MAKING THE MARK: CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL TITLE III ELL PROGRAMS IN SUBURBAN DISTRICTS IN MASSACHUSETTS

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Abstract
The purpose of this research was to understand the organizational elements and external factors that were perceived to impact the success of the ESL programs in three Title III districts in Massachusetts. The researcher used a qualitative collective case study to understand the primary research question, what organizational and environmental elements do various stakeholders in highly successful suburban Title III districts in Massachusetts attribute to the success of the ESL program in their district? The researcher gathered data through interviews with administrators and focus groups with teachers in three Title III school districts in Massachusetts: Belmont Public Schools, Newton Public Schools, and Winchester Public Schools. The study found that in the three successful Title III districts, the districts employed highly qualified ESL teachers who collaborate together and with other educators to meet the needs of the English language learners, and the English language learners in the districts have support which extends beyond the school day. The findings of this study could inform other suburban Title III districts seeking to implement changes to their ESL program in order to meet accountability standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Keywords: ELL, English language learners, ESL, ESL programs, Title III districts
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“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.”

-Henry David Thoreau
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Chapter I: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this case study is to identify the strategies, practices, and resources that three school districts have developed and implemented to effectively support their English language learners (ELLs). At this stage in the research, the indicators of effective support will be generally defined as outperforming other districts on standardized tests as well as meeting their Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs). Knowledge generated is expected to provide constructive examples for other districts in Massachusetts with ELLs that are not meeting targets on state standardized assessments and that are not showing effectiveness in improving ELLs’ progress towards English language proficiency.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to educating English language learners (ELLs) to provide context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study are discussed next, drawing connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented to focus and ground the study. Finally, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study is introduced and explained.

Context and Background

In 2002, Massachusetts voters passed a ballot initiative that eliminated most bilingual education programs and required English language learners (ELLs) to learn through sheltered English immersion (SEI) for both English language acquisition and academic content. Under SEI, ELLs spend most of their time in mainstream classes and only see a licensed English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teacher “[for] 1 and 2.5 hours of ESL instruction per day, depending on their proficiency level” (Massachusetts DOE, 2006). The rest of their day is spent with their content teacher, who are generally not prepared to integrate these students (Clair, 1995;
Echeverria, Vogt & Short, 2008; Penfield, 1987; Wong Fillmore & Meyer, 1992). In the years that have followed the passage of the ballot initiative, ELLs have not consistently narrowed the gap between their subgroup and all students on the state standardized tests, Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). As of the 2013-14 school-year, Massachusetts schools were home to more than 73,000 English language learners, which marks a 41% increase from the 2002-2003 school year. According to Rennie Center (2007), they were a consistently growing student population. “Coupled with this rising population of English language learners in mainstream classrooms is an overriding concern regarding a lack of academic progress among this group of students” (Hutchinson & Hadjioannou, 2011, p. 91).

Within the last ten years, as more and more teachers have welcomed ELL students into their classrooms, researchers have documented the problems English language learners have in achieving academic success. ELLs such as Mei, a 14-year-old Chinese ESL student who puzzled her principal and teachers, still cannot read after being in a pullout ESL program for two years (Li and Zhang, 2004, p. 92). Supporting English language learners in both academic achievement and language proficiency means content teachers also need to recognize their role as language teachers (Bell & Walker, 2012).

In order to make schools responsible for academic progress, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) was an update to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which put a special focus on ensuring that states and schools improve the performance of certain groups of students such as English language learners. Under the law, schools are kept on track toward their goals through a mechanism known as “adequate yearly progress,” or AYP, on the state standardized assessment. If a school misses its state’s annual achievement targets for two
years or more, either for all students or for a particular subgroup, it is identified as not “making AYP” and is subject to sanctions. Additionally, Massachusetts is required under Title III of NCLB to establish Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) for the English language acquisition and academic achievement of students who are classified as English language learners in Title III districts (reporting 100 or more ELLs). AMAOs evaluate district achievement in three categories: percent of students making progress toward English proficiency on the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State (ACCESS); percent of ELL students attaining English language proficiency on the ACCESS; and percent of ELL students making adequate yearly progress in English language arts and math on MCAS.

**Rationale and Significance**

English language learners (ELLs) represent a rapidly growing population of students today. Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy (2008) suggested that the majority of teachers in the United States probably have at least one ELL in their classes, whereas less than 30% of teachers with ELLs in their classes have the training to teach these students effectively. According to a report released by the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, more than 8% of students in classrooms were non-native English speakers and ELL students enrolled in the Massachusetts school systems in 2013. More recent data from Massachusetts Department of Education show a consistent increase in English language learners enrolled in Massachusetts schools.

After Massachusetts’ voters passed the ballot initiative that mandated SEI to teach ELLs English and academic content, category trainings in SEI areas were given to teachers who worked with ELLs. Teachers were not mandated to attend category trainings, and subsequently, the category trainings conducted were deemed insufficient by the U.S. Department of Justice.
The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education was subsequently notified they had violated the civil rights of ELLs by not mandating adequate training for content teachers.

Because they were in violation of the federal Equal Educational Opportunities Act (1974), the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education enacted major changes in their SEI trainings mandated for teachers. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012), the goal of the Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English (RETELL) initiative is to “close the proficiency gap [which] depends on teachers having the necessary skills and knowledge necessary to instruct ELLs” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). All content teachers of ELLs and their administrators are now required to complete a 45 hour SEI instruction course to receive their SEI endorsement on their licenses by 2016. Despite these trainings, not all districts are making strides in successfully teaching their ESL students English. In 2014, there were 79 districts receiving Title III funds. Of those districts, only 31 achieved Annual Measurable Objective (AMAO) 1 of their ELLs making progress in learning the English language; 36 districts met AMAO 2 of their ELLs attaining proficiency on their English proficiency assessment; 19 districts achieved AMAO 3 of their ELLs scoring proficiency or advanced on the state standardized assessment, and only 15 districts met all 3 objectives. As of the 2013-2014 school year, on MCAS, ELLs still struggled to close the proficiency gaps with their native English-speaking peers (see Table 1).

Table 1

2014 % ELL & All Students MCAS Scores, Proficiency and Advanced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>ELA P &amp; A</th>
<th>Math P &amp; A</th>
<th>Science P &amp; A</th>
</tr>
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Despite the fact that English language learners are not meeting the targets set on state standardized tests, there are school districts with noticeable success in narrowing the gaps and meeting their Annual Measurable Objectives. With data from both the state standardized assessment (MCAS) and the AMAOs, the researcher has identified three districts that have been outperforming other districts. Using the Casual Model of Organizational Performance and Change (Burke & Litwin, 1992), this study sought to identify and investigate the components of the ESL programs that support their English language learners. Three Title III districts have been identified as outliers in 2013-2016 accountability reports.

**Research Question**

1. What organizational and environmental elements do various stakeholders in highly successful Title III districts in Massachusetts attribute to the success of the ESL program in their district?

**Theoretical Framework**

Organization culture theory is used to inform the design and data analysis of this research study. The Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change, also known as the Burke-Litwin Model (Burke & Litwin, 1992), provides a framework to assess organizational and environmental components which are linked causally to affect performance or achieve a change.
The components suggested by the model will be analyzed to find similarities between districts that make for a successful design of an ESL program in Massachusetts.

The foundations for the model come from George Litwin and his colleagues (Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Taguiri & Litwin, 1968) in studying organizational climate. The early research linked psychological and organizational variables in an empirically-tested cause-effect model. Litwin & Stringer (1968) were able to predict and control the motivational and performance outcomes of several organizational climates. The model was further developed by Warren Burke and his associates (Bernstein & Burke, 1989; Michela, Boni, Schecter, Manderlink, Bernstein, O’Malley, & Burke, 1988) and was modified to its current form by Burke & Litwin (1992).

The Burke-Litwin model evolved from the open system framework. The researchers believed in Katz and Kahn’s (1978) widely accepted theory, which describes an organization as an open system composed of an input, throughput, and output with a feedback loop. The model likens the external environment to an input and the individual and organizational performance to an output. The feedback loop goes in both directions as organizational performance affects the system’s external environment via its products and services, and the organization’s performance may be directly affected by its external environment. The Burke-Litwin Model is unique in that it contends that each component of the framework influences every other component.

The Burke-Litwin model distinguishes a set of variables that influence and are influenced by climate and those that influence and are influenced by culture (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 525). In figure 1, the model presents the 12 drivers of change and ranks them in order of importance, with the key factors at the top. Burke & Litwin (1992) asserted that all factors are integrated to different degrees, therefore, a change in one will eventually affect all other factors. The components were defined by Burke-Litwin as the following:
- **External environment.** Any outside condition or situation that influences the organization which include markets, competition, other organizations, political situations and the economy.

- **Mission and strategy.** What the organization’s top management believes is the organization’s mission and strategy. What the employees within the organization believe is the central purpose of the organization. Organizations often utilize mission statements and employ a strategy, which is how the organization plans to accomplish their mission over time.

