. The next section will provide information filtered through my personal interpretative lens of reality concerning the characteristics of the participants.

Participant Descriptions

Participant descriptions are important elements of a case study design because the individuals are part of a bounded system, both contextual and a study of process (Merriam, 2007). It is important that context is understood as part of the process. Participant descriptions allow for a deeper understanding of particular people, problems or situations in a more comprehensive manner. It is of particular note that most participants were monolingual individuals.

Below are descriptions of the principals who participated in interviews. Each description includes information about the principals, their schools, and my perceptions of our initial interactions. Some aspects of the descriptions are uniform across principals (e.g., principal time at job, linguistic status, gender, school enrollment, etc.). These aspects are also presented in Table 2 and Table 3 to facilitate comparisons among principals and allow for a better overview of their situations. Other aspects of the descriptions are included to represent the unique situations of each principal. Although there are commonalities regarding their roles, each principal has a unique demeanor, set of goals, and
communication style. Accordingly, I have included some statements from the principals and my perceptions of our interactions in order to highlight the uniqueness of each encounter.

Table 3
Information about Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Title/Role</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years at School</th>
<th>Linguistic Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Danielle

Danielle was the principal of a K-8 elementary school (North School) and had been at her school for four years at the time of the interview. Danielle is a White female who is monolingual. North School, a traditional brick building with two floors, welcomes visitors upon entry with a
school sign and the words “Learning Together” in 17 different languages. North is a school on
the north side of a rural school district, and there are 512 kindergarten through 8th grade students
enrolled at her school. Forty-nine percent of her students receive free or reduced lunch, and 24%
are ELs. She described her school as functioning well because of great teachers collaborating
together. Most teachers have lived and worked in the area for many years. Besides a factory
within the town, the school and school district provide a stable source of employment. The
school is a central institution within the town, and the principal is considered not only a school
leader, but a town leader and public figure.

The interview was conducted during summertime. When I arrived at the school I walked
through the front door, labeled with a big “3” painted on it. I pressed the buzzer at the door and
received a buzz in return. I opened the door and walked into a brightly lit, linoleum-floored
building with clean lines and neutral colors of gray and beige, with student art on the walls upon
entry. The school secretary invited me in from the front office and stated that the principal was
expecting me. I sat with Danielle in her office, just inside the entryway, to conduct my interview.
We sat down at a round, uncluttered table, and my perception was that her demeanor was warm,
friendly, and professional. Prior to the interview, Danielle stated that she loved her job and that it
was in fact, her dream job. She stated that she had seen education change, not only for the
teachers’ pedagogy (curriculum and instruction), but also for the students’ needs. According to
Danielle:

We really do try to serve the students in a holistic way...Our social worker, psychologist,
and teachers serving the holistic needs of the students in their classrooms, all make for
the changes in the field and changes in the work we do...We have academic goals, but we
have social-emotional goals, too..I love it, and can’t picture doing anything else.
(Danielle)
Wanda

Wanda was the principal of a pre-K-6th elementary school (Dayton School). At the time of the interview Wanda had been principal at Dayton School for two years. Wanda is a Black female who is monolingual. Upon entrance to Dayton School, I noted that the hallways were bright, inviting, and covered with student work as well as positive messages, such as “Be safe, kind, and respectful!” Student enrollment at Dayton includes 427 pre-6th graders, and the school is located within a large urban school district of 324 schools. Seventy-seven percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch, and 12% of the students are ELs. Prior to the interview, Wanda reported that she felt like the staff and student culture of the school is positive due to an emphasis on instructional leadership at the school and district levels. Wanda stated that she hopes to lead Dayton in measurable academic and social-emotional metrics that have been set by herself and the superintendent. She stated that she considers the school and district as setting the bar and leading as an example for other surrounding areas.

My perception when meeting Wanda was that she was a warm, engaging, positive interlocutor and school leader. She considered a huge component of her job as principal to be continually engaged and involved with ongoing learning for herself and her staff. Wanda moved to Illinois from the South and has worked to adjust to the move. She described her 11 years in Illinois to be enjoyable and smiled as she spoke about the wintertime: “I enjoy the snow. It was such a rare thing down south and so I appreciate seeing it. It doesn’t bother me.”

Bill

Bill is the principal of Walker High School and had been in this role for 17 years at the time of the interview. At the time of the interview Bill had plans to transition within a year to a
district-level position that oversees principals in the district, both instructionally and with operations. Bill is a White male who is monolingual. Walker High School serves 9th-12th grades and enrollment was 640 students. Walker is located in a suburban context; 9% of the students receive free or reduced lunch, and 18% are ELs. Walker High School had an extensive renovation and construction project during Bill’s time as principal, and he described the building and grounds as being like a college campus. Bill expressed the renovations were important to improve the dignity and experience of the students. He stated that he believes in the need for a building and staff to treat students with respect and as burgeoning adults.

Prior to and throughout the interview Bill talked with perceived pride about his school and grounds. He explained that his office is a space not to do work, but to generate ideas and check in with his secretary. He considers the spaces outside of his office to be where his work occurs, including classroom observations. When I arrived for the interview, he smiled and shook my hand as I walked in to first meet him. Wearing a collared white shirt and tie, he explained at one point in our conversation that he was a “legacy educator” because multiple generations before him had been career educators, both teachers and administrators. His professional trajectory was unique in that he started off at Walker as a teacher, then transitioned to another school to start his administrative career, and then returned to Walker as the principal.

The school tour involved seeing students working in an open space with chairs and alternative seating arrangements (circle of beanbags), as well as windows supplementing the typical bright fluorescent lighting of the school building, with natural light streaming into the classrooms and hallways. Hallways were generally empty, with a few teachers walking by who
greeted us as we walked past. Overall, Bill talked enthusiastically about his time at Walker High School.

Sharon

Sharon is a White female who is monolingual. She is the principal of a suburban middle school serving 6th-8th grades (Camden Middle School) and had been principal for seven years at the time of the interview. Camden Middle School enrollment is 249 students, and 4% are ELs. Seventeen receive free or reduced lunch. Camden is a large building with three floors and three gymnasium open spaces used for the cafeteria, assemblies, and physical education. Camden has a lengthy school improvement plan (SIP) that all principals within the district submit to the superintendent, which includes the professional development calendar and the grade-level student learning goals using the previous year’s data. Sharon participates in district professional development as a principal but also leads many initiatives collaboratively with the other principals on the district level and at her school.

For our initial meeting, Sharon walked towards me in the waiting area of Camden’s entryway with a big smile and a firm handshake. Wearing a gray blazer and with her hair tied back in a short ponytail, she welcomed me to the school and brought me into her office, just down the hall from the waiting area. My perception was that she was effusive and energetic throughout the interview and talked positively throughout about her staff, the school and the profession. She reported that she was working as an administrator “almost by accident” and that she intended to retire at Camden and at the district. She reported that she made yearly changes in staffing, which she described as a combination of “retirements, resignations, and transitions,” and is purportedly the district’s leader in increasing test scores for students from Fall MAP
(standardized test scores) to Spring MAP. My perception of her during our interactions was that she is humble and regularly gives credit to her staff members. She mentioned many staff by name throughout her interview, giving credit to many others in the building for the successes that she shares. Her office is situated near the front of the building, but it is decorated sparsely, with a desk and a small table with chairs, and, like Bill, she stated that she tries to work outside of her office whenever possible.

Gary

Gary is the principal of Valin High School. Gary is a monolingual White male who had been the principal at Valin High for five years at the time of the interview. There are 581 students in Grades 9-12 at Valin High School. In a rural location, Valin has 42% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch, and 27% are ELs. Gary informed me that ELs at Valin High can participate in a Spanish for native/heritage speakers class that had only recently been made separate from their other Spanish class within the World Languages Department. However, Gary did say that the home language survey process was a complicated and lengthy one involving paper letters, e-mails, and parent meetings. Valin High School is a large brick building with a few open classrooms renovated for their S.T.E.A.M. lab classes. The school district received a building construction grant that allowed them to expand the building to include additional space for S.T.E.A.M. curriculum like the lab and music and technology (MaT) classes.

For the interview session, Gary greeted me from behind his office desk. He smiled as he closed his laptop computer and stood up to shake my hand and welcome me. Gary worked closely with his district mentor to engage with issues that allowed his students to thrive while also personally and professionally being successful at his role as instructional leader at the
school. He stated that he enjoyed being in a smaller district and that Valin was a naturally collaborative place for staff who enjoyed working with each other for the benefit and learning of all students. He mentioned engaging the ELs repeatedly in our interview and also mentioned EL staff and reported that he intentionally hired a diverse staff to be role models for the students. Admittedly monolingual, he was listening to Spanish language tapes in the car and enjoyed learning Spanish as part of his commute, to and from work every day.

Julie

Julie is the principal at L. Dodds School and had been for 11 years at the time of the interview. During our interview session she described herself in this way: “I’m a social worker at heart and still do student check-ins and check-outs at the beginning and end of the day.” It was my perception during our time together that Julie exuded warm confidence and commitment to her work. L. Dodds is a 3-5 elementary school in a rural school district. With ten classrooms and 268 students, the school serves 68% of students who receive free or reduced lunch, and 38% are ELs. The building is a one-story traditional brick building with linoleum hallways and hooks for jackets and backpacks lined on both sides.

At the time of the interview, Julie used a dual-language program for bilingual education for her students. Staff, teaching staff in particular, have all worked in the same school or district for 6-14 years, and Julie mentioned her intention to retire at L. Dodds School. Julie stated that she had worked as a classroom teacher and a reading specialist before she transitioned into administration. She spoke passionately about her work, and her intentionality about seeking work-life balance also threaded throughout our conversation: “I had a health scare a few years back, and since then, I’ve started walking before school with some girlfriends. I walk with my
girlfriends about three times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings.” Although Julie repeatedly mentioned work-life balance, she also admittedly spent a lot of time at school and working from home as well. She reported spending time working at home, e-mailing and preparing for meetings and observations until as late as 9:30 pm and beginning as early as 5:00 am. L. Dodds had a unique grade configuration (3-5) that Julie reported allowed her to really hone in on the developmental needs of those three grade levels of students, and she stated her deep enjoyment of those grade levels.

Julie placed emphasis on her staff members during the interview and mentioned that she had two physical education teachers who were described as irreplaceable. She stated the following about them:

We need them both, and they really make a positive difference for the students. The students love going to PE, and teachers are given prep time...the PE teachers do a lot of physical exercise and life-habits teaching, but they are also overseeing the health curriculum, which covers adolescent issues for our 4th and 5th graders. (Julie)

Christina

At the time of the interview, Christina was principal of a K-5th school in an urban school district, Ridge Elementary School. Christina, a White monolingual female, had been a principal at Ridge Elementary for two years when we conducted the interview. Thirty-four percent of her students are ELs, and 39% receive free or reduced lunch. Ridge Elementary is a one-floor, 31-classroom school building with 607 students enrolled in the school. Ridge has an open floor plan, with two classes sharing rooms divided by partitions that allow sound and light to travel across and be shared among both class spaces.

During our interview session, Christina mentioned her ability to innovate and make intentional changes to the school to fit student and family needs. She used a dual-language
curriculum as supported by the school district. Christina admittedly had little to no experience working with ELs prior to her work with Project DREAMS. My perceptions of her during our time together were that she is a vivacious, fast-talking, enthusiastic leader. She stated that she found community among other administrators in her district who desired to work for the academic and holistic wellness of their EL students. She often mentioned that these interactions and support affected the way she interacted with her EL staff. She called herself a blank slate and expressed so much gratitude for PD and ongoing learning opportunities. She also mentioned multiple best practices initiatives that made her school a very strong, positive one for students, staff and families. She laughed as she stated that she had been in education for 27 years and had done nothing else vocationally outside of education; she expressed both passion, purpose, and deep conviction in her work.

Participant Description Summary

Interestingly, both diversity and uniformity were observed in participant characteristics (See Table 3). The principals were diverse in the amount of time at their school at the time of the interview (ranging from 2-17 years). It is reasonable to think that the longer a principal has been in a school the more familiar he or she will be with the needs and challenges in that unique context. On the other end of the spectrum, however, a “fresh set of eyes” as represented by the principals who have been at their schools for a short time can allow for a valuable lens through which challenges can be viewed.

It is important to note the uniformity of race and linguistic status of the principals. The majority of principals were White, and all were monolingual. This demographic is, arguably, one of the most important groups in need of PD that is focused on ELs. Because these principals are
not considered ELs themselves, it is vital to study their perspectives on PD focused on ELs and to openly discuss their perceived challenges with implementing EL-focused PD in their schools. The combination of uniformity in principal linguistic status and diversity in school demographics made for particularly enlightening discussions during the interviews around the topic of EL PD.

Summary

This chapter framed the context of the study in terms of the researcher, the school environments, and the participants. Expanding upon each of these contexts is a vital part of qualitative research in which the researcher is an insider. I took intentional steps to address biases and include a mix of diverse and uniform factors. This combination of diversity and uniformity provided a rich context for an important discussion about EL needs and challenges in implementing PD that creates a caring community focused on ELs. The next chapter provides a synopsis of the case analysis.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTING PD

This descriptive study used constant comparative analysis to explore K-12 administrators’ (principals’) perceived challenges with implementing professional development focused on English Learners to create a community of caring to support academic success in schools. This study was important as the growing population of ELs in our schools face unique academic challenges as they navigate the American educational system. In this chapter I will discuss common themes about principals’ perceived challenges to PD in relation to ELs.

