Exploring new roles of classroom teachers in Iowa communities experiencing rapid ethnic diversification

Cindy R. Lewis
University of Northern Iowa

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EXPLORING NEW ROLES OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS IN IOWA COMMUNITIES EXPERIENCING RAPID ETHNIC DIVERSIFICATION

A Dissertation

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Of Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Victoria Robinson, Committee Chair

Dr. Radhi Al-Mabuk, Committee Member

Dr. Deborah Gallagher, Committee Member

Dr. Mark Grey, Committee Member

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University of Northern Iowa

May 2012
EXPLORING NEW ROLES OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS IN IOWA
COMMUNITIES EXPERIENCING RAPID ETHNIC DIVERSIFICATION

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

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Of Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Victoria Robinson, Committee Chair

Dr. Michael J. Licari
Dean of the Graduate College

Cindy R. Lewis

University of Northern Iowa

May 2012
ABSTRACT

Non-English speakers are currently the fastest growing population group in Iowa schools. Immigrant and refugee families are choosing in record numbers to make Iowa their home. Across the state, newcomers are added daily to classroom rosters, and teachers are challenged to meet the unique social, emotional, and educational needs of students.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how selected teachers in classrooms across Iowa have responded personally and professionally to an evolving socio-political climate. The study examined how professional roles have been redefined and how teachers have responded to the changes. Three research questions guided this qualitative study. (1) How do teachers respond to the demands of meeting the instructional needs of English language learners? (2) How does the current political climate and teachers' understanding of immigration issues affect their interactions with students? (3) How do teachers' personal immigration stories, family history, faith and traditions influence how they define and enact their own identities as related their professional work? Data was collected through semi-structured teacher interviews and classroom observations across eight school districts ranging in size and demographics. Interactions between teachers and their linguistically and culturally diverse students were observed and analyzed. Narratives were co-constructed to convey meaning through story telling.

Themes emerged through the process of reflection and analysis. Teachers reported lack of knowledge and skills to meet demands in classrooms that have
become increasingly diverse. They cited inadequate preparation from both pre-service teacher education programs and district-provided professional development. Teacher preparation was lacking in the areas of language acquisition, cultural competencies, and instructional strategies for effective teaching of English learners. Teachers reported that their practice was generally not influenced by the current political climate, and that both faith and personal history were significant motivations for meeting the needs of English learners. Implications can be drawn for universities, school districts, and legislators.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The printed pages of this dissertation reflect relationships with many generous and inspiring people that I have had the privilege of working with during my graduate program. I am especially grateful for the support of my committee members. Dr. Victoria Robinson, Dr. Radhi Al-Mabuk, Dr. Deborah Gallagher, Dr. Mark Grey, and Dr. Dewitt Jones graciously offered their time, insight, and expertise.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Victoria Robinson for serving as my academic advisor and committee chair. Throughout my graduate career, she has provided her wise counsel and support. Her positive attitude and encouragement kept me moving forward when the project seemed overwhelming and lonely. It was with Dr. Robinson’s help and influence that I was able to assemble such a stellar group of professionals to serve on my committee.

To each of my committee members, I say, “Thank you!” Dr. Radhi Al-Mabuk guided me toward a closer examination of the motivations of teachers. I am grateful to have worked with Deborah Gallagher, as she has challenged me both as a scholar and as a qualitative researcher. I appreciate Dr. Mark Grey’s leadership in the field of immigration and refugee studies. His probes and suggestions for my research have helped me to sharpen my focus. Lastly, I am grateful to Dr. Dewitt Jones who provided invaluable support and enthusiasm for my work.

I am indebted to my husband and life partner, Robert. It was with his unconditional love, support...and good cooking that I was able to continue on in my research. Robert
steadfastly insisted that I should persevere in this important work, and I consider that the culmination of this project is ours to appreciate and celebrate together.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As I moved around the classroom, attending to the instructional needs of 23 other third graders, a persistent Kevin patiently followed behind me. With his Math-practice paper in his hand, Kevin would smile and pull on my sleeve, waiting for my attention to turn to him and to his questions. It wasn’t that I didn’t want to help Kevin. He demanded and deserved an opportunity to learn, but I just did not have time to give him the individual help that he needed for each task.

Kevin’s colorful nametag marked his spot at a table in my third-grade classroom on the first day of school. A recent immigrant from China, he did not speak a word of English on that first school day. He quietly cried in his seat. The English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers gave Kevin picture cards to hold up to request permission for drinks and bathroom. He followed along with the classroom procedures in those first days and weeks, moving himself through the motions and directing his eyes appropriately to the task, but he was disconnected from the group. He was lost and alone.

Once Kevin figured out the pattern for a Math assignment, he would complete the task independently. It was easy to see that Kevin was a bright boy, but the language barrier between us prevented me from challenging him with more rigorous tasks requiring the application of knowledge in higher-order thinking tasks. For one hour each day, Kevin left my classroom to work with an ESL teacher, but the majority of the day was spent in my classroom where he was bored and disconnected from me and from his peers. Kevin’s inability to speak or understand English made every task difficult and
isolated him from the work and from the fun. I knew that it was my job to make the classroom environment welcoming; I did that for all kids. What I didn’t know was how to meet Kevin’s unique learning needs while teaching everyone else, as well. While I was acutely aware of the missed opportunity to provide quality instruction, I felt limited by my lack of resources and expertise. I comforted myself with the belief that the bulk of the responsibility for Kevin’s language learning and academic progress belonged to the ESL teacher. Kevin and I simply survived the year together.

A scenario much like this one plays out in classrooms across the country, in Iowa, and in our local communities. Within a traditional school setting, English Language Learners (ELL) like Kevin typically spend the majority of the instructional day in a general education classroom with a teacher who lacks the pedagogical skills and knowledge to meet the needs of non-English speaking students. To be successful in teaching diverse populations, teachers need to be prepared in the core competencies of (1) socio-cultural and political foundations, (2) foundations of second-language acquisition, (3) content knowledge and effective instructional practices for teaching, and (4) assessment practices and accommodations for language learners (McGraner & Saenz, 2009). Adequate resources and professional development are essential if mainstream general education teachers are to differentiate instruction and assessment with success (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). Teachers need opportunity to observe the practice of other successful teachers, plan and collaborate with their colleagues, and establish coaching relationships. The “one-shot” workshops do not change practice. A
peer collaboration model, as well as an administrator who will support it, is central to
effective professional development (Gandara et al., 2005).

Andy Hargreaves of Boston College, a leader in the study of geographies and
emotional politics of teaching and leading, asserts that there is more to teacher education
than just knowledge and skill development. He states:

The reason that knowledge about how to improve teaching is often not well
utilized by teachers is not just that it is bad knowledge (though sometimes it is), or
even badly communicated and disseminated knowledge. Rather, it does not
acknowledge or address the personal identities and moral purposes of teachers,
nor the cultures and contexts in which they work. The false certainties of much
knowledge and skill development are too inflexible for the practical complexities
of the postmodern age. They reside in the preoccupations and obsessions of
modern times with eliminating ambiguity, suppressing spontaneity, taming chaos,

Workshops and professional development programs as stand alone solutions are at risk
of being ineffective unless plans evolve from authentic connections among teachers,
administrators and legislators. Listening to teachers will lead to a better understanding of
the complexities of the contemporary classroom. Dialogue that focuses on both the
instructional goals and the obstacles that make reaching them a challenge is an essential
first step in creating a better educational experience for students and teachers.

There are many stories to tell in these times of rapidly changing student
demographics. Across the state, newcomers are added to classroom rosters daily, and
teachers are seldom given more than a day’s notice to prepare to meet the unique social,
emotional, and educational needs of the new students who walk through the classroom
door. Instabilities of the current socio-political climate within both global and local
communities are directly related to the complexities that teachers face in their classrooms.

Certainly one of the changing characteristics of the classroom is its rapid ethnic diversification. The fastest growing population group in Iowa’s schools is students who are non-English speakers (Grey, 2006). For many decades, immigrants and refugees have been able to count on Iowans to welcome newcomers, and in record numbers new residents choose to make Iowa their home. While many Iowans embrace new foreign-born families with open arms, this is not always the case. Drastic changes in a community’s climate and culture and the strain that under-resourced newcomers put on jobs, services, and schools have lately made “rolling out the welcome mat” a less enthusiastic gesture.

**Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative study and dissertation was designed to examine how Iowa’s classroom teachers have responded personally and professionally to an evolving socio-political climate. I set out to learn if and how professional roles have been redefined in classrooms of increasingly diverse multi-ethnic student populations. Through analysis of teacher interviews, stories and reflections, and field notes of observations, I worked to make meaning of these issues affecting education. The audience targeted for this research was teachers, principals, district administrators, universities and state legislators.
The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. How do teachers respond to the demands of meeting the instructional needs of English language learners?

2. How do the current political climate and a teacher's understanding of immigration issues affect the interactions between teachers and students?

3. How do teacher's personal immigration stories, family history, faith and traditions influence how they define and enact their own identities in their professional work?

**Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for analysis of teachers' response within a context of change is broadly social constructionist (Denzin, 1984). Here human feelings, actions, and motivations are viewed as integral to the process of understanding the changing roles within the organizational, social, and cultural contexts in which they occur. The dialogue between teacher and interviewer within the context of race, social class, community and globalization, give insight to better understand the school experiences of students and teachers.

My research sits well on the foundation of philosophical assumptions associated with qualitative research. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as:
...multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

Using an interpretive naturalistic approach, the researcher uses inquiry practices to gain new understandings. The researcher within the field of the social sciences does not search for objectivity. Rather, through an interpretivist’s view, the researcher explores meaningful perspectives and recognizes multiple versions of reality (Putnam, 1981). Human affairs are complex, yet through the methods-driven science of educational research we can gain new meaning.

A qualitative researcher will seek to develop a clearer understanding of history and the context of relationships to position the subject within the larger framework of society and culture. Creswell (1994) defines qualitative research “as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Schwandt (2007) suggests that qualitative researchers should think in terms of metaphors which suggest interface, ecology and relations. He explains:

These metaphors portray the subject matter in terms of issues, relationships transactions, and interactions. Issues are unsettled matters about which reasonable people disagree. Relationships may be harmonious or discordant. Interactions may be characterized as agreements, differences, disagreements, oppositions, points of contentions, conflicts, and contradictions. Such metaphors suggest that the subject matter of qualitative inquiry is like a dynamic field in which ideas about subjectivity, objectivity, social reality, meaning, understanding, knowing, justification, evidence, and so on are always in play. Accordingly, to teach and to learn qualitative inquiry is to engage this dynamic conversation and to learn how to participate in it with clarity, alacrity, and perspicacity (pp. xxx - xxxi).
The idea of "engaging the dynamic conversation" (Schwandt, 2007) is especially relevant in the context of my inquiry. Living life in various roles within various communities both within and outside of school (family, social clubs, church, neighborhood, etc.), a teacher experiences the intersection of conflicting values and ongoing debate. These antecedent factors bring background to the events that unfold within a classroom. They bring meaning to the exchange between teacher and student. What does it mean for the teacher whose friends think racial jokes are funny? How does a teacher process her husband's ardent anti-immigration sentiments? How will these and other interactions influence her thoughts, words, actions, and motivations in her interactions with students of differing race and ethnicity? According to Eisner (1991), "Qualitative researchers are interested in matters of motive and in the quality of experience undergone by those in the situation studied" (p. 35). He would suggest that such questions are relevant in qualitative research. A good qualitative study can help us to "understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner, 1991). In qualitative research, the researcher is an active participant of the research. Observation is not "theory-free," and truth does not exist beyond and outside of us. In our humanity, we are unable to observe with a "God's eye point of view" (Putnam, 1981) or view a world without us in it. Therefore, our experiences and observations are steeped in value-laden interpretations. Things do not exist apart from the meaning we bring to them; all observation is inevitably prepossessed by the observer's personal dispositions. Gallagher tells us that to observe is to interpret (2006). By functioning as a part of reality, it impossible to step outside to become an observer. Rorty (1989) states that truth
can be no more or less than what can be framed in language. "Truth ... cannot exist independently of the human mind. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own---unaided by the describing activities of human beings---cannot" (p. 5).

Through an interpretivist approach to inquiry, I can begin to understand the experiences of a teacher's interactions in a changing environment and engage in an ongoing process of constructing and reshaping meaning (Smith, 1993). Interpreting perceptual data requires that I project the observed action of another human into my imagined future outcome. Or, I might observe the individual and make meaning by putting myself into the place of the observed by recognizing a shared experience. In either action, I will become a part of the interpretation of the observation. Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe the inability to genuinely experience another without recognizing "Thou" as the "other I." All observed experiences are viewed and recorded through the context of my own experiences. Glesne (2006) agrees that the process of inquiry and the role of the researcher are connected and cannot be estranged from one another.

Viewing inquiry from a hermeneutical perspective requires consideration of the context and interconnectedness of the participant and the researcher, as well as the cyclical character of the analysis. There is not a starting point or a final closure, and the researcher must be reflective and responsive as the research ensues. Smith (1993) further clarifies, "the circle of interpretation can be broadened and deepened, but it is a circle from which escape is not possible" (p. 199). Kincheloe and Mc Laren (2007) state that
philosophical hermeneutics seeks for meaning. They acknowledge: "The quest for understanding is a fundamental feature of human existence, as encounter with the unfamiliar always demands the attempt to make meaning, to make sense. Hermeneutics contends that perception itself is an act of interpretation" (p. 24).

**Historical and Political Perspectives**

**Context for English Language Learners**

The American founders recognized the importance of a common language for building community, and while they were reluctant to legislate English as the official language, the government generally operated as if it were. By the time the Constitution was drafted and ratified, the United States of America was inhabited by a diverse population who spoke English, German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Greek, Yiddish, Arabic, as well as hundreds of American Indian languages and African-based creoles. In the *Federalist Papers*, John Jay characterized the nation as "one united people--a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion...very similar in their manners and customs" (Crawford, 1992, p. 32); however, in all practicality, the diversity of languages and cultures defined a new nation on a long journey to understand the complexities of how to be both different and unified.

In the early 1900s, the language issues were again pushed to the forefront of debate. Parochial institutions and churches, which established bilingual education programs in German, French, and Scandinavian languages, taught academic content in the preferred language, and English was taught as a subject. The German-American
Alliance, with a membership of over two million new Americans, initiated a campaign to preserve German language and literature (Johnson, 1999). However, in 1917 when the United States (U.S.) entered the conflict of World War I, U.S. citizens began to exhibit hostility toward German-Americans and their traditions and culture (Kloss, 1977). Nebraska and several other states, in gestures of patriotism, banned the teaching of foreign languages in private schools and homes. In 1923, the Supreme Court struck down these restrictions banning the teaching of foreign language in parochial schools. In Myers v. Nebraska, the court ruled that the Nebraska law violated the Due Process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

In May of 1918, Iowa's 22nd governor, William Lloyd Harding drafted into law the infamous Babel Proclamation (Derr, 1979). Under the guise of patriotism, the governor's law made it illegal for Iowans to speak any language other than English in public meetings, on the street, over the telephone, or in schools and religious services. Harding's immediate goal was the systematic eradication of German language and culture, but he became the laughing stock of the nation when five Scott County farm wives were arrested for speaking German during a party line telephone conversation. Acts of anti-German sentiment resulted in hysteria and panic, as citizens who continued to display pride in their German cultural roots faced rebuke and arrest. Governor Harding repealed the Babel Proclamation in December of that same year, but in seven short months, the law damaged the unity and pride of the German-American community in Iowa.
In 1974, the San Francisco School System was held responsible for delivery of comprehensible instruction to non-English speaking children. A class action lawsuit, representing more than 1,800 Chinese-speaking students who failed in academic subjects taught in English, made its way to the Supreme Court. The court ruled in Lau v. Nichols that the San Francisco Unified School District was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The school district was given the choice of either offering English language instruction to children of Chinese ancestry, or to deliver content area instruction in the student’s native language. Justice Douglas, while clearly mandating the opportunity for all students to learn, was non-specific on how a school’s bi-lingual policy was to be carried out. He stated, “Teaching English to the students of Chinese ancestry who do not speak the language is one choice. Giving instructions to this group in Chinese is another. There may be others. Petitioners ask only that the Board of Education be directed to apply its expertise to the problem and rectify the situation” (Zirkel, Richardson, & Goldberg, 2001). This opinion made way for continuing debate around bi-lingual education versus the language emersion model.

In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court made a historical and groundbreaking interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. In Plyler v. Doe, the Supreme Court held by a five to four vote that the Equal Protection Clause forbade the State of Texas to lawfully “deny to undocumented school-age children the free public education that it provides to children who are citizens of the United States” (Zirkel et al., 2001). The ruling stated that it is the constitutional
right of all children to have access to free public education, "whether citizens or strangers" (p. 76). This decision granted access to thousands of immigrant children.

Plyler v Doe's provisions end at graduation, and post-high school opportunities are still very limited for an estimated 3.4 million undocumented young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 (Perez, 2009). College is too expensive for students who are denied access to in-state tuition and who are ineligible for state and federal college aid programs. For the fortunate few who do graduate from college, their employability opportunities remain uncertain under current immigration law.

Increased media attention has led a few states to draft policy to provide undocumented high-school graduates access to college. In spite of a 1996 Congressional restriction on state's provision of higher education benefits to unauthorized immigrants, (Zota, 2009), ten states have passed laws offering in-state tuition rates to unauthorized immigrants. Some of these have faced court challenges. New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas have drafted laws to offer state financial aid for undocumented students.

The Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act was drafted at the federal level to provide opportunity for undocumented students to attend college. The bill was introduced to Congress in 2001 and was placed on the legislative calendar, but to date it has not received enough votes to pass the Senate. Under the DREAM Act, undocumented immigrant students would receive six-years of conditional legal status if they meet the following criteria: (1) entry into the United States before the age of 16, (2) continuous presence in the United States for five years prior to the bill's enactment, (3) receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent, and (4) demonstrated
good moral character. If during the six-year period they graduate from a two-year
college, complete at least two years of a four-year degree, or serve at least two years in
the United States military, the beneficiary would be able to adjust from conditional to
permanent legal resident status (Perez, 2009, p. xxviii).