- **Leadership.** Leadership refers to the executives providing the organization with an overall direction and serving as behavioral role models for all employees.

- **Culture.** Culture is defined as the “way we do things around here.” Culture is a collection of both overt and covert rules, values and principles that are enduring and guide organizational behavior.

- **Structure.** Structure refers to the arrangement of functions and people into specific areas and levels of responsibility, decision-making authority, communication, and relationships to assure effective implementation of the organization’s mission and strategies.

- **Management Practices.** What managers do in the normal course of events to utilize the human and material resources at their disposal to carry out the organization’s strategy.

- **Systems.** Standardized policies and mechanisms that facilitate work, primarily manifested in the organization’s reward systems, management information systems (MIS), and in such control systems as performance appraisal, goal and budget
development, and human resource allocation.

- **Climate.** The collective current impressions, expectations, and feelings that members of local work units have that, in turn, affect their relations with their boss, with one another, and with other units.

![Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change](image)

*Figure 1. Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change*

- Task requirements/individual skills and abilities. The required behavior for task effectiveness, including specific skills and knowledge required of people to accomplish the work for which they were assigned and for which they feel they are
directly responsible.

- Individual needs and values. Specific psychological factors that provide desire and worth for individual actions or thoughts.

- Motivation. Aroused behavior tendencies to move towards goals, take needed action, and persist until satisfaction is attained.

- Individual and organizational performance. The outcome or result as well as the indicator or effort and achievement (e.g. productivity, customer satisfaction, profit and quality). (Burke & Litwin, 1992, pp. 531-533)

The Burke-Litwin model (1992) also separates these factors into transformational and transactional components. According to Burke and Litwin (1992), transformational change involves fundamental changes in behavior (e.g., value shifts). Such transformational processes are required for genuine change in the culture of an organization (p. 527). Burke and Litwin posited that transformational changes are initiated from the environment component of the model. The transformational section includes the external environment, organizational culture, organizational performance, mission and strategy, and leadership (see Figure 2). Transactional change involves the everyday interactions and exchanges that more directly create climate conditions (p. 527). Transactional changes are typically exchanges between organizational members, both individuals and groups, and are generally short-term in nature (p. 530). The transactional section includes structure, management practices, systems (policies and procedures), work unit climate, task requirements and individual skills/abilities, motivation, individual needs/abilities, motivation, individual needs and values, and individual performance (see Figure 3). The important difference between transformational and transactional change
within the model is that transformational change impacts the organizational culture, whereas transactional change impacts the organizational climate.

Figure 2. Transformational Components

Figure 3. Transactional Components

**Critics of the theory.** Burke & Litwin (1992) admitted that the development of this model evolved more from practice than extensive theory. In their 1992 article, *A Casual Model of Organizational Performance and Change*, Burke & Litwin attempted to theoretically and
empirically justify their model after the fact stating that “this seemed to have worked; I wonder if the literature supports our action” (p. 524). The model is based in part from practice -- from their consulting efforts with British Airways.

Furthermore, Burke & Litwin (1992) conceded that other change models are simple, but they may not go far enough to explain the complexities of the organization change. Nico Martins and Melinda Coetzee (2009) compared various models before selecting the Burke-Litwin model. In their comparison, Martins and Coetzee (2009) concluded that the model’s complexity is outweighed by its strength to add value to the outcomes of the organizational diagnostic process in cross-cultural research (Furnham & Gunter, 1993; Howard, 1994; Jones & Brazzel, 2006).

**Rationale.** The Burke-Litwin model (1992) is a useful framework to identify the factors involved in change and to consider their influence upon each other. Researchers conducting organizational analysis generally agree that organizational effectiveness should be viewed from a systems perspective using a multidimensional approach in assessing the factors affecting an organization’s performance and overall effectiveness (Baker & Maddux, 2005; Baruch & Ramalho, 2006; Burke & Litwin, 1992; Cummings & Worley, 2005; Lee & Brower, 2006; Martins & Coetzee, 2009). The model provides a framework that encompasses both what and how specific components are key to successful change and how they are linked causally to achieve those goals.

**Summary**

English language learners are a growing population in Massachusetts school districts and have not been making effective progress on Massachusetts standardized tests, despite increased teaching training as initiated by RETELL. ELLs in some Title III school districts have
continuously performed well on the State test and have been making effective progress in learning English. The researcher would like to identify the strategies, practices, and resources in the three districts identified as successful. The Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change (1992) suggests that organizational performance is affected by internal and external factors. It functions as an appropriate lens in this study to identify the components of the organizational culture used by a district to support its ELL population and to discern which policies, strategies and practices have been employed to support and influence strong achievement on the Massachusetts’ standardized assessments, specifically MCAS and PARCC and their achievement in progress and attainment towards English language proficiency. The model provides the framework to assess the organizational and external or environmental factors that are fundamental to change and to identify how they link with each other to influence organization behavior and change in other districts looking to create a change in their ESL program. As the model is applied within the study, some components may emerge as more critical than others.
Chapter II: Literature Review

What do we know about educating English language learners, and how do districts try to educate them? The need for teachers and schools to support the academic success and English language proficiency progress of ELLs is the challenge of many districts in Massachusetts in the wake of No Child Left Behind (2001) mandating accountability across target groups. Analyzing this pressing need, this literature review begins with an examination of the laws governing educating English language learners in Massachusetts. The term English language learner (ELL) is continued to be used in this guide, except when references are made to federal or state legislation; in such cases the term limited English proficient (LEP) will be used. The literature review then examines linguistic research in the field of second language acquisition as to provide a basis for understanding the theory of developing ELLs’ academic language proficiency and content knowledge. Next, the literature review considers the problems that have arisen in schools and classrooms where policies enacted have fared successful in English language learners becoming proficient in English. Lastly, the review discloses the components of successful ESL programs according the literature. This section is divided into professional development, administrative support, home & school connection, and high expectations for students.

The Laws Governing ELL Education

Long before 2002, when Massachusetts voted to replace transitional bilingual education programs with a sheltered English immersion instructional approach on the ballot Question 2, federal laws impacted the education of English language learners. Until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, minority students were educated in “sink or swim” English immersion classes. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or
national origin. ELLs were not offered much support in their English learning. Four years later, English language learners were specifically addressed in Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1968, also known as The Bilingual Education Act, which established federal policy for bilingual education to allocate funds for innovative programs, and recognized the unique educational disadvantages faced by non-English speaking students. Between 1978 and 1994, there were several amendments to Title VII:

- 1978: emphasized the strictly transitional nature of native language instruction, expanded eligibility to students who are limited English proficient (LEP), and permitted enrollment of English-speaking students in bilingual programs
- 1982: allowed for some native language instruction, provided funding for LEP students with special needs, support for family English literacy programs, promoted teacher training
- 1988: increased funding to state education agencies, expanded funding for "special alternative" programs where only English is used, established a three-year limit on participation in most Title VII, created fellowship programs for professional training
- 1994: improved research and evaluation at state and local level, supplied additional funds for immigrant education (Colorín Colorado, 2011)

Some cases have gone to the Supreme Court which have also had say in the education of English language learners. Most notoriously, in 1974 the US Supreme Court, in *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974), held that school districts must take affirmative steps to help students overcome language barriers so that they can participate meaningfully in each school district's programs. The Lau case was a suit brought on behalf of 1,856 Chinese-speaking students in the San Francisco schools who claimed that the schools had made no effort to
accommodate their needs and that they were therefore denied equal access to an education. The lower federal court had rejected the students' claim, and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, in refusing to intervene on the students' behalf, concluded that children had arrived at school with "different advantages and disadvantages caused in part by social, economic, and cultural created and continued completely apart from any contribution by the school system." In the Ninth circuit's view, schools were not required to rectify these differences and disadvantages. The Supreme Court reversed the ruling but did not find a violation of the 14th Amendment as it had in Brown; rather, it found that the district had violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, relying heavily on the view of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) that language discrimination was a form of national-origin discrimination. Moreover, language policies that effectively excluded children from an educational program could amount to impermissible discrimination (Gandara, Moran, & Garcia, 2004; Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011).

**Question 2.** On November 5, 2002, Massachusetts voters passed Question 2 (Q2), an initiative sponsored by English for the Children of Massachusetts to provide students whose first language was not English with

…nearly all classroom instruction […] in English but with the curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language. Books and instructional materials are in English and all reading, writing, and subject matter are taught in English. Although teachers may use a minimal amount of the child’s native language when necessary, no subject matter shall be taught in any language other than English in this program. (Massachusetts General Law, Chp 71A, 2002)
Ron Unz, a businessman from California, created the organization English for the Children which sponsored efforts to promote and pass English-only education laws in California (Proposition 227) and in Arizona (Proposition 203). Unz’s background did not include linguistic research or education. The majority of Massachusetts voters voted yes; “born of both ignorance and intent, the support that allowed for the passing of Q2 paved the way for the rapid dismantling of bilingual programs” (Adams & Jones, 2006, p. 16). The referendum replaced the state law requiring Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) in districts with 20 or more limited-English proficiency students from the same language group (Adams & Jones, 2006). TBE programs used native language materials and instruction to support content knowledge while developing students’ English proficiency in both oral communication and literacy, and eventually transitioning them into all-English instruction (Adams & Jones, 2006). Districts across Massachusetts were quick to answer to the new law and diligently worked to implement the new program, offer professional development and order necessary materials. Adams & Jones (2006) noted that “the school systems’ prompt response […] in no way resembled the foot dragging and resistance that occurred when bilingual education (native language instruction) became the law in Massachusetts back in 1971” (p. 16).