Chapter 5 investigates the first research question: After participating in Project DREAMS Summer Academy, what are the challenges for principals in implementing PD focused on ELs in their respective schools? The results of a constant comparative analysis revealed four themes: Access Paradox, Conflicting Priorities, Shifting Paradigms, and Budget Demands. This chapter will provide evidence that these four themes were present in the data and will be described in the narrative that follows. For each challenge, some principals expressed ways to address the challenge. In fact, these two ideas often occurred in the same portion of interviews. As such, each theme below has principal quotes and narrative to expand on the represented challenge as well as a section on addressing each challenge.

Challenge One: Access Paradox

One challenge for principals in implementing EL PD in their respective schools is that, despite recognizing a strong need for EL-focused PD, principals have not received proper EL PD. Principals cannot effectively plan and lead PD on ELs if they themselves have not received such PD. The theme represents the paradox that the principals were aware that EL-focused PD
was needed and important but had little or no access to EL PD for either themselves or their teachers. The following quote from Gary (one of the principal participants) typifies this theme:

This is an issue that is so important because there are just more and more ELs in our schools. It is just simply, a social justice issue...our EL population has literally exploded. It’s grown exponentially, and we’ve discovered, we’re new to meeting the needs of English Learners, and we didn’t know who they were, what languages they spoke, and what schools they went to. So, we started digging deeper…and we [dig deeper] by receiving and giving good professional development. (Gary)

Gary demonstrates an awareness and importance of this challenge to make his PD for staff on ELs effective. He expressed that PD on ELs is important and expressed desire to “dig deeper” both personally for his own professional development and also to improve his ability to plan and provide PD on this topic to his staff. He expressed that he would “…need to engage many teachers who admittedly have not had education on ELs before” and often also “…lack experience with ELs.” He found it challenging to give good PD to his staff when he himself also lacked experience and did not readily and regularly receive PD on ELs. In fact, despite knowledge that the EL population is increasing in their respective school districts, four out of seven of the principals in the study admitted that Project DREAMS was their first exposure to PD concerning ELs.

Julie, the principal of L. Dodds School, speaks of the increase in ELs as having been one of the themes that she had learned about when she received PD on ELs at Project DREAMS Summer Academy. She clearly states that one of the challenges that exist for principals in giving PD to their staff is their own lack of education and PD, in particular, a lack of awareness and education or PD for this population:
I worked with gifted…I did a lot of different kinds of things until I landed at the middle school. My experience with ELs had been extremely limited. I mean, like extremely limited…my exposure was very, very limited. Then when I came to [district] where we have a significant population, and so when I had the opportunity to attend Project DREAMS, I knew I needed to take it…that it would help the ELL students and all the students… that it would be impacting the kinds of decisions and things that I would be doing in this position…I really came in just about as blank slate as you could be, intentionally coming out with just about as deep an understanding, which obviously I did. (Julie)

Julie articulates the first challenge to principals implementing PD on ELs; that they have not received good, “deep” PD on ELs themselves. It is interesting to note that Julie and Gary both mentioned “deep” learning or understanding as a necessary part of PD to support ELs. This indicates a desire on the part of principals to have PD that does not focus on superficial elements, but rather provides an opportunity to grapple with the complex and multi-faceted needs of ELs in their schools.

Another principal, Danielle, described challenges of not having received district PD on ELs as she tried to implement a dual-language pedagogy and curriculum for her English language learners and native-English speakers: “We essentially are running two schools in one school: a dual-language school and a traditional English-language school. The two groups can feel like separate communities and before Project DREAMS I had not received any training.”

Christine, one principal in an urban school district, also expressed that she had not received PD or training focused exclusively on ELs. She did discuss a district-wide professional development session that increased empathy for ELs among the district school leaders:

We were all given headphones as we walked into PD. Then, the entire PD was done in Spanish, with the translation being English, in our headphones. This was of course, the opposite of what normally happens...It was a really great exercise, and increased our appreciation of some of the practical aspects and challenges of our English Learner families… the discomfort was real, but so was the relief to the discomfort after it was explained to us. (Christine)
Christine reported that this experience increased her empathy toward ELs in her school and fueled her desire to seek out PD opportunities focused on ELs.

Addressing the Challenge

Provide access to EL-focused PD. There is currently ample PD available for teachers and principals. For example, 345 administrator academies have recently begun to be offered for principals required to keep their license relevant and up-to-date (ISBE, 2019). These are annually required by the state of Illinois for principal practitioners, but none included a listing on ELs. The principals in the current study confirmed that neither the district nor the regional offices of education (RoEs) offered PD on ELs within the last three years of their professional practice, yet, the state required curricular and staffing protocols that should have been supported with EL-focused training/professional development.

Multiple principals in the current study expressed a concern that PD for ELs did not readily exist at the time of the interviews. Accordingly, the first step in addressing this challenge is that EL-focused PD needs to be offered regularly and that participation should be encouraged. Although it may be important to remind (or inform) staff that the EL population is consistently on the rise in schools, PD should focus on the more complex needs of ELs. Further, it is important that all school leaders, administrators, faculty and staff have access to such PD. All seven principal participants expressed a desire for access to EL PD for themselves and all staff members at their respective schools after participating in Project DREAMS. PD on ELs can and should be offered to all staff according to school/site or district relevance with EL populations of 20 students or more per language group, as per Title III parameters and descriptions (ISBE 2013).
Combining methods. Some principals, acknowledging a lack of EL-focused PD, made a point to discuss alternative methods of supporting students. Bill, for example, had already established a structure for mentoring groups of students. He called these “advisory groups” and stated the following about them:

On Wednesdays, we have what we call advisory groups, and our students meet in groups of 12: they are grade level specific, and gender specific, so sophomore girls, a group of 12 girls will meet with a female teacher and they will talk about different issues - social emotional, gender issues - there’s a curriculum for our advisory groups, but again, that’s another way to foster community. There’s more than one way to skin a cat, and although I did not [receive PD from my district], we are serving the needs of our students. (Bill)

Bill stated that his alternative method to support students has functioned well in the past. However, Bill indicated that his advisory groups would benefit from PD focused on EL for the faculty, staff, and administrators who mentor his student groups. Bill expressed that he was interested in providing his staff with PD on ELs in addition to his advisory groups. Giving specific, focused PD for these mentors would allow for a better mentoring approach geared toward the unique needs of ELs.

EL training requirements. In addition to limited access to EL-focused PD, none of the seven participants in the current study were offered classes on ELs during their principal certification program. However, all felt that coursework for initial certification, not only professional development upon continuation of the certification, was merited as necessary to lead their schools well. Coursework for initial certification as well as licensure and endorsement requirements particularly targeted at acknowledging and accommodating ELs in schools (ISBE, 2016) could be the platform needed to fulfill the need for better understanding EL education.
Challenge Two: Conflicting Priorities

The second challenge for principals in implementing EL PD in their respective schools was that their job responsibilities were too varied, distracting from their primary focus and responsibility as an instructional leader. Because all seven principal participants expressed wanting to provide PD on ELs to their staff, there exists a disconnect between wanting to provide PD on ELs and actually doing so. Principals are faced with conflicting priorities daily and must acknowledge these conflicts. Gary, a high school principal participant, asked: “So what is my job, really? And how can I structure it so that a primary job is coaching and instructional leadership, so that I’m not e-mailing or doing administrivia all day?”

Part of Gary’s questions expressed distraction by “administrivia” (mundane essential detailed tasks); they also express a need to prioritize his primary job as “…coaching and instructional leadership,” rather than administrivia. Although none of the interview questions initially or explicitly asked about principal responsibilities, many participants managed to share themes around their job duties, and in particular, an increased emphasis on instructional leadership with inclusion of best practices for ELs, rather than logistics or even budgetary and disciplinary responsibilities:

I am paid too much to be caught up in that administrivia- in fact, I am trying to read some of my email and do my correspondence in classrooms and out of my office. We can do that, right? There was one week [after a PD] that I did not go into my office. The PD reframed the principal’s office as an impeccable conference room. I need to get to a classroom. I need to be where the people are. [Most principals] are not doing the work of coaching teachers, which is the primary role of what they should be doing… [Administrivia] should be replaced with cultural-emotional changes and instructional leadership. (Gary)

Gary expressed his inability to truly attend to his primary responsibilities: instructional leadership and classroom coaching. Instead, administrivia held him back from doing the “good
and important” work of instructional leadership. He wanted to be coaching teachers, supporting students (ELs included), and engaging in instructional leadership.

Bill (a high school principal participant) also expressed frustration with administrivia impeding his ability to be an effective leader. Bill mentioned, “I am a coach and an instructional leader. I’m paid too much to do all the administrivia…. I want to be a leader, not a manager. [After the Project DREAMS PD] I felt empowered to give away the administrivia.”

Unlike Gary’s and Bill’s emphases on administrivia, Julie (an elementary principal participant) emphasized the additional social-emotional roles required in her daily interactions with students and staff. Julie described the instructional leadership that she strives to provide as beyond a cognitive and pedagogical leadership: “My job is so much about the social-emotional. Not only the students’, but … dealing with the staff social-emotional, too.”

At some point during the interviews, all seven principals mentioned that having too many and too varied responsibilities were impediments to implementing EL-focused PD. Rather than having the time to grapple with the complex and unique needs of the ELs in their schools, principals stated that they had to focus daily priorities based on their perceptions of immediate importance. This meant that tasks such as those associated with administrivia (e.g., filing, copying, scheduling, etc.) were typically moved to the forefront of daily schedules and additional, more complex goals were left unmet.

Addressing the Challenge

**PD as an opportunity for realignment.** It is a challenge for school leaders not to get distracted from the other aspects of their job, but rather to shift (or maintain) their focus and attention to instructional leadership. By acknowledging the challenge of varied responsibilities,
principals created an opportunity to realign and refocus their work on instructional leadership for ELs. PD focused on ELs provides the context in which such an opportunity can be realized. PD about ELs can and should focus on the instructional leadership portion of principals’ jobs, but it is a challenge: “[In the Project DREAMS PD] I was exposed to a whole different ball game. And it was something that really helped me. Some days [after the PD] I think, ‘This is great’ and some days I want to run there and go out in the field and never come back…. So listening to different stories about what other people have gone through also helped me” (Danielle, K-8 elementary principal). For some of the principal participants, like Danielle, the PD allowed a paradigmatic shift, “a whole different ball game,” from administrative functions to instructional leadership.

Julie also expressed the value of EL-focused PD:

Project DREAMS really provided for me, a much deeper, broader understanding of what the instructional needs are, as far as these students are concerned in terms of their language development… so I had a new understanding that my passion for literacy was right in line with the same kind of passion that we needed to have in terms of getting the ELL program a little better, tightened up… and understanding what I understand about literacy, because of my background in Title I and literacy emergence, if they’re not fully equipped, ELLs—we are setting them up for certain failure. (Julie)

Julie’s newfound connection between the EL students in her building and her already present passion for literacy and literacy development helped to bridge her understanding between ELs and the curricular work she was leading in her school. Julie expressed that to avoid “certain failure,” principals needed to “tighten up” their focus onto instructional leadership opportunities like providing PD about ELs to their staff.

Including ELs in instructional leadership. Understanding the instructional needs of the ELs in a principal’s building can give purpose to PD and focus for the instruction within the
school. PD that frames principal leadership as instructional leadership is part of what might make PD effective for ELs. By including ELs explicitly in instructional leadership, the PD itself reorients the principalship as well as the programs and structures under the principal’s leadership toward the focus of ELs. A first step to reorient the principalship is to make principals aware of the unique needs of ELs and a PD focused on ELs allows for that possibility.

This reframed and renewed vision carries with it contemporary relevance to district and state emphases on principals becoming instructional leaders. Outsourcing administrivia, as noted by Gary, allows more time for consideration of quality instruction for all students, especially ELs. PD on ELs can and should be an opportunity for principals to hone in on their role as instructional leader, rather than working on and through “administrivia” and other non-instructional projects.

Challenge Three: Shifting Paradigms

Another challenge for principals in implementing PD about ELs at their respective schools is that much of their experiences with PD were rote and required, rather than empowering. A paradigm shift is needed in order to ignite passion and excitement for EL-focused PD. PD must be viewed as empowering. In contrast to traditional PD experiences, Project DREAMS Summer Academy “reignited[ed] passion,” according to Christina, a K-5 elementary principal participant. Christina stated:

[Excellent professional development] kind of wakes you up. It wakes you up and kind of reignites your passion that you came with. Because often you can get kind of buried under everything that’s happening, and everything that’s on your plate, and you have to just clear it and just realize that okay, this is what I’m here for, this is my focus, and let’s get back to business. (Christina)
All seven principals mentioned that PD for principals was mandated and required and as such was often viewed negatively. Despite having had mixed (and often negative) experiences with PD in the past, their experiences with Project DREAMS represented a contrastingly positive experience. Danielle, a K-8 principal participant, stated:

There’s a big difference between policy and actually facilitating my development… this PD, unlike other PDs, overall has been very helpful and I can contrast that to years that I have not gotten professional development or received really bad professional development… I have high hopes for the utilization of the knowledge gained from this professional development [Project DREAMS]. (Danielle)

Although Danielle had experienced years without PD, and also “really bad” PD, she had high hopes for the applications from her experiences with PD that was focused on ELs. This represents a shift in mindset from PD as a negative experience to a positive and hopeful one. The mention of utilizing the knowledge indicates a plan to incorporate the knowledge gained into the current practices in her school.