Proponents of the DREAM Act argue that enabling unauthorized immigrants who
graduate from high school to continue their education is both fair and in the best interest
of society. The fiscal investment would easily pay for itself by resulting in increased
earnings, taxpayer revenue, and social service savings. Opponents object to taxpayer
dollars being used to fund the education of students who are undocumented or who are
children of law-breaking undocumented immigrants. There is much controversy around
these proposals, and the debate rages on.

Immigration in Iowa

Iowa has a rapidly growing immigrant population. Dr. Mark Grey, anthropologist
and Director of the Iowa Center for Immigration and Leadership, reports that in the years
from 1990 to 2005, two-thirds of Iowa’s population growth was fueled by immigration
(Grey, Devlin, & Goldsmith, 2009, p. 5). Iowa’s Latino population grew by 235 percent,
the fastest growing minority population (Grey, 2006, p. 5). The Spanish-speaking student
population in Iowa’s schools has held its spot over time as the largest group, representing
more than 15,000 of the English language learners in the state in 2009-10 (Iowa
Department of Education, 2010). Without a doubt, English language learners make up the
fastest growing population in Iowa’s classrooms. Table 1 – “Iowa’s Public School K-12
Weighted English Language Learners by Enrollment Size 1997-1998, 2008-2009, and
2009-2010" demonstrates the growing percentage of weighted ELL enrollment as compared to certified enrollment (p. 53). In the spring of 2011, Iowa’s schools will give I-ELDA language proficiency test to nearly 25,000 ELLs (T. Green, personal communication, March 4, 2011).

Iowa’s refugee population has increased, as well. Grey (2006) notes that Iowa is now home to people from disparate places such as the Congo, Somalia, Iran, Vietnam, Laos, Honduras, Guatemala, Bosnia, India, the former Soviet Union, Iraq, Burma, and the Central Pacific. Des Moines is home to the nation’s second largest settlement of Sudanese refugees in the U.S., second to Omaha, Nebraska (Grey et al., 2009). In 1997-98, 11 non-English languages were represented in Iowa schools. In 2008-09, the number of languages grew to 17, and just one year later to 23 (Iowa Department of Education, 2010). Table 2, “Iowa’s Public and Nonpublic K-12 English Language Learners’ Primary Language 1997-1998, 2008-2009, and 2009-10” demonstrates this rapidly growing diversity in Iowa’s classrooms (p. 56). Note that the weighted ELL counts are not the same as the total ELL counts on the language table.
Table 1

Iowa's Public School K-12 Weighted English Language Learners by Enrollment Size 1997-1998, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010

|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|

Source: Iowa Department of Education, Division of School Support and Information, Certified Enrollment files.
Table 2

Iowa’s Public and Nonpublic K-12 English Language Learners’ Primary Language

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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serbici; Srpski</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>1,532</td>
<td>1,397</td>
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<tr>
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<td>20,774</td>
<td>21,278</td>
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Note: Table reflects only those languages identified by 50 or more students in a given year.
Iowa has experienced rapid demographic change, and the state can no longer be accurately described as the “heartland” represented by stereotypical images of the small family farmer descended from Europeans (Grey et al., 2009). “Since 1990, many of Iowa’s communities have experienced ‘rapid ethnic diversification,’ transitioning from populations that are predominantly or exclusively white and English-speaking to those that are multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual, all in the course of a few short years” (p. 2). This change to Iowa’s demographic has gone largely unnoticed.

Many of Iowa’s newcomers are drawn by jobs in meatpacking, construction, and hospitality. Meatpacking is a job only for those who are willing to endure heavy labor, long hours, low pay, difficult conditions, and no benefits. The work attracts immigrants, as it does not require that they have an advanced education, proficient English skills, or specialized training (Grey et al., 2009). Turnover is high as the work is often times distasteful and unsafe. Immigrant families remain transient for a time in search for a better life for themselves and for their families.

Undocumented Immigrants

The public debate regarding the legal rights of undocumented students to have access to a public education has uncovered deep divisions on our national landscape. Unauthorized immigrants make up nearly 4% of the nation’s population. Children of undocumented immigrants, both those who are unauthorized and those who are legal citizens, make up 6.8% of students enrolled in our nation’s schools, up from 5.4% in 2003 (Passel & Cohn, 2009).
Of the 11.9 million undocumented immigrants estimated to be in the U.S., Iowa is estimated to be home to 55,000 such individuals (Passel & Cohn, 2009). While children of undocumented immigrants born in the United States are U.S. citizens, their day-to-day experiences are reflective of the challenges faced by their parents. Cultural differences cause isolation and social divisions. Newcomers often times speak little or no English, and their cultures, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors tend to accentuate the differences from those of established residents of the new communities (Grey, 2006).

Nearly half of unauthorized-immigrant households are couples with children, a relatively younger population group (Passel & Cohn, 2009, p. 14), and many of these are poor. Children of immigrants make up 22% of the total number of children living in poverty (Jensen, 2009, p. 12). Correlations between social economic status of students and their cognitive and language development are significant (Gotfried, Gotfried, Bathurst, Guerin, & Parramore, 2003), and the discrepancies in opportunities afforded by working class and poor children begin early. Findings of the well-known six-year study by Hart and Risley (1995) indicate that a preschoooler’s acquisition of vocabulary, a pre-determiner of school success, is directly correlated to family income levels. Typically, high poverty high-minority schools receive less state and local money than do schools in more prosperous neighborhoods, and the children in these schools are likely to be taught by teachers who are less skilled (Jensen, 2009).

Undocumented immigrants are often poorly educated. While 8% of US-born citizens have less than a high school education, among the group of undocumented immigrants ages 25-64, nearly half do not have a diploma (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Of
those who have graduated high school, half have attended some college compared to 71% of US citizens in the same group (Passel & Cohn, 2009, p.12). Undocumented adults are more likely to hold low-skilled jobs. The 2007 median household income of unauthorized immigrants was $36,000 per year, well below the national average of $50,000 median income for U.S.-born residents. Only 35% of undocumented immigrants are homeowners (p. 20). Students in these families are more transient than their U.S. born peers, changing schools many times during their educational career. Without documentation, an unauthorized citizen cannot obtain a drivers license, and typically, the family does not own a car. Access to community services and adequate health care may be limited. Nearly half of all children who are undocumented citizens have health insurance, and only 75% of those who were born in the US are insured (p. 18).

The experience of undocumented families is a difficult one (Grey, 2006). Students and families may live in fear that they, or a family member may be arrested and deported back to their country of origin. Unauthorized workers run a greater risk of job exploitation. Under-aged youth may be asked to work long hours performing unsafe jobs lawfully prohibited to young workers, and women are especially vulnerable to exploitation and sexual harassment. These labor practices and injustices go unchecked when the victim has no legal recourse, for fear of arrest and deportation.

Perceptions of Race and Ethnicity

While the concept of race is socially constructed and has no real biological or scientific basis, the perceptions of human differences may be “real” to a teacher. As a result, learning opportunity may be limited to students of diverse cultural backgrounds.
Educational outcomes are pre-determined by the race of the students when teacher-bias plays a role (Ferguson, 2003). Racism, while less overt and virulent than in decades past, is still in play, and the more subtle interactions with children may be even more harmful than the previous more blatant forms of racism from the past (Cole, 2008). When teacher’s expectations, perceptions, and behaviors interact with the beliefs, behaviors and work habits of students, an achievement gap results (Tatum, 2005, p. 33), and student potential is tragically limited. Examples of more subtle forms of racism may include disallowing poor and minority children to take books and materials home fearing they will not be returned, imposing harsher discipline practices for minority students than for their white peers, and/or lowering academic expectations for low-income and minority students.

Teachers must become self-aware of their thoughts about and interactions with students. They must recognize that their perceptions are filtered through the lens of their own culture and values, and they must be vigilant to keep this “culture clash” (Cole, 2008) in check and be willing to change damaging practice. Legions of teachers may be unaware of the destruction their subtle acts of racism are doing to the fragile psyches of poor and minority students.

Our experiences are deeply ingrained in us and influence our perceptions of ourselves and of those around us. A Nobel laureate, archbishop emeritus, and native black South African, Desmond TuTu, was a key player in his country’s transition from Apartheid to democracy. He is celebrated as an international champion for the cause of racial equality. In a recent interview, Archbishop TuTu makes transparent how personal
experiences form the pulp and grain of our human identities and self-perceptions. His reflections reveal how deeply held are our values regarding race. He shared a poignant self-reflective story of a recent flight to Nigeria:

I think, I mean, that we have very gravely underestimated the damage that apartheid inflicted on all of us. You know, the damage to our psyches, the damage that has made — I mean, it shocked me.

I went to Nigeria when I was working for the World Council of Churches, and I was due to fly to Jos. And so I go to Lagos airport and I get onto the plane and the two pilots in the cockpit are both black. And wheeeee, I just grew inches! You know, it was fantastic because we had been told that blacks can't do this!

And we have a smooth takeoff and then we hit the mother and father of turbulence. I mean, it was quite awful, scary. Do you know, I can't believe it but the first thought that came to my mind was, "Hey, there's no white men in that cockpit. Are those blacks going to be able to make it?" And of course, they obviously made it — here I am. But the thing is, I had not known that I was damaged to the extent of thinking that somehow actually what those white people who had kept drumming into us in South Africa about our being inferior, about our being incapable, it had lodged some way in me. And so whilst we have had this process, which is an important process, we wouldn't be where we are without it. We certainly are needing a great deal more, the most important being a recognition that we are damaged. We are wounded people (Tippett, 2010).

If we can be so deeply misinformed about ourselves, how can we begin to understand and respond to each other with respect and decency? Our values are deeply engrained, and one human cannot completely understand another's attempt to make meaning of life experiences and resulting cultural biases. "When people are uninformed or misinformed about others, they are prone to accept generalizations — statements about a population based on some kind of statistical measure — as facts that apply to every individual" (Grey et al., 2009, p.98). Diversity education and cultural proficiency must be approached with wisdom and sensitivity. We need to guard against quick fixes and overly
simplified explanations of how to move ourselves and others toward a disposition and attitude of cultural proficiency. Participation in a professional development workshop will not make a teacher culturally relevant. "Culturally proficient teachers hold an unshakable belief in the full of humanity of those students described as 'the least of these'" (Dixon & Fasching-Varner, 2009, p. 121).

Teachers live in a real world with real experiences, and all are affected by the emotion projected in the media around the issues of race and ethnicity, immigration, and diversity. Individual perceptions, interactions, and racial assumptions left unchecked may negatively affect a teacher's motivations, curriculum choices, and instructional interactions with students. Coming to understand the social constructions of race will inform interactions with both colleagues and students (Compton-Lilly, 2009). Teachers, in defense of challenges to issues of racism, may profess that they do not see color...they work for the benefit of all kids. Spina and Tai (1998) caution that, "not seeing race is predicated on not seeing White as race and denying Whiteness as a focus of critique and analysis. Ignoring the racial construction of Whiteness reinscribes its centrality and reinforces its privilege and oppressive position as normative" (p. 37). Like Desmond TuTu, we begin to heal and work to make changes in our perceptions only when we recognize that we live within a broader context and that we are wounded people.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Teaching Non-English Speakers

Schools receive non-English speaking students from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Some students enter the U.S. public schools with literacy proficiency in a first language, which prepares them for their English language learning experience. Some arrive as refugees from settings of political unrest, poor economic conditions, and/or a history of violence. Children from migrant families move often and experience dissimilar curriculum and methods from school to school. Their mobility also prevents them from forging relationships and benefiting from informal conversation and practice with English language, which is so important to language learning. The variability of students' academic readiness, their English language proficiency, and cultural background prove to be significant challenges for classroom teachers.

Students typically spend a shortened period of the day in intensive instruction with an ELS teacher, and the majority of their learning is back in the mainstream general education classroom with little or no support. While this type of "pullout" instruction is among the least successful strategies for teaching English learners, it is often the model used with early language learners (Gandara et al., 2005). A survey of more than five thousand California teachers in 2004 highlighted the challenges of mainstreaming ELLs (Gandara et al., 2005). A single teacher typically greets a classroom of students with considerable variances in academic and language skills and is charged to teach with curriculum lacking in design to meet the needs of such a diverse group of students.
Teachers face the challenge of differentiating instruction for a diverse classroom of students with varying language proficiency levels and with different educational backgrounds (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2010).

A significant achievement gap exists between English-speaking students and their ELL classmates. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2007) only 6% of fourth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency in reading compared to 36% of non-ELLs in 2009. Poor and minority children are represented in the low end of an ever-widening achievement gap. In a system where children traditionally are sorted by age and grade level, schools identify performers at different rates and levels of ability. Children are identified and labeled, which often determines who gets access to higher-quality learning experiences. Martin Haberman (1991) suggests that such a system of labeling results in a “pedagogy of poverty,” where the less fortunate can come to expect curriculum and instruction defined by low-level tasks. This type of teaching is characterized by “giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, monitoring non-compliance, marking papers, and giving grades” (p. 291). These low-level tasks, lacking in cognitive challenge, do not encourage children to think critically. If children are to figure out the complexities of the world and their place in it, they need to be challenged with rigorous curriculum and motivating and relevant learning tasks.

Teachers may not intentionally deliver sub-quality instruction. Inadequate resources, improper training, scheduling, and staffing issues may be at the heart of the issue. The wealthiest U.S. public schools spend on average $30,000 per pupil, while the
poorest schools spend a mere $3,000 annually (Meier & Wood, 2004). It is not possible for a teacher alone to make up for such a vast difference in the quality of education when funding disparities are such significant contributors to the achievement gap.

The Iowa Department of Education has made commendable efforts to ease the transition of newcomers and to support language and content area instruction for English language learners. Recognizing that serving diverse learners requires deep understanding, empathy, and cultural sensitivity, the Iowa Department of Education in recent years has provided professional resources for classroom teachers, administrators, college instructors, parents, employers and co-workers. Videos and books offer support for school districts in developing processes for identification, assessment, placement, and progress reporting for English language learners, appropriate teaching techniques, and information to develop systems to maintain compliance with the federal laws. It is a good start in an effort to meet the challenges in schools.

Language Acquisition

Research on English learners indicates that language acquisition occurs in stages (Oritz & Kushner, 1997; Roseberry-McKibbin, 2002) in both academic and non-academic environments (Cummins, 1984). While stages of second-language learning have been identified, predicting the learning for every student is difficult. The stages are incremental (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Student’s learning progresses more quickly in the lower stages of language development, and slow as they approach full proficiency (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2010). Second-language learning is complex and non-linear, and differences may vary across contexts (Spolsky, 1989).
Social language is most easy level of English to acquire. Researcher Jim Cummins (1981) calls this language Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). Students use BICS with peers in the hallways, at lunchtime, in the bus, and on the playground. Cummins research indicates that it generally takes one to three years for immigrants to achieve the same level of social language as their peers. Students can often use the aid of gestures, pictures, or objects when communicating social English when BICS is embedded in the context of language. These supports help students and teachers make language comprehensible.

Context-reduced language is more challenging for students learning English. English language learners need to be taught interpersonal skills, how to give and receive compliments, how to exchanging greetings, as well as the propriety of voice tone and volume in different social scenarios. Giving students opportunity for collaboration and conversation in the classroom supports the language learning of newcomers.

Students may demonstrate such a level of proficiency in social language that they fool their teachers into thinking that they do not need formal language and/or academic support. Often teachers will say, “I hear the student talking all day to his/her peers, but he/she cannot write or read well. What is going on?” A likely explanation is that the child’s excellent social language is masking a lack of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP; Cummins, 1981). Students need CALP for formal academic learning and for reading and writing in the content areas, such as Math, Science, and Social Studies. Cognitive academic language skills are both context-reduced and abstract. Students from families with low social-economics struggle for mastery in this area as
well. Students experience a deficit in matching authentic experiences with rich language experiences. CALP allows a student to use language to compare, contrast, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and infer, necessary skills to be successful in academics in secondary school and beyond.

Students should be encouraged to use their native language to support their learning of English. Academic concepts learned in the home language will help the child learn, as what we learn in one language transfers quite easily to the new (Freeman & Freeman, 1994). Having proficiency in the native language provides great support to a language learner, as learned skills can be transferred to the new language. Conversely, a new literacy skill is very difficult to teach in a new language if the concept has not been taught in the child’s native language. Sometimes a skill or concept is difficult to learn because it does not exist in the native language (Haynes, 2007). For example, a student who speaks a native language where plurals do not exist has a very difficult time learning the grammatical English concept of adding “s” or “es” to the end of a word.

Teacher Education

Providing quality education experiences for English learners in the general educational setting requires that teachers be culturally proficient, knowledgeable in content, and skilled in a variety of instruction strategies to support both content and language learning. The research on teacher preparedness indicates that those who fail to hold bilingual or ELL certification are less equipped to be successful teachers in diverse classrooms than are their peers who are skilled in a variety of curricular and instructional strategies (Alexander, Heaviside, & Farris, 1999; Karabenick & Clemens Noda, 2004;
Reeves, 2006). The body of research gives evidence to the failure of pre-service programs to adequately prepare teacher candidates for the realities of the classroom (Lewis et al., 1999). There has been a minimal response by university teacher education programs to meet the demands of changing demographics in the nation's classrooms. States and universities have been slow to respond to the rally cry to prepare new teachers to meet the challenges that diverse cultures and languages bring to school (Hollins & Guzman, 2005).

Lack of teacher preparation can result in ineffective and/or harmful consequences for students, as well as in unfortunate career decisions for teachers. Darling-Hammond reported that nationally about one third of beginning teachers leave within 5 years, and the proportions are higher for teachers who enter with inadequate preparation (2006). Burnout is high for teachers who begin careers in classrooms with high diversity and high poverty. "In the classrooms that most beginning teachers enter, at least 25% of students live in poverty and many of them lack basic food, shelter, and health care; from 10% to 20% have identified learning differences; 15% speak a language other than English as their primary language (many more in urban settings); and about 40% are members of racial/ethnic minority groups, many of them recent immigrants from countries with different educational systems and cultural traditions" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 300). A frequently cited definition of cultural competence comes from the work of the National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) at Georgetown University Child Development Center (Goode, Dunne, & Bronheim, 2008). "Cultural competency is defined as the capacity to (1) value diversity; (2) conduct self-assessment; (3) manage the
dynamics of difference; (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge; and (5) adapt
to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities served.” A culturally competent
school is “one that honors, respects, and values diversity in theory and in practice and
where teaching and learning are made relevant and meaningful to students of various
cultures” (Klotz, 2006, p. 11).