**Sheltered English Immersion.** Structured English immersion (SEI) is defined as “nearly all classroom instruction is in English but with the curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2003, as cited in Adams & Jones, 2006, p. 16). The original conceptualization of sheltered English immersion (SEI) treated it as an instructional approach reserved for ELLs at an intermediate English language proficiency level with native language used to support students at early proficiency
levels so that content knowledge would be more comprehensible (Adams & Jones, 2006, p. 17).

Therefore, ideally, SEI is an instructional approach meant to assist ELLs acquiring English language proficiency while simultaneously learning grade-appropriate academic content knowledge. In SEI classrooms, teachers should scaffold instruction using strategies tailored to their current English proficiency to make the language and content more comprehensible to the varying levels of English language proficiency. In other words, “SEI teachers develop their ELL students’ English language abilities through linguistically modified instruction in the content areas such as math, science, and social studies” (Adams & Jones, 2006, p. 17)

The law, Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71A, required public schools to educate students classified as English learners through a sheltered English immersion program, normally not lasting more than a year. Despite Question 2, stating that ELLs shall receive sheltered instruction for a temporary period "not normally intended to exceed one year", Title VI of the Federal Civil Rights act does not permit time limitations placed on ELLs' English language acquisition (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2003). In the program, all books and nearly all teaching would be in English, with the curriculum designed for children learning English. Schools are encouraged to group students by English proficiency. Once a student is able to do regular schoolwork in English, the student would be transferred to an English language mainstream classroom.

Accountability for ELLs. Not without controversy, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which is the federal policy for language minority students learning English. The purposes of Title III in
NCLB are to ensure that LEP students attain English proficiency and to hold state and local educational agencies accountable for students improving in their English proficiency and making adequate yearly progress on state assessment tests. Title III of NCLB provides funds to state education agencies who in turn make sub-grants to school districts and charter schools to improve the education of LEP students. In order to receive funds, each district must submit a plan outlining how they are using a scientifically tied language instruction curriculum. The Act requires states to set high standards and establish measurable goals to evaluate LEP students’ progress in meeting those standards. Each state sets its own standards and assessments for all students. Some states have developed their own standards; some states have borrowed from existing work, such as the TESOL standards; and some states have created multistate consortia, such as the WIDA Consortium (named after the first three states involved: Wisconsin, Delaware, and Arkansas) or the Mountain West Assessment Consortium to undertake the task. Massachusetts adopted the WIDA English Development Standards Framework in June 2012. According to NCLB, English language proficiency assessments must be given annually to all LEP students, and the results are a part of the state’s accountability system. Each state must set annual measurable achievement objectives for the progress of English language learners achieving proficiency in English.

At the federal level, it is evident that schools have an obligation to teach English and academic content to English language learners. Case law has had an impact on policy for the ongoing and improved implementation of instructional practices to support ELLs. These laws are trying to address the population growth of English language learners in schools. NCLB does not dictate the curriculum or instructional approach districts must use; the act only specifies they must be from theory. There has been a lot of political debate about whether students should be
taught in bilingual or English immersion classes. Since 2002, Massachusetts’ policy shifted to
the sheltered English immersion model to improve the students’ English proficiency while
learning the same academic content of their peers. States and school districts are held
accountable in students’ progress in both English proficiency and on state standardized tests to
assure that English language learners are receiving an equitable education.

**Language Acquisition Perspectives**

Manfred Pienemann (1995) posed the question, “why is it important for language
teachers to know about language acquisition?” (p. 3). Pienemann (1995) argued that the study of
second language acquisition provides information on what learners do or not do during the
language learning process. This knowledge gives teachers a foundation from which to draw their
classroom instructional techniques. In this section, three main perspectives of language
acquisition are presented: behaviorist, innatist, and interactionist.

**Behaviorist theory.** Behaviorism is an early language acquisition theory. According to
behaviorism, language is a system of habits; learning proceeds by producing a response to a
stimulus and receiving either positive or negative reinforcement. After enough positive
reinforcement, a certain response will become a habit. B.F. Skinner (1957) posited that children
learn language based on behaviorist principles by associating words with meanings. Correct
utterances are positively reinforced when the child realizes the communicative value of words
and phrases (operant conditioning). Ambridge & Lieven (2011) gave the example, when the
child says ‘milk’ and the mother will smile and give her some as a result, the child will find this
outcome rewarding, enhancing the child's language development. Skinner’s claims were refuted
by Noam Chomsky and the innatist perspective.
Behaviorist perspective in second language acquisition. Peregoy & Boyle (2005) posited that the behaviorist theories of language acquisition have influenced second language teaching in a number of ways still today in many classrooms. The audiolingual method, popular in the 1960s, emphasized “drill and skill” practice. Students memorized dialogues from tapes and practiced verb forms and sentence structures with drills. Errors were corrected immediately in order to prevent “bad habits” from forming. Behaviorism influenced the imitation, repetition, and reinforcement of grammar structures in foreign language classrooms.

Innatist theory. Noam Chomsky (1957) revolutionized the field of linguistics and argued that behaviorist theory could not adequately explain language development. Chomsky argued that language was far too complicated to be explained through imitation, rather it was an innate process, how can they say things they have never heard before? Innatism states that children are born with a language acquisition “device”, prewired for language learning. He claimed that all children possessed a grammar template, universal grammar, to develop grammar in a systemic process. Children construct grammar through a hypothesis test, eventually they revise their hypothesis to accommodate exceptions, creating sentences through rules, not imitation.

Innatist perspective in second language acquisition. An influential theory of second language acquisition from the innatist perspective, Krashen developed the Monitor Model (1978), which detailed five hypotheses of the second language acquisition process:

- The natural order hypothesis indicates that the acquisition of grammatical structures by the second language learner occurs in a predictable natural or predictable order void of the first language.
• The input hypothesis says that language learners need comprehensible input, measured at i+1, or in other words at a level slightly above their current proficiency in order to acquire language

• The affective filter hypothesis implicates stress and motivation as dependent variables on the language learning process

• The monitor hypothesis states that an innate monitor is developed in order to self-correct utterances in the target language

• The learning acquisition hypothesis states that learning a language occurs consciously while acquisition occurs subconsciously

According to Krashen (1981), “people acquire second languages when they obtain comprehensible input when their affective filters are low enough to allow the input in” (p. 62). Therefore, he urges teachers to not force production, but allow a “silent period” while they acquire some knowledge through listening rather than rote memorization drills. His theories have promoted teaching practices that focus on communication.

Interactionist theory. According to the interactionist theory, both nature and nurture play a role in the language acquisition process. In first language, interactionists believe that the caregiver scaffolds, modifies their speech to provide linguistic input as they develop language. “Children are constantly constructing meaning as they interact with people and the world around them, and through? These interactions, they gradually […] construct the multiple meanings of words and phrases” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005, p. 50). Research by Lois Bloom, Jean Piaget, and Dan Slobin explored the relationship of cognitive development to language acquisition.

Interactionist perspective on second language acquisition. Interactionists agree that comprehensible input is necessary for second language acquisition, however, they
perceive the natural conversations between natives and non-natives as a crucial element of the language acquisition process (Long & Porter, 1985). Lev Vygotsky’s theory of zone of proximal development (1978) has influenced second language learning. According to him, interaction with peers is an effective way to develop language. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is an area of learning that occurs when a person is assisted by a peer or teacher. His theory has influenced the use of cooperative learning in the classroom.

The three views of language acquisition provide teachers the knowledge base to teach English language learners. While the theories extend the nature vs. nurture debate, researchers are beginning to propose theories that emphasize both in language acquisition. These theories do not offer specific teaching methods; however, teachers can use the information to develop appropriate activities and have an understanding of the complex learning process to facilitate learning English in their classroom.