One principal, Wanda, expressed the Project DREAMS PD’s effective nature in teaching about empathy for ELs as well as the practical ways she could support them. She stated:

The most memorable aspect was learning about other cultures- learning the struggles, learning what some of my students are dealing with and in what ways I can assist. That was the most memorable because I don’t have all experiences, and so I appreciate hearing from individuals that work within different contexts. The individuals and their cultures bring me to a place where I can give in an authentic and real way to support their learning- how things are happening and how I can help. (Wanda)

Wanda’s statement represents a shift in mindset in that she has taken away an increased sense of compassion and empathy for her EL population. She expressed leaving the PD with a stronger desire to help and support the EL students in her school. This change in mindset about the needs of ELs has the potential to impact daily practices in Wanda’s school.
Another principal participant, Sharon, echoed Wanda’s appreciation in learning about the challenges of serving ELs as well as the importance of PD about ELs:

I liked the idea of remaining unfinished. I like the challenge of learning about a new subgroup population [ELs], and want to use that learning by constantly challenging myself and asking myself what I’m doing as a professional and how best I can change what I’m doing to best meet the needs of the students. I kind of piece together all that information [from the PD] all that information we got about the language programs and those types of things. I’ve now been three years, but I continue to stay unfinished, and want to stay unfinished as long as I’m a principal. (Sharon)

Sharon’s change in mindset was to represent learning about the needs of ELs as a welcome challenge that can be successfully tackled. Both Sharon and Wanda were able to grow during their PD experiences and renewed a lifelong commitment to ongoing learning. With ELs in particular, Wanda was able to learn and connect in an effective way, and Sharon was able to learn about the learning process. Both participants remained unfinished and both engaged in the PD on ELs with renewed commitment and energy towards their work back in their schools.

Bill, a high school principal participant, reflected on this learning and his PD experiences as not only being challenging because the PD has to incorporate the social-emotional components of serving ELs. According to Bill, “I had the IQ to be a principal to those students [ELs], but I didn’t have the EQ, the emotional quota.” And when he was asked about any changes after having the PD on ELs: “I felt trained to at least know what I didn’t know. I am unfinished, like all educators who want to lead well. But I feel excited to use what I learned to serve my students and staff better.”

Bill’s change in mindset represents a shift to normalizing his struggle. Bill’s shift was a metacognitive one in that he became aware of what he didn’t know. Bill’s quote eludes to the
possibility that this metacognitive shift may have positive outcomes as he plans to use the knowledge to serve students and staff better.

Addressing the Challenge

**Co-constructing knowledge.** Thinking of PD as a co-constructed endeavor can be particularly challenging because traditional PD relies on the “expert(s)” to be the givers of knowledge. In the absence of accessibility to EL PD, co-constructed training may be the only option. For example, one of the principal participants, Gary, found a way to support his ELs without having had the opportunity to take classes or receive PD on the topic. He stated:

I don’t feel like [the lack of PD on ELs] has hurt us as a school because we’ve been able to bring on some really good teacher specialists in that area… for example, an EL teacher, and a technology teacher… many of our EL students’ parents or grandparents live outside of this country. And just to talk about them, to sing a song together and watch them light up, to read part of a story with them, just validates them as people… they are so smart and if we make them bilingual and they become educated, you are going to create an extreme strength in the community. (Gary)

The theme “making do” with functional structures and internal staff sharing expertise is what Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) refers to as “in-bucket” professional development. Not having district PD on ELs or coursework relevant to ELs in his principal certification program, Gary expressed that he developed his school professionally by relying on others who had experienced PD on ELs (“good teacher specialists”). As he acknowledged the expertise of his teachers, he relied on their knowledge and training to inform instruction and reflect and reform best practices within the school. Gary’s experience highlights the benefit of creating a community of well-informed professionals. Although he himself had not experienced PD focused on ELs, he was able to help co-construct an environment conducive to meeting the needs of ELs. This experience represents a shift in mindset that developing professionally can be a group effort and
that piecing together the knowledge from each of the parts combines to create a rich and detailed overall representation of the needs of ELs. Although Gary came to this mindset from a position of necessity, it stands to reason that facilitating a group of professionals to co-construct training, some of whom have participated in EL-focused PD, has the potential to be a fruitful endeavor.

Lifelong learners. Traditional PD can often be considered a “one-and-done” experience where participants receive knowledge in one setting and are expected to apply that knowledge in another. Reframing PD as a stage in a lifelong learning process is a challenge, but a challenge that is necessary. Stretching the principals’ empathic capabilities and “remaining unfinished” (Freire, 1997), a concept cited by one of the speakers at the Project DREAMS Summer Academy, captures the spirit of the lifelong learner and ongoing professional development for all teacher-learners. PD can and should be a place for continual learning and growth. It should represent one aspect of a multi-faceted approach to training. Although PD learning is often content specific, the learning is lifelong and can transfer different topics and concepts. Adopting the perspective of a lifelong learner is needed in order to maximally benefit from PD focused on ELs.

Challenge Four: Budget Demands

Limited budgets are an impediment to implementing EL-focused PD in school contexts. Principals expressed feelings of frustration and challenges regarding general budgets as well as budget lines benefitting their EL students. Although this was not expressed by all of the principals, partly because “…it’s not always appropriate to talk about money, even school budget money. It’s not right to complain instead of just working with what you can and what you’ve got” (Bill, high school principal), multiple repetitions of this theme emerged from the data. To
further complicate the matter, as one principal noted, even when budget money was available it was often released too late to be maximally effective to student learning. Julie, an elementary school principal, highlighted this point by stating, “It takes time to spend money well. And the money just came through…. We’re just now able to execute. It’s a little disappointing.”

The challenge that emerges from such limited budgets is how to make the best decisions about allocation of funds. Although each principal expressed different needs and budget concerns, they collectively felt the need to maximize their budgets in support of students. In order to do so, difficult decisions had to be made about where money should be allocated.

Julie went on to explain that she felt understaffed and described some of the work she did as making up for the inability of her budget to hire another social worker: “I only have a social worker here half the day… I am [doing social worker responsibilities]. Even when she’s here, I still do social work. And she knows that.” Julie’s example highlights the challenge of not having enough within the school budget to address student needs, which can be particularly problematic for an underserved population such as ELs. Because of limited budget issues, Julie had to come up with ways to meet student needs without access to additional money.

Another principal, Christina, tied in the theme of difficult decisions due to budget constraints: “We need to do more with less. A lot of what we are doing to support students and parents requires figuring out how to spend the money well. We bought laptops and got a great deal on them, but we could have used more.” Limited access to laptops can be especially detrimental for underserved populations that may have limited access to technology at home.

One principal participant, Sharon, expressed a great deal of concern over the impact of limited budgets on PD: “I am the one who tracks teacher continuing education credits. If teachers
are not proactive about going to free district PD, the teacher or the school has to pay for the
teacher PD, which can get very expensive.” This is a very real concern as teachers who don’t
complete all of the required continuing education credits could lose certification in their state.
Accordingly, principals’ decisions about funding allocation have very real consequences for
teachers as well as students. If, for example, the principal were to allocate additional funds to PD
that does not have an EL focus, then they risk not meeting the unique needs of their EL
population. On the other hand, if the principal were to cut money from PD budgets, teachers risk
losing their licensure. These kinds of decisions represent a serious challenge to implementing PD
in school contexts.

One principal, Christina, mentioned an additional budgeting challenge regarding budget
categories. She stated, “Learning about Title I and Title III funding, as well as the district
policies and usage of those funding sources, is challenging. But I am glad the district qualifies.
We are a Title I district. I don’t know what we would do without that money.” Although her
district’s school boundary lines allow all the schools to receive Title I funding, Christina further
states that leveraging those funds towards genuine benefit for the students is challenging:
“[D]istrict policies and usage of those funding sources is [also] challenging….”

Addressing the Challenge

Reframing. Overall, principals discussed numerous budget concerns including limited
budgets, budget allocation decisions, and complexities of categorical funding. When combined,
these concerns set the stage for an environment in which the needs of ELs can fall by the
wayside. However, when principals are able to leverage budgets for the benefit of their ELs,
students, staff, and families, they can reframe the budgeting challenges as budgeting
opportunities. For example, Christina’s framing of the Title I funds as opportunities to provide for students allows for a more positive and focused environment. Rather than perceiving budget challenges as a failure to serve ELs, she sees it as an opportunity and a support for students in need. This positive framing is an important facet of embracing the challenges that were present for every principal and in every school.

Establish partnerships. Many of the principals involved in Project DREAMS expressed gratitude and appreciation for the PD opportunity. Bill, for example, said, “I want to be a leader, not a manager. [After the Project DREAMS PD] I felt empowered to give away the administrivia.” Wanda stated, “I appreciate hearing from individuals that work within different contexts. The individuals and their cultures bring me to a place where I can give in an authentic and real way to support their learning.” Danielle said, “This PD, unlike other PD, overall has been very helpful….I have high hopes for the utilization of the knowledge gained from this professional development [Project DREAMS].” Julie mentioned, “Project DREAMS really provided for me a much deeper, broader understanding of what the instructional needs are, as far as these students are concerned in terms of their language development.” These comments reflect that the interviewed principals perceived the PD provided by Project DREAMS as beneficial to their growth and development. However, there is limited access to these kinds of opportunities for principals.

In order to have greater access to opportunities like those in Project DREAMS, it can be beneficial to establish partnerships with other organizations with similar goals. When organizations partner together toward a common goal of supporting the needs of ELs there is a greater opportunity for success in establishing a community focused on ELs. Partnering with
other schools, districts, or colleges/universities that have grant funding is a particularly effective way to access PD for reduced or no money. In fact, it is often the case that universities have opportunities for grants to provide PD for teachers and administrators for little or no cost in exchange for research opportunities. Partnerships between schools and universities, such as those in Project DREAMS, are mutually beneficial and provide an environment to ignite passion and elicit the changes needed to fully support ELs.

Regarding the challenges for implementing EL-focused PD, four themes emerged from the data. Table 4 below provides a concise summary of these four themes. The table lists the emergent themes with a description and example quotes that typify the theme. The table also includes a measure of prevalence, the number of principals who mentioned each theme during their interviews. This table is included to facilitate an overview and comparison of the themes as well as their prevalence within the data.

Table 4
Emergent Themes with Descriptions and Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Prevalence (# of Principals)</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Access Paradox| Principals were aware of the increasing EL populations in their schools and the need for EL-focused PD, but were unable to access EL-focused PD opportunities. | 5/7: EL population increase 4/7: Did not receive EL training 3/7: Did not provide EL training | • “Before Project DREAMS I had not received any training.”
• “My experience with ELL had been extremely limited. I mean, like extremely limited… my exposure was very, very limited. Then when I came to [district], where we have a significant population, and so when I had the opportunity to attend Project DREAMS, I knew I needed to take it…” |
• “Our EL population has literally exploded. It’s grown exponentially, and we’ve discovered, we’re new to meeting the needs of English Learners, and we didn’t know who they were, what languages they spoke, and what schools they went to. So, we started digging deeper…and we [dig deeper] by receiving and giving good professional development.”

• “How can I structure [my job] so that a primary job is coaching and instructional leadership, so that I’m not emailing or doing administrivia all day?”

• “I am a coach, and an instructional leader. I’m paid too much to do all the administrivia…I want to be a leader, not a manager.”

• “This PD, unlike other PDs, overall has been very helpful and I can contrast that to years that I have not gotten professional development or received really bad professional development.”

• “The most memorable aspect was learning about other cultures- learning the struggles, learning what some of my students are dealing with and in what ways I can assist. That was the most memorable because I don’t have all experiences, and so I appreciate hearing from individuals that work within different contexts. The individuals and their cultures bring me to a place where I can give in an authentic and real way to support their learning- how things are happening and how I can help.”