“Culturally responsive teaching” (Gay, 2000) uses the cultural characteristics,
experiences, and perspectives of diverse students in planning and implementation of
effective instructional strategies. When academic knowledge and skills are situated
within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally
meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly.
Culturally responsive teaching integrates modes of teaching that are congruent with
children's cultural and class-based patterns of living. The focus is on assisting teachers to
become multicultural, which is no small task in classrooms that resemble a gathering at
the United Nations.


Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural
heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect student’s
dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be
taught in the formal curriculum. It serves to build meaningful bridges between
home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived
socio-cultural realities. Teachers may use a wide variety of instructional strategies
that are connected to different learning styles. Students come to know and
appreciate their own and each other’s cultures. Culturally responsive teaching
incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects
and skills routinely taught in schools (p. 29).

By providing culturally competent learning experiences for pre-service teachers,
universities will help them deepen capacity for valuing differences and for providing
effective instruction for all children. Not to do so threatens the success of a new teacher as well as the achievements of her students.

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE; 1994) addressed culturally competent schools in the policy update, *Cultural Competence and Education*. It strongly recommended that policies regarding cultural relevance or competence should be linked with teacher training and in-service professional development programs to prepare teachers to meet a diverse student body. A recent survey of first year teachers from across the country conducted by The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (Rochkind, Ott, Immerwahr, Doble, & Johnson, 2007) asked participants to share their recommendations for the improving the teaching profession. Of the recommendations that emerged, preparation for teachers to teach in diverse classrooms was one of the top two.

As few as 20 states require that teachers receive some type of training to work with ELLs, and the standard of those requirements varies significantly. Only five of the 20, California, Arizona, Florida, New York, and Pennsylvania, require prospective teachers to demonstrate competence and attain a certain number of credits or semester hours in TESOL or instructional techniques appropriate for ELLs. While there are alternate paths to certification, most often requirements are completed in state-approved teacher education programs (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008).

California state law, particularly *EC Section 44253.1*, reads, “For these pupils to have access to quality education, their special needs must be met by teachers who have essential skills and knowledge related to English language development, specially
designed content instruction delivered in English, and content instruction delivered in the pupils’ primary languages” (Suckow, 2012). All teachers and administrators who complete preparation programs in California receive training in aspects of cultural competency. Elementary teachers must complete a comprehensive reading instruction course that includes a systematic study of (1) phonemic awareness, (2) phonics and decoding, (3) literature, language and comprehension, and (4) diagnostic and early intervention techniques.

In Florida, teachers are required to complete at least three semester hours or equivalent of training in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) standards. New teachers meet the requirements via university coursework. For teachers who instruct students in the foundations of reading and literacy, the requirement is an additional 15 semester hours or the equivalent (Florida Bureau of Educator Recruitment and Professional Development, 2001). Teacher preparation programs in New York require pre-service teachers to complete six semester hours in language acquisition and literacy development. The coursework applies to teachers of both native English speakers and ELLs (Ballantyne et al., 2008). Pennsylvania is the newest state to require certification. As of January 2012, individuals seeking a teaching license in Pennsylvania must complete 3 credits or 90 hours of coursework or other preparatory work addressing the instructional needs of ELLs (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006).

Iowa is one of 17 states where teacher certification standards for all teachers contain reference to the special needs of ELLs, however requirements are non-specific and may vary between university programs. Information for meeting the instructional
needs of ELLs is hit or miss. Other states require varying degrees of teacher preparation, as well. Fifteen states were found to have no requirements for teachers to gain additional training or expertise in working with ELLs (Ballantyne et al., 2008).

In addition to training the nation's pre-service teachers, there is a need for a more focused approach in professional development of teachers already in the field. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) has produced widely recognized standards in professional development for teachers in the field (Hirsh, 2009). Based on a model of continuous improvement, the NSDC's definition for professional development is "a comprehensive sustained and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement" (2009, p. 11). The organization’s standards support long-term job-embedded learning for teachers. This represents a departure from decontextualized workshops led by external experts. Meaningful learning in the field involves a focus on research and critical analysis of local data. Practitioner’s participation in meaningful collaboration with peers demonstrates a higher commitment to the goals, mission, and vision of the school (Hord & Sommers, 2008).

California required that by 2008, all veteran teachers who provide instruction to ELLs be appropriately certified. Teachers are required to attain Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) certification through coursework or by passing the California Teachers of English Learners (CTEL) Examination. The state holds the school district responsible for determining how ELL services will be provided and for appropriate assignment of staff to meet the needs of their students. The employer determines program design, placement of students, and teacher hiring and retention
practices, and teacher incentives and sanctions are at the discretion of the district (Suckow, 2012).

Learning happens in community, and educators are adopting systems and collaborative models based on proven successes in the fields of business and industry. David Perkins (2003) describes the work done through necessary collaboration within business organizations as “distributed cognition”. Professional learning communities as defined by NSDC standards are “teams that meet on a regular basis...for the purposes of learning joint lesson planning, and problem solving” (Hirsh, 2009). Professional learning communities are viewed as a powerful tools for improving the quality of teaching (Hord, 1997; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). By carefully assigning individuals to collaborative groups infused with expertise in ESL, we can hope to advance the learning for general education teachers. Dialogue brings people together to share ideas, create new knowledge, and learn new perspectives (Knight, 2007). Reciprocal teacher partnering encourages sharing and intrinsically motivates teachers to advocate for others’ ideas as much as for their own point of view (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2010).

Professional development for mainstream teachers should be narrowly targeted to their specialty. An over emphasis on second language acquisition and linguistics or an attempt to replicate the knowledge of second language acquisition experts may prove to be counterproductive for mainstream teachers (Tellez & Waxman, 2005). Most beneficial for new teachers are classes in (1) cultural proficiency, an (2) overview of language acquisition, and (3) effective teaching strategies.
Emotional Aspects of Change

In the past decade, the profession of teaching has experienced rapid change. Teachers are faced with the challenge of exploring new roles and managing the emotions associated with this change. Government-imposed mandates, local school reform initiatives, and the rapid ethnic diversification of our communities have forced teachers to look at new ways of doing things. There was a day in the not-so-distant past when the “3 R’s” defined the role of a teacher. Today’s teachers are called on to teach as well as to build a more equitable society (Fairclough, 1989; Pennycook, 1994).

Perhaps because change impacts us at so many levels, much has been written about the processes of change in education. Educational researchers have presented ways of understanding and managing change through the constructs of principles and stages (Fullen, 1999; Hall & Hord, 2006; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wagner & Kegan, 2006). In most cases, the solutions are deceitfully simplistic and fall short of understanding the human aspect of change. Hall and Hord (2006) remind us,

Participants in the change process develop a wide range of impressions and interpretations about what the change is about. ... Each participant individually, and each group of participants collectively, will construct their own understandings about what was intended and what it all means. Regardless of what was intended, participant interpretations will have an effect (pp. 231-232).

Hargreaves (1995) acknowledges the impact change has on teachers. He writes, “Change and emotion are inseparable. Each implicates the other. Both involve movement. Change is defined as ‘movement from one state to another’” (p. 287).

Hargreaves work distinguishes between teacher’s self-initiated change, which teachers view as more positive, and the mandated, legislated, externally imposed change, which
teachers view more negatively. What seems to matter most to teachers is that the processes of educational change "consider the personal and professional realities of their working lives" (p. 302). Hargreaves asserts,

It is important to teachers that the change process is inclusive of their purposes, passions, and professional classroom judgments. Inclusive change and reform processes that engage the teachers' knowledge and commitments are more likely to increase teachers' professional involvement in school improvement and reduce the anger and anxiety that divert their emotional energies into attacking others and protecting the self" (p. 306).

Teachers want to be heard. They are motivated when they feel they have some influence in the change process. It is beneficial to everyone when educational change happens that way, as teachers working at the front lines of education should inform any process for which the intended outcome is school improvement.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Background

I worked for more than a decade as a teacher in an elementary school with an ESL program. In that span of time, I was able to meet more than a hundred ESL students and their families, who were assigned to my general education classroom. The backgrounds, cultures, and instructional needs of each of these children were diverse, and the richness that this diversity brought to the classroom community was a gift. I met some extraordinary people...strong, industrious, smart, and brave! The stories families shared with me of the extraordinary efforts they made to get themselves and family members to the United States were unforgettable. The respect and gratitude that was demonstrated toward me was humbling and remarkable. For some who were “newcomers” during our school year together, I was more than a teacher. I was an ambassador...an important guide to navigating in a new country and culture.

I am currently the Elementary Reading/Language Arts Curriculum Specialist and the District ESL Program Facilitator for a school district with a student population of nearly 16,000. More than 500 students, K – 12\textsuperscript{th} grade receive language support through the district ESL program. Eight out of our district’s 30 schools have full-time ESL teachers and para-educators committed to helping student gain language skills and knowledge in the content areas of reading writing, science and social studies. I embrace the challenges of supporting the learning of general education teachers in the areas of language development and cultural proficiency.
My doctoral research grew from an interest in supporting mainstream teachers of ELLs. I set out to explore the experiences of teachers in small, medium, and large school districts where classrooms that have quickly grown to be more academically heterogeneous, as well as more ethnically and linguistically diverse. In many cases, Iowa's school districts were not prepared to meet the demands of new immigrant students, and teachers have had to make do to meet the learning needs of students. In some districts, the leadership has stepped up and responded with extraordinary measures to meet the learning needs of all students. I talked to teachers across the state to learn about how their teacher education and professional development, their background and personal experiences, and faith and motivations have influenced their responses to English learners in their classrooms.

This research brings the stories of elementary teachers in Iowa who have been working in a profession that has experienced extraordinary change in the last decade. Amidst the challenges brought on by rapid demographic changes, teachers continue to work to teach kids. I hope that through the stories of teachers, we may come to a better understanding of ways to respond to the needs of the diverse learners in our state's classrooms and the adults who teach them.

**Research Methodology**

My analytical approach to the data was through a combination of grounded theory and narrative analysis. We develop techniques of inquiry when variables cannot be easily identified, when theories are not available to explain the behavior of participants or their population of study (Creswell, 1994). Strauss (1993) reminds us “the world of social
phenomena is bafflingly complex.” In order make sense of the world and to simplify our understanding, we are prone to develop theory. Yet, if we are to comprehend deeply we need to recognize that some degree of abstraction is necessary. Strauss cautions, “We should neither avoid complexity nor distort interpretation by oversimplification” (p.12).

Grounded theory (Glaser & Straus, 1967) uses the analytic techniques of coding and sorting data into categories and themes. I used coding strategies, identified and sorted key words and phrases, and constantly compared data until I felt that my data collection and analysis had reached a point of saturation. This involved sorting files into generic categories (Glesne, 2006). Adopting these organizational systems of sorting and grouping helped me keep a narrow focus and to make sense of the vast collection of data. I set out to execute and implement a rigorous research design and to carry out my work in a logical sequential manner. I maintained scrupulous adherence to detail and strict accuracy, yet I was stubborn in maintaining a fresh disposition for discovery by heeding Smith and Heshusius’ (1986) caution not to engage in “transforming qualitative inquiry into a procedural variation of quantitative inquiry” (p. 8).

When I felt that I had exhausted all of the possible ways to group and vary the organization of the data, I highlighted the emerging themes through the construction of four narratives. This more storied approach continued analysis through a process of closer introspection. Silverman (2000) offers narrative analysis as a means for understanding participants and making meaning of stories they tell. My analysis of interview transcripts followed a sociological tradition of “treating text as a window into the human experience.” Narratives represent storied ways of knowing and
communicating (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997) which requires the construction of text
for organization of ideas and further analysis. Analysis of the narrative gives value to the
research, as reflections and retold stories gain meaning through the process.

Narratives do not mirror, they refract (emphasis added) the past. Narratives are
useful in research precisely because storytellers interpret the past rather than
reproduce it as it was. The “truths” of narrative accounts are not in their faithful
representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among
past, present, and futures. They offer storytellers a way to re-imagine lives.
(Riessman, 2005, p. 6)

There is a range of contemporary approaches for evaluation and analysis of
personal narratives. The typology that I determined to be most suitable for my work is
interactional analysis. “A basic underlying theoretical assumption surrounding
interactional analysis is that knowledge and action are fundamentally social in origin.”
(Jordan & Henderson, 1995, p. 41) In this method the emphasis is on the dialogic
process between the storyteller and listener. While attention to thematic content and
narrative structure is not abandoned, the emphasis and interest is on interviewing and
storytelling as a process of co-construction. Imagination, ideas, and past experiences
influence both the storyteller and the listener as they retell events to make them
meaningful to others. Expert knowledge and practice are not seen as being located in the
heads of individuals. Rather knowing is constructed through the interactions of those
who are engaged in the process.

Through semi-structured interviews and observations, I studied teacher
perceptions, motivations, and interactions with student learners of English. This multiple-
methods approach (Flick, 1998) of data collection served well to increase confidence in
my research findings (Glesne, 2006, p. 36). These complementary perspectives served as
means for triangulation or crystallization of the data in order to examine the issues from various angles. Denzin and Lincon describe (1994) this interpretive structure “like a quilt, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole” (p. 6).

My primary data-gathering tool was the interview. I was intentional in using my interview questions as a guide, and was sensitive to not allowing rigidity to limit the discourse. Prior to each interview, I read aloud to the teacher the three broad topic questions and gave him the list of more detailed questions to prompt his thinking about what he might chose to talk about. During the interview, when I thought we had exhausted a topic and/or because we needed to consider the limits of time, I prompted to move the discussion to hit on each of the three broad topic areas. My questions were constructed to prompt the teacher to retell experiences through reflections, stories, and opinions in hopes that I would glean genuinely meaningful information. I did not probe deeply into the numerous and specific questions to be sure that in our short time together I did not dominate the conversation and miss the more important stories that a teacher might choose to tell me. This proved to be a good choice, as I could not have anticipated the areas where passions and wounds were fresh for teachers, and in the privacy of their classrooms I found them eager to talk to someone who was ready to listen. This method of semi-structured interviewing suggests that I might not only analyze the teacher responses, but that the questions teachers chose not to answer may be significant for a closer look, as well. I will address this in my analysis in Chapter 5.
Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe the interview as “negotiated text – a site where power, gender, race, and class intersect” (p. 47). Eisner (1998) stressed the importance of being a good listener, making the interviewee comfortable, and putting the person at ease. He says, “Conducting a good interview is, in some ways, like participating in a good conversation” (p. 183). Schwandt (1996) describes social inquiry as “a dialogical encounter examined dialogically.” Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p. 79). Observation is a primary tool used by ethnographers who do fieldwork. My logbook was a record and reflection of my multisensory observations in my visits to elementary classrooms over the period of eight months. I used a tape recorder to capture the voices when at all possible, and my logbook is where I recorded my observations. During the process of transcribing interviews, I came to realize how much of each conversation I soon forgot. I discovered the importance of going back to the data, as listening to each of the audio recordings over and over and reading transcriptions gave me the opportunity to glean new information in each subsequent reading. I transferred this principle to the discipline and value of writing field notes. Recognizing that I only had one opportunity to gather data from a single moment in time, I became a disciplined observer. I was intentional to “take in” the moment and to be very explicit in my handwritten notes. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen would describe this method of data collection as a “written photograph” (1993) of the situation under study.
There were some moments where my tape recorder did not work well and/or was not welcome, and in those moments I was able to rely on only my field notes for subsequent reflection and analysis. For example, I met one teacher for an interview in a coffee shop, and the only table available was near the wall speakers that played music so loudly that my recorder was unable to pick up the voices. I left the coffee shop and immediately wrote a detailed entry in my log book of the conversation and of my reflections of the interview. On another occasion, a casual conversation with a teacher evolved into an opportunity to glean information for my research. In the moment, I discerned that it would be too intrusive to pull out my recorder and request signatures on permission forms, so I recorded my observations and reflections after the fact. Lincoln and Guba write about the importance of the researcher collecting and later writing about the fine-grained detail of the setting, participants, and events as they are taking place. They describe this characteristic of method as using “thick description” (1985). As I worked, I was intentional in using all of my senses to gather information.

**Participant Selection and Ethical Considerations**

Study participants were selected from the pool of Iowa teachers, K-6th grade, who work with ELLs in their general education classrooms. I interviewed teachers, ages 25 – 60, from different grade levels and from different sized school districts where the community has experienced rapid ethnic diversity. It was important to my research that the interviewees were classroom teachers who teach English language learners, rather than teachers who had formal training for working with a multicultural multilingual population and had sought an ESL endorsement.
As a current member of a cohort of administrators across Iowa working to improve the quality of learning for English language learners in the state, I began this work with unique access to Iowa school districts. Having attended conferences together, I knew a number of administrators who were sensitive to the challenges of teaching diverse learners. My plan was to share the essence of my research project through email and invite their participation. To discourage bias, administrators were asked to NOT recruit, encourage, discourage or directly inquire about a teacher’s willingness to participate. They were asked to simply generate a list of email addresses and send the teacher contacts to me. Those who did not wish to participate in my study could choose to not respond to my email request. I hoped that administrators would choose to participate by responding through email with a list of general education teachers whom I might contact. From the teacher names and contact information shared with me, I would then send an email to request their participation. My goal was to interview a number of elementary teachers from communities experiencing rapid ethnic diversification across state. Selecting from the willing respondents a sampling from rural and urban areas, it was my hope that through these forty contacts, I would successfully interview at least six to eight teachers from across the state. I will share in detail in Chapter 5 that the response from administrators was disappointing, and I had to find other ways to make contacts with teachers.