**Learning a Second Language in School**

**Language used.** More noteworthy research in the field of linguistics comes from Jim Cummins (1981, 1984) who theorized that there are two kinds of language acquired. Students learning English may at times sound like they are fully adept in the target language; indeed, students often develop their basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), or language for social communication, in one to three years (Dailey, 2009, p. 128). Another dimension of language proficiency that clouds the issues of assessment and is critically important to an understanding of competency is what Cummins (1981, 1984) refers to as the BICS/CALP distinction. BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) are context-embedded everyday language skills, while CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) is a more decontextualized, cognitive-linguistic communicative skill. This is important because a student may have a well-developed surface communicative competence (BICS) and
be able to perform successfully in a conversational mode, without having developed a strong facility with the complex language skills required for academic success (CALP). According to Cummins, proficiency in BICS takes 2-4 years, while CALP takes five to seven years on average (Cummins, 1984, Dailey, 2009); the implications of this theory for the measurement of language proficiency and program placement are enormous “and are not well-accounted for in the current state of the art of language proficiency assessment” (Cummins, 1984; De Avila, 1990 as cited in Gandara & Merino, 1993, p. 326). Studies demonstrate that students learning another language need

rich and varied language experiences; teach individual words, noun phrases, and idioms; teach word-learning strategies, such as looking for prefixes and root words; and foster word consciousness that makes clear the importance of learning as many words as possible throughout the day. (Calderón, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011, p. 110)

Similarly to learning a first language, vocabulary is the foundation for second language learning success for English learners and other students (Calderón, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). Language teaching methods often detail direct vocabulary instruction for frequent exposure to a word in multiple forms; ensuring understanding of meaning(s); providing examples of its use in phrases, idioms, and usual contexts; ensuring proper pronunciation, spelling, and word parts; and, when possible, teaching its cognate, or a false cognate, in the child's primary language (Calderón, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). Classroom teachers now become language teachers under the mandate of sheltered English immersion and need to understand the theory and process of second language acquisition.

**Background knowledge.** English language learners may struggle connecting with the examples, readings, or assignments in a classroom if they do not have the prior knowledge or
experiences. Teachers need to make sure that the ELLs have the same knowledge to comprehend the texts as their non-ELL peers. Echeverria & Graves (2011) contend that using connections validates students’ experiences and brings them actively into the lesson. Miller & Endo (2004) validated the importance of considering students’ prior knowledge and life experiences; they shared the story of Mrs. Wright who asked her students to describe the experience of going to the dentist, but many of her students had never been to the dentist. “Students experience a heavy ‘cognitive load’” when they cannot draw on their experiences.

**Challenges with Educating English language learners**

Since the passage of the NCLB Act and Question 2, Massachusetts Department of Education has developed the RETELL initiative in order to comply with the new accountability measurements from the NCLB to increase teacher education and professional development. Freeman & Riley (2005) noted that teachers and districts are feeling the pressure as the mandates and regulations come from the top-down. Even with some professional development, mainstream teachers still feel ill prepared to meet the needs of ELLs in their classrooms (Adams & Jones, 2006). Formerly, when bilingual education was in place, teachers were required to have special licenses, which required a master’s degree in linguistics or English as a second language. These programs would feature several courses about language learning theories and the implications for the students in classrooms. With SEI, content teachers are now also English as a second language teachers and must try to adapt their lessons while not understanding the process their students are undertaking. As Adams and Jones (2006) state,

> to expect a mainstream math teacher to teach arithmetic while helping a newcomer conquer English, become literate, learn the material at hand, and prepare for a high-
stakes test in order to advance and graduate is not realistic or fair to both teacher and
ELL student. (p. 17)

There is a huge difference between a class in which a student is learning a language and a class
in which a student is expected to learn academic material using that new language (Dailey,
2009). ELLs are expected to go to school and learn English and learn their grade level academic
material (Canagarajah, 2006).

According to the reports by the Massachusetts Department of Education, English
language learners are consistently underperforming on the Massachusetts Comprehensive
Assessment System test (Adams & Jones, 2006). Furthermore, English language proficiency
assessments show that most ELLs are still at the beginning proficiency level after a year
(Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005). These results demonstrate what a lot of
research is also saying: “SEI doesn't work well” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 21).

Districts are hiring ESL teachers, who are only a small part of the ELL student’s day.
Most of the time, ELL students are interacting with their academic content teachers who are
unsure of how to work with their ELL students. As Brooks, Adams, and Mullaney (2010,
state,
scheduling meeting times to discuss strategies, issues, and progress is often difficult
because ESL teachers do not always share common planning periods and are not
available for team meetings with the content area teachers and administrators of their
students. (p. 146).

A lack of communication between ESL teachers and the academic content teachers
hurts the students who are not getting the necessary scaffolding to understand the material,
“content area teachers and administrators make decisions without a full understanding of how
their decisions will impact ELL students” (Brooks, Adams, & Mullaney, 2010, p. 146). To fully grasp what their students endure, “teachers and administrators need to experience firsthand the turmoil, fatigue, and frustration […] as they struggle to assert themselves as students and human beings with only limited English” (Dailey, 2009, p. 127). Without the background knowledge, ELLs are placed in setting where teachers do not modify their instruction and practices (DaSilva Iddlings, 2005; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Asato, 2001; Manyak, 2002), and therefore ELLs are prevented from meaningful access to instruction and curriculum because they cannot comprehend the teacher or instructional materials and demonstrate their content knowledge (Adams & Jones, 2006). This stress lowers their affective filter (Krashen, 1978), which does encourage successful language learning or motivate students to succeed. ELLs often drop out before graduating high school.

The reality is that in the beginning stages of learning English, ELLs require a well-developed English language development curriculum and program (Adams & Jones, 2006). However, even those districts that service ELLs through appropriate SEI often “violate the civil rights of ELLs by prematurely withdrawing needed language support and transitioning them into mainstream classrooms before they are sufficiently proficient in English” (Adams & Jones, 2006, p. 17). As Cummins discovered, students can appear proficient in a language during basic conversations, but their academic language proficiency, which is necessary for school success may still not be developed. In the process of learning a second language, ESL students must keep up with a demanding program of studies (Ernst, 1994). Despite the potential effectiveness of SEI and its numerous implementations, “it has failed to live up to English-only proponents' false claim that ELLs can reach full English language proficiency in one year's time” (Adams & Jones, 2006, p. 17).
A problem with both the NCLB and the Question 2 mandate is that there is no section regarding the content of these classes or what should become of the students once they become proficient in English, such as whether this program should replace a normal year of schooling or the students should be held back a year (Burdick-Will & Gomez, 2006). Perhaps composing such standards or specific details could make the SEI mandate practical for the content level teachers.

**Professional Development**

The need for well-trained professionals is crucial (Burnaby, 1998; Kouritzin, 2004; McGivern & Eddy, 1999) for effective programs in schools. Mainstream teachers are now seeing high numbers of ELLs among their students and therefore all teachers need to be prepared to work with ELLs (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008). With appropriate training, teachers can increase student learning (Padon & Waxman, 1999, Franco, Padrón, & Waxman, 2015). Harwell (2003) explained, many professional development activities stop short of producing their intended results; they point out problems with traditional teaching but offer little help in changing what happens in the classroom and provide no opportunities for participants to practice what they learn. When teachers are given the opportunity, “via high-quality professional development, to learn new strategies for teaching to rigorous standards, they report changing their teaching in the classroom” (Alexander, Heaviside, & Farris, 1998, p. 2). Cranton & King (2003) concluded that professional development opportunities are not seen as “valuable, perhaps because they are not themselves grounded in adult learning theory” (p. 31). Adult learners thrive on the application of their learning (Cranton & King, 2003). When teachers are provided with models of performance and opportunities for practice and feedback, they can attain significantly increased levels of knowledge and skills (Fradd & Lee, 1997; Fradd, Lee, Cabrera, del Rio, Leth, Morin, Ceballos,
Santalla, Cross & Mathieu, 1997). In their research study, Rafael Lora-Alecio & his colleagues (2009) found that teachers became more effective in the classroom after receiving training in eight specific strategies: enhanced instruction via planning, student engagement, vocabulary building and fluency, oral language development, literacy development, reading comprehension, parental support and involvement, and reflective practice through portfolio development. In the process of professional development, teachers, particularly those with many years of teaching experience need to make deliberate efforts to reflect on or challenge their own knowledge about how students learn in order to enhance the teaching and learning process (Freeman 2002; Sen 2002). Today most English learners spend their time in regular classrooms with teachers “who feel ill equipped to meet their needs” (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011, p. 107). More than 90% of pre-service teachers in teacher education programs across the U.S. come from White, middle class, and non-urban backgrounds (National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004; Nieto, 2000) and “have little experience with learning other languages” (p. 59). Given this inequality, it is imperative that teachers be sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of their students and know how to build on these students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and experiences (Brooks & Karathanos, 2009; Lee, Butler & Tippins, 2007).

**Knowledge needed.** In response to the Department of Justice’s directive that Massachusetts “must mandate professional standards for educators who provide sheltered English instruction to ELL students” (DESE, 2012), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education launched the Rethinking Equity & Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELLE) initiative in order to better educate and train teachers in the knowledge of SEI and instruction of English language learners. According to Commissioner Mitchell Chester (2012), “closing the proficiency gap depends on teachers having the skills and knowledge
necessary to instruct ELLs”. All current and new content teachers are required to obtain an SEI endorsement for their teaching licensure. Most teachers will need to take classes in order to receive the training that qualifies them for the endorsement. The training from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is divided into two modules: Module A and Module B. Module A: develops participants’ knowledge of the context academic settings in which English language learners learn in the K-12 academia; provides teachers information regarding the demographic and achievement data of ELLs in Massachusetts and the laws and policies applicable to educating them; explains the cultural and social aspects of language acquisition and achievement; and explores the pedagogical implications of principles, theories, and processes of language acquisition. Module B: provides information on sheltering content in SEI classrooms to make the content comprehensible; develops SEI instructional skills; and illustrates how curriculum and lesson planning can be scaffolded for ELLs at different levels of English language proficiency and literacy skill development. According to DESE, these trainings provide teachers with the knowledge to carry out their responsibility to educate English language learners and support them in their academic and language achievement.