### Table 4 (continued)

| Conflicting Priorities | Principals’ job responsibilities were too varied and focused on “administrivia,” which distracted them from engaging in instructional leadership. |

| Shifting Paradigms | Traditional views of PD are that it is rote, too theory driven and mandatory rather than uplifting, empowering, and applicable. |

(Continued on following page)
Table 4 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Demands</th>
<th>Principals reported challenges with limited budgets, which forced them to make decisions on money allocation that may not be ideal.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>“I like the challenge of learning about a new sub group population [ELs], and want to use that learning by constantly challenging myself and asking myself what I’m doing as a professional and how best I can change what I’m doing to best meet the needs of the students. I kind of piece together all that information [from the PD] all that information we got about the language programs and those types of things.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A lot of what we are doing to support students and parents requires figuring out how to spend the money well…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I am the one who tracks teacher continuing education credits. If teachers are not proactive about going to free district PD, the teacher or the school has to pay for the teacher PD, which can get very expensive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Learning about Title I and Title III funding, as well as the district policies and usage of those funding sources, is challenging…district policies and usage of those funding sources is [also] challenging.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

Overall, principals were excited about the possibilities of offering EL-focused PD to their respective staff members; however, they noted a number of challenges associated with implementing such PD. The interviews provided an opportunity for rich and detailed discussions about EL-focused PD, and it was often the case that when challenges were expressed, the possible solutions were expressed in the same breath. These solutions either took the form of
their attempts to meet the challenges with structural, staffing, and other solutions or the form of possibilities they looked forward to implementing. The perceived challenges and potential solutions noted in this chapter have direct implications to EL-focused PD. Not unlike the principalship itself, PD can and should reflect the broad base of responsibilities and facets of the school leader’s work. Despite the myriad of challenges for principals in implementing PD about ELs in their schools, these challenges were met with solutions and an emphasis on “staying unfinished” as works-in-progress.

Chapter 6 will feature a continuation of the emergent themes for the principals’ perceived challenges. In Chapter 6, I will discuss results for Research Question 2: What are the challenges for principals in developing a caring community for ELs? Whereas Chapter 5 focused on challenges with implementing EL-focused PD, Chapter 6 will investigate challenges with creating a caring community for ELs. Although the two are deeply intertwined, effective PD is part and parcel of creating a caring community; they are distinct goals with unique challenges. As such, they will be discussed in a separate chapter with separate analyses.
Educators use the term “community” when referring to the sense of community experienced by those working, teaching, and learning in a school which includes the administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Educators may also be actively working to improve the culture of a school; strengthen relationships between teachers and students; and foster feelings of inclusion, caring, shared purpose, and collective investment (Great Schools Partnership, 2019). Community has been identified in the literature as important for academic success.

Collier and Thomas’s longitudinal meta-study (2017) found literacy (as well as numeracy) gains for ELs over time. It was thought that the connection of ELs to peers, other native speakers and the greater school community influenced this gain. Collier and Thomas (2017) further found the early literacy development in students’ L1 (Language 1) includes the community-building process within the spaces where the EL students are.

Due to the importance of creating a caring community and the rich level of detail in participant interviews regarding community, challenges about developing a caring community are reported separately from challenges associated with implementing PD. Accordingly, Chapter 6 investigates the second research question: After participating in Project DREAMS Summer Academy, what are the challenges for principals in fostering a caring community for ELs? This chapter reports results of constant comparative analysis to explore K-12 administrators’ (principals’) perceived challenges creating a community of caring to support academic success.
for ELs in schools. In this chapter I will discuss common themes that emerged from the data about principals’ perceived challenges to creating caring communities for ELs. The themes included challenges of communities within communities, student cluster facets, scattered focus, social-emotional learning, budget allocations, and authentic application.

Challenge One: Communities Within Communities

A primary challenge that is at the heart of community building for ELs is determining what constitutes a community. On the one hand, a community is represented by a set of students in a classroom with one or more teachers. That community is situated within a community of classrooms and teachers within a particular grade level, which is situated within a community of the school. That school is situated within a community of schools within a district and that district is within a community of districts in a state, etc. To further complicate the matter, teachers belong to multiple communities within grade levels, departments, schools, and districts. Principals belong to multiple communities within schools, districts, and administrative circles. The school itself is situated within a physical community (neighborhood) that is home to a multitude of social communities including parents, friends, neighbors and relatives of students as well as faith communities. Some communities are explicitly identified (e.g., a school resides at a physical address in a particular neighborhood) while others are imagined (e.g., students can imagine themselves as part of a community of athletes within and beyond the school).

Communities within communities is perhaps the most pressing challenge faced by principals because they are responsible for creating the best possible environment for students that integrates multiple systems of identified or imagined communities. In this section, the principal participants focused on leveraging pre-existing aspects of their staff community and building
community with families as the two primary challenges to building community for ELs. I discuss each in turn below.

Leveraging Staff Community

Most principals reported that they had existing mechanisms in place to promote community among staff members. Some, such as Sharon, a middle school principal, noted that the relational connections was the “real challenge of her job.” She reported:

Some of the work I do is so technical. I respond to emails, fill out forms, create agendas, submit proposals, and do work I consider “technical.” But some of my work, and this part is the fun part—is connecting with people—with students, staff, and families… [the] technical parts are necessary, but the real challenge is the relational connections. (Sharon)

Sharon’s comment not only notes that building community is a challenge but also that there are multiple dimensions of community to consider: “students, staff, and families.” In fact, multiple participants reported that building community within their staffs after participating in the PD was especially challenging. A part of this challenge is leveraging their existing staff community-building mechanisms and applying them to building community for ELs.

Community building among staff is a parallel goal and a challenge when building community among EL learners within a school. Julie, a 3-5 elementary principal participant, describes the challenge of building community with staff as a model for building community among her students: “We have a great staff here. We work together and truly are a team. I feel like we are modeling this community and collaboration for the kids.”

Julie, and the other six principal participants, responded affirmatively upon being asked about community-building efforts in their staff. Embedded within the work with grade-level teams, subject specialist teams, and special education teams is also the work of the EL support
teaching teams. Principals mentioned their “teams” intermittently throughout the interviews. The challenges in community building among staff fell squarely within the challenges for building community for ELs. Christina, an elementary principal, noted:

Our staff is close. We collaborate and have structures to support the collaborations. I need to see how to do this for our EL students, since we’ve been trying to do this for teachers and are generally successful at it. It is hard to see how to bridge these things. Maybe the EL community work with Bilingual Parent Advisory Councils (BPACs) can be a bridge, since parts of the community building are working and entrenched, and parts are so new. The student pieces are new and hard, but so important. (Christina)

Christina directly tied the challenge of staff community building with the challenge of EL student community building, a connection Julie, another elementary principal, also noted:

I wonder if the staff are close because we have been creating structures and working at it a long time. The EL stuff, to me, is just so new. And when we talk about mixing up friend groups, that serves a different purpose than connecting with other ELs, isn’t it? Mixing up friends is valuable but finding connection within the EL community is another. The staff are close, and we can work on getting the students close, too. (Julie)

As principals like Julie want to build community among staff as parallel to building community among students, they want the both/and of connecting ELs to each other as well as connecting ELs to other friend groups. Julie alludes to the staff community as an already-present strength that helps staff support students in connecting to each other as well. Julie asserts that her already-present staff connectedness can and will be a bridge to “…getting the students close, too.” Connection and community are not a fixed measure in which one takes away from the other; by building staff community, there is no dynamic where this staff connectedness takes away the potential for student connectedness. Rather, the staff community is a lever by which community is being modeled and student community can be an additional goal. Julie sees building staff community as a challenge and goal that is then used to help cultivate student EL
and general community. Although building staff and student community are a challenge, one can be used to strengthen the other.

Although a challenge, other principals also expressed that building a strong staff community was an important and welcome endeavor. For example, Danielle, a K-8 principal participant, stated:

Any strong anything- any strong family unit, any strong business, any strong empire, any strong government, there has to be this idea of shared, collective community of shared passion and good intentions. I feel like it’s only through this positive uniformity, that great things can be accomplished…Care is an umbrella word. That’s just another way of saying they’re a strong community. (Danielle)

In the aforementioned comment expressed by Danielle, about “shared passion and good intentions” have the potential to unite staff by giving collective mission and vision that is focused on ELs. On multiple occasions, principals expressed care and intention for their staff to have community and connection with each other: “We have special events throughout the year that really foster community [for staff]—celebrations of their birthdays, work anniversaries, and even as they say goodbye” (Bill, high school principal participant).

With competing time demands as the backdrop, administrators, faculty and staff can often find themselves feeling isolated and without a sense of community. Staff cohesion and community building can be particularly hard to foster within a school environment where focus is continuously placed on the best ways to improve student outcomes. Principals are increasingly aware of the need for and challenge of community building among their staff as their staff, in turn, build community among their students.
Another principal, Bill, describes the staff community and relational connections in his school as being a challenge partly also because of the language barrier between his staff and his international EL student population:

The teachers do a great job with connecting with our EL students. Considering that the students are apart from their families, and learning a new language and culture, teachers really step in to support [the EL students]. The teachers who connect and invest the most actually help each other, too. They brainstorm together and attend supportive events together, too. (Bill)

Bill describes the language barrier between staff and students as a challenge that is directly related to staff community building. In his discussion of community, Bill was clear that his staff reached out to build the EL student community and by doing so connected with each other as staff and built staff community. Bill’s statement that the staff end up “help[ing] each other too” indicates that staff community can be built as a function of the language barrier between students and teachers. This point emphasizes that the challenge of building student community can and will be supported by building staff community. This further emphasizes the complex interrelated nature of the multiple communities that co-exist.

In addition to building community among staff in schools, district-level PD also connected district staff to each other even between different buildings. Wanda, an elementary principal, discussed this: “We… took it on together. We started to focus more on our ELs, and we had [SIOP/EL] training all together, too.” Wanda was fortunate to have had positive experiences with district-wide PD. Wanda’s district moved the scope of PD from simply school-wide initiatives as determined by the principal to district-wide focus on PD on ELs. This focus was considered important enough to broadly and consistently expose teachers and principals to throughout the district. Although other principals from other districts made no mention of the
district-wide initiatives, again, the in-bucket PD (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) and the internal staff as experts in their fields of expertise were some of the ways that principals made schools EL ready and reflecting best practices for their EL population.

Generally speaking, community building among staff was divided between professional planning times and shared celebrations that revolved around explicitly social opportunities to connect. Both contexts, shared planning and social celebrations, were referenced as times created with intention for connection and community and cultivating care, according to Danielle, a K-8 principal. One strand strengthened the other, and as teachers were empowered to professionally connect and align with one another, the more personal connections were strengthened, and vice versa. These structures and the process in creation of the structures for staff community were a challenge inherent in the ways principals “brought back” to their schools their learning from their PD experiences.

Principals reported that opportunities to cultivate community among staff empowered teachers to then cultivate caring communities for their EL students. PD that enabled principals to value and structure shared planning times and school celebrations for staff also then affected how the staff valued structuring opportunities for ELs to connect with each other in caring communities. Principal PD on ELs not only had pedagogical and instructional implications, but the PD challenged principals to think about their schools as communities of learners, staff and students alike.

Family Community

Another type of community was frequently discussed within the interviews: the community of students’ families. Multiple principals demonstrated an understanding that parent
and family engagement meant a win-win for student connection and success in their schools. Christina, an elementary school principal, expressed this by stating, “Parents are our partners. When we educate the parents, we are helping to educate their children, too.”

Although some principals considered this a highlight and emphasis within their initiatives, others alluded to it as simply being interwoven into everything that they do. For example, two principals talked about intentional parent training which included parent meetings and resources targeted to parent information about school projects and student curriculum. Others thought that parents were already a part of the community through teacher communication and interaction.

In particular, one way that principals addressed the challenge of engaging parents and building community among parents is a structured, formal intervention like having a Parent Advisory Council (PAC). Danielle, a K-8 principal participant, emphasized the role of her PAC in involving parents:

We include our parents and invite them with letters translated into Spanish, to parent advisory council meetings. There, they share and lead out about the things that they care about. It was a district initiative, but our PAC is really going well, and involves parents of the ELs, connecting with each other and connecting with our community. (Danielle)

Knowing that formal initiatives/requirements as well as valued parent relationships were embedded within the principals’ responsibilities, many participants also considered some parents as genuine agents within their schools to further the school’s mission and objectives. One participant in particular, Sharon, mentioned their parents as leading Parent Teacher Council (PTC) events within the fabric of the school calendar and community: “Our PTC is very involved. They bring together our families with fun events, fundraisers, and we see parents
connecting with the school because of the PTC. Our PAC, Bilingual Parent Advisory Council (BPAC), and PTC really do so much for the school” (Sharon, junior high school principal).

Principals’ comments highlight that parent involvement, and in particular, parent involvement of students who are ELs, made for collaborative leadership models that include and empower the students as they see their parents involved and a genuine part of the school community. When parents are a genuine part of the school community it is common to think of them as vital to the very fabric of the school. Julie, an elementary school principal, stated:

Our school is a family. The teachers, the parents, the administrators, we all work together because we want every child to succeed. It doesn’t matter if they’re ESL. It doesn’t matter if they need speech and language. It doesn’t matter. We’re all gonna help them. (Julie)

In fact, multiple principal participants referenced PACs and BPACs, as well as PTAs or Committees (PTCs). Principal participants admittedly felt mixed emotions and initiatives, ranging from, “They [PAC and BPAC meetings] are working really well. Parents are feeling more connected and sharing their opinions and voice” (Sharon, junior high school principal), to frustration about poor parent attendance at the most recent PAC meetings:

There was not a good turnout [at the last PAC]. I felt so bad for the prep work they had done for the meeting. We are playing with different times and different ways we can connect with the parents in our community. It will take time, and we need to accommodate different working and home schedules, but we’ll get there. (Wanda, elementary principal).