Interviews occurred face-to-face within an eight-month time frame, from March 2011 to October 2011. All data collected was secured, I assured teachers that their names and locations of their schools would be kept in confidence. As I found willing
participants, they were assured that they could pull out of the study at any time without consequences. No compensation was given to participants. Prior to interviews, I requested that each participant complete the required IRB agreements and permission forms. Each interview was planned at a location chosen by the participant. If the participant chose to be interviewed in the school, an appropriate letter of cooperation was obtained.
Interview Questions

Teacher Name: School District:

Phone: Email:

Male____ Female____

Age____

Number of years of teaching_____

Grade level of current students_____

Number of ELLs on current class roster(s)_____

Questions:

How do teachers respond to the demands of meeting the instructional needs of English language learners?

1. Have you received either formal or informal training in the educational field of ESL?

2. Share your understanding of the processes of language development and English language acquisition.

3. Talk about your experiences teaching English language and content-area instruction (Science, Math, Social Studies) to ELLs?

4. What instructional strategies have you learned that have proven effective for English language learners?

5. What literature do you have in your classroom that exposes students to different cultures and broadens perspectives on immigration?

How do the current political climate and a teacher's understanding of immigration issues affect the interactions between teachers and students?

1. How does the current political climate and emotionally charged media focus inform and affect your current work with ELLs?
2. How do you feel about having students in your classroom who are undocumented immigrants ... Students whose parents are undocumented?

3. How do you use assessment in a classroom that has become increasingly diverse?

4. How have you responded to changes in education and the demands placed on classroom teachers (high stakes testing, budget cuts...?)

**How do teacher's personal immigration stories, family history, faith and traditions influence how they define and enact their own identities in their professional work?**

1. How do your personal immigration experiences inform and affect your current work with ELLs?

2. Please talk about the ethnicity of your family. Do you know your relative’s immigration story?

3. What do you know about their first few years of life in this country?

4. What languages did they speak?

5. What religions did they practice?

6. What language did they use for worship?

7. What helped them become members of their new society? (M Grey, The New Iowans)

8. How have your personal values, faith, customs, and family traditions inform and affected your current work with ELLs?

9. How do your past and present life-experiences with immigrants inform and affect your current work with ELLs?

**Other prompts:**

Please share a success story that you have had with an English language learner in your classroom.

What are some challenges you have faced in meeting the needs of ELLs in your classroom?

What steps have you taken to embrace this work?
CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVES

Introduction to Teacher Stories

Through this qualitative study, I set out to learn how selected elementary teachers are responding personally and professionally to the demands of classrooms that have become increasingly more linguistically, culturally, and cognitively diverse. I interviewed sixteen teachers from eight different school districts, and from those interviews I was able to audio record and type ten full transcriptions. From the transcripts of interviews with those ten teachers, from reflections of the additional interviews not transcribed, as well as data from classroom observations and field notes, I have constructed four narratives to describe the experiences of five classroom teachers in classrooms that have increasingly become more ethnically and linguistically diverse. I have explored how professional roles are being redefined and how teachers are responding to the changes they are experiencing in their classrooms. Throughout the observations and interviews, my research questions guided the process, helping me to gain insight in the areas of (1) professional preparedness, (2) social and political influences, and (3) influences and motivations.

Tony Wagner and Robert Kegan (2006) write,

Qualitative data, such as that generated through interview and focus groups, are particularly powerful in illuminating and communicating key insights. Seeing the faces, and hearing the stories, hopes and opinions of those in our own community moves us emotionally, reminds us of the moral imperative behind our work, and enables us to see the information as living in multiple dimensions. The stories, the faces, and the voices remain with us with an insistency that numbers can rarely inspire. Above all, more and better data can help us to define the various challenges related to improving students' learning, and track the vitality of the change effort.
In this chapter, I have illuminated the voices of five teachers who have shared their personal and professional reflections. Through the process of constructing these narratives, my goal has been to bring the stories to life for the reader. You are invited into each of these classrooms. I hope that you will gain insights into the world of Iowa educators as they work to support immigrant children.

Four Conversations

Mr. Marlee and Mr. Dean

Large colorful flags hung on opposite walls of the classroom, announcing a perpetual celebration of nations in this two-section classroom. Mr. Dean greeted me as I walked through the door. Mr. Marlee, hearing our introductions, peeked around the partition between the two fifth grade classrooms, and he, too, stepped forward extending his hand in a warm welcome. It was generous of these men to stop their work during the precious few minutes of a teacher’s day devoted for preparation and lesson planning.

I was most anxious to hear the story of the basketball team made up of young African refugees, and settling in for an interview at a table stacked high with Social Studies textbooks were the two men with the first-hand story to share. “The students’ lack of personal disciplines and self-regulation skills drove us to brainstorm ideas,” explained Mr. Marlee. “These kids were always getting in trouble. We had to do something!”

He continued, “We became aware of their challenging behaviors last year when the students were yet new arrivals to the fourth grade...to Kennedy Elementary... to Iowa...and to the U.S.! Students came to us from Liberia and the Ivory Coast (renamed
Cote d'Ivoire). Their childhood was interrupted by war. Most of these kids grew up in refugee camps and came to the United States, along with an estimated 10,000 other refugees, as part of a massive United Nations resettlement effort six or seven years ago. A lot of families had to flee and many were separated from each other in the process. Many of our students are being raised by single mothers. One boy on our basketball team has a father, but it’s not his real dad. Sadly, they all have these violent stories and difficult histories in common.”

It was the hope of hearing stories like this one that had brought me across the state to Kennedy Elementary School on this beautiful spring day. I had learned at the early morning staff meeting that, indeed, Kennedy’s newest English language learners (ELLs) were from Liberia and the Ivory Coast ... as well as from Sudan, Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Burundi! Within little more than four years time, refugees from war-torn African nations, many of whom were not literate in their home languages, were sitting in these suburban Iowa classrooms. They made up more than a third of the school’s student population at this middle-class suburban school and spoke more than 11 different African dialects. The surge of Kennedy’s growth was directly related to unoccupied units in a large multi-unit low-rent apartment complex in the Kennedy neighborhood, and a landlord who was eager to collect a steady rent.

As a result of the new surge in Kennedy’s enrollment, 80 of the school’s 210 children were ELLs, speaking languages that included Kinyarwanda, Grebo, Krahn, Kirundi, Gokana, and Swahili. Kennedy had long been an English as a Second Language (ESL) building, comfortable in the role of supporting academic and language goals for
the school’s few Bosnian and Latino students. Now things had changed...and they had
changed quickly! Many teachers chose to apply for transfer out of the school at the end of
that first growth year. Those who stayed, as well as the new administrator and teachers
who chose to transfer in, knew the challenges they faced and were ready to meet them.

“It was obvious how athletic these boys were,” said Mr. Dean, revealing his
disposition for assuming a positive outlook. “They were easily the most athletic and
physically well-developed kids in the whole class! We thought, ‘Let’s put together a
basketball team!”’ Mr. Dean smiled. “Thinking back, it seemed like such an obvious and
simple solution. I don’t know if you would agree, “he said looking at his cohort, “but
truly nothing about this project turned out to be simple.” Mr. Marlee nodded his head in
agreement and both men smiled as they reflected on the past year’s challenges. Mr. Dean
pointed his finger at himself and then at Mr. Marlee. “Together we decided that a
basketball team would give kids the important experiences they needed. Personally, we
have had great experiences through participation in sports during our growing up years.
We have been on teams where we acquired important life skills... experienced the
motivation to work hard at something bigger than ourselves. We learned lessons in
discipline by showing up for practices and games, learned how to follow directions, how
to play by the rules...stuff like that. We wanted to give those things to these boys who
needed it so badly!”

“Just think of all the skills you can build when you are playing team sports,” said
Mr. Marlee. “Kids are not only taught how to build ball skills, they are taught how to get
along with each other. These fourth grade boys from Africa demonstrated a natural
physical ability, for sure! They had the talent for athletics! They liked to play ball and they could really run!” He paused, and then went on share more details. “Actually, they played a little too rough on the playground when they were out for recess...and they got in trouble for it. They didn’t know any team skills and they had never been in an organized sport. They did not follow rules outside or inside of the school, and were considered by teachers and staff here at Kennedy to be students with negative behaviors! We wanted to help them fit in, and we were sure we could help them develop athletic skills and learn disciplines at the same time.”

Mr. Marlee went on to share examples of how teachers were quick to identify student actions as “negative behaviors” when really it was just that children hadn’t been socialized to know how to act in school. He shared a story of a child who spent the first days of school under a table hiding from what was strange and frightening. This kind of behavior was disruptive to the class, and some teachers had little patience to work through those first days when the child’s social and emotional needs were so great.

“Exactly!” Agreed Mr. Dean. “So, we decided to start a basketball team. We called ourselves the Golden Cats and joined an already organized boys basketball league within the community. We knew we would need money, so we sent out a letter informing people around the community...around Iowa, to explain what we were doing. We asked for money to sponsor the team, and we got hundreds of responses from across the country. It ended up that this e-mail got forwarded. People were excited about helping and they told their friends who told their friends...”

“Wow, that must have been a pretty amazing letter,” I said.
"Not necessarily. The letter just told the story. We asked people to think back to when they were younger and to recall the impact of teamwork and sports in their lives. We told how these refugee kids had not had any experiences with team sports, and we explained how it was our hope that through the power of sports and teamwork these boys would learn essential life skills...stuff like that. And people wrote us back. Many of the responses came from the guys we had played sports with. A lot of people responded to our letter, and they sent money!"

"We got money, for sure! Mr. Marlee confirmed. "People donated! We were able to buy nice equipment and uniforms!"

Mr. Dean nodded his head to confirm the success of the fund-drive. "Prior to that first basketball practice, we stressed to the kids that this was going to be a really big deal!" He said. "We told the boys that practice was really important. We stressed that they needed to come to every practice and they needed to work really hard when they got there. We reminded them that a lot of people had donated money to make this opportunity happen for them. Well, I guess they got the idea about this being important, all right! For the first practice, they all showed up dressed in their church clothes...button-down shirts, neckties, dress pants and dress shoes! We realized that we hadn't told the guys what to wear for basketball practice! So, after that day we also provided practice gym shorts and t-shirts. I think that we were learning more than they were!"

"We practiced during non-school time. Wednesday nights for two hours and again on Saturdays we practiced again for about three hours." Mr. Marlee reflected. "We used
the school gym. We’d teach basketball skills, for sure, but we also taught self-discipline and anger management.”

I just had to ask! This story had already demonstrated commitment far beyond even the most extraordinary teacher stories that I had heard. I asked, “So, what is your motivation? I mean, you know, there are a lot of teachers who see the need, but if it can’t happen within their contract day they’re going to say, ‘Sorry! This is what I am hired to do and when the day is over, I’m going home.’ So, what do you think? Why are you willing to build relationships that extend outside of your contract day? Are you motivated by your own family’s personal immigration story, your history? How have faith and tradition influenced your motivations? What are your thoughts about that?”

Mr. Marlee took only a second to respond. “I think personally, for me, a lot of it is my faith. My motivations also are a result of family history and some traditions and stuff. I have lived my life in a way that is consistent with believing that I have a purpose that’s greater than satisfying my own needs. Applying that to the job I have is important. I meet a kid in my classroom, and I realize that he or she is just a normal kid who needs help. I do what I can to help. It’s not always enough and it probably never will be enough. But, whatever I can do I do...I try to make things work. But, yes, I would say that faith definitely motivates. And no, I don’t have a whole lot of personal immigration stories. We do have some people in our family that have been adopted...one from Vietnam and a couple from South Korea. But I don’t necessarily think those are things that would define the way that I interact with students in the classroom.”
He went on, “In the town where I grew up, I had all white kids in my classroom. This is how I was raised. This was the whole neighborhood, the town. At that time, if I saw someone homeless on the street or someone complaining that they didn’t have money, I’d always say, ‘Get a job at McDonalds or WalMart at minimum wage. Why can’t you get a job and help your family?’ Well, now that I have taken time to know people who are newly immigrated, I realize that the jobs available to them are terrible...if they can get a job. The work hours that are offered to immigrant non-English speakers are four o’clock to eleven o’clock at night. Teachers will say to students, ‘Take this home and read this with your mom and dad.’ But, how can they manage all of this when they are trying to make a living the best way that they can? As a society, we are hard on these parents! We say, ‘Why aren’t they taking care of these kids?’ Well, I’d like to ask, ‘Who has taken time to explain to them how things work here? How can they know what they need to do for their kids to be successful in school if we don’t take time to teach both the students and the parents?’ There is no doubt that immigrant families love their kids as much as my mom loved me!”

“In answer to your motivation question...I guess it is my faith that motivates me, too,” said Mr. Dean. “A couple a weeks ago, my ‘small group’ (Bible Study) did a study on ‘What is your dream?’ You know, I listened to all other eight members in the group talk about their jobs, and how they would make changes if they could. They all told what they actually want to ‘be’ and I kept thinking, ‘You know, I am pretty happy with my job! I get to teach and coach. And, you know, I love working with the kids. It feels like I am doing good, and on top of that I get paid to do it. I mean, it’s not the kind of money
that private business pays, but I like what I do. I wouldn’t trade a thing about my job. I value the relationships I build with these kids, ... not just these ESL kids but also the other kids in the class, as well. Some people don’t think much of the refugee kids, but I know for a fact that these kids would run through a brick wall for you if you asked them. Some of the relationships...you just can’t put a price on it! For example, all of the time that basketball practices and games brought us together with kids resulted in some pretty special friendships. Language was very difficult at first, but we learned pretty quickly how to communicate with each other.”

“We got to know the students so well that we started to better understand the reasons behind some of the negative behaviors and aggression, wouldn’t you say, Dean?”

“Definitely! One thing that I have observed is how difficult it is for refugee kids to deal with the fact that they have so few resources and the native kids, in comparison, have so much! It sometimes makes them mad! Well, you can just imagine the “show and tell” that goes on in a middle class suburban elementary school like Kennedy where kids share all of their good news from home...whether peers want to hear it or not. ‘This is where my family went on vacation.’ or, ‘This is what we did over spring break.’”

“Right!” agreed Mr. Marlee. “You don’t have to know all of the English words to understand the message when a kid is showing his ‘bling’ and saying, ‘Look at this medal I got from soccer!’ These poor, and I mean that literally...these poor refugee kids never get to do that kind of stuff. They just go home to an empty apartment where there is nothing to do. These are the kids who are sad when there is a snow day. They want to
come to school because it is the best thing they have going on. ...And we all wonder where their anger problems come from? ...The negative behaviors and stuff?"

We nodded in agreement, pondering the inequities. We spoke about how absurd it is that we are so quick to view an innocent child, one who has had the good fortune to come from a family with a few privileges, as the villain. We agreed that it is both appropriate and good for a kid with a new soccer medal to want to share this success with friends. We agreed that it is also necessary for children to learn to be sensitive and discrete in sharing good news in ways that allow the listeners to appreciate and delight in the success. Helping children develop this social sensitivity is yet another responsibility of the classroom teacher.

Mr. Dean went on to talk about another teacher responsibility. "I was going to say that another one of the things that we learned, which also applies to what we teach in the classroom, is the importance of building background knowledge for kids who are new to a language and culture. One thing we wished we had done, prior to the first team practice, was to just let them observe the game. We should have invited them to watch a basketball game on TV, or we should have taken them to a basketball game so that they could have made sense of the game as a whole...learned the rules and the culture of the game. That would have been brilliant! If kids don’t have the background knowledge to help them make sense of new learning, they will be “lost” for the duration of the teaching. We realized too late in our basketball learning that the guys really didn’t understand the context of the game. We assumed that they would just catch on, but it was
hard for them! We worked really hard to teach them, but I think that even while playing the first games this fall they didn't know all the rules of the game!"

"Right." Mr. Marlee agreed. "There was another time when the kids from Africa taught us the importance of pre-teaching. When the students first arrived, neighbors called the school. They were upset that that our students were cutting across their yards...picking flowers and picking apples. These kids thought they were in Canaan Land!" We laughed at the striking parallels to this Biblical reference. "They were so excited to be living in such a fertile garden, and they didn't have the will to practice restraint! Living in an African refugee camp, kids had been free to run everywhere. It is a wide-open space! Our students didn't have the background to understand the concepts of a privately owned off-limit property."

He went on, "When phone calls came into the school office from neighbors complaining about children trespassing and stealing vegetables out of gardens, the Kennedy staff responded. Teachers began by explicitly teaching the meaning of words like 'yard' and 'sidewalk.' We taught kids that in this new neighborhood, people own property with boundaries. Properties are divided up into little squares, and it is not OK to walk on land owned by others. You have to walk on the perimeter...on the edge of the square, so to speak. In those first days and weeks, teachers volunteered to walk students to and from school, communicating through gestures and words 'no' and 'yes' as to which paths were permissible and which were off limits. Our teachers have worked hard to help these kids to be successful!"
“We are always explicitly teaching concepts and new vocabulary. That is something that we’ve had to really learn on the job, we didn’t really get this stuff in college. Teachers can’t assume kids know what you are talking about. So, we pre-teach a lot of background information for our immigrant students. We use pictures, objects, illustrations and examples...sometimes videos. These same teaching strategies would have been great if we had thought to apply them to teaching the boys about basketball! It would have been much easier for them to learn the game if we had done a better job of building background,” Mr. Dean shared.

“...So true!” agreed Mr. Marlee. “Eventually, our team did learn the game, but we were not very competitive in this our first season. The Golden Cats looked great in their new uniforms, all right, but they didn’t win a game. It would have been fun for them to win just one game.”

“Another thing we realized at the first game is that the player’s families were not able to come to the game, because none of their mothers could drive,” shared Mr. Dean. “This caught us by surprise, you know? In our childhood, the stands are always packed with onlookers at a basketball game. That is just a part of basketball…the cheering and support from the fans. But not at our games. With the exception of the coaches, there was not one person there at the first game to cheer the guys on. Few of our boys are lucky to have a father, and the one or two who do hardly ever get to see him. Most dads work out of town at meat packing plants. Dads say goodbye to family on Monday and hop on a bus for a 45-minute ride, and then ride the bus again to come back home on Friday. They are not able to participate in school activities. Some of the Kennedy teachers decided to
organized rides so that Moms were able to attend some of the games. That was really
great for the guys to see their moms and siblings there!”