**Sustained professional development.** In exploring the literature on professional development for educators of English language learners, researchers argued that the professional development should be a long term training rather than carried out over only one or two days. In their study, Fradd & Okhee (1998) concluded that short term professional development lacked influence on participants and didn’t change their behavior. “Short-term activities have little, if any, impact on enhancing teachers’ ability to effectively assess students’ learning needs” (p. 763). Clair (1995) also argued that alternatives to short term workshops were necessary to be meaningful.
Successful ESL Programs

Limited studies were found that analyzed the success of specific ESL programs. Several studies posited the elements of ESL programs that would support the success of English language learners: commonalities included support from leadership; collaboration between ELL and content area teachers, a connection between home and school; a curriculum that incorporates students’ language and culture, and a monitoring procedure.

Administrative support. Teachers cited the support of administration as being key to a successful ESL program (Kouritzin, 2004; Nesselrodt, 2007). Teachers and administrators in successful schools spoke of the need to be advocates for resources, programs, and funding. Administrators found ways to enable teachers to purchase resources they needed, ensured they were able to attend conferences and gained additional funding when ESL funds were not reaching the classrooms. Administrators also had goals for the ESL program including monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and holding all staff responsible for the progress of those goals (Calderón et al., 2011).

Collaboration between content area and ESL teachers. The academic achievement of English language learners is enriched by the collaboration of the ESL teacher and content area teacher working together to meet the needs of the English language learners (Bell & Walker, 2012; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Gottlieb, 2006). While, schedule conflicts and lack of time often prove to be a barrier to collaboration, Bell & Walker found in their 2012 study that teachers found collaboration was beneficial “because two heads are better than one” and they are able “to play to each others’ strengths.” Additionally as a result of the collaboration, Bell & Walker (2012) found the teachers’ lessons improved through the shared expertise which led to increased student achievement.
**Home & school connection.** One of the most important factors in successful schools appeared to be their ability to bridge the gap between the school and the family of their students. Kouritzin (2004) found that in each school families of ESL students were expected to engage in the collaborative construction of learning plans and in collaborative evaluation. Both ESL students and their parents were part of a network approach to student learning and language development (Kouritzin, 2004; May, 2001). In a report published by the Rennie Center (2007), schools enhance the chance of student success when they promote parent engagement. Home and school relations were supported through foreign language speaking liaisons in some schools. These liaisons would contact parents with issues, scheduling parent-teacher conferences, or update them on their child’s progress. Schools also translated documents to be sent home in the home language for parents to understand what was going on.

**High expectations for students.** English language learners are obligated to gain proficiency in English while learning academic concepts in that second language. Participants in a study conducted by Schachter (2013) contended that regardless of the lack of English language proficiency, teachers should value the diversity ELL students bring to the classroom; “start seeing them as a resource” (p. 60). August and Shanahan (2006) concluded that practices that have the effect of lowered expectations for English learners lowered their self-esteem and increased drop-out rates among Latino students.

**Conclusion**

The literature review reveals limited studies on components of ESL programs in K-12 districts despite the documented challenges faced by schools and teachers to educate English language learners. Research uncovered that field of linguistics provides information on the second language acquisition process which could be used to inform districts and teachers of
English language learners. Despite increasing professional development and requiring coursework on English as a second language for licensure, there are still gaps in achievement scores on standardized tests between ELLs and their English-speaking peers. However, not all school districts show gaps on tests results; several districts appear as outliers when looking at standardized test scores over the years. A multiple case study across these districts could reveal components of a successful ESL program.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to document the success of three Title III district ESL programs in Massachusetts through the lens of the Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The Burke-Litwin model identifies the internal and external components of organization culture that are keys to successful change and how these factors are linked to achieve a change in performance. The goal of the research was to discover what strategies, practices, and resources are used by districts successfully serving their English language learners. This chapter describes the research study’s methodological approach, including a description of the research design, study participants, and procedures including the approach for data collection and analysis, aspects of the study’s validity and reliability and limitations.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question:

What organizational and environmental elements do various stakeholders in highly successful Title III districts in Massachusetts attribute to the success of the ESL program in their district?

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm establishes the context for the research study and guides the researcher in the philosophical assumptions about the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005). This study approached the research with a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist position employs a hermeneutical approach, which maintains that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection (Schwandt, 2000; Sciarra, 1999). This reflection can be accomplished by the interactive researcher-participant dialogue
Thus a distinguishing characteristic of constructivism is the significance of the interaction between the investigator and the object of the investigation. Only through this interaction can deeper meaning be uncovered; the “researcher and her or his participants jointly create (co-construct) findings from their interactive dialogue and interpretation” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). Researchers working within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm have the goal of understanding the "lived experiences," erlebnis, from the point of view of the daily realities of the subjects (Schwandt, 1994, 2000). Constructivist-interpretivists assert that multiple, constructed realities, rather than a single true reality, exist. People actively construct or create their own subjective representations of reality, which is influenced by the context of the situation, the individual’s experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005). There are multiple realities, multiple interpretations of the data; the researcher does not attempt to discover a single "truth" from the realities of participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivists-interpretivists maintain that the researcher's values and lived experience cannot be disconnected from the research process. The author “should acknowledge, describe, and bracket his or her values [and biases], but not eliminate them” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131). This is typically referred to as positioning oneself in a study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher impacts each part of the research through their construction of the reality.

**Research Tradition**

A qualitative multiple case study methodology was used to “gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 2001, p. 19). The goal of case study research is to explore or describe a phenomenon, or case, in context using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It allows the researcher to explore individuals or
organizations, simple through complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs (Yin, 2003). A phenomenon is explored using multiple data sources to provide a variety of lens or perspectives of it to be revealed and understood. In this study, the case study method was used in order to discover the contextual conditions, or strategies, practices, and resources of the organization according to the components in the Casual Model of Organizational Performance & Change (Burke-Litwin, 1992) that make each case’s ESL program successful as defined by the state standardized test and meeting their Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives.

A multiple case study design allows the research to explore similarities and differences and it enables the researcher to explore patterns across cases (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The goal in this study was to replicate the findings across the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). If data was collected from just one case, the data collected would not be as compelling to understand the strategies, resources, and practices used which makes these three ESL programs successful. In a multiple case study design, cases can be examined to see if patterns exist across the cases (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Given comparisons will be drawn, it is imperative that the cases are chosen carefully so that the researcher can predict contrasting results based on a theory (Yin, 2003). In this study three Title III districts in Massachusetts were the cases studied in order to find similarities in the components of their organizations that have played a role in the successful performance of their ESL programs.

This case study followed the approach of Merriam (1998) who established her definition of this type of research in constructivism. Merriam (1998) delineated qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (p. xiii). It is particularistic (it focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon); descriptive (it yields a rich, thick
description of the phenomenon under study); and heuristic (it illuminates the reader’s understanding of phenomenon under study). Merriam (1998) presented a step by step of the process of designing qualitative research including conducting the literature review, constructing a theoretical framework, identifying a research problem, crafting and sharpening research questions, and selecting the sample (purposive sampling). Merriam’s approach in case study design is close neither to Yin’s nor Stake’s; it is a combination of both approaches (Yazan, 2015). Merriam presented the techniques and procedures which researchers need in order to become effective users of the data collected. Merriam (1998) also provided guidance to develop theory from data analysis.

**Positionality Statement**

In addition to expressing researcher bias from the outset of the study to alert the reader of any positions or assumptions held by the researcher that could have shaped the interpretation, the researcher will write reflective memos to help process the information. These steps will help limit bias and support the validity of the study.

English language learners are expected to acquire a second language while learning academic content. As a linguist and middle school foreign language teacher, I encourage students to explore and learn about different cultures and languages. I wouldn’t be able to teach other languages without having spent years studying and becoming proficient in them. I understand the second language acquisition process through both my studies and experiences, which have encouraged a passion to influence ESL policy and education in Massachusetts.

As a child, despite being raised in a monolingual family I developed an early fascination with languages. Growing up on Cape Cod, I was not overwhelmed by diversity, but I was jealous of friends with families that spoke Portuguese. I would curiously listen to the Spanish channel
on the television, which would spark an imagination that I could speak another language. It wouldn’t be until 7th grade when I would begin formally learning another language.