Based on principals’ comments, schools seemed to have different levels of participation and attendance at PTC, PAC, and BPAC meetings, despite principals reporting that they were consistently committed to increasing parent involvement (6/7). School organizational structures of PTA/PTCs as well as PAC and BPACs allow parents to have voice and choice in their
children’s education and community experiences. Principals support their schools and communities with their commitment to students, staff, and families.

Principals identified specific challenges within their parent communities in supporting ELs. As principal and district leadership identified those challenges, they also helped create functional structures to support those challenges to eventually transform them into strengths within the school. Julie’s prior reference to her staff cohesion as being a springboard for eventual student cohesion and community is not unlike Gary’s comments about the family support structures. Gary, a high school principal, stated:

The PTA and PAC run a whole gamut of activities that support our students and families. Whether it’s holiday events or teacher appreciation week, the parents and families that lead PTA and PAC help to co-lead community-building initiatives that help our students. There is so much going on in our school, and these events that are led by families are parent-driven and parent-supporting. (Gary)

Gary mentions the dual directionality of parents supporting other parents. The PTA and PAC both serve as committees and leadership opportunities that work towards representing parent needs and student needs. This comment highlights that the challenge of cultivating community among EL parents and parents overall is not the principal’s work alone. Christina, an elementary principal, also alludes to the PTC and PAC/BPAC as addressing the challenge of cultivating community among families and students:

I love our PTC. They do so much for the school. Their work makes my work easier, and we really have a good partnership in the things we do for the school together. I love hearing the things that they are doing and ideas for how they do it for the students…The BPAC (Bilingual Parent Advisory Council) is a newer group, that I also really have loved connecting with. They are doing things and helping me see what the challenges are and needs for not only the EL students, but the EL parents and families. (Christina)

This quote highlights that the challenge of connecting EL families to each other is met in part with PTA/PTC and PAC/BPAC meetings and initiatives. However, there are other
challenges to consider when connecting monolingual teachers with students’ families. In fact, three principals mentioned that having multiple languages could pose challenges that should be met with accommodations, such as translating communications to families or having translation offered at events. Two of these three principals also mentioned cultural norms and wanting to be culturally sensitive to differences in communication, body language, relational dynamics, etc.

Bill, a high school principal, for example, stated:

We are trying to be inclusive. We are trying to be intentionally welcoming, especially for our international EL students. We are learning as we are trying and are even letting the EL students lead and share so that we can include them into our community and our learning. (Bill)

Gary, a high school principal, further emphasized this need to learn about other cultures to create a caring community for ELs. During his interview he stated:

I am learning so much- which cultures require eye contact during communication, and which don’t. I always invite students to correct me and help me learn the ways and culture that they’re coming from, and we are learning and growing together in this way. They are connected to each other, but also connected to all of us as a school community. (Gary)

This quote evidenced that there are barriers to creating communities with student families that are associated with cultural norms. Gary’s statement further emphasizes that these cultural barriers were not great or unsurmountable, but merely logistical.

The two communities that principals focused on in their interviews were building community among staff and building communities with EL families. Comments in the principal interviews suggested that principals saw addressing these challenges as integral to developing a caring community for ELs in schools.
Challenge Two: Student Cluster Facets

The second challenge with creating a caring community for ELs is determining what characteristics constitute a student “community” and, therefore, how to best orchestrate groups to facilitate community. A very common method of clustering students for grouping within classrooms is by language. For example, a high school principal participant, Gary, stated:

Our student groups cluster by gender and language. This is not just because we want similar students to connect with each other, but because the very connections that they make in their first language [especially for our international students] then provide a bridge and a place of strength for their second language…Language and culture are interconnected, entwined. The students need both connection with other students like them, and students that are different from them as well. (Gary)

Gary’s insight provides a lens through which we see multiple conundrums. First, it is unlikely there are enough hours in a school week to allow sufficient time for building community within similar language groups as well as within diverse language groups. A principal, then, has to make decisions about how to cluster students in a manner that is most beneficial to EL students. To further complicate the matter, it is not clear whether it is more beneficial for ELs to be grouped with other students who share their native language or whether to try to facilitate strategically diverse clusters. Functionally, to group students of similar L1 has benefits, yet there are other benefits for diverse grouping.

Danielle, an elementary principal, further addresses the struggle of building community when students who speak multiple languages are clustered. She stated:

Here’s the thing with our bilingual classrooms. It’s a great thing, but it’s a struggle [to learn both languages and connect with each other]. So, they go to class, and they’re together. Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd and 3rd. So, they’re a family. They’re a family. (Danielle)

Danielle’s quote illustrates the perception that clustering students with diverse linguistic backgrounds has unique struggles, but that the community that emerges is like a “family.”
Student connectedness and building school community are not easy, nor has it historically been emphasized as part of the principal’s job as leader of the building. Now, as Danielle expressed, connecting students together is not only challenging, but challenging for bilingual/ESL students who may or may not have the same language in common with each other or their teachers.

Community building among students is within the scope of responsibility within principals’ work, but structural norms within public education today often prevent ease of transitioning into bilingualism and integration. For example, schools are structured in a way where students go from a consistent community of learners (one classroom) to different student groups (multiple classrooms) often without sufficient transitional support. Although the diverse environments provided by multiple classrooms have the potential to benefit ELs, it is possible they will need additional support systems. Julie, a 3-5 elementary school principal, discussed supporting ELs during the transition from single to multiple classrooms:

We start moving EL students away from each other to get used to a junior high model. After they graduate from our school, they move into lots of different student groups in one day. Our elementary model keeps kids together mostly throughout the day. So, in 5th grade, we start mixing it up. We mix it up with multi-level reading groups and multi-language social groups, and small group instruction… and all the while, I am saying “we’re mixing it up to get you ready” and “you can do it- we are going to split some of you up but you’ll get used to it and even like it”… I have a set of twins that I split up even before the 5th grade for the same reasons, actually. (Julie)

Overall, principals expressed that a challenge in fostering caring communities is deciding how to group students to maximize benefits for ELs. Most conversations centered on the idea of grouping by language characteristics. Principals reported mixed results with grouping students by language, noting that there are some benefits and some detriments to these clusters. On the one hand, EL students might benefit from the social support and linguistic alignment found in homogeneous groups. One the other hand, EL students might benefit from exposure to a second
language they may not get at home. Decisions about the best ways to cluster students in order to foster a caring community have potentially far-reaching effects that principals must take into account.

Challenge Three: Scattered Focus

All principals expressed that creating a caring community was an important, albeit challenging endeavor. Julie, an elementary school principal participant, reflected on the importance of community by saying:

We work together as a team. All of the students are ours. They don’t belong to one teacher, and we don’t care for only one class at a time, or even one group at a time. No one says “Oh, but he’s in [that teacher]’s class.” We all work together and care for all of the students. We really do. (Julie)

Julie explains that despite the challenges of the principal’s job responsibilities, she works with her staff team and they “work together and care for all of the students.” Julie’s repeated usage of words like “we” and “ours” and “together” reflect verbiage and values of community and group cohesion and care. Although she expressed that she encounters challenges to cultivating community for her ELs in her school, she also has a paradigmatic shared-leadership approach that uses her staff members’ shared strengths for the benefit of her student community.

Julie and other principals expressed the challenge of prioritizing facilitating ELs’ needs among their varied urgent and important items within their responsibilities. Examples of other responsibilities stated by principals were returning e-mails, managing meetings with other administrators and parents, and generating and submitting reports. Accordingly, challenges to building community for ELs required creative scheduling and prioritization processes. The challenge of balancing the responsibilities of the principal position was noted by five of the seven principal participants. Two in particular, Gary and Julie (both having been principals for
over 17 years), seemed to have both a calm but grave grasp of this component of their jobs.

Gary, a high school principal, stated:

There is always just so much to do. I cannot do it all, and hiring good people is a huge part of what I do to even the load. Because we have good staff, I can do what I do, and know that so much of the load is carried by my teachers. They are giving good instruction, talking to parents, problem solving with kids, and then I have to spend less time resolving conflicts, conducting student discipline and doing administrivia. I can work on instructional leadership, be outside of my office, and care for the students and staff. (Gary)

Julie, 3-5 elementary school principal participant, further emphasized this point by stating:

We want to care for our ELs. And we do. But there is a lot of other stuff that always seems to come up. We have to balance it all, and my teachers know they can depend on me to be here early and to leave late. But, that’s the only way I get everything done. The ELs are a priority in my building. Our dual language program is going really well, and we are proud of the work we are doing together. But it’s long days, and there’s always so much to do. (Julie)

Balancing the job responsibilities of the principal/school leaders while developing a caring community for ELs and focusing on community and curricular initiatives that benefit this population is a challenge that principals face. Participants like Gary and Julie emphasize that there simply does not seem to be enough time to do it all. Because of this, principals have to focus their energy and prioritize decisions that they believe will enhance a sense of community in their schools.

Some principals reported using strategies to maximize community building within pre-existing time constraints. For example, one principal, Bill, described intentionally representing the value of community building within architectural decisions, i.e., in the buildings that were constructed at the school. Bill expressed that his decisions regarding the building of the school’s auditorium were driven by a desire to foster community. Bill’s school engaged in community
time each week and Bill considered the space in which this would happen. Through this, he demonstrated knowledge about the connection between space/structure and community building for the students. Bill, a high school principal participant, stated:

I think for our whole school community, as we built our fine arts center, we had to decide what size school do we want to be? The research at the time said schools between 400 and 800 are going to be the ideal size; 400 is such that you have a comprehensive program, and when you start getting 800 you start losing, you start becoming more anonymous. And so we started thinking between there. So we built our auditorium for 700 people. So really about 650 students, and about 50 teachers, and we’re gathered in that auditorium about 3 times a week, once a week for Community Time. (Bill)

Bill did not expand further on what happened during Community Time, but his intentionality and explanation of the auditorium (arts center) within the framework of asking about community development was notably unique and innovative. Then, when asked to explain further, Bill highlighted the relevance between the arts center building and building community for his EL students:

Buildings and numbers matter. When I see groups of students clustered together, they are building and bridging communities and sub-groups. I hope that the way we group students instructionally and socially, that they make ties and friendships that last a lifetime. Our [EL students] connect with each other naturally. How can I, and the other adults in the building, help make connections that aren’t as automatic? (Bill)

Other principals “made additional time” by fostering a sense of community for ELs during after-school programs. Two principals in particular expressed these types of efforts in their schools: Christina and Wanda. Christina, a K-5 principal, expressed intentionality with the community-building efforts in her, Bilingual Parent Advisory Council:

We started a mariachi after-school music program based on the BPAC’s [Bilingual Parent Advisory Council] recommendations to incorporate an after-school option that infused Latino culture into the school community. Our 5th grade teacher teaches guitar at lunch time, and the band teacher works with a mariachi teacher to run rehearsals once a week after school on Thursdays. (Christina)
Christina chose to respond to BPAC feedback to infuse Latino culture into her school community. The PD she attended caused her to innovate and think about ways to support her particular, school-specific EL community. In the face of priorities that compete for Christina’s time during the typical work day, Christina responded with building in community time for ELs after school. Similarly, another principal, Wanda, a pre-K-6 principal, also responded to the challenges in building community for her ELs during after-school hours:

> Our after-school program is called BASE, and it is a general homework help time, but we started a Culture Club too—it covers language and culture mini-lessons with the students writing about the culture of the week in their Culture journals. The journal at the end of the year has about 20 different countries and cultures. The students try different kinds of foods because of culture club, too, everything from Chinese dim sum to Portuguese fried fish croquettes. They love it, and we are thinking about doing more clubs at BASE like it. (Christina)

> The challenge of competing priorities means that principals have to think outside of the box and find ways to either maximize the time they have, like Bill did with his architectural initiatives at Walker School, or find more time, like Christina’s Mariachi Club at Ridge or Wanda’s Culture Club within her BASE after-school programming. These principals used their school day and school structures to cultivate community for their students.