“Part of the fun of this experience was when we had the chance to expose the kids
to new things. For example, after the game, we’d take them out for meals,” Mr. Dean
went on. “For some of the boys, it was the first time they’d ever been in a restaurant.
None of them knew how to order food. We felt it was important to teach them how to
use their good manners wherever they went.”

“And we taught them how to order. The first time we went to McDonalds I tried
to prepare them a little. I said, ‘If you don’t know what to do, look at the picture and just
pick a number and make sure you have that amount of money.’ They got a little confused
with their ordering, but they just ate whatever they got...no problem. Each time we went
it got a little easier for them. And then, one day about four months into our basketball
season, we went to McDonalds and I heard one of our guys say, ‘Well... I’ll have a
Number 3, hold the onions and pickles... just catsup. And can you change my pop to a
shake... Oh, and can you ‘super size’ it?’ Mr. Marlee chuckled at the memory. “They
catched on to some things very quickly!”

He went on, “We also taught them that when you meet new people you should
introduce yourself and shake hands. Well, we didn’t stop to think that handshaking is a
formal greeting, only appropriate for a certain time and place. So, another time after one
of our games, we went into a sit down restaurant. We found a table...no problem. When
the waiter came, the boys each jumped up to greet him! One at a time, they each shook
the waiter’s hand and introduced themselves. We just sat and watched. We were
probably not quite as surprised as the waiter. He just looked at us like... What?” We all laughed together at how even the simplest things can become complicated for a newcomer.

“Can you imagine these kids going on a field trip... their first time to go to a museum or theater?” Mr. Dean asked. “For most native kids, this is not a new experience because their parents have taken them there before. But our African refugee students have never been in a theater. They get in trouble, because they don’t know how to act. Sometimes they do things that make them feel embarrassed. I’ve invited newcomers to my house, and I’ll never forget the first time,” recalled Mr. Dean. “They walked in and they all just started jumping... and these are fourth graders! They all just started jumping because they were so excited... excited by just looking around. They thought it was the greatest thing. It is those experiences, like our basketball team, that give kids great opportunities for learning. Some things are difficult to teach in a classroom!”

I just had to ask, “So, have you seen positive changes in behaviors? Did the learning translate for these kids in other areas of their schooling and lives?”

“Yes and no. I think we saw ups and downs with it,” replied Mr. Marlee. “I think we realized that it wasn’t something that, was going to be changed in a short period of time. Perhaps we had hoped to see a quicker result, but things turned out to be much more complicated than we had anticipated. Change will happen through meaningful relationships that happen over a longer period of time. We have really good relationships with those boys who are still here at this school, but you know they still present
challenges from time to time. I think we just have to remember that learning happens
over time."

I had learned that the extraordinary efforts of these two teachers were not the only
interventions that Kennedy had put into place to respond the urgent needs of the new ESL
students. Stipends were offered to teachers to create and implement programs that
addressed needs of students. Teachers were asked to commit after work hours to oversee
groups such as Homework Club, Adult English Classes, Theater Club, Family Clothing
Drive (sorting and distributing donated clothing in the school gym), Summer Library
Check Out (providing students access to books over the summer), and Back Pack
Buddies (sending home a full bag of donated “weekend” food for children). The question
of how Kennedy Elementary will sustain the momentum of the staff and maintain the
flow of resources that supports these initiatives was undetermined.

The local Area Education Agency had stepped in to support the school during the
transition. A quality-learning consultant gathered teacher feedback and wrote a syllabus
for a “college class” uniquely developed for Kennedy Elementary School. To equip
teachers to meet the needs of their new culturally and linguistically diverse students, the
agency offered the opportunity for teachers to earn two college level graduate credits by
meeting course requirements over an 18 month period by participating in work above and
beyond their mandatory district and building professional development. The goals for
learning fell into four categories (1) building empathy and understanding, (2) addressing
the needs of the under-resourced learner, (3) implementing instructional strategies for
teaching non English proficient, and (4) collaborating with community and families to support student learning.

On school time, teachers committed to a collaborative book study and implementation of Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol strategies (Echevarria, Short, & Vogt, 2008). Staff-meeting agendas were designed to broaden perspectives. For example, neighborhood and community organizations were invited in for a showing and discussion of a documentary highlighting the experience and challenges of Sudanese refugees in the stages of early resettlement in the U.S. Other meetings were devoted to speakers who talked about issues ranging from brain research to Title III. In addition, teachers were given opportunity to participate in learning outside of school by choosing from a menu of learning options. For each area of participation they were asked to submit a journal entry to reflect on their learning. For example, teachers might choose to attend community forums with discussions centered on issues of poverty and immigration, or visit neighborhood cultural food markets and restaurants. Participation in the after school programs designed to offered support to ESL students gave teachers opportunity to log hours and write reflections. All building staff was required to participate in learning opportunities scheduled during the school day, but they could opt in or out for the additional work.

The community also got involved. The city’s parks and recreation department and the police department collaborated with the school to set up a summer camp for ESL students. While camp enrollment was not exclusive to the African refugees, nearly all of the ESL students were encouraged to attend. In addition to academic and language
learning goals, camp goals focused on teaching positive behaviors, manners, and respect. The school documented fewer office referrals in the fall after camp. In the second year after the arrival of the African refugee students at Kennedy, the percentages of students sent to the office with behavior referrals went from 70% students in the ESL program to 15% ESL. The school and community were pleased to celebrate success in teaching children the life skills important to becoming successful citizens. In addition to the summer camp, these community partners had worked to support community picnics, elimination of serious health and welfare concerns, expansion of the food pantry and accommodations and services, summer learning for adults, and a new fall and winter soccer program sponsored free of charge to participants.

It was time to wrap up with Mr. Dean and Mr. Marlee. I wanted to ask them about their hopes and expectations for the future at Kennedy. Other teachers had shared with me that the cost of living was forcing families into the city where they could get cheaper housing. "It is a huge concern," said Mr. Marlee. "Recently, we heard that there is serious talk about the large multi-unit low-rent complex up the street being sold for conversion into condos. If that happens, our families will be forced to move. None of them can afford to purchase a condo. The sad reality is that there is not a lot of other low-rent housing within the Kennedy boundary. Our ESL families will be forced to move into the more urban areas where housing is more affordable. Unfortunately, the schools in the inner city are larger, less personable, and have fewer resources to meet the needs of students and families. Also, if that happens, our neighborhood school would face the reality of loosing large numbers of students and staff. We have worked so hard to get to
know these kids and families, and to learn about cultural diversity and the needs of non-English proficient students. In the near future, the African immigrants could all be gone from our neighborhood just as quickly as they arrived!"

Mrs. Franken

Mrs. Franken arrived at school just minutes before the morning bell. She breathlessly met the line of third graders at the door in her jacket with car keys in hand and a purse on her shoulder. She moved to the front of the line in a harried pace, looking a bit embarrassed that she was noticeably late for work. The students followed her down the hallway, a row of 24 sleepy faces with tussled hair and tennis shoes. I scanned the crowd to see if I could pick out Kevin, but the long line of brightly colored cartoon-character backpacks did not reveal the identity of the newest classmate. The children stopped to drop coats and bags into their hall lockers and then proceeded on to the classroom.

Kevin was a new arrival from China. This was only his fourth day of school, and for the most part, the reports from the school staff about his adjustment were good. The classroom teacher knew in the first day that Kevin was literate in his home language, he was compliant and kind to peers, and it seemed he had a disposition for learning. Kevin’s parents owned and operated one of the biggest Chinese buffets in town. His family had local English-speaking advocates who supported them through the school registration process and helped with translation at school meetings. The school secretary reported that Kevin was eight years old, and while he had never attended school in the United States he was born in this country. He and his now 4-year-old sister had been sent back to China to
live with his grandmother, and had recently arrived in the US to be rejoined with their parents.

At the first formal meeting with interpreter assistance, Kevin’s parents reported that schooling in China was much different than school in the US. “Children in China are academically two grade levels ahead of their American peers,” they said. In his former school, Kevin was one of 71 students in the class. The teaching was delivered in a rote direct instructional style. In a fast pace volley, teachers called out information and students responded. If children were out of line and not following directions, they were hit with a stick. Kevin’s parents were adamant about his new teacher being strict to be sure that he would do well in his new American school.

It was simply an amazing coincidence that I was off to meet yet another third grader named Kevin who was recently emigrated from China! It brought back many memories of my experiences as a third grade teacher with a Chinese-speaking English learner named Kevin nearly five years. In my current job, as the district facilitator for ESL programs in an urban school district of nearly 16,000 students, I offered needed support to schools and classroom as the welcomed new students. A decade ago, ESL programs in this same school district mostly served students whose native languages were Spanish and Vietnamese, and we had strong supports in place to meet the needs of these learners and families. In recent years, we had welcomed a growing number of students from China, Nepal, Burma, as well as a variety of African nations. Our school district was now home to over 500 English learners representing 19 different language groups.
The bell rang and the school day officially started in third grade. I took a seat near the back of the room where I could watch and be out of the way. Mrs. Franken verbally prodded the children through their start-up routine as she dropped her bag and hung her coat in the small closet near the door. “Boys and girls take your seats and get out your planners! Adrianna, please pick up your jacket from the floor. You should have left that in your locker. Tomorrow I want you to hang your coats in your lockers, boys and girls. They do not belong on the back of your chairs! Brett, please put that away and get out your planner.” Brett was playing with a highlighter, practicing flips and catches to pass the time and entertain himself and his peers nearby. “Why can’t you find it? It is your job to keep track of your planner, Brett. Did you leave it at home? Is it in your locker...OK, I’ll let you check your locker, but next time you need to get yourself organized before you come into the classroom.” Brett pitched the marker into his desk with a side arm throw and jumped from his seat. He was out the door on the way to his locker in less than three seconds.

Moving through the motions with little expression, students complied with the demands of the teacher. Children plopped their spiral notebook/planners onto their desktops. In addition to serving as an organizer for children to keep track of assignments, the planner was an essential tool in the teacher/parent communication system. Each morning, while simultaneously taking attendance and pledging the flag, the teacher circled the classroom checking each planner to see if parents had responded over the night to yesterday’s handwritten notes, or to see if they had initiated new communications to her.
The voice of the principal came over the loudspeaker, “Good morning boys and girls! It is Friday! I hope that you remembered to bring back your items for the fundraiser. Teachers, please collect the record sheets in your classroom and designate a student to bring these to the office.” Kevin sat leaning sideways in his seat to look inside of his desk, as if something that he needed and could not find was lost deep inside. Eventually, he pulled out his spiral planner and dropped in on his desktop, imitating what his peers had done. His planner apparently had not made the round trip from school to home and back again. Kevin’s family would not have been able to read the teacher’s English communications, nor could the teacher have read returning family notes written in Chinese, so the pages of Kevin’s planner were empty. Kevin’s face was sleepy and expressionless. His dark straight hair stood straight up on his head, revealing either a busy morning at home or a lack of initiative to tame his coif.

The principal’s voice continued on over the loudspeaker, competing with the ongoing coaching from the teacher as she made her way around the room. The principal said, “Boys and girls, please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance.” The students rose and put their hand over hearts, but Kevin did not respond. He fiddled with the spiral on his planner, unaware that the blather from the speaker had issued a request demanding a response from both him and his peers. Kevin leaned sideways, again peering deeply into his desk. He emerged with a pencil, and began to poke the pencil tip into the spiral on his planner. “And to the Republic for which it stands...”

The teacher suddenly noted Kevin’s non-participation and walked briskly across the room. She assumed a position behind him facing the flag. With her hand under his
elbow she urged him to stand. Looking up and noticing for the first time that others were standing, Kevin stood slowly, looking confused and embarrassed. "One nation under God..." In spite of his gentle resistance, the teacher took Kevin’s right hand and put it over his heart. Kevin, who had been a third grader in China only a month before, tipped his head to the side to look up at the teacher with an expression that pleaded for her to back away. Kevin shook his head and quietly said, "No," but the teacher ignored his words. The teacher persisted with the conviction of an American patriot. Kevin politely went through the motions in silent resistance. "With liberty and justice for all!" The teacher took a step back and Kevin slumped into his seat bearing a lonely frown.

I rushed in to be on time for my after school meeting with Mrs. Franken. For our second meeting, I found her casually sitting at the kidney shaped table in the classroom correcting papers. Kevin had been in her classroom for almost two weeks now. We were meeting to talk about ways to support his learning, however, I realized early on in our conversation that the focus was on ways to support the teacher.

Mrs. Franken had emailed me just days before to say that she "was overwhelmed!" She was concerned that, because she was required to spend such a great deal of time with Kevin, it had caused her other students to fall behind in their lessons. She had not been trained, either in college or in on-going professional development, on how to meet the needs of non-English speaking students. Her email stated that she didn't know how to work with Kevin, who was so demanding, and yet give every other child
good instruction. She “needed immediate help!” and could I come for a visit to give her ideas.

So here I was in her classroom on a Thursday at 3:00 PM. Mrs. Franken started out by sharing the good news that Kevin was beginning to pick up some words. She reported with a smile, “He says, ‘Teacher, Teacher!’ when he wants my attention, and I remind him as I point to myself, ‘I am Mrs. Franken!’” She modeled how she rapidly tapped her chest with her pointer finger. She went on to explain how each of the many times that he forgot to call her by name she would correct him and ask him to respectfully repeat her name. “Now he watches and listens to my correction. Then he points to his chest and says, “I am Mrs. Franken.” We laughed in at the innocence of Kevin’s confusion. “He also says ‘No’ and ‘Yes’ in English, said Mrs. Franken, “and I now know the Mandarin Chinese word for ‘No’...it is “Meiyou!” Believe me, I have heard it quite often!”

I asked Mrs. Franken if she had read the professional book that I had given to her with helpful strategies for adapting instruction without lowering the learning standards for a non-English proficient language learner. She said, “No. I don’t have time to read a book! I need someone to tell me what to do...to give me some ideas and materials that I can use!” She said “There is no way that I can meet the needs of every child in this room without some help.” I asked about her professional training. She said that she had been in college such a long time ago and that there was no training at all for working with non-English speakers. She remembered seeing the posting for the district’s summer training,
but didn’t see the need to attend until now. Now she wished she had attended so she would have a few “tricks in her pocket.”

Mrs. Franken told me that another experienced teacher in the building came by to offer support and to share some information about working with non-English speakers. The peer teacher had explained that language acquisition generally follows a progression through five stages. She had explained that Kevin was in the preproduction stage where he had minimal oral language comprehension. He would not be able to verbalize, having to rely on gestures and simple “yes” and “no” responses. She had explained that this stage would likely last for a few short months. She suggested that Mrs. Franken could prompt with tier questions such as “Show me...,” “Point to the...,” and “Where is the...?”. Soon, Kevin would be in the early production stage where he would begin to use one or two-word responses. Most likely this would be the extent of his language growth while in Mrs. Franken’s classroom. While I was appreciative for the shared wisdom of the supporting teacher, the knowledge alone did not seem to bring comfort or renewed confidence to Mrs. Franken.

Mrs. Franken was so excited about an idea that she wanted to share with me! She thought that she still had some of those baby board books at home that she had purchased for her grand children. “Those books will be perfect for Kevin,” she said with pride. “They only four or five words on each page with a lot of picture labels to build vocabulary.” I asked if she didn’t think that Kevin would be offended by the “babyish” graphics and toddler themes. Did she think that the materials would be respectful to the
learner? After all, he was eight years old, and by all indications he had been performing academically at grade level in China. "They will be perfect!" responded Mrs. Franken.

Our newest Kevin was not able to work independently for very long in her classroom, and that was beginning to be a problem for Mrs. Franken. She thought that the American classroom was probably very different than the demanding fast-paced rote-style of learning that he was used to in China. If he didn’t have someone close at his side, he tired of the activity and was soon off-task. "He demands so much of my time!" Mrs. Franken cried.

Mrs. Franken said that she had very few materials in her classroom appropriate for instruction for English language learners. She reminded me that Kevin could not read and write in English, and he was bored to follow along in a textbook during Reading and Language Arts instruction. While he displayed an aptitude for Math, he could not read the story problems that were a part of the daily Math work. Mrs. Franken said that ever since Kevin joined her classroom, she just "could not find the time to teach either Science or Social Studies!" There was no question that these more engaging subject areas required additional teacher prep time for planning and material set-up, but it was also true that the hands-on learning was wonderful for English learners.

I suggested that we consider purchasing some new math manipulatives and math books that didn’t have story problems to require a proficiency in reading. There were some available Title III funds that were set aside for purchasing Math and/or Reading curriculum materials, and I asked Mrs. Franken if she would like to borrow one of my catalogs to look through. "Will you provide a half day sub for me so the I can find time to
look through the catalog?” she asked. “That kind of thing ... looking through a catalog to find materials, can take a long time!” she said. Surprised by her response, I suggested that this new suggestion would need some consideration...I’d get back to her.

Mrs. Bennett

I traveled to my childhood home to visit with Mrs. Bennett, an elementary teacher in the small town where I went to high school. For a century, this small community has been made up of mostly white northern European settlers. The quiet little homogeneous community had not changed much in a hundred years, but in recent years, farm and industry brought in large numbers of immigrant workers. These new community members took on a multitude of difficult jobs providing much needed agricultural labor and industrial workers. Mrs. Bennett is a third grade teacher and my older brother’s first crush. She grew up in the town and had been a teacher at the local elementary school for more than thirty years. She was experiencing this new diversity in both her community and in her classroom, and I looked forward to hearing about her experiences.

After introductions at the coffee shop we found a place to settle in for our interview. Mrs. Bennett said that, yes, she remembered me, and, of course, she remembered my brother. I asked her to tell me how the community had changed since I had moved away. She explained, “For the first five decades of my life, the town did not change much at all. For the most part, the people who live in this community are descendents of Dutch or German settlers. Residents are farmers or businessmen whose livelihood depends on a good farm economy. For nearly a century, they have attended the same churches, eat the same foods, shop the same stores, and cheer for the same high
school ball teams. The town has not grown much. We have had some industry come and go, but the population has pretty much stayed the same. Each spring we have a big festival with ethnic foods and authentic costumes, and we are known in the region for these traditions.”