In middle school and high school, learning languages was “easy”. In 7th grade I began learning Spanish and by the time I graduated high school I was taking classes in Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin. In these classes, we memorized vocabulary words from a unit, words grouped by a theme, and completed translation exercises after learning a set grammar rules. I excelled in all my foreign language classes by having a good memory. The main emphasis in these classes was reading and writing. Most of my spoken practice was based on accurately reproducing translated texts. Having mastered grammar drills and memorized vocabulary words successfully progressing through each language course, I thought I would be ready to attend my first year of college in Madrid, Spain.

Shortly after landing at Barajas Airport in Madrid, Spain, I quickly found that I had trouble understanding the native speed and accent and struggled to produce fluent responses spontaneously. The rote memorization and grammar drills reminiscent of the grammar translation approach did not provide meaningful practice. I could recite verb endings for “each person”, but failed to change the verb in an impulsive utterance. With time, talking to my host family, listening to my professors at the college, walking around the city, I became more successful in speaking and comprehending the native Spanish, not just reading and writing it.

In my first-year teaching, I encountered two English language learners who struggled to interact with their teachers and peers, never mind understand the academic content. “David” was a sixth-grade student from Georgia and this was only his second year in the school. I was told he was “not yet eligible” to receive English as a second language services. “Erika” was an eighth-grade student; she had come to the district in the fifth grade from Egypt. During this year, she
was placed on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), a legal document entitling her to special education services for a “disability”. Truthfully, it was a cover. No one knew if Erika certainly had a learning disability because she would need to be tested in her native language of Arabic, which no one spoke. In this way, however, she would receive small group instruction and individualized support. Over the next few years I watched as my district improved its compliance with Massachusetts’ laws and policies. Albeit my district began to follow the SEI instruction model and hired English as a second language teachers, students still struggled and teachers felt lost instructing them. The district encouraged the teachers to take voluntary “Category” trainings to learn more about English as second language. Several teachers including myself took advantage of the opportunity. In 2011, Massachusetts Department of Education launched the RETELL initiative in order to better educate teachers with ESL students; the US Department of Justice ruled the category trainings did not adequately educate teachers and violated the civil rights of ELLs to receive an equal education. During my Master’s program in which I studied Applied Linguistics, I attended the category trainings. In my Master’s Program, I learned about the language acquisition theories, the different approaches or ideas of language learning in the classroom. This information fascinated me, but educators do not want to necessarily know the research; teachers want to know what they need to do to help these students achieve success. Under RETELL, teachers and administrators must take a 45-hour course for license renewal. The longer required training has not proven to lessen the achievement gaps in standardized assessments of ELLs and their native speaking peers.

I understand the difficulties and rewards of foreign language learning. In each language, I have achieved different levels of proficiency based on length of study and the context of that studying. Language research has demonstrated that two to four years are required to gain social
language proficiency and as many as five to seven years in a language program before achieving academic language proficiency. Yet the ELL student population is forced to sit in mainstream classes before they are ready and without auxiliary support. Stephen Krashen (1982) hypothesized that an affective filter can interfere with a child’s ability to learn another language. ESL students are overwhelmed to learn English and content in the core classes and their affective filter under these circumstances will be high. As teachers, how can we help students such as David o/r Erika to learn English and the academic information they need? We need to “believe that pedagogy in schools must be focused on morally impacting ends” (Jenlink, 2005, p. 9). Scaffolding and a well-developed curriculum provide equal access to learn for the ELL students; they will receive the same rigorous curriculum modified to their capabilities. Frad and Okhee (1998) demonstrated that short-term faculty development activities, sessions that take place over 1-3 times, lacked lasting impact on participants because such programs did not continue long enough to change behaviors or follow up to see that changed behaviors persisted. Furthermore, Fradd and Okhee said that “short-term activities have little, if any, impact on enhancing teachers’ ability to effectively assess students’ learning needs” (Fradd and Okhee, 1998, p. 763).

In order to identify and isolate my personal bias and opinions in order to preserve my neutral position as a researcher I will reflect on those possible opinions through introspection. According to Machi & McEvoy (2009), “by rationally identifying and confronting these views, you can control personal bias, opinion, and preferred outcome, and can become open minded, skeptical, and considerate of research data” (p. 19). As scholar-practitioners, we may have a bias rebuking our own organization, or trying to create change in our workplace. Teachers struggle with synthesis of research, they “often feel that the programs are challenging the legitimacy of
their own teacher-based perspective on education, and they often respond by challenging the legitimacy of the proffered research-based perspective” (Larabee, 2003, p. 16-17).

**Research Design**

Qualitative research centers on the description and understanding of a phenomenon (Andersen & Taylor, 2007; Patton, 1990). Maxwell (2005) suggests that qualitative research is optimal when investigating and exploring causal relationships, such as the components of an organization culture on the (successful) performance of its ESL program. This type of research used an interpretive/constructive approach by collecting multiple forms of data in the natural setting to make sense of the phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to it (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research is based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998). Unlike quantitative research which examines the effect of variables or components of a phenomenon, qualitative research reveals how the parts work together to form a whole (Merriam, 1998). According to Creswell (2007) “the final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a ‘complex’ description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action” (p. 37).

**Sites and Participants**

In qualitative studies, the researcher attempts to explore a phenomenon and needs to select sites and participants that are “information rich” (Patton, 2005). Purposeful sampling applies to both sites and individuals, which are selected to allow the researcher “to develop a detailed understanding that might provide useful information; that might help people ‘learn’ about the phenomenon; and that might give voice to ‘silenced’ people” (Creswell, 2002, p. 206), this knowledge they bring to the study about a phenomenon deems them “information rich”
Random sampling does not control the population to be representative of the goals of the research, which in this study, are to explore the strategies, programs, and resources of successful ESL programs. Therefore, the researcher deliberately will select case sites and participants that meet specified criteria that represent the typical setting and people embodied in the problem of practice.

Three cases or school districts in Massachusetts were selected for their English language learners outperforming other Title III districts on the MCAS assessment in the years 2013-2016, when subgroup data was available from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Furthermore, these districts met all three of their Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives in those years. Superintendents from Belmont Public Schools, Newton Public Schools, and Winchester Public Schools granted the researcher permission to investigate the practices of their ESL programs.

Maximum variation was utilized to select participants within each school district “to fully describe multiple perspectives about the cases” (Creswell, 2007, p. 129). It will be important to ensure a balance of individuals who could speak about the components of the organization according to those described in the Burke-Litwin (1992) model. Administrators were recruited based on the contributions they were able to provide by their leadership role. Requests were made for any administrator who oversees the ELL program, curriculum, and professional development/training in the district to voluntarily participate in the study. Given that leadership is a transformational factor in the model it will be essential to understand the role administration has played in the organization’s success performance with the English language learners. Furthermore, it was important to explore management practices, a transactional component of the model, to see what they do “to use the human and material resources at their disposal to carry out
the organization’s strategy” (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 532). In addition to the insight an
administrator could provide, three to seven teachers were recruited. Teachers have the
responsibility of delivering academic content to their ELLs to prepare them to take the MCAS test. Teachers provided their perspective on the various components of the Model of Casual Performance and Change (Burke & Liwtin, 1992) including climate, mission and strategy,
systems, and task requirements and individual skills/abilities. The researcher identified teachers
in the district who have experienced the phenomena to volunteer to participate in the study. The
study sought to include teachers who have had English language learners in their classes and
have taught in the district for at least three years to ensure that they had familiarity with the ESL program.

**Recruitment and access.** Participants were recruited using the following steps:

1. After IRB approval, an initial email was sent to the Assistant Superintendent and/or
   Head of the English Language Learners Department of the districts that match the
   sampling criteria discussing the potential study to see if they were potentially
   interested in participating in the study.

2. If they were interested in participating in the study, emails requesting site permission
   (Appendix A) and interview permission (Appendix B) were sent to the Assistant
   Superintendent or administrator in charge of English language learners. The email
   asked the administrator if they would allow the researcher to email a letter describing
   the study to staff members (Appendix C). A copy of the consent form for an
   interview (Appendix D) and administrator interview guide (Appendix F) were also
   included. The researcher answered any questions the administrator had about the
   study or the process.
3. The researcher emailed teachers in the district to describe the study (Appendix C). The teachers were offered light refreshments as compensation for participation in the study. If these teachers were interested in participating, they were asked to respond by email.

4. If teachers were interested in participating in the study, an email was sent with additional details about the study, a consent form (Appendix E) and a copy of the focus group guide (Appendix G). The researcher answered any questions the teachers had about the study or process.

Data Collection

Approval for study was first solicited from Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon approval, the researcher contacted the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent of each district that were to be involved in the case study by email (Appendix A). Data that informs case studies comes from multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). Each data source is “one piece of the “puzzle,” with each piece contributing to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon. This convergence adds strength to the findings as the various strands of data are braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). Data was collected from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to understand the perspective of different stakeholders.