Community building among students was a consistent value and repeated theme in the principal participant interviews. Despite the challenges and broad responsibilities of the principalship, all participants noted the importance of community building as part of their work as school leaders. The consistent intentionality of the principals in wanting to develop community as part of what they did for work reflects a value on community development within their schools.
Challenge Four: Social-Emotional Learning/SEL

An additional challenge expressed by principals is that they are responsible for multiple facets of student welfare. One dimension multiple principals mentioned being particularly challenging was social-emotional learning (SEL). Danielle, an elementary principal, expressed the challenge when she said:

…and a huge part of our work is now SEL [social-emotional learning]: we need to bridge parent communications with teacher communications, and teacher communication to student communications. All these communities have their unique perspectives, and we need to all work together to make it happen. (Danielle)

In her interview, Danielle framed the challenge of building community for EL students as a functionally social-emotional one. Sharon, a junior high principal, echoed this challenge in her interview:

In Education, things are constantly changing. We keep up with the newest laws, policies, and norms with being educated ourselves. Although sometimes teachers are the worst students (we are used to being the teacher!), we do value learning. I would say that we especially value good teaching and want to be taught well. Good PD is so important and reminds us to keep learning and growing. It also can remind us how distinctive, and unique, and hard, good teaching can be… SEL [social emotional learning] is one of the new emphases for [the state]. We need to help our students with their academics and their SEL. (Sharon)

Sharon mentioned content within the PD she received as a part of her participation in Project DREAMS but then acknowledged how much the content itself was a springboard for building community within her ELs at her school. Sharon also mentioned that good PD combines the content with the SEL social-emotional learning in her school. She expressed that this SEL component is irreplaceable when building community for ELs, since the challenges and backgrounds are unique as a demographic group.
Sharon explicitly discussed the SEL component of student learning and its relationship to PD. As principals are now given opportunities to learn about SEL, they also are able to connect their SEL learning to students and staff. Knowledge about SEL in PD for principals has the potential to affect the school climate. With a focus on SEL, staff and students can have a sense of belonging and, at the very least, a sense of emotional safety and health that makes the school learning stronger.

Steve, a high school principal, also articulated the challenges of building a caring community and shared these takeaways as components of his PD experience:

I loved the PD and brought so much back. I brought my PE teacher to go with me because I wanted us to be on the same page. We brought back learning tools, but also brought back a shift in thinking. Our thinking shifted from being reactive about our day, to being proactive- instructional leadership and staff development; caring for our staff and students and getting back to that focus. (Steve)

Steve’s discussion of caring for staff and students indicates his focus on SEL within this building. Bringing his PE teacher with him to the PD further demonstrated his desire to care for the needs of his staff and school community. Engaging staff with new concepts they were exposed to in PD and making sure all staff have the same momentum and direction as Steve directly addresses the challenge of caring for students’ SEL through caring for teachers’ SEL. As the staff members got exposed to new “learning tools,” they took what they learned first-hand and expanded the effectiveness of their implementation by sharing their knowledge and experiences with all teachers and then all students in their school. Further, Steve’s mention of his shift to proactive leadership from reactive leadership made for an important challenge turned into an opportunity. Caring for the social-emotional learning of his ELs and the challenge of being proactive in his daily work, meant that he was working towards making proactive decisions not
only with staff engagement but also with a proactive mindset. Taking action in advance of a situation, anticipating something before it happens, is indicative of a proactive mindset. For example, a proactive mindset might involve making decisions and taking actions to foster SEL as opposed to reacting to SEL-related situations after they occur. Steve’s shift involved pushing forward PD initiatives and values, rather than reacting to issues and problems as they arose. His emphasis on “caring for staff and students” and “getting back to that focus” meant he was able to shift his priorities in a proactive way towards caring for ELs and cultivating community for his EL students.

Challenge Five: Budget Allocations

Principals mentioned having dealt with multiple aspects of their budgets. As noted in Chapter 5, principals made multiple comments about how their limited budgets led to challenging decisions about how to allocate funds to allow for EL-focused PD. In addition, principals stressed the role limited budgets played on building caring communities for ELs.

Unilaterally, principals spoke of having budget challenges at the district and state levels, referendums not getting passed, or new district initiatives not being able to be supported. One principal discussed budget in a more positive light and was also the most dismissive about finances being a challenge in her work. Julie, a 3-5 elementary principal, stated, “Finances can sometimes go through waves of hard seasons and easier ones. But we serve the kids and make do, and fundraise, or whatever it takes.” Julie’s explanation highlights that budgets are an important part of creating a caring community for students, and fluctuations in budgets can be challenging to achieving that goal. Despite this, Julie showed a commitment to use the budget to “serve… students” with a “whatever-it-takes” attitude.
Overall, principals demonstrated a desire to create community-building programs and a caring climate. However, the remaining interviews (6/7) emphasized the challenges of making budget and its role in developing the programs and caring community for their EL students. The connection between budget challenges and developing a caring community for ELs was noted consistently throughout one principal’s interview. Gary, a high school principal participant, said:

We have more ELs than before. And we want to serve and teach our ELs. But with new challenges come a need for new resources. And we do not always have these resources... Things take time and money... We are fighting the constant changes in curriculum, law, learning, and human resources. I want our community to be welcoming, but, it is really hard to make this happen... and to make things work. (Gary)

Gary and the other principals saw the connection between quantified, particular budget decisions and budget line, and soft skills like supporting teams with mentoring initiatives for developing caring communities for ELs. Christina, a K-5 elementary principal participant, also noted this connection, and this challenge:

Sometimes we are charged with important, lofty goals like the social-emotional learning and climate of the school—anti-bullying, caring communities, strong social ties to teachers and to each other for students. But there is not as much clarity about how we can make that happen when budgets are tight. And when we are continuing all the same things we were doing before, but adding on new initiatives without new sources of funding, implementation can be unclear... Our PTC is wonderful. They raise money and help us with box tops, fun runs, cooks’ nights out, just so much. But it can sometimes feel “not enough” for our kids. I want to develop caring communities for our students, families, and staff... I do not need to “throw money at the situation” but money can be helpful. (Christina)

Budget challenges are an ongoing source of concern for principals. As Christina and other principal participants expressed the complexity of school budgets, they also discussed that the budgets often did not have justifications for building caring community in the same way that other academic initiatives did. Wanda, an elementary principal, expressed concern with meeting
initiatives such as those focused on social-emotional dimensions and EL programs with the goal of building community. She stated:

New initiatives happen sometimes without the proper funding or training to back it up. I’ve been in education long enough now to see that the pendulum swings both ways. As a teacher and a principal, we work hard to meet the needs of our students. And needs change and shift. We reorient and re-center, and the [SEL and EL] programs are important ones. But we need to receive good training, and we need to have appropriate funding to support these programs to serve the students well. (Wanda)

Wanda’s statements during the interview expressed that initiatives by the district or state were easier to implement because of the funding tied to the initiatives rather than school and site-based initiatives. These challenges are further complicated by principals’ awareness of the importance of caring communities for ELs. Julie, an elementary principal, demonstrated a passion to build community:

I am still interested and hopeful for the things we are doing. I loved learning about ELs with other educators, and I love learning about the things we are doing and how they are changing. But I also use the things that other people care about with the things I want for my school. My school will always serve students and always care about the people we have right in front of us- the students, staff, and families. (Julie)

Building community and having a caring climate for their ELs were important parts of principals’ work. But budgets need to align with these goals. Resources should be given to support the complex and important work in schools for EL students and all students, staff, and families. Budget allocations reflect the values and initiatives within a school and district. Budgets aligned with the instructional goals of the school and proactively managed by the building principal make for student-centered schools and student-centered budgets that support ELs and all students.
Challenge Six: Authentic Application

As discussed in Chapter 5, five of the seven principals directly addressed an increase in EL population in their schools, and all principals expressed a need for access to PD that focuses on ELs. The lack of EL-focused PD seemed a barrier to doing the work they wanted to do to support their English Learner students. Wanda, an elementary school principal, noted:

We want to support our EL students, just like we want to support our students of poverty, and just like we want to support our teachers. Sometimes, training seems disconnected and irrelevant, behind the times from the issues we really are facing today. But we learn from each other and do what’s best for the kids. (Wanda)

As Wanda’s quote highlights, not only is the lack of access to EL training limited, but the training that is accessible often lacks authentic application. In other words, multiple principals expressed that PD seemed to lack a direct connection to everyday, real-world practices. Rather, principals reported that they used their schools’ internal expertise and resources to grow and adapt to the needs of the school. For example, Danielle, a K-8 principal, stated:

I love growing with my school. The school is changing, and the population is changing, and we are up for the challenge. We keep learning and growing to serve the needs of our students. My school is not changing quickly, but I see it all around me, and I do see change in my school. (Danielle)

Danielle’s quote further demonstrates that principals recognize the need for training, but it should be training that “keeps up with the times.” The EL-focused training that would be most relevant to helping their changing population needs to be easily translated to classroom practices. Some principals did experience PD opportunities in multiple languages; however, this was not a typically reported experience. Two principals from a large, diverse, urban district, shared about a professional development experience that was conducted in Spanish, with non-Spanish-speaking teachers and administrators listening to the session with headphones. This represented a role
reversal in that translations are typically done from English to Spanish and not vice versa. Both principals expressed that this was a helpful experience that made them to see things from their students’ perspectives. However, Wanda was the only principal who referred to the PD experience as directly relevant to her professional practice and with direct application on her school leadership and relationships with her students. She said:

> It [the time we wore headphones to hear the PD translated from Spanish to English] increased empathy. We had already been talking as a staff about how hard bilingual immersion was. We had seen and shown YouTube videos showing the experience through the students’ eyes. But then we experienced it at that PD, and it was powerful. (Wanda)

Instead of resentment or discomfort after the exercise, the two principals separately expressed gratitude for the experience, as well as the need for empathy to be a part of the connection between PD on ELs and the practice of good pedagogy and practice with ELs in their schools. Increased empathy is something that directly translated into classroom practice and that impacted the environment constructed by the administrators and teachers.

The challenge of authentic application is one that is paramount to overcome. Principals and teachers often recognize the need for there to be direct, practical connections between training and the school environment. However, the need for EL-focused PD is born out of the classroom, and so training should be focused on practical applications that can be directly applied to the classroom (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013). The result of a PD that lacks authentic application is a disconnect between training and practice which is unlikely to have lasting impact on students’ needs.

Table 5 presents comparisons of the different themes. The table lists the emergent themes with a description and example quotes that typify each theme. The table also includes a measure
of prevalence, the number of principals who mentioned each theme during their interviews. In addition, each of the themes is expanded upon below.

Table 5
Emergent Themes About Caring Community with Descriptions and Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th># of Principals</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communities Within Communities</td>
<td>Principals identified the challenge of fostering multiple communities in order to best facilitate EL community within their schools. The focus was on building staff community and family community.</td>
<td>7/7</td>
<td>• “We… took it on together. We started to focus more on our ELs, and we had [SIOP/EL] training all together, too” [in reference to building community among staff].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “Parents are our partners. When we educate the parents, we are helping to educate their children, too.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “We include our parents and invite them with letters translated into Spanish, to parent advisory council meetings. There, they share and lead out about the things that they care about. It was a district initiative, but our PAC is really going well, and involves parents of the ELs, connecting with each other and connecting with our community.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on following page)
Student Cluster Facets

One challenge with fostering a caring community is deciding how to group students. Multiple principals gave the example of grouping by language and highlight that it has positive and negative impacts.

- “Our student groups cluster by gender and language. This is not just because we want similar students to connect with each other, but because the very connections that they make in their first language [especially for our international students] then provide a bridge and a place of strength for their second language.”

- “We start moving EL students away from each other to get used to a junior high model. After they graduate from our school, they move into lots of different student groups in one day. Our elementary model keeps kids together mostly throughout the day. So, in 5th grade, we start mixing it up. We mix it up with multi-level reading groups and multi-language social groups, and small group instruction.”

Scattered Focus

Principals reported facing the challenge of finding time to cultivate a caring community when their focus was scattered.

- “We want to care for our ELs. And we do. But there is a lot of other stuff that always seems to come up. We have to balance it all, and my teachers know they can depend on me to be here early and to leave late. But, that’s the only way I get everything done.”

- “There is always just so much to do. I cannot do it all, and hiring good people is a huge part of what I do to even the load. Because we have good staff, I can do what I do, and know that so much of the load is carried by my teachers.”

(Continued on following page)
Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social-Emotional Dimensions</th>
<th>Principals reported that addressing the social-emotional needs of ELs was particularly challenging, especially because principals often do not have the training they need for this dimension.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget Allocations</td>
<td>Principals addressed issues with creating a caring community for ELs considering limited funding and lack of support for local, school-based, initiatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• “…and a huge part of our work is now SEL [social-emotional learning]: we need to bridge parent communications with teacher communications, and teacher communication to student communications. All these communities have their unique perspectives, and we need to all work together to make it happen.”

• “Good PD is so important and reminds us to keep learning and growing. It also can remind us how distinctive, and unique, and hard, good teaching can be…SEL (social emotional learning) is one of the new emphases for [the state]. We need to help our students with their academics and their SEL.”

• “We have more ELs than before. And we want to serve and teach our ELs. But with new challenges come a need for new resources. And we do not always have these resources…Things take time and money…We are fighting the constant changes in curriculum, law, learning, and human resources. I want our community to be welcoming, but, it is really hard to make this happen… and to make things work.”

(Continued on following page)
• “Sometimes we are charged with important, lofty goals like the...climate of the school—anti-bullying, caring communities... But there is not as much clarity about how we can make that happen when budgets are tight. And when we are continuing all the same things we were doing before, but adding on new initiatives without new sources of funding, implementation can be unclear... Our PTC is wonderful. They raise money and help us with box tops, fun runs, cooks’ nights out, just so much. But, it can sometimes feel ‘not enough’ for our kids. I want to develop caring communities for our students, families, and staff... I do not need to “throw money at the situation” but money can be helpful.”

• “We want to support our EL students... Sometimes, training seems disconnected and irrelevant, behind the times from the issues we really are facing today. But we learn from each other and do what’s best for the kids.”