She went on, “When the first Mexican family moved into town a few years ago, the local people considered it novelty at first. There was a warm welcome and outpouring of support from neighbors and from the church. The mostly Christian community had a history of generously supporting global ministries through the churches, but few anticipated that their community would become a global mission! A decade ago, new Latino families moved in responding to the promise of employment in the local meat packing plants and dairies, and within a few short years there were hundreds of Spanish-speaking immigrant families living in and around town. Some of the Spanish-speakers were from Honduras and Guatemala, but most came from Mexico. Many were undocumented and faced additional challenges.”

“Do you have non-English speakers in your classroom?” I asked.

“Yes, I do. This year I have just one student who is an English learner. I have other Latino students in my classroom, but they speak English very well. When the first English learner came to my classroom an administrator told me, ‘Well, just seat him near a good student.’ That was the solution offered to accommodate learning needs! I knew enough to know that that was not the way to support language acquisition, but my pleading for instructional support did nothing to bring results. My peer teachers and I told
our administrators, 'We need a program!' But we were told, 'There isn’t any money', and 'There aren’t enough students to make it worthwhile to hire an ESL teacher.'

"It sounds as if you were on your own to find solutions. Do you feel that you were prepared as a teacher to meet the instructional needs of English learners?" I asked.

"No. I really did not have any pre-service training in this, and the school district has not been very supportive. The sudden change in our student demographic caught us unprepared. We all said, 'What is this? What are we going to do?' In fact, I think for a long time our administrators were waiting and hoping that this first influx of Latino students was a just a passing novelty. They did nothing to respond to the needs of the students.

Mrs. Bennett went on to tell me how she decided to do what she instinctively knew was best for her new student. "I had a wonderful volunteer in my classroom. She was so faithful to come every day. She did not speak Spanish, but she was willing to work with my new student. I knew that we had to support him in learning English, so we started by teaching him some practical school vocabulary. We made cards and pictures and used a lot of visuals! Words that were a part of his experience like 'pencil' and 'desk.' The volunteer worked with him every day. She came in every afternoon, and after weeks and months the student DID learn conversational English!"

"Now days, most of my new immigrant students come to me knowing some English." Said Mrs. Bennett. "Their parents may not know English, but the children do. Most new students that come to our school are not new to the country, as they have moved here from other communities in the United States. I recently have had students
move here from Nebraska and California. They can manage conversational English quite well. Now, in regards to academic English words...? That is another ballgame! English learners and children who do not speak English in their home almost always lack in background knowledge and in vocabulary."

Mrs. Bennett went on, "We do not have a certified ESL teacher on staff. Our students are served by a teacher's aid who speaks and writes Spanish, and she is here only three days a week. She pulls the students out of my classroom and I am not sure what she teaches when they work together. I would like it if she would ask for our text books so that together we could select vocabulary words from our lessons for her to pre-teach, but that is not happening."

"So, tell me, how does the current political climate and your understanding of immigration issues affect your interactions with students?" I prompted. "You mentioned the community's resistance to change. As a member of the community, how does this affect your work as a teacher?"

"Well, your question reminds me of a difficult conversation yesterday with a teacher colleague on the playground. She teaches second grade and was telling me about a Latino girl in her classroom whose family has had a difficult time. The student is one of five children. "Mom" lives in a government-run shelter. It is a kind of homeless shelter ...a safe place for women and children. Prior to this move, she and the children had been living with her boyfriend who was physically abusive. The child saw Mom be threatened with a knife. The goal of the shelter is to give the family necessary social and emotional support, and they also work to support Mom in her transition back into the workplace."
“Well, my teacher colleague was spitting mad! She said things like, ‘How can it be that Mom is still in the shelter after three years? Why are my tax dollars still paying for these ‘slackers’?’ I was really annoyed by her intolerance. I wanted to grab her and say, ‘You don’t really know what the situation is.’ And I wanted to ask her, ‘How can you be effective in your role as the teacher of this child when you harbor so much anger?’ I think that she is a little unrealistic to think that this Mom has resources in place to learn language easily...and to get a job. Will this teacher colleague step up to volunteer? No way! My feeling is that as teachers, it is not helpful to hold judgment. ...A family who needs support... a sick child who needs medical care... or a pregnant teenager? Families like this one need and deserve health care...this is not a luxury! Providing resources for people who need them is just the right thing to do!”

“Unfortunately, this teacher’s response is shared by many others in our community. I think that sometimes we forget that most of us are ancestors of immigrants. I recently found a book that was created for the town’s bicentennial celebration. I was reading how in the late nineteen forties the church congregation voted to discontinue the afternoon Dutch language worship service. That was a big step for those immigrants! I was thinking how my grandfather’s experiences would have been similar to those of my Latino students. Grandpa showed courage by letting go of the familiar and adapting to change. It seems that many in my generation have become very intolerant and have acquired an unreasonable sense of entitlement. You would think others would share my excitement that our traditional Dutch Bakery on Main Street now sells the most delicious
tamales for only one dollar each!” We laughed to think of possibilities of this new international menu.

She went on, “People argue, ‘Well, they, meaning my grandfather’s generation, at least all learned the English language!’ My response is, ‘Not overnight they didn’t! It was because of their children going to school ...and of time passing. After a generation or two everyone DID speak English. I don’t think that today’s immigrants are that much different.’

I wanted to hear more about how Mrs. Bennett’s personal immigration stories, family history, faith and/or traditions defined her work with English learners. I wanted to know what motivated Mrs. Bennett to extend herself for the benefit of the neediest students in her classroom. I prompted her to continue.

“Of course, I believe that we are called to reach out to those who are less fortunate. My faith in God gives me direction there. But really, teaching students from different cultures is such an amazing gift! The children and families are so courageous and resilient, and it is my honor to know them! Student faces just light up when they finally make those learning connections, and they are so grateful for your help on the journey of learning a new culture and language...and it is a wonderful moment for a teacher! We have so much to gain through the opportunity to work together. It is so much fun when we embrace the challenges. My angry teacher colleague thinks that she is giving so much to the students and families, but she is missing all of the joy she could be getting through her work! Some of my treasured teaching highlights involve students who are immigrants learning English!
She went on to say, "I had a little student who loved to write. She was quite fluent in Spanish and English. On a particular day, all the kids were struggling with editing and proof reading, and I said to this particular child, 'You did a wonderful job, but the end of the story, your flamingo, you misspelled as flaminga and the clown you spelled clowna.' The little girl said, 'Teacher that was not a mistake. Those are the girls!' In her story, a clown married a clowna and a flamingo married a flaminga. Wasn't that cute and clever?"

Ms. Shannon

Ms. Shannon greeted me with a smile. She made one more quick attempt at tidying up the classroom before she took a seat beside me at the table. We settled in on small chairs to sip tea out of Styrofoam cups that Ms. Shannon so generously had brought in from the teacher’s lounge. She sat to share her stories of work with English language learners. I asked, “Do you remember in your pre-service program and in your undergraduate work...Did you have any classes to prepare you for work with English Language Learners?”

“I went to three different state universities.” Ms. Shannon reported. “I remember one class that addressed general over-all disabilities, and ESL was just kind of lumped in there. Colleges really should have stronger ESL component in the undergraduate programs. More than ever, I mean, you need to be prepared. Schools are so diverse. I believe colleges are doing a disservice by not preparing teachers strategies for teaching in a diverse classroom. You might get a lecture on it, in one course, in a semester course, if you’re really lucky.”
She went on, “This school offered my first ESL experience. When I came, some Bosnian students had been here for a while, and they had already learned English, for the most part. We also had a growing Hispanic population. Many students came with some English and, while there are still some obvious challenges the Hispanic kids moved into a supportive community. It was in my third year of teaching that we had our first African refugee come. That’s when I really saw the challenges of being a ‘newcomer.’ I got a student in my classroom that first year and he did not speak English. Of course, none of us spoke his tribal language, and we didn’t have any interpreters or any way of speaking to the family or anything. It was a huge challenge, and our first reaction was, ‘We need some formal training here!’ We didn’t really even know what to ask for or what it involved at all. That was a big challenge both for our school and for our district. The work we did here at our school came from an immediate need, and that kind of paved the way for the district.”

“I went through Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP) training, seven years ago. I also attended the Iowa Culture and Language Conference and Iowa’s Our Kids workshops for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. I was looking for strategies to be a better teacher. Another way I tried to learn was by shadowing our ESL teacher. I tried to get into her classroom to watch her teach as often as I could. We started doing co-teaching, and I took the co-teaching course to learn how to collaborate to meet the needs of students.”
"That is great," I responded. "Do you think that all teachers respond to the challenges by looking for ways to educate themselves to become better equipped to meet the challenges, as you have done?"

"Yes and no," Ms. Shannon responded. We got a new principal in our building. The new administrator was very passionate about leading the way in ESL and most of the staff followed right along with her. Those who did not left to work in other schools. I am just going to be very frank with you. There was a big split. The staff that was very passionate about ESL stayed at this building. And the staff that wanted to move on to a different clientele moved to a different school. While it was difficult at the time, it was probably the best thing for everyone."

I asked Ms. Shannon how the current political climate affected her teaching. She responded, "In the classroom, it doesn't affect me. I try and separate it. In the classroom, we concentrate on what we are doing in the classroom. As far as if we're focusing on Math, we are focusing on Math. If we are focusing on animal classification, we are focusing on animal classification. Outside of the classroom, politics do affect me because it affects my students' needs. If, for example, I know that a landlord is evicting one of our families then I get involved. We have resources, within our school and district where I can go and say, 'We have this going on with so and so...' and they step in to offer support. Yes, it affects me in that I must do something...that I feel the need to do something to help those families. The ESL families seem to have the greatest environmental challenges and fewer resources to manage them."
“So, those things affect me emotionally because I am compassionate about my kids. But really, those broader conflicts are adult issues and I try to not bring them into the classroom. I make a conscious decision to not let all of this become a drama and a distraction, because it can easily get in the way of teaching. There are other kids in the classroom, as well. And, so, I do the best that I can to meet all of the students’ needs. I will try to manage the family issues by making a phone call or doing a home visit with a family after school. Or, I might make a phone call during ‘specials’ time.”

I wanted to hear more about home visits. “Do you visit all of your students? Do you go to their homes frequently, and what would prompt you to go?”

“I have made home visits to families as a way to build relationship with students. Our conversations are not complicated. I smile a lot and my student does a lot of the talking. Each visit is unpredictable, as I may not find the family at home. Maybe because African refugees are used to living in a village, I would often find that the door was left unlocked or standing wide open, and people walk in and out all the time. It is very difficult to make a phone call to a parent who doesn’t speak English, but I do try to call before I come. My students think it’s strange that I don’t just show up. They ask why I don’t just come over and walk into their home because that is what everyone else does. I say, “No, I have to call first. It is that cultural difference. But, you know, we are beginning to understand each other better. The cultural boundaries are starting to blend.”

Ms. Shannon shared how she prompted discussions of culture and diversity inside of her classroom as a way of building community. Her focus was to help each student
experience a classroom that was a safe environment, and she made sure that everyone knew they had an important place in it.

She reported, “At the beginning of the year, we spend three or four weeks creating a positive climate and culture in the classroom. We do a classroom activity to discuss the positive values of diversity. We each have a different flower and we talk about how beautiful it is, in its own uniqueness. And then we put them in little groups and notice how pretty they are together. And then we put them together as a group and notice how beautiful they are together as a group. And then we write about it. I teach that each child is beautiful individual, yet, we can a work together as small group...we are much more beautiful as a group together. We celebrate our diversity and help children be proud of who they are. This is extremely important. We talk about what “refugee” means and we have open discussion, but we do not discuss the adult issues. That is where things get complicated. I am not sure that most of us understand the history and emotion that undergirds most of those larger political discussions.”

I asked Ms. Shannon to share how her personal history impacts her work? I asked, “Do you have an immigration story or an experience that affects the way that you teach? What do you think it is that motivates you?”

She responded, “I would have to say, there is one kid that stands out in my mind. It was my first experience with a non-English speaker and the experience has transformed the way that I teach. I believe it was in my second year of teaching that I met Dahab, a Sudanese refugee. He had never seen snow before, he had never seen water coming out of a faucet, never seen a water fountain, had never seen things like desks, chairs, and
pencils. And so, when he came at first he had to learn about everything! By the time he left our classroom he could read a book! I mean, in level A, which is a very early reader...but he made such growth! He was a very intelligent kid.”

She went on, “Early on, we had to use gestures to communicate, and he would catch on very quickly. I just remember that being such a joyous time... one of the most fulfilling experiences of my teaching career. Every moment was a wonderful learning experience for him, and I got such pleasure watching him and learning with him. You know how as a teacher you check yourself and say, “I hope I made a difference for someone today...I hope my students are making progress toward achievement.” It seemed like, every day for Dahab was a great, great day. Even just turning a pencil sharpener was a great thing for him!”

So, in the first days and weeks he just roamed around and touched things. And I remember, I just laughed out of pure joy. One day he and I worked together to hang student work on the walls of the classroom. I was standing on chair to be able to reach. He went to stand on a chair and he said, ‘Teacher and Dahab is so big, too!’”

We laughed at Ms. Shannon’s stories of those early days with Dahab.

“Once we went on a field trip to a history museum. People were dressed in period costumes talking about the past, and he was so confused at that. Dahab would ask things like, “Why they be no dead?” I had to explain that the people were just pretending to be past U.S. presidents. We saw this little teapot collection at the museum. There were teapots of all sizes and shapes. Dahab picked up a little miniature teapot and he said, “For
little people?” He was very, very inquisitive and just everything was just such an incredible discovery through his eyes.

“Working with Dahab was such an amazing experience! Those memories are locked in my heart, forever and ever. And I will never forget him or his family, and the stories that they told. Danhab’s father was also an incredible individual. Another teacher and I would do home visits to that house often because we loved to listen to stories of their lives in Africa. I could have just sat there and listened for hours and hours. Danhab’s father spoke English. Even though the rest of the family spoke little English, Dad was well educated and very articulate. He could say words like “negotiate”...yet he didn’t know the word for “pillow.” And so, we could just sit there and just listen for hours. It was so rewarding. I have gained so much getting to know the families of my students.”

“These experiences have changed my family’s perspectives, as well. My father is a big time conservative corporate attorney. He lives in the city, but he often comes to the suburbs to see me. He has come to some of the events and meetings here at our school, and I have shared some of the stories about this school and about individual student and families that I have come to know. He has had the opportunity to meet a few of them, and it has really broadened his thinking. For so long he has been so far to the “right.” He had strong opinions about immigration. Hearing stories and meeting real people has broken down some walls...maybe alleviated some fears for him. And for me, personally, to see him change...Well, it’s huge for me! It has changed our relationship! I am so proud of him!
CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION

In this chapter, I will review my research methods and discuss the process of my research, summarize my research findings and offer additional discussion. The last three headings in the chapter, which summarize my findings, are directly correlated to my original research questions, and the discussion unwraps the emerging themes in each of the three topic areas. Lastly, I share implications for educators and suggestions for further research.

The Research Process and Analysis

The stories of teacher’s experiences are embedded with reflections of their experiences in classrooms with changing demographics. These stories were retold through narratives of observations and question and answer exchanges. Interpretation and analysis were embedded throughout the process. I collected field notes of my classroom observations, email, and phone conversations, and multiple interviews resulted in many pages of transcribed text. In my transcriptions I represented, word by word, the conversation between the teacher participants and me. I also included some annotations for the non-verbal behaviors observed. As I found it difficult to anticipate all of the potentially relevant aspects of my interactions with participants, I decided to transcribe each of the interviews in entirety. Data collected from my observations provided rich detail and a background for the conversations. In my narrative writing, I referenced the multi-faceted collection of data in order to tell a descriptive story.
My interviews took place within eight different school districts varying in size from 800 to a district of nearly 16,000 students. While we are able to learn much from these constructed narratives, the intent of the research was not for findings to be generalized beyond this qualitative study. What the study does do is to provide a window into schools and classrooms where I was able to gain privileged access. I was able to talk with teachers in their work environment, observe and document with authenticity their interactions with students, and describe the sounds, smells, and the energy of the school setting. This close interaction is rare, and the insights to be gained are valuable in understanding a teacher’s experience and the affect on student’s learning and well-being.

While I started this project with tremendous enthusiasm for hearing the stories of teachers, I discovered early on that most teachers were not eager to participate in my study. Though I made efforts to make connections, I found it difficult to get teachers to commit to sharing their story. Responses from each of my initial inquiries revealed a great deal of apprehension, a resistance to vulnerability, a fear of getting in trouble with school administration, and hesitancy to crowd an already busy schedule.

As I described in Chapter 3, I had hoped that through a network of administrators in the state I would gain easy access to teachers. Through the efforts of a small local university awarded a federal grant to support Iowa’s English language learners, I was given the opportunity to join a large cohort of administrators from ESL programs across the state. Together we worked to learn how to more effectively support our English learners in both language and content area instruction. I started my research with the false certainty that this network would provide my easy access to teachers. Composing a brief
summary and the goals of my research, I sent out a mailing to twenty-three principals, district ESL program facilitators, and superintendents across Iowa. I asked them to give me names of teachers I could contact within their school districts who might be willing to share their stories. I asked the administrators to merely share names and not to make contact with teachers to either encourage or discourage their participation. I wanted to ensure that teacher responses be completely voluntary and unbiased.

From those initial 23 administrator contacts I heard back from only three. The first principal to respond was very enthusiastic and supportive. He gave me names of four teachers that he thought would share their stories. I emailed each teacher twice explaining my research and asking for his or her participation, but I received no response. The second administrator told me that she would have to get the approval of the human resources department in her school district prior to sharing teacher names. We emailed back and forth trying to move things forward, but eventually she just stopped writing back. The third principal and I played phone tag until I saw his name in the newspaper announcing that he had accepted a job in a different school district. My plan to find teachers to interview through my email blitz to administrators had failed.