Interviews. Interviews are used in studies to enter other people’s perspectives (Patton, 1990). Data will be collected from one on one semi structured interviews with an administrator. The interview was conducted at each site guided by the Interview Protocol (Appendix F) which lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. Before beginning the interview, the researcher explained the
The interview process and provided each administrator with the consent form (Appendix D). The interview was audio recorded and the researcher also took notes during the process. The Interview Protocol included open-ended questions about their ESL program in the interest of ascertaining their perception of what has helped make their district’s ESL program so effective, and specifically the strategies, resources, and practices that are effective in serving their district’s English language learner population. The researcher asked follow up questions, or “probes.” According to Merriam (1998), probes are follow up questions to seek clarification or learn something more after the participant answers the lead question. At the end of the interview, the participants were given the chance to offer any additional information that may pertain to the subject of the study and the researcher will delineate the process for data storage, follow up for clarification, and transcript review.

**Focus groups.** Focus groups are “used to collect shared understanding from several individuals” (Creswell, 2002, p. 218). One forty-five to seventy-five minute, audio recorded focus groups with three to seven teachers were conducted in each district. The teachers were asked open ended questions guided by the Interview Protocol in Appendix G; the researcher also asked additional questions in order to clarify participants’ responses or further explanation. The focus group presents more challenges to the researcher than a one on one interview if the participants are not cooperative together, and it may be difficult to note take during the process. Additionally, it may be difficult to transcribe and differentiate the voices. However, it is also valuable; the focus group allowed discussion and collective responses in regards to what they feel attributes to the success of their ESL program.

**Document collection.** Creswell (2012) acknowledged that documents are in the language and words of the participants and provide background information about the phenomenon being
School documents relevant to the practices, strategies, and resources used to service the English language learners in a district were collected for review. Documents included in-service agendas, minutes, and training materials; staff meeting agendas, minutes, and informational materials; professional development materials; and lesson plans and curriculum maps. Any documents offered for the study were collected from participants in the interviews and focus groups.

Initially after the interviews, focus groups, and document collection, the audio files were transcribed using the reliable and confidential transcription service, Rev.com. Electronic files including audio recordings and digital documents were stored on a password protected laptop accessible only to the researcher and in a cloud that is password protected and accessible through a two-step verification process. Audio recordings of the interviews were also stored as backup files on a password protected iPhone only accessible to the researcher. After the audio files were transcribed, the audio recordings were deleted from both the laptop and iPhone. Paper documents and any electronic files that were printed during the data analysis process were kept in a locked cabinet at the home of and only accessible to the researcher. When the researcher was ready to analyze the data collected, the researcher moved the files to a qualitative software program.

**Data Analysis**

Data was gathered to identify strategies, resources, and practices used by the districts to support their English language learners and describe the stakeholders’ beliefs about what contributes the most to the success of the ESL programs. Merriam (1998) conjectured that the analysis process should begin during the data collection phase; it is dynamic and recursive. During a qualitative study, the researcher is already analyzing data by using working hypotheses...
that direct their attention to certain data that will verify or refine that hunch, nor will the researcher know every person that might be interviewed or all the questions that need to be asked. In the analysis of data collected in a case study, the researcher attempts “the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). In this study, the researcher constructed what has made the ESL programs in these districts so successful, particularly the strategies, practices, and resources as perceived by the administrators and teachers. Creswell (2002) delineated six steps in analyzing and interpreting qualitative data.

First, the researcher organized the data collected using qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA. Creswell (2002) suggested that organization is critical because of the vast amount of different types of data collected. The software was not used to read the text and decide what it means; the researcher is still the main tool for analysis (Weitzman 2000), but the software allows the researcher to read, review, categorize, and sort text passages and images.

Next, Agar (1980) suggested that the researcher read and immerse themselves into the transcripts. Analysis of qualitative data begins with the process of coding, to derive meaning from the data. A code is defined as a “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of […] data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). The researcher will use descriptive coding and in vivo, two first coding strategies. Descriptive coding helps identify the topics of the transcripts, “its primary goal it to assist the reader to see what you saw and to hear what you heard (Wolcott, 1994). In vivo coding will highlight particular words used by participants to explain their experiences with the
phenomenon and will “help [the researcher] preserve participants’ meanings for their views and actions in the coding itself” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55).

Third, the researcher analyzes the data to form answers to the research questions by developing themes or categories of ideas from the data. The researcher will take the data through a second coding cycle, pattern coding, to group the material into a smaller number of sets, themes, or concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) regard that identifying categories too quickly results in lost themes, so it will be important to move through this process methodically and repeat the process if needed.

Fourth, the researcher represents and reports their findings. The primary form to report findings in qualitative research is narrative discussion (Creswell, 2011), but also often display findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, the researcher will write a case profile for each research site.

Subsequently, fifth, the researcher will then examine the patterns and themes across the cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Using a table to view the data from each case, the researcher will examine similarities and differences between each of the cases (Yin, 2009). The researcher will be able to make “naturalistic generalizations” based on the cases (Stake, 1995), an intuitive process that recognizes the similarities of issues or objects.

Finally, sixth, the last step in data analysis according to Creswell (2011) is to verify the findings and interpretations are accurate.

Validity and Credibility

Angen (2000) acknowledged that within interpretative research, validation is "a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research" (p. 387). A qualitative study assumes that reality is socially constructed and it is what participants perceive it to be therefore it is
important to check how accurately participants’ realities have been portrayed (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

**Triangulation.** The researcher employed triangulation of sources (Denzin, 1978 & Patton, 1999). Creswell & Miller (2000) define triangulation as a systemic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories. As a case study, the various forms of data (interviews, focus groups, and document review) collected provide triangulation, or corroborate findings. The researcher collected data from one on one interviews, focus groups, and document collection to inform the researcher of which strategies, practices, and resources teachers and administrators attribute to the success of the ESL program in their district. Creswell (2002) argued that triangulation “ensures that the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information […] to develop a rapport that is both accurate and credible” (p. 259).

**Member Checking.** The researcher used member checking to establish validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider this strategy to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). In member checking, the researcher solicits participants' views of accuracy of the findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). From the constructivist research paradigm, the researcher revealed what participants’ attribute to the success of their ESL programs; it is important to check with the participants that transcripts were precisely transcribed and that their meaning was accurately interpreted. Participants will be provided with a transcript of their interview or of the focus group and the interpretations of those in order to provide feedback in order to add credibility to the qualitative study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).
Thick Description. Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Creswell & Miller (2000) posit that thick description is another method to establish validity & credibility in qualitative studies. It is defined as “the procedure of describing the setting, the participants, and themes of a qualitative study in rich detail” (p. 128). Merriam (1998) contends that a case study produces a “thick,” rich description of the phenomenon. Contextualizing the findings will also allow the readers of the study to decide if the conclusions are applicable to other settings or similar contexts. The researcher analyzed, interpreted, and theorized about the phenomenon and thick description illustrated and supported the generalizability of the findings to similar contexts.

Limitations

In a qualitative study, researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data. According to Merriam (1998), the researcher can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information, [but can be self-limiting] by being human: making mistakes and letting personal biases interfere. The goal of case study research is to understand the phenomenon through the participants’ perspectives. The constructivist paradigm dictates that researcher is interpreting the data and contends that there are multiple realities, therefore multiple analyses of the data (Ponderotto, 2005).

Although the study includes data from three cases, the themes identified between these districts about the strategies, resources, and practices used to make the ESL programs successful as attributed by the stakeholders, the findings will not be generalizable to other districts in Massachusetts. Only three districts were selected that met the study criterion to enable an in depth study of each. The strategies, resources, and practices used in each district do not represent the only ones used by successful programs in Massachusetts Title III districts.

Protection of Human Subjects
The intent of this study was to identify the strategies, practice, and resources that teachers and administrators attribute to the success of their ESL programs through the lens of the Casual Model of Organizational Change and Performance (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The researcher completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) online certification training for human subjects research and the study was conducted following the guidelines and approval of Northeastern University’s IRB.

**Informed Consent.** Participants were to sign a consent form before the interview (Appendix D) or focus group (Appendix E). The consent form stated that participation is voluntary and both teachers and administrators may withdraw themselves from the study at any time or may simply not answer any questions which they choose not to. The consent form also explained the purpose of the study and researcher information, outlined procedures documenting how data would be collected, managed, and stored and stated that there are no known risks to study participating and expresses the perceived benefits from the study. Both consent forms disclosed that the study would give identifying information about the site and participants, but there was no more than minimum risk in participating. All participants were autonomous individuals, capable of understanding and giving consent.

**Ethical Considerations.** The study was conducted in school districts other than that of the researcher to remove any unwarranted bias. Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were asked to describe what they attribute to the success of the ESL program in their district. Although the subject matter did not appear to be of a traumatizing nature, participants could be uncomfortable talking about elements of their employment, therefore participants were permitted to not answer any questions in which they do not want to or quit the study at any time. Additionally, the researcher monitored the participants for any discomfort. Administrators were
compensated for their participation in the study, however, teachers were provided refreshments prior to and during participation in the focus group. Participants were offered the opportunity to review and inspect the transcripts for accuracy and to receive copy of the study when completed.