• “It [the time we wore headphones to hear the PD translated from Spanish to English] increased empathy. We had already been talking as a staff about how hard bilingual immersion was. We had seen and shown YouTube videos showing the experience through the students’ eyes. But then we experienced it at that PD, and it was powerful.”

Table 5 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authentic Application</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>7/7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expressed a disconnect between traditional PD and practical applications to building caring communities for ELs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

All interviewed principals discussed the importance of creating a caring community for ELs. Some principals discussed explicit attempts to do so that were in progress at the time of their interview. However, there were some thematic challenges associated with this goal. Each of these themes will be expanded on in Chapter 7. Chapter 7 will feature a discussion of the principal responses and themes that were explored in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 7 will also feature a discussion of the limitations of the study and implications to theory, practice, and future research.
CHAPTER 7
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This descriptive case study was an investigation into principals’ perceptions of challenges related to professional development (PD) for educators focused on English Learners (ELs) after participating in a summer academy called as Project DREAMS. Project DREAMS focused on professional development for administrators and auxiliary staff using a conceptual approach to understanding relationships (community) that support language learners. This professional development was unique due to the content and context of the PD topics, which varied from traditional administrative topics (budget, enrollment numbers, resource allotment, etc.) to include recommendations for community building and specific interactional and environmental influences on ELs’ learning. This study was needed to explore how intentional PD might influence principals’ understanding and implementation of an approach to create a caring community in their school sites. The identification of themes related to challenges to professional development (PD) and development of communities to support English Learners (ELs) provides insight into some of the obstacles to serving the changing demographics in our schools.

Discussion

As educators continue to learn more about how caring communities support learning, principals are starting to realize their role is far more complex than that of a manager. This change of mindset is vital to the success of groups of children, particularly those from different cultures entering schools with different languages. This study examined principals’ attempts, trained through focused PD, to implement ideas of community to support ELs. Project DREAMS
PD included general plus specific conceptual training about how to develop a community climate to support student learning. The research addresses the following two questions:

1. What are principals’ perceptions of the challenges associated with implementing PD focused on English Learners in their school communities after participation in a professional development on English Learners?

2. What are the perceived challenges for principals in developing a caring community for ELs to support academic and career success in school settings?

In the first section of this chapter I will discuss the themes and implications from Question 1. In the next section I will address the themes and implications from Question 2 about the development of a caring community for ELs.

Challenges to Implementing EL-focused PD

Four overarching themes emerged related to Question 1: What are principals’ perceptions of the challenges associated with implementing PD focused on English Learners in their school communities after participation in a professional development on English Learners? These themes were Access Paradox, Shifting Paradigms, Conflicting Priorities and Budget Constraints. Each of these will be discussed below.

**Access Paradox.** Administrators recognize and acknowledge the need to alter instruction or climate to be focused on the needs of ELs, and yet they often fail to take appropriate action to make this happen. The proposition is an increasing demand and need for EL PD that, despite sound reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to ineffective or no action. In the current study, principals indicated they had limited, if any, professional development in this identified area while reporting there was a major increase in need. Limiting access to training needed to support
any population of students might be interpreted as marginalization of opportunity for learning. This is further compounded when principals are mandated to implement dual-language programs with no prior training. The contradiction, or paradox, between our claimed understanding of need versus actionable application poses an interesting view of how our educational systems work. Our educational systems are notorious for making supportive claims on the one hand and failing to make that support actionable on the other. Further, the identification of isolated facts (number of increasing populations, variation percentages among identified language groups, passing scores on mandated tests, etc.) in PD, rather than development of deep understanding of the issues facing the communities of multiple cultures and languages, does not seem to support statements of importance and need.

One school of thought about this paradox is a body of literature collectively known as institutional theory (Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). They claim that institutional arrangements are reproduced because individuals may not even conceive of appropriate alternatives to change. This is further supported by Cox (1994), who proposed that homogeneous organized environments may be prone to group-think as application alternatives are often ruled out as different from the norm. The notion of institutional inertia has appeal for understanding the continuing homogeneous character of educational institutions despite discussion and intentions of promotion of the ideal of diversity (Rowley, Hurtado, & Ponjuan, 2002).

**Shifting Paradigms.** In relation to this study, there was a reported need for changes to understanding and perceptions of the role of the principal. This is key to development of a community where collaboration and mutual understanding of culture and climate are involved in learning and support for ELs. Personal epistemology and bias are also key shifts to be explored
for PD training. The intertwining of language learners and perception of disability are deeply rooted in our way of thinking (Ogbu, 1978). Intrinsic deficit combined with an interpretation of cultural and racial difference as a deficit impacts interactions and relationships with lower socioeconomic populations, students of color and second-language learners (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Rather than terms like “issue” and “challenge,” we need to change our terms to “opportunity” and “benefits” and think in terms of human variation, not pathology. In general, we need to start training preservice teacher candidates before they enter the professional school environment and continue across the continuum if we are to change their mindset from deficiency to opportunity.

Conflicting Priorities. “Administrivia,” which was used by several study participants to describe the mundane tasks of principals, steals time from working with the more important issues facing our schools. Fundamentally, the idea that principals are coaches and leaders requires a reconceptualization of how their time is spent. The ESSA Act (2015) demands accountability for ELs, moving them from Title III (provides funding to support EL students and their families) to Title I (funds to improve basic programs and ensure economically and socially disadvantaged students receive equal opportunity for access to a quality education), making accountability a priority. ELs now have three years to move to proficiency on these tests. Although this new accountability can be viewed as a first step toward change, it focuses on test scores rather than recommended learning support for these students. As a result, principals were forced to focus on scores as a priority, which reduced time available to developing a learning or cultural community PD.
**Budget Constraints.** Public school funding in the United States comes from federal, state, and local sources, with nearly half of school funds from local property taxes. This system generates large funding differences between wealthy and impoverished communities. In theory, the federal government does not interfere with states’ rights in education. However, when federal funds are distributed, they come with multiple stipulations as to how these funds can be spent. If states and schools do not comply with these mandates, they lose money. While Title III dollars offered some support, a 2012 survey found that Title III officials and district administrators believe the funds are helpful but insufficient for EL services (Millard, 2015). This includes PD funding to support administrators and educators in focusing on the needs of ELs. Schools lack the resources and capabilities to meet the needs of immigrant children, many of whom have limited or interrupted formal education, low or no proficiency in English, physical or mental health needs due to migration conditions or poverty, and families with little knowledge of the American school systems (Gozdziak, 2015). Accordingly, principals must find innovative ways to acquire and spend money for EL PD that maximize the impact on student outcomes.

**Challenges in Developing a Caring Community for ELs**

Six major themes emerged related to Question 2: What are the perceived challenges for principals in developing a caring community for ELs to support academic and career success in school settings? These were: Communities Within Communities, Student Cluster Facets, Scattered Focus, Authentic Application, Social Emotional Dimensions, and Budget Allocations. Each of these is discussed below.

**Communities Within Communities.** Community building is a complex and multi-faceted endeavor. This is partly because there are multiple groups within our schools: racial, ethnic,
gender identity, sexual orientation, language, staff, teachers, and administrators. These groups are mixed in communities within communities, sets of students in classrooms within a grade level in a school. The school is within a community of schools, within a district, within a state, and all communities are made up of different subgroups of people. A primary challenge that is at the heart of community building for ELs is determining what constitutes a community. On the one hand, a community is represented by a set of students in a classroom with one or more teachers. To further complicate the matter, individuals belong to multiple communities within grade levels, departments, schools, and districts. Principals belong to multiple communities within schools, districts, and administrative circles. The school itself is situated within a physical community (neighborhood) that is home to a multitude of social communities including parents, friends, and relatives of students.

Rather than being a part of a community of instructional leadership, EL teachers and paraprofessionals are often isolated from other teachers and excluded from discussing systemic decisions regarding their students (Tupa & McFadden, 2009). The principals realized that barriers to beliefs about ELs, teachers, staff and students needed to be identified, examined and rethought through the lens of all participants if community were to be achieved. It is often difficult to determine how or what should bind these groups, much less find time to create a space for open communication.

The participants expressed a connection to and community within their cohorts during Project DREAMS training as a community in the present, but they had problems with implementation in their school sites. Principals are charged with many initiatives and responsibilities, but community building and creating imagined communities within their
students, staff, and families are among their most important purposes and driving forces for their schools and changing the role of principal leadership. The idea that Project DREAMS participants are now starting to think about what binds community for ELs together in a broader sense is encouraging.

**Student Cluster Facets.** Students form self-selected social clusters based on identity, comfort levels and shared values. All students have identities that make them unique, and students with similar language, socio-economic backgrounds or belief systems often cluster together to form support systems. These clusters seem to separate rather than unite student groups. This is further compounded by school- or class-designated academic grouping practices. Participants reported difficulty in determining how students should be grouped to maximize community while still valuing identity and conforming to traditional school grouping practices. Similar to the Communities Within Communities theme, principals realized that student clusters may need to be rethought to support community. They discovered that the traditional approach to student grouping within the school environment, often motivated by “getting students ready for junior high,” or ability grouping may not be supportive of sustaining the third space needed for open dialogue. It is possible that grouping in schools for ability, future preparation for higher levels of school, and isolation of language groups might be affecting the learning process. Forging connections and identities with college-bound students and parents connecting in a diverse pool of parents involved with their school allows for an identity that is tied to education, upward mobility, and each other (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Cohen, 2012).

**Scattered Focus.** There are multiple expectations of our schools, and therefore their principals. In educational settings across the country, meeting the needs of different student
groups is a perpetual struggle. National, state, district, and sometimes individual school mandates and policies are often in conflict with support for community development within educational institutions. This is especially true for community building within and between ELs. Principals “juggle many balls” as they try to find some balance to meet all requirements for academic progress. Although principals directly mentioned this as a challenge to implementing PD focused on ELs, the idea of having “too much on their plate” resurfaced when discussing building caring communities among ELs. Specifically, staff and resource constraints frequently limit or exhaust the possibility of programming for ELs and principals struggled with keeping community building on the forefront of their goals. A clear vision and identification of goals for building communities to support ELs is needed in schools along with focused support of these initiatives. Without focused support, the goal can never be reached no matter how much it is prioritized.

After participating in Project DREAMS, the principals reported that they are starting to view themselves as an instructional leader responsible for ELs. This represents progress in keeping the goal of building community in the forefront of their daily routines. However, the many demands on principals makes this difficult, and despite recognizing the importance of building communities, the principals expressed frustration with making it a reality.

**Authentic Application.** School-level administrators are often concerned about tertiary supports for ELs, such as translating signs and school documents or offering Spanish classes for their teachers (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010). While these efforts are important, they do not build community to address the broader systemic issues facing ELs. Participants agreed that some professional development initiatives are helping teachers to learn about new ways of teaching, but meaningful education reform requires more than just an introduction of
new teaching approaches. Principals are charged with many initiatives and responsibilities, but community building and creating imagined communities within their students, staff, and families are among their most important purposes and driving forces for their school and building leadership. Rather than including a laundry list of routines that may or may not increase community within schools, PD should be focused on directly applicable strategies toward this goal. When there is a disconnect between PD focused on ELs and applications to the school community, principals are responsible for translating theory to practice without the necessary support in place to do so. To further complicate the matter, community building has aspects that are both generalized across environments as well as those that are unique to each school. PD focused on ELs needs to recognize and directly address this by building a community during PD that could be modeled for school settings. Further, principals should be allowed the space during PD to make the content applicable to their unique situation.

**Social-Emotional Dimensions.** The promotion of social, emotional, and academic learning is not a shifting educational fad; it is the substance of education itself (The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). Historically, schools focused on academics only, ignoring the connections to the affective domain. More than two decades of research across a wide range of disciplines—psychology, social science, neuroscience—demonstrates that learning depends on deep connections across a variety of skills, attitudes, and character traits. These generally fall into three broad categories: (1) skills and competencies; (2) attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets; and (3) character and values (Jones & Kahn, 2017).
Principal participants acknowledged that Project DREAMS had increased their empathy or made them aware of need for empathy for EL students in particular. This empathy is directly related to facilitating students’ social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL has recently been added to the expectations in schools and PD; however, when taught in isolation this too may fail to provide a building block of community. All educators across all levels will need PD to help them better understand connections among attitudes, beliefs, mindsets and traditional views of learning. This is vital to the development and sustainability of communities to support ELs.

After participation in Project DREAMS, principals reported they lacked both resources and capacities to meet the SEL needs of newcomer students, particularly because many of these students come with limited or interrupted formal education and low or no proficiency in English. Further, these students often have physical and mental health needs due to migration conditions or poverty, as well as families with little knowledge of American school systems (Jones & Kahn, 2017). As a result, EL students may need additional attention to adjust for their increased needs for the social-emotional dimensions. Principals and teachers alike should be prepared to meet these needs.