I didn’t have time to get discouraged because just a few weeks later I met the teachers at Kennedy. It was through a professional contact that I was able to meet with the principal there, and without hesitancy she gave permission for me to interview her teachers. The school staff had embraced the challenges of meeting the needs of “newcomers” head-on, and they were getting used to publically telling their unique story. In months prior to my visit, they had talked to a local newspaper and had written and
posted the basketball team story on the school website. The school principal was willing to invite me in to talk to teachers. I found them to be open and willing to talk and I was able to interview seven teachers in that school.

On the first day that I came to Kennedy, I was invited to sit in on their early morning staff meeting. The meeting was a celebration of the completion of a year-long commitment. Teachers had made efforts to learn how to work with students with diverse language and cultures and deliver effective instruction by participating in a uniquely designed in-house class for which they could receive graduate or re-licensure credit. Fifteen hours of seat time and selected project work held the incentive of an hour of college credit. I learned through table discussions that the staff demonstrated a “can-do” attitude and they had countless success stories to share. After the staff meeting, I was given permission to move throughout Kennedy Elementary to interview and record conversations with teachers.

Moving forward with my research, a few weeks later an interview with a teacher in the town where I grew up was a bit easier to arrange because of our past acquaintance. I made a long drive to meet with her in a coffee shop to listen to and audio record her story. On the next day, I attended a Spanish-only church service where that same teacher’s sister did the Spanish to English translation, and I had long conversations with the people who sold tamales at the Dutch bakery. I visited the school and informally visited with teachers in the hallway and office. A former high school classmate helped me make connections with a town historian, and my grandma’s diary helped me to reflect on daily life of European immigrants of more than 50 years ago in the homogeneous
community of my childhood. I collected notes of conversations, observations, and reflections and began to understand first-hand the data management challenges of a qualitative researcher.

In the school district where I work, the stories came through workday conversation with students, staff, and families, by email, and through frequent school and classroom observations. I visited Mrs. Franken’s room often. While there are hundreds of local stories to tell, I chose to write about a boy named Kevin. I chose to tell the story of Kevin because the observations and conversations with Kevin’s teacher demonstrated typical challenges of the English learners and teacher early in the process. I also chose to tell about Kevin because his story was so hauntingly similar to the story of a boy named Kevin from a decade before...the Kevin who was a student in my third grade classroom! It was such a remarkable coincidence that a call came early one morning to our district ESL offices saying that we were going to place a newly-arrived Chinese non-English speaking boy in a third grade classroom. “...And oh, by the way, his name is Kevin!”

Summary and Discussion

Classroom demographics have changed. By necessity, teachers have become gifted practitioners designing individualized instruction so that all students can learn. Pressures are great to create and sustain teaching that is culturally, linguistically, and cognitively diverse so that all children can achieve learning measured to be proficient by new rigorous Common Core standards. This is no small task! In addition, teachers are challenged to manage the personalities within their classrooms. Students within the global classroom are taught to appreciate and celebrate differences. Having no choice but
to accept this challenge, teachers work to help children be respectful of others whose values they may not share and to learn how to be members of a supportive heterogeneous community.

I began this research well aware of the challenges that teachers face in classrooms where they are expected to meet the needs of students who have diverse learning needs. As I moved in and out of schools for my research, I found teachers fully engaged in the work of teaching all students. I recognize that I may have observed the best of the best, as it is reasonable to infer that teachers who are willing to participate in a study such as this are doing so because they have a “success story” to tell. It is also true that I made some solicitations for participation that were left unanswered, and these may have represented the teachers who were less confident of their skills. Yet, I think we can draw themes and learn from this small group of teachers who had stories to share.

**Theme 1: Instruction**

Teachers who were research participants self-reported their lack of preparedness for the challenges of effective teaching in today's culturally, linguistically, and cognitively diverse classrooms. They received less than adequate training in their undergraduate teacher education programs to prepare them to meet the demands in their changing classrooms. However, a significant theme to emerge was that the teachers who responded to this deficit by actively participating in on-the-job learning, both through formal professional development opportunities and/or through experiential learning, gained expertise, confidence, and a renewed enthusiasm for their work.
All teachers reported a lack of opportunity for learning in their pre-service college education programs. Most indicated that, at the time of their attendance, there were few or no classes offered in ESL or in cultural proficiency. None had received an endorsement in ESL. Some teachers had taken classes in special education and had learned some strategies that they thought they could apply to teaching English learners, but few were able to do so with confidence. None of the teachers interviewed had received training in the stages of language acquisition or in appropriate strategies for instructing students at each of the stages. While they had heard about Cummin’s Second Language Acquisition Theory (1981), teachers could not confirm a depth of knowledge. What they knew they had learned “on the job.” All were familiar with Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarria, Short, & Vogt, 2008), however, only Marlee, Dean, and Shannon had been formally trained to use the instructional strategies with English learners. There was recognition by teachers that the needs brought on by a changing society did not exist at the time they went through their teacher education programs, and therefore, it could be assumed that university offerings at the time of their enrollment were then appropriate for meeting the current demands.

Teachers recognize that changing demographics will continue to have a profound impact on teaching and learning, and on-going professional development is one way for professionals to grow and change. Levels of engagement in professional development and the teacher’s attitude, levels of satisfaction, and support for student achievement were highly correlated among the teachers in my study. Teachers who had the opportunity to immerse themselves in learning about language acquisition, culture, and effective
instructional strategies spoke about job satisfaction and joy in their work. Those who had little support or who were at an earlier stage on the change and learning continuum demonstrated little of the same job satisfaction and joy. Rather, their stated emotions were those of resistance and fear.

Opportunities for growth through on-going professional development varied significantly among teachers represented in my narratives. Marlee and Dean, and teachers at Kennedy participated in the most comprehensive professional development model. These teachers gained expertise and support through traditional district-provided workshop attendance and study groups. The college-credit class designed specifically for the school through the local area education agency provided an extraordinary level of targeted learning. The experiential on-the-job learning through participation in after school programs for which teachers could earn a stipend promoted relationship building, and teachers gained confidence through interactions. It is my observation that this type of emersion in the work, including hours of study and hands-on-learning produced a level of expertise in the staff that made them feel like experts. Buy-in among the staff at Kennedy initially was difficult, as some staff chose to leave to teach at another school, but among those who committed to the work the participation levels were high. The implications from this outcome are important and will be addressed later in this chapter.

Of teachers in my narratives, Franken was in the earliest stages of adapting her teaching to meet the needs of the English learners in her classroom, and in the first days she appeared to be most resistant and unhappy with her new responsibilities. Franken voiced that she had not participated in professional development opportunities for
teachers of English learners, and she resisted having to “read a book” to gain new insights. Hall and Hord (2006) would remind us that “change is a process, not an event.” People and organizations must move through the change process to learn new skills and competencies. This experience, while difficult for Franken was the contrast that allowed me to clearly see how motivation and confidence is directly correlated to the investment in professional learning. In all fairness to Franken, she needs support and time to immerse herself in learning to meet cultural, linguistic, and academic demands, and in time her investment may also net personal and professional success and satisfaction.

Marlee and Dean talked about teaching and learning being reciprocal. “We were learning more than they (students) were!” they stated. The returns were also realized through other affective modalities. Bennet described the experience this way, “Teaching students from different cultures is such an amazing gift! The children and families are so courageous and resilient, and it is my honor to know them!” She used words like “joy” and “opportunity.” Ms. Shannon described her interactions with an African student as “a joyous time... one of the most fulfilling experiences of my teaching career.” She also used words like “fulfilling” and “wonderful.” Teachers who created calm in the chaos, which often accompanies a newcomer’s experience, shared that they were able to experience a sense of satisfaction.

Marlee and Dean came to another realization about their professional learning. They saw that, in the same way that children need to learn to build background knowledge in order to link new information, teachers need to build background knowledge, as well. Hall and Hord (2006) share,
There is much attention given to student's learning and various ways that different groups of students can be served in their learning, but little focus is on the professionals and how they will develop increased capacity in the long run to ensure that students are successful learners. ...the possibility for the staff to manage it's own professionalism has been largely ignored (p. 272).

It is important for administrators to provide resources and time for teachers to engage in meaningful learning over time.

Franken, shared a very different experience and outlook. In her first days of working with a demanding new English learner, she admittedly had few resources and little training. She was not yet experiencing any additional benefits from the changes in her classroom demographic. She used words like “overwhelmed” and “needing help.” While we can be hopeful that in time, Franken may experience the same satisfaction, however, it is naïve to assume that the formula for success is guaranteed by a simple formula. It is also not the work of the qualitative researcher to generalize outcomes.

**Theme 2: Political Influence**

The individual teacher narratives are stories of caring, friendship, and relationship building between individuals. Teachers have a remarkable capacity for embracing the individual child that walks through the door. At Kennedy Elementary and in Mrs. Bennet's school, teacher empathy was not limited to students, as their stories reflected caring and concern for families of the students, as well.

While anti-immigration sentiments flood the current national conversation reported through media, teachers in my study gave indication that these broader discussions have not influenced their teaching. When I asked how they made sense of all of the anti-immigration rhetoric, Marlee and Dean responded with a message of
compassion in defense of the immigrant. They talked about the extraordinary efforts immigrant parents make to meet the demands in their new society. They describe how the jobs available to them are very difficult. They recognized how immigrants work long hours under poor conditions with the challenges of difficulty in communicating. The expectations needed to demonstrate good parenting and to meet school demands adds to these unrealistic expectations. Marlee defends, “But, how can they manage all of this when they are trying to make a living the best way that they can? As a society, we are hard on these parents! We say, ‘Why aren’t they taking care of these kids?’ Well, I’d like to ask, ‘Who has taken time to explain to them how things work here?’” Marlee is making a case in defense of the immigrant. The challenges are great and he points out that often time criticisms are unjust. Marlee and Dean share many stories of caring, friendship, and relationships. This response is representative of the theme of responses demonstrating how individuals who personally know an individual and put a face on a different “other” have no interest in participation in the angry anti-immigration conversation.

When I posed the same questions about the anti-immigration messages to Shannon, she shared how she is intentional about leaving the “adult issues” outside of her classroom. She said that she brings opportunity for students to have reflective conversation about immigration and refugees, but only as it relates to students within the school community. She describes these discussions as “very important.” She creates a climate and culture in her classroom that allows every child to feel physically and emotionally safe and they are required to be respectful of all persons. They are
encouraged to process their ideas through collaborative discussion with peers. Shannon indicated that the anti-immigration sentiments in the national conversation do not influence her teaching.

Bennett also demonstrated that she is able to separate her values from the political conversations around her. She separated views from the teacher who expressed anger about an immigrant family still getting public support after three years of struggle. Bennett reflected on the importance of respectfully caring for those who are in need and the challenges of separating the political conversations from the classroom.

We might question the motives of Franken in forcing a new arrival to say the pledge to the American flag when it held no meaning for the child. Kevin was more Chinese than American in his thoughts and emotions, as he had only been in the country for a few days. The pledge to the flag deserves a much more heartfelt solute, and Mrs. Franken’s forcing his compliance was unnecessary and perhaps harmful.

The United States Flag Code, which governs the display and care of the American flag, requires a respectful response. A non-citizen should show respect by standing upright with arms at the side looking at the flag with no talking or bodily movements, but there is no expectation that he/she recite the pledge...certainly not on the first days in the country.

I observed that teachers avoided answering some of the interview questions in my semi-structured interviews, and I chose not to probe into these areas. Questions such as, “How do you feel about having students in your classroom who are undocumented immigrants?” and “How have you responded to changes in education and the demands
placed on classroom teachers (high stakes testing, budget cuts, etc.)?” may have been overlooked by teachers due to time constraints. It is possible, however, that the avoidance of these questions was due to their political nature and sensitivity nature. Social conditioning often causes people to hesitate in talking about politics or religion in “polite company,” and it may be that the teachers were intentionally avoiding this topic. It is not surprising that teachers in the middle of their workday would steer clear of topics requiring a greater investment of energy and emotion. Marlee and Dean, Shannon, and Bennett said they are able to separate global politics from their work with children in the classroom. Their statements held congruence throughout their interview. It is predictable that the evidence of undocumented status would not change how each of them perceive an identified student. I am not so sure about Franken. I predict that she may have had strong negative views and would have been open to share them if probed to do so.

Teachers have been thrust into the work of creating a place of peace within their classroom communities, and they do not have opportunity to select the mix of personalities that populate it. Perhaps through their work to create peace within the microcosms of elementary classrooms that are becoming increasingly diverse, we can learn how to redefine our moral obligations to others who are different from us. Anthony K. Appiah (2006, p. xv) reintroduces us to the ideas of “cosmopolitanism,” a fourth century term that that literally means “citizens of the cosmos.” His work helps us reflect on and challenge our thinking about our responsibility to others.

Appiah says there are two strands interwoven through the idea of cosmopolitanism. He writes that our obligations to others stretch beyond our literal
fellow citizens. We take an interest not only in human life but in particular human lives, which means we care about those practices and beliefs of others that lend them significance. People are different and we can learn from our differences. There are many human possibilities worth exploring, and we neither expect nor desire that all humans converge on a single chosen path of life practice. There will be times when universal concern and respect for legitimate difference clash. There is a sense then that cosmopolitanism is the name not of a solution but of a challenge.

In these days of divisiveness and rancor in American life, understanding and tolerance requires a commitment to building relationships with people who are different from us. Hostilities and tensions in our culture breed new hostilities and tensions. It is helpful to build relationships first and foremost so that we can navigate the difficult conversations. The example of Ms. Shannon bringing students together in her classroom to talk about community and to practice respect for each other demonstrates a successful model for creating a safe place where those ideas about which people disagree can be shared. In a recent interview (Tippett, 2011), Appiah described a process for making a connection with others.

If you have that background of relationship between individuals and communities that is in that sense conversational, then when you have to talk about the things that do divide you, you have a better platform. You can begin with the assumption that you like and respect each other even though you don't agree about everything, and you can maybe build on that. And you can know that, at the end of the conversation, it's quite likely that you'll both think something pretty close to what you both thought at the start. But you might at least have a deeper appreciation for the other person's point of view. It may also turn out that it is easier to accept the outcome, whether it's the outcome you favor or the outcome the other person favors, simply because you have had the chance to be heard. This is one of the great virtues of democracy when it's working. People tend to be more willing to
accept an outcome that they wouldn't have chosen because they feel they've had voice...they've participated in the process (p. 6).

People tend to charge into moral discussions head on, which results in a monolithic “us” and “them.” Defensiveness builds up between the groups, which inhibits the opportunity to really listen to each other. A better guide for interaction would be Appiah’s suggestion for “sidling up to differences” (p. 6). Two people might disagree about child rearing or homosexuality but they both like soccer, so they can begin by building relationship around those things they have in common. Appiah suggests that if people first address those things they have in common, they can create a platform for the more difficult conversations to come.

Donald E. Brown (1991) suggests that people are more alike than different. He describes shared traits among humans; (1) *practices* such as music, poetry, dance, marriage, funerals, (2) *values* representing courtesy, hospitality, sexual modesty, generosity, reciprocity and the concern for the resolution of social conflict; and (3) *concepts* such as good and evil, right and wrong, parent and child, past present and future. A shared human nature allows us to make sense of one another. A teacher and his/her immigrant student may both appreciate the sport of soccer, and a great connection begins when they are able to appreciate this single unique commonality together. Brown suggests that the first threads of relationship building may begin with what these individuals have in common.

In our schools, where linguistically and culturally diverse communities of children are randomly formed, teachers may use common experiences through relationships to build foundations for amiable encounters. This work is not conflict free,
and passions and emotions can get in the way of progress. However, intentional interactions and practices will forge foundations for those more difficult conversations.

Theme 3: Motivations

Teachers I met gave generous amounts of time and effort on behalf of the newcomers in their classrooms. They told of motivations by faith, tradition, and/or their own personal immigration stories. Marlee and Dean both said that their personal faith was a motivator to support their students by building relationships, moving “beyond personal gain and conveniences.” Certainly, the work to create a basketball team required motivations beyond what typically drives a teacher to give a fair day’s work. Mr. Marlee states,

I think personally, for me, a lot of it is my faith. My motivations also are a result of family history and some traditions and stuff. I have lived my life in a way that is consistent with believing that I have a purpose that’s greater than satisfying my own needs. Applying that to the job I have is important. I meet a kid in my classroom, and I realize that he or she is just a normal kid who needs help. I do what I can to help. It’s not always enough and it probably never will be enough. But, whatever I can do I do...I try to make things work. But, yes, I would say that faith definitely motivates (me).

Mr. Dean shares a similar motivation of faith. He shared how he experiences job satisfaction through a sense of purpose, as well. In his reflections about a conversation with peers at a Bible Study, he came to realize that he was the only one who was happy in his work. He reflected on the economies of the work place and that a paycheck is just one way that our jobs pay us.

Mr. Dean shared the story about bringing African boys into his home. He said, “The students were so excited to visit, and when they walked into the house they just started to jump up and down!...And these are fourth graders!  They all just started
jumping because they were so excited... from just looking around. They thought it was the greatest thing.”

When asked about her motivation, Shannon jumped into the story of a former African student. Knowing that she was making an impact in the life of a child motivated her in her job. Shannon also shared how her father, whom she described as “far right wing” had become more open minded as a result of hearing stories and meeting the students in her classroom. She reported that this was a significant change that positively impacted her relationship with her father. Bennett shared her religious faith motivation, and said that her faith in God gave her some direction and motivation.

Bennett also shared that her motivation came from her faith and from satisfaction of a job well done. She said, “Student faces just light up when they finally make those learning connections, and they are so grateful for help on the journey of learning a new culture and language... it is a wonderful moment for a teacher!” Relationship is another motivating factor.

Understanding our civic and religious traditions may guide us as we examine motivations for interactions with immigrants. We are a nation of individuals, yet our history predisposes us to compassion toward community. American culture and hospitality are exemplified in the words of Puritan John Withrop (1588-1648) (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). His sermon, “A Model of Christian Charity” delivered aboard ship as it was landing in Salem Harbor in 1630, describes his commitment and that of his community of likeminded pilgrims who left prosperity in Europe to start a new life in the wilderness. Winthrop’s words have remained archetypal
for understanding what life in America was to become. He said, “We must delight in each other, make others conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body” (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 28).

Our nation’s early history of commitment to community stands in contrast to the hegemony of individualism, which defines American society today. This switch from a purely social disposition to one where the focus is on the development of individual was at least partially due to the influence of John Locke’s (Bellah et al., 1985) popular child rearing theories proposed in the eighteenth century. The emphasis, which for generations had been placed on peace and order in the family and community, took a turn toward the development of independent and self-sufficient individuals. How then do we make sense of this vast contrast, which defines our culture and history? If individuals will determine that giving to another in need seems too great a commitment, broadening the charge to citizenship and politics poses an even greater challenge.

While faith may be the motivator for an individual to reach out to immigrants in compassion through relationships, faith seldom nets the same results when religion meets politics. The message from the organized Christian “right” is often laced with anti-immigration sentiments. The Family Research Council, which describes its mission as “defending faith, family, and freedom,” conducted a member poll in the spring of 2007 in which 90% of respondents chose forced deportation as the appropriate fate for America's estimated 11 million-12 million undocumented immigrants (Zaltchik, 2006). Even in the face of great need, the “religious” political agenda is to often set to protect the resources
of the most advantaged among us. In fairness, however, there are many Christians who are not motivated by political gain that through local efforts reach out to immigrants and refugees with genuine compassion.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; 2012) provides protection and assistance to the world’s refugees. Based in Geneva, Switzerland, the agency was created on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly and began work in 1951, initially aiding more than 1,000,000 European refugees in the aftermath of World War II. The humanitarian agency has steadily increased its identification and submissions of persons in need of resettlement over the past few years. They estimate global resettlement needs at about 800,000 persons, including populations where resettlement is envisioned over a period of several years. While the number of refugees in need of resettlement is growing, available resettlement places are not keeping pace. In 2005, UNHCR successfully resettled 40,000 refugees. In 2010, resettlement countries provided 80,000 places for UNHCR resettlement submissions. UNHCR reports that this increase is in direct correlation to improvements in the process of identifying people in need of resettlement, yet only 10 of every 100 refugees in need of resettlement arrive in a safe new home each year. UNHCR estimates the resettlement needs for 2011 to be about 172,300 persons, however, if the available number of resettlement places remain at current levels, there will only be places for 46% of those identified.

Individually, Mr. Dean and Mr. Marlee’s faith will motivate them to welcome these newly resettled refugees, but organized faith-based groups, while they share the same religious documents of faith, will not.
Political and religious outreach seem generous at first glance, however the true motive may be less about compassion for the recipient and more about easing the conscience of the giver, gaining recognition, or seeking a feeling of self-worth. The giver chooses to keep himself insulated from the recipients, as sharing resources across an ocean “costs” far less than sharing a life, a community, local resources, and time, as these are the values that American’s hold most dear. Projecting the faces of sick African children on television screens may stir the compassionate to contribute money in support of fresh water well projects, but many of the same persons would hesitate to share a cup of water with a newly arrived refugee who lives across town. A face-to-face encounter, makes it much more difficult for the giver to control how much and when he wants to give, and that is where many draw the line in their faith motivated giving. Individuals decide how far to extend themselves for the benefits of another. Will they choose to ignore a human in need, or will they take him home and share a meal? The challenge for both the individual and for organized groups is where to draw the lines of compassion.

Philosopher Peter Unger (1996) has demonstrated this challenge in his book provocatively called, *Living High and Letting Die*. He writes that “To behave in a way that’s not seriously wrong, a well-off person like you and me must contribute to vitally effective groups like OXFAM and UNICEF, most of the money and property that we have and most of what comes our way in the foreseeable future.” Philosophers have defended such a view in considerable detail. One of Unger’s points of departure is a famous analogy previously offered by philosopher Peter Singer (1972) entitled “The Shallow Pond.” It reads, “If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning
in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy. But dirty clothes are insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing.” Unger creates other scenarios to help us check our motivations. Would you stop to give a ride to an injured man if it meant he would bloody the beautiful leather seats in your car? Would you give $100 to UNICEF if it would keep one hundred children alive? ...And if you save the first hundred children, what will do with your next $100? Are you willing to bankrupt yourself to save children? How far will we go for the sake of another? How much is enough? We individually answer these questions in an attempt to define our obligations to others.

_Habits of the Heart_ (Bellah et al., 1985), a modern classic which defines our changing American society, contends that our overemphasis on individualism undermines our nation’s capacity to seek the common good. The authors call for our nation to transcend radical individualism and to recover the insights of Biblical traditions and “republicanism”. The authors challenge society to return to rhetoric of a higher calling. Movements such as civil rights, equality, community, and freedom speak to the heart and soul of man more so than the dry and emotionally drained individualism that takes a technocratic approach to solving issues. The authors call for a community that embodies civic ideals to guide us in decisions we need to make in common. Our individualism has caused us to lose our ability to work toward a common goal.

The right wing in America has been realigning politics, talking about the importance of values while pressing forward with a greedy agenda that begs no apology. Conservatives claim deference to religious texts, which teach that the follower must reach
out to the stranger with compassion; to meet the needs of the sojourner, yet political language is laden with individualistic terminology such as “cost-benefit analysis.” Bellah suggests that this independence snuffs out authentic community action, and in the absence of any objective criteria of right and wrong, good or evil, the self and its feelings become our only moral guide (Bellah et al., 1985).

While the expression of larger organized religion often produces rhetoric that is individualistic and self-protecting, teachers reported that they were motivated by faith and experiences to reach out to immigrants and refugees and to nurture relationship. They knew their names, what made them laugh, and their favorite ice cream flavors. Through the stories shared by teachers, I have observed that individuals can learn to be caring and compassionate. Teachers demonstrate in their actions that by taking time to know each other as individuals can break through initial fears presented by the unknown to build positive relationships with others different from themselves. We can support the work of teachers by taking collective responsibility.

Implications of Research for Educators

Professional Development for Schools and Staff

Teachers at Kennedy participated in a comprehensive professional development model, and it is my observation that explicit instruction resulting in cultural proficiency and effective teaching strategies produced a higher level of expertise resulting in teacher confidence. We discovered through narrative analysis that leadership’s response to change was key to school success. At Kennedy, administrators and community agencies moved quickly in response to the rapid demographic changes. Teachers were not allowed
to commiserate in despair as they faced changes in their workplace that were out of their control. Plans were put into place and a professional development calendar was created to communicate the intentions.

It is important to note the Kennedy received a great deal of support from the local Area Administration Agency (AEA), to which much of the credits for teacher education can be given. This high level of support was not evident at each school that I visited. Neither was there a correlation evident that larger school districts received a greater level of AEA supports than smaller districts. Rather, the extraordinary and creative support given to Kennedy school and staff appeared to be due to one individual who demonstrated extraordinary talent and interest in supporting the school’s new non-English speaking students. The model created for the Kennedy staff could certainly be replicated, however, if support was to be made available.

Early in the implementation of the staff development model at Kennedy there was some pushback, and some teachers and administrators chose to leave the school. Those who stayed, however, accepted the challenges and demonstrated readiness and a commitment to the work of making the school home to a new student population. Teachers were given the choice to engage in the learning or to choose to leave to work at another school. While this was reported to be a difficult and tumultuous time, it forced teachers to make a choice. School leaders did not allow teachers to stay and not engage, Plans were made for professional development for all teachers to gain necessary resources and information to support their work. It was important for the staff to adopt a
mindset that it was the school’s job to adapt to change, and that the responsibility to “fit” was not owned by the students.

Much of the success in the early implementation was due to Kennedy’s success in enticing participation. In the early days when there were some extrinsic motivators. Incentives such as monetary pay and college credit were offered to teachers who pledged to engage in the work. In time, the relationships with students and confidence in new teaching skills gained became more intrinsic motivators. Teachers began to feel like experts, and they collected success stories to tell. They reported that they were motivated by applied learning, faith, and relationships.

Change is Ongoing

Another implication of this work is that change is ongoing. There is no promise that initiatives offering solutions for today’s challenges will meet the needs of students and staff tomorrow. Evaluation must be ongoing. Teachers at Kennedy are currently facing a downshift in their population, as available housing has become too expensive for many of the refuge families. Enrollment this fall was down by nearly 40 students. This has required that the school respond with staffing changes.

It may be helpful to develop a corporate mindset that recognizes realities of the characteristics of change so that teachers can prepare themselves rather than participating in a culture of resistance. Teachers are heard to say things like, “This school district cannot stick with anything! We are always throwing things out and adopting new programs.” Change for change’s sake is not efficient, but if new initiatives are the best
response for meeting needs of a changing student population, then we need to be prepared to respond.

Change begins with and is implemented by the school leader. At Kennedy a new principal was brought in to lead the staff through changes to meet the new refugee students.

Cultural change, although challenging and time-consuming, is not only possible but necessary—especially in organizations in which stakeholders use the word ‘culture’ as a rhetorical talisman to block leadership initiatives, stifle innovation, and maintain the status quo. In the last decade, the education standards movement has taught us that policy change without cultural change is an exercise in futility and frustration (Reeves, 2006/2007).

Reeves would suggest that school leaders approach change with a plan and action. To talk about change is not enough. Effective leaders identify and build on traditions. Some valued practices can still be maintained through new changes.

Need For Pre-Service Teacher Education

This study highlights important implications for colleges and universities. All of the teachers in my interviews shared concerns about the lack of adequate preparations for themselves and for current graduates of teacher education programs. It is essential that the universities not wait for state mandates to add courses that will better prepare teachers for the classroom, but that they take responsibility to better prepare students for today’s culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms by adding courses that address language acquisition, cultural competencies, and instructional strategies effective for ELLs.

Byrd-Blake and Schulte Olivieri (2009), educators from Florida, developed an outline for implementation of teacher education program to better prepare teachers for the
diverse classroom. Their work supports the findings that programs for pre-service teachers need to include class work in (1) cultural proficiency, (2) understanding the process of language acquisition, and (3) effective instructional strategies for ELLs. I have summarized below the key elements that are recommended for an undergraduate teacher preparation program:

1. Pre-service teachers first need to be taught how to self reflect and step outside of their own worldview to consider how their experiences and cultural affects perceptions of race, culture, and ethnicity of the students in their classrooms. Students need to recognize and address the complexities of their own attitudes and dispositions. Pre-service teachers will begin to recognize how their prior experiences and values affect the way in which they interact with their students and how their own attitudes and beliefs influence their thinking about others. Understanding self is the beginning of seeing students as the unique individuals they are.

2. Secondly, teachers need to understand, acknowledge and appreciate the historical impact of immigration as it relates to education. University programs should engage students in conversations that include historical analysis of the events of racism, privilege, and power. Both the proud and the difficult moments in history should be acknowledged, described and analyzed. When teachers begin to understand the historical context in which their ideas about teaching and learning were developed, they will begin to recognize and resist the tendency toward stereotyping in the classroom. Teachers will find freedom to educate in a diverse, global society through reflective classroom instruction and dialogue.
3. Effective culturally competent teachers are at the forefront of understanding the
dynamics of the differences among their students and the differences between their
students and their personal lives. This acknowledgement of the differences,
understanding the differences, and managing the differences assists in eliminating
misconceptions and unconstructive interactions that may occur in the classroom (Byrd-
Blake & Schulte-Olivieri, 2009, p. 12). Teachers must learn how to engage students in
neutral conversations to build relationships that, in time, will be able to sustain the more
difficult conversations to come.

4. Culturally competent teachers are aware of the impact that teacher expectations
have on student achievement. Pre-service teachers should be taught how to facilitate
instruction with expectation that all children will meet the grade level core standards.
Holding high positive expectations for students entails offering targeted constructive
feedback, engaging both high and low-achieving students in higher order thinking tasks,
and being student centered by engaging students in the active construction of their
analysis from educational research to ascribe value to the teacher practice that has highest
effect sizes. His research shows that a “teacher’s high expectations for students” is one of
the top three strategies for improving student achievement! When teachers learn to
explicitly value each student and partner in goal setting, all students can and will learn!

5. To become culturally proficient, pre-service teachers need to acquire skills in
positive behavior management that will instill positive self-concept, character and
leadership skills in children from all races and cultures. Too often, the loss of student
self-confidence and positive self-image stems from ineffective and disempowering behavior management techniques (Byrd-Blake & Schulte-Olivieri, 2009). Culturally responsive behavior management strategies focus on helping students become motivated to achieve and to gain confidence through (1) modeling good behaviors, (2) building relationships, and (3) scaffolding students toward self-discipline.

6. Pre-service teachers will build cultural proficiency by encouraging parent/guardian participation in learning. They develop a respect for and understand the culture of the community they serve through an objective analysis of the historical prejudiced practices many generations have endured. Children experience greater success at school when parents and teachers build relationships and work together to support student learning. Feeling a part of a larger community provides parents residing in high poverty areas an antidote to an unstable environment. Belonging to a school community builds capacity and multiplies resources and supports that become available to the family. The benefit of collaboration is increased student achievement! Daily communication should focus on effective teaching strategies and student learning.

7. Culturally competent teachers collaborate with colleagues to assess students, analyze results of data, and plan and deliver instruction. Collaborative teaching provides a framework for teachers to learn from each other. Pre-service teachers will learn that the autonomous classrooms of yesteryear are a thing of the past. Teachers team together to analyze academic performance as well as to share expertise and resources to support the child academically, socially, and emotionally.
8. Engaging in self-management techniques that reduce stress and improve professionalism and interpersonal skills are important skills for pre-service teachers to acquire. Culturally responsive professional development in self-management better prepares teachers to deal with the added stresses of teaching at high poverty, high risk, culturally diverse schools, while increasing their ability to professionally manage students and communicate with parents and colleagues (Byrd-Blake & Schulte-Olivieri, 2009, pp.14-15.). Self-management needs to begin with proactive personal stress reduction which includes recognizing stressors, dealing with stress appropriately, eating a balanced diet and having an exercise plan (Anderson & Bolt, 2008). It also includes prioritizing, developing organizational strategies, and honing time management skills. Lastly, pre-service teachers need to practice good oral and written communications.

9. Culturally proficient teachers must be trained to become excellent teachers of reading! Pre-service teachers need exceptional reading instruction to build skills that motivate students to become proficient lifelong readers and writers. Using a “prevention model,” children are given benchmark assessments to test phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension sub skills along a literacy continuum to predict if they are on-track to becoming good readers. If the child scores “below benchmark,” the teacher will take a closer look in order to target instruction. Culturally informed teaching uses students' culture as a frame of reference to facilitate learning literacy achievement. Teachers learn the importance of arranging materials in the classroom that reflect students' culture.
10. To become a culturally competent teacher, a pre-service teacher will learn to engage students in higher order critical thinking. Achievement in mathematics and science education for high poverty culturally and linguistically diverse students requires instruction within a problem-solving context. Students engage in active learning by exploring, predicting, reasoning, and they apply math skills to authentic real world problems. Teachers engage in curriculum transformation (Spradlin & Parsons, 2008) to make the content of lessons applicable to real world scenarios of children of poverty and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

University undergraduate teacher education programs under serve students by focusing only on academic content and pedagogy, while avoiding the political and cultural discussions surrounding the growing needs in classrooms filled with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teacher education programs must teach effective differentiated instructional strategies and deepen capacity for respect for and understanding of society and cultures. To do so will require a shifting of priorities, while not to do so ignores the influences that so heavily bear on learning for a growing group of underrepresented Iowans. Teachers across our state are telling us that they are leaving university programs having gained necessary credits for licensure, yet they are entering the workplace unprepared. They are asking for support!

**Student-Teaching Abroad**

Student teaching abroad is a beneficial method for pre-service teachers to build cultural proficiency (Gilson & Martin, 2012). Principals report that new teachers who have done their student teaching experiences abroad demonstrate an expanded world
view, an increased appreciation for diverse cultures, and are more tolerant and understanding of educational differences and barriers to learning. Pre-service teachers who have had an experience abroad know first hand the challenges of communicating in a setting where the majority of people speak a different language. An experience where the student teacher has to adjust to a new culture will likely challenge and change their conceptual framework, as being a language learner will build empathy and awareness of the struggle of an ESL student in an Iowa classroom.

Student teachers who have had a global student teaching experience report that in addition to having a quality experience, they believe that having this experience on their resume will help them get a job. Employers value a candidate who is more culturally aware and ready to meet the demands in an increasingly global workplace.

Suggestions for Future Research

In 2002, a team of thirteen literacy education experts was commissioned by the federal government to identify, assess, and synthesize research on the education of language minority children and youth with regard to literacy attainment (Morrow, Rueda, & Lapp, 2009). As a result, the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth published a report in 2006 called Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners. This was the largest study ever done to determine best practice in teaching English learners. Findings showed that instruction in the key components of reading, identified by the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension, has clear benefits for language-minority students, just as the components
are proven to be effective for native English speakers! These findings were exciting for professionals in the field of teaching ELLs, and professionals quickly turned to the enormous task of providing effective professional in those key components of reading.

Only five studies on scientifically based professional development for teachers were included in this work, as so little research has been done to determine the effectiveness of professional development for teachers of English learners. Funding for comprehensive studies on teacher development has been almost nonexistent, and the need is great for further research. Specifically, more research needs to be done on methods of literacy attainment for language minority students.

This same study also found professional development to be most helpful when it provided (1) opportunities for hands-on practice with teaching techniques readily applicable in their classrooms, (2) in-class demonstrations with their own or a colleague's students, or (3) personalized coaching. Collaboration with special education teachers and resource specialists also improves the quality of instruction (Reeves, 2006-2007). In all the studies reviewed, when outside collaborators with expertise assisted in professional development, gains were indicated. These finding suggests that outside change agents can help teachers improve their classroom practices (August & Shanahan, 2006).

My research demonstrates the benefits of professional development and supported learning for teachers. Teachers demonstrated that learning how to be more effective with the new culturally and linguistically diverse students impacted their relationships, job satisfaction, and enthusiasm for work. Studies that take a closer look at the content, delivery and follow-up of instruction offered will be helpful to the field. Further research
needs to be done to determine the correlation between a teacher's engagement in learning and job satisfaction.
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