**Budget Allocations.** Principals referenced budget challenges with regard to implementing EL-focused PD as well as to building a caring community for ELs. Indeed, there are many factors involved in funding services for ELs. Programs for ELs require additional costs such as academic support services for students, specialized materials, and socioemotional supports to newcomers and their families. States vary regarding which funds come with rules and monitoring, and with only a few states have special funding set aside to improve quality of service to ELs (Sugarman, 2016). Educational costs vary on the background and needs of
students and can vary across grade bands. Districts generally receive state funding regardless of the level of English proficiency for ELs, so when a district has a larger population of ELs, the funding has to stretch farther than other districts with a fewer number of ELs. Accordingly, principals have to make difficult decisions about how to prioritize spending, and building community often falls to the bottom of the “most important” list. In fact, principals have many demands on their budget and often find themselves with considerably less money than would be ideal. This can delay or eliminate the support needed to build and sustain community in schools, which has the potential to be particularly detrimental for ELs who find themselves at greater need for a sense of community.

Interpretation of Findings

Project DREAMS, as an example of English Learner professional development, brings to light the importance of professional development for teachers, administrators, and auxiliary staff regarding ELs. It also connects to third space theory, imagined communities and an ethic of care as important potential components for PD. Three examples are highlighted below.

First, evidence of an understanding of third space was evident under the theme of Communities Within Communities. Principals realized that as people communicate, they produce and reproduce culture through the very process of communication with friends, neighbors, and colleagues, which produces their reality. Their interactions construct the reality of community, which can be fluid, with one person fitting across multiple groups at the same and different times. During the Project DREAMS Summer Academy, the facilitators modeled the process of third space to help principals understand how groups interact and form to build community. The discussions were often uncomfortable, as expressed by one participant: “… it
got hot. It was an uncomfortable space.” However, through the process, the principals realized the importance of open dialogue in a safe space to build and bond community.

Second, the Project DREAMS professional development program investigated the complex idea of imagined communities. Traditionally, students may be placed in one group that does not fit their internal understanding of community or contradicts their vision of communities in which they want to belong. Participants realized that while schools and their vision for students’ learning outcomes represent a type of imagined community that influences learning, the approach may not fit the expectations or individual needs of all students. Students may or may not view these imagined communities as important to their academic success. ELs may view language mastery or proficient English status as a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future (Cohen, 2012). However, if other groupings conflict with the vision of a community, it can have a negative impact on learning.

Finally, the theme of social-emotional dimensions reflects Noddings’s (1988) interpretation of the ethic of care theory. Ethic of care as a learning climate, another component of Project DREAMS, is conducive to growth, safety, and individual and group health. The ethic of care within education allows teachers and administrators to make decisions based on a moral foundation of caring for the well-being of students. A fiduciary ethic of care can be interpreted as conflicting with a standards-based business model of education where students are reduced to numerical, quantitative measures and scores. Advocacy and care for students and communities came up repeatedly within the participant interviews. This is a difficult mindset to change in our schools. The current interpretation of standards-based instruction and
accountability has skewed the work of educational systems in the United States to create an assessment-driven curriculum and environment. ELs, and all children, need to believe they are safe, respected, and in an environment of care.

Overall, the current research reveals themes to support the assertion that professional development on ELs is important, not only for the classroom teachers of the English Language learner students but also for the principals as school leaders themselves. The data speak in terms of change, for good EL PD to shift the focus from “administrivia” portions of principals’ jobs to the caring, community-oriented, relational aspects of instructional leadership. Effective principals work with people, build community and conduct true instructional leadership that involves, educates, and engages people and community.

Limitations of the Study

There were multiple limitations associated with the current study. This section will expand on four of these limitations. First, the results of this study may have been limited because of reliance on one form of data, interviews with principals. The DREAMS project had a larger and more varied collection of data; however, I only had access to the principals’ interviews. Additional sources of data would have allowed for triangulation of the findings and would have allowed me to make stronger claims about the impact attending EL-focused PD had on school-based communities of learning. For example, if I had had access to additional staff meetings or school-based PD implemented by the principals, the data could have spoken to whether or not principals applied what they learned through Project DREAMS. In addition, if interviews had been conducted with staff and EL students post-Project DREAMS PD, I could
have investigated whether or not changes in principals’ perceptions were noticeably effective in creating a caring community for ELs.

Further, I acknowledge that all principals’ perceptions in Project DREAMS might be disproportionately skewed due to their limited PD on ELs before training. This study was intentionally conducted with principals who had limited or no access to PD focused on ELs in order to investigate perceptions of that particular population. However, it is possible that different themes would emerge from principals who had a strong background in EL-focused PD. For example, principals who had participated in multiple EL PD experiences may have found ways to address the challenges reported in this study. As a result, the interviews could have focused more on methods for addressing challenges rather than the identification of challenges. As well, principals with more EL PD experiences may state very different challenges than those with limited experience.

Another possible limitation was the participants were all monolingual, which could influence their interpretation of PD experiences through the lens of one language. The selection of this sample was intentional, as monolinguals may perceive unique challenges as compared to those who speak multiple languages. Further, due to a lack of experience with learning English as one of multiple languages, monolinguals may require additional supports in implementing EL-focused PD and building a caring community for ELs. However, focusing on this group of principals may have had adverse consequences. For example, it is possible that participants were biased or not comfortable adapting to linguistic and cultural situations. This bias could act as a lens through which decisions about how to foster ELs’ sense of community were made,
impacting the efficacy of practices. As such, the data could benefit from including principals who were bi- or multi-lingual to better represent the perceptions of a variety of participants.

A final limitation was that no fidelity follow-up with teachers or classroom observations to determine if applications of learning were implemented in the participating principals’ school sites. The current data only speaks to the perceived challenges of implementing EL-focused PD and creating a caring community for ELs. There is no discussion of whether or not these challenges were attempted to be addressed and to what degree any attempts were successful. It would have been powerful, for example, to collect data that suggested principals’ perceived challenges were met and successfully addressed. Future interviews with participants as well as outcome measures from staff and students could have provided a richer data set that would allow for stronger conclusions about challenges of implementing PD.

Implications

Educational leadership and professional development can and should include our EL students and staff alike. ELs can benefit from principals who are able to participate in professional development with content explicitly and intentionally on ELs. Implications from this study are as follows:

1. Allow for more opportunities for principals to participate in EL-focused professional development in their leadership. Data indicated that principals did not have time or financial resources for professional development, in particular, PD targeted at EL-student instruction or instructional leadership.

2. Make that professional development suited to the principals’ developmental and contextual needs. Data indicated that principals did not attend PD that was consistently
meaningful for their particular school and/or context. There was a disconnect between PD and practice, with an acknowledgement that finding PD that was neither too specific nor too general was a real challenge.

3. Allow for more opportunities for principals to create structures cultivating community for staff, including staff who work directly with English Learners. Data indicated that principals did not always have structural support for community-building emphases in their schools, but social-emotional emphases were being newly implemented.

4. Allow for more opportunities for principals and staff to create structures cultivating community for students, including English Learner students. Data indicated that principals found it challenging to cultivate community among students, staff, and families because of other urgent and important initiatives.

5. Allow school budgets to reflect monies designated for English Learner students. Data indicated that principals who were not at Title III or Title I schools did not know where or how to budget EL support structures.

6. Allow time for PD and community building for English Learner students and staff. Data indicated that principals did not feel there was time allowed for community-building structures within the school day due to multiple variables and reasons.

These recommendations to allow more PD suited to their personal and school needs, allow more opportunities for principals to create community among their constituents-- allow school budgets to reflect designated funding for EL students, and allow time for PD among the EL students and staff-- would make principals better able to be stronger instructional leaders of their schools. These principals are addressing challenges and transforming these perceived
challenges to opportunities. They are identifying ways to professionally develop and strengthen their schools. These principals expressed attention and concern regarding themes of an increase in EL population: principal job responsibilities; the value of professional development; community building among staff, community and families; community building among students; and budget challenges. Effective PD can address these challenges and empower principals and school leaders to serve and lead their students, families, and staff effectively, proactively, and in the best interests of ELs and all students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current qualitative study was a first step in understanding the complexities involved with creating a community of learning and caring for ELs in our schools. Although this study provided insight into aspects of these complexities, future research should be conducted to further investigate this phenomenon. First, research should investigate what aspects of EL-focused PD have the most impact on EL success. This study suggests a number of challenges that could be targeted to facilitate EL success; however, there was no measure of efficacy included. More information is needed as to how principals fit into the community approach to schools, what training they would need and how they could transform school environments into caring supportive environments. More investigations into what aspects of community best support learning for ELs and all students need to be explored.

Further, the changing role of the principal from manager to participant/collaborator is an idea that needs investigation. Multiple participants in the current study referred to the challenge of shifting paradigms, but there was no measure of shift from manager (with many duties) to participant/collaborator in a larger community of educators and scholars who keep the needs of
ELs in the forefront. It would seem that a shift from manager to collaborator would be a necessary, but insufficient, element to enacting change in a school environment. In other words, a change in the understanding of the role principals play in the academic and social success of ELs is needed, but that change in perspective must also be accompanied by actions.

Finally, the results from the current study have implications for what might be addressed to facilitate principals’ focus on the EL community in their schools. A natural next step would be investigating how to accomplish this goal. For example, it would be valuable to investigate whether there are commonalities in approaches that can be taken by principals to enrich academic, social, and emotional aspects of ELs’ schooling. Although each school represents a unique space— a unique community of learners with unique needs and challenges— it is quite possible that there are common elements of EL communities that could be targeted by principals. In addition, longitudinal research is needed to investigate the type of long-term support principals need to facilitate a caring community for ELs.

Conclusion

The need to build community to support ELs is not a new idea. Fullan (2001) insisted that “changes in actual practice along three dimensions—in materials, teaching approaches, and beliefs, in what people do and think— are essential if the intended outcome is to be achieved” (p. 46). Cummins (2001) argued that all teachers and administrators in schools must:

- Change their view of the languages and cultures of ELL, integrating students’ language and culture into curriculum and instruction
- Focus on critical-thinking skills in which students learn to question the world around them and work to make a difference in their communities and
• Build relationships with parents of ELL students.

If real educational change is to occur, educators must form communities in which they have deep, sustained, and challenging conversations about teaching and learning (DuFour & Eaker, 2009; Fullan, 2001; Hord, 2009; Schmoker, 2006). We have known for a long time that community matters for ELs, that educators need to expand their worldview of how to work with ELs and that relationships are vital to academic success. The time is now, not twenty years from now. Professional development, similar to Project DREAMS, must be implemented across schools, districts, and states if we are to truly provide equity in our schools for all children. Although PD like that provided in Project DREAMS is a start, we also need to provide ongoing opportunities and support for principals to truly provide a learning community committed to the needs of ELs. EL-focused PD shows promise in making participants aware of the needs of ELs and for “fanning the flames” to keep principals motivated to keep ELs at the forefront of their efforts to provide equity. However, the principals noted many challenges associated with accomplishing this goal. These perceived challenges emphasize the complex nature of such endeavors but also suggest that it is imperative to provide continued and varied support over time for principals and teachers alike.

The need for continual, ongoing adaptations to PD is evident from the changing needs of our students and teachers. With the rise of EL populations in the schools, the needs of teachers and students are changing dramatically. Simultaneously, principals are expected to make the shift from managers and logistics leaders to instructional leaders. Such a shift requires their leadership and learning needs to be adapted to fit current school and staffing structures and philosophies. This paper addressed some of the particularities and implications of an increasing EL student
population and the ways that principals and teachers are both equipped and ill-equipped to serve EL students. PD is an opportunity to bridge a gap between teacher or principal certification programs and the needs of the EL populations. This is a promising challenge, but also one with extraordinary, inordinate pressures because of the lack of training on ELs during teacher and principal certification programs. With the aforementioned recommendations, we see a great deal of potential and possibility for PD to be better suited to the needs of an ever-changing, dynamic student body represented in K-12 public schools.
REFERENCES


Schmoker, M. (2006). Results now: How we can achieve unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning. ASCD.


APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
1. What was the most outstanding aspect of the Academy?
2. Was there any one particular concept or fact that really surprised you?
3. Before the Academy, what would you have said was your understanding of bilingual education? Was it a positive one, a negative one?
4. Do you have any connection with bilingual education and your own family?
5. What information did you take away from the Academy that particularly impacted your approach to English Language Learners?
6. What was the big idea that stimulated your action plan from the Academy? -- then talk to me about the action plan itself.
7. Do you have a timeline, when you hope to have all this accomplished?
8. Your ultimate goal then, is what?
9. Who all is critical to the success of the goals you have set?
10. What about the larger organization? The school board? Parents?
11. Have you had any contact with any members since the Academy?
12. Were there any topics that you yourself would have liked a more in-depth discussion about?
13. Have your ideas about ELs stayed the same, or changed, and how?
14. Have your ideas about EL education stayed the same, or changed, and how?
15. What are your professional or personal influences to your thinking about ELs?
16. How are the ELs doing at your school?
17. What does a typical day look like for an EL?
18. Do you or other staff in the district receive any PD on ELs?
19. Who is involved with the PD on ELs?
20. Do you have any goals for your ELs?

21. What would be the timeline for the goals?

22. Who would be involved?

23. Are there any topics that you would benefit from in PD for these goals or otherwise?

24. Is there anything else you want to add that I haven’t touched on?