Summary

This qualitative research study sought to identify the strategies, practices, and resources used by Title III districts in Massachusetts that are demonstrating success with their English language learners through standardized test scores and meeting their Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives. Using a multiple case study design, the researcher collected data on this phenomenon by interviewing administrators, facilitating focus groups with teachers, and reviewing supporting documents. The interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis were used to form a profile of each district. The three cases were compared to determine themes and patterns to inform other school districts interested in changing their ESL programs.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data acquired from various stakeholders interviewed for the purpose of this study through one-on-one interviews and focus groups. This research study examined the administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions towards the success of the ELL program in three Title III districts in Massachusetts as defined by their meeting AMAO objectives and outperforming other Title III districts on state standardized assessments. The findings are based on information collected from Belmont Public Schools, Newton Public Schools, and Winchester Public Schools.

Belmont Public Schools

Belmont Public Schools is a Title III district located in the Greater Boston region of Massachusetts. There are six schools in the district: four elementary schools (grades PreK-4), one middle school (grades 5-8), and one high school (grades 9-12). In the 2016-2017 school year, there were 4,466 students enrolled in the district, 6.2% were identified as ELLs. Both the administration and teachers have noticed an increase in the ELL population over the years, including a 72% surge in the 2013-2014 school year. As the population grew, so did the ESL department. Seven years ago, the district employed tutors to work with the English language learners, now there are nine certified ESL teachers and a director who oversees the English Language Education program.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Belmont has been successful in teaching their English language learners in both academic content and English language proficiency. Looking at accountability data collected by DESE from 2013 to 2016, the district has successfully met their AMAOs each year and compared to other Title III districts, has a higher percentage of ELLs achieving proficient or advanced on the
Massachusetts standardized achievement tests in English language arts, mathematics, and science.

Table 2

*Percentage of ELLs Scoring Advanced & Proficient on State Standardized Tests in Belmont*

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<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
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*Note:* The asterisk denotes PARCC results for Grades 3-8. The rest are MCAS results for all grades.

According to the interview with Belmont’s director and a document analysis, English language learners in Belmont are taught using sheltered English immersion with pullout instruction of a separate English language development curriculum by their ESL teachers. At both the elementary and secondary levels, English language learners are placed in SEI classrooms with native English speaking peers. At the secondary level, students are placed into an English language development class by their proficiency level. Additionally, the district offers a newcomer American history class. According to a 2015 presentation to families, the Belmont ESL program goals are to “provide intensive support early so that the students exit the program in two or three years” and to help “each student to reach full grade level proficiency so that they will have equal access to all educational and employment opportunities”.

**Director of English, Reading and ELL.** Lindsey is a female, Caucasian, native English speaker who is in her eighth year as the Director of English in Belmont. The interview with Lindsey took place in her office, which is located at the high school. As the director of English,
Reading and ELL, Lindsey divides her administrative role to oversee not only the ESL program in the district, but also the district’s English department. Prior to this role, she worked as a high school English teacher and taught adult ESL while she was in college. While, Lindsey is currently not ESL certified, she has completed coursework in the Applied Linguistics Master of Arts program at University of Massachusetts Boston.

The Director described the English language education program model in Belmont. As mandated by the state, they follow a sheltered English immersion model. English language learners are taught using sheltered content instruction with English language development with an ESL teacher. When we talked about pull out versus push in, Lindsey explained that she prefers pull out over push in because she believes, for it to work effectively, the teachers would need to have shared planning time, which the ESL and content teachers do not have. They also do not cluster up the kids in classes. Lindsey stressed they “try to keep the cognitive piece high, respectful of their abilities in their native language, but the linguistic piece lower.” At the secondary level, the district has always offered a foundational English language arts class for the lower English proficiency students (levels 1-3), but this year they added an ESL American history class for newcomers because the Director of English found that many students did not understand democracy. At the end of every school year, the Director meets with the entire ESL department to review what worked well and what didn’t work from the past year’s service model.

Since coming into her role as Director of English, Lindsey revealed the ELL department has changed and grown. In 2009, when she started, there were fewer than 100 English language learners and they were provided support with tutors. Administratively, as the Director of English, Lindsey would organize rosters of the ELL students. As the numbers of ELLs in the
district grew, her job as Director of English included more responsibility for the ELLs and certified ESL teachers were hired; “there’s almost zero similarity between what we’re doing now and what we were doing eight or even six years ago.” Lindsey recalled a great surge in the ELL population in the 2013-2014 school of 72%. While she claims some would maintain that her primary role is the language arts coordinator, she now has the authority of additionally leading the ESL department of 9 teachers and responsibility of ensuring the academic achievement and progress of nearly 300 ELLs. Lindsey also observed a change in the demographics of the English language learners in Belmont, “it used to be that most of the students were sojourners.” Lindsey reported the primary languages spoken by the English language learners are Chinese, Spanish, then Portuguese; “it would have been for many years Chinese, Japanese, Korean or Chinese, Korean, Japanese back in the old model where we have these sojourners.” Before the shift, the Director described the students’ backgrounds including children of researchers doing sabbaticals at Harvard University with a lot of support at home. A lot of the students that came into the district would also have had English instruction in their home countries, “and then all that changed,” Lindsey said. She disclosed she doesn’t think the district’s success in educating their English language learners was because “they were smart kids to begin with when they came.”

Reflecting on the district’s success in educating the English language learners, the Director attributed it to the quality teachers that Belmont employs. Surprised, she believed that the SEI endorsement worked, “when you look at the AMAO data, there’s a huge spike in the CPI for the ELLs after the second year of RETELL.” She reasoned that it “put the [ELLs] in front of the teacher’s face.” “Belmont teachers are so powerful,” when a problem is pointed out to them, they will address it, the Director commended. Within the English language learner department,
Lindsey credited the collegiality as another factor in the district’s success. Even though they are spread out in the district within different buildings, “there’ll be huge email chains. Everybody is bringing a different strength and they learn from each other.” Lindsey admitted there are a few challenges the district faces despite the successful numbers.

The issues that arise during her daily work or what she hears from parents influence the future goals of the program. During the interview, she would pull up slides or documents citing the information on them, she explained, “this is the documentation of my process.” One problem is translation and interpreter services; that morning she heard from a teacher that an interpreter did not show. Another challenge has been the amount of time that it takes to figure out if students have a learning disability or if the issue is the language barrier. With the changing demographics, Lindsey reported that the district is seeing more students with limited or interrupted formal education. She recalled a meeting in with the family of an ELL who was struggling in math, “it turns out there’s 100 kids in a class at her old school; one teacher, 100 kids. [...] That’s probably what the problem was.” In order to not waste time in September with service hours, Lindsey would build a schedule before the school year, however, another problem, the Director shared is it is difficult to anticipate the enrollment by building. Currently, she has a teacher with 54 kids on her roster. “More staff would make everything easier,” she lamented, but class sizes are large throughout the district.

Lindsey confessed, “we cannot make it without Title III.” According to her, the district is under-resourced and spends less than the state average per a student. With their Title III funds, the district provides extra support for their English language learners with an extended day program during the school year and offer a summer camp program. This year, Lindsey invested in Ellevation, a student information system to report progress of ELL students to the content
teachers. While, they have bought curriculum books, the director found most books were not specific to the needs of English language learners. The Director alleged that it is an advantage to also be the Director of Reading because she could recognize that “the needs are just really different in [her] opinion.” Therefore, through Title III, she gives some of her teachers 30 or 40 hours to write curriculum, which they are still writing. Similarly to last year, the Director would like to bring in an outside consultant to run an ELL curriculum-specific PD to aid the teachers in working on the scope and sequence of their ELL curriculum. A portion of the Title III funds must be allocated to professional development (PD). She confessed that the SEI endorsement courses must have exhausted the teachers in the district as the ELL specific PD was not well attended this year. Title III funds also help fund activities related to the department’s goal to improve community & family engagement.

The Director believes it is important to improve community & family engagement to help the ELL families integrate themselves into their life in Belmont. As the Director, Lindsey talks with a lot of parents and found they had a lot of questions about how to do things like sign their child up for soccer or how to use public transportation. Belmont has an event “Meet Belmont” that an ELL teacher and student interpreters attend to give information to the families about different parts of the town like the recreation department. They try to have non-ELL families participate as well. Lindsey also sets up family programs. Part of these programs are conversation groups which allow the families to practice using English relating to a topic for the parents to learn about, for example, how to use the library. Some other programs include the international Valentine celebration in which families could make valentines for recent immigrants or senior citizens. Using the Title III funds, Lindsey also paid for a family mentor
program to try and match families who speak the same home language. In conversation with parents, she learned what activities were helpful to the families.

**Belmont teacher focus group.** The Belmont teacher focus group included four teachers from the elementary and secondary levels. All the teachers identified as Caucasian, female, and native English speakers. “Melina” is an elementary ESL teacher who has been teaching for seven years, four in Belmont. She previously taught a sheltered grade 4 class in another district. Her Bachelor’s degree is in elementary education and she received a Master’s degree in ESL. “Charlotte” taught in Europe for two years before teaching in Belmont for the last three years. She teaches sheltered English language arts and history at the high school. She received a Bachelor’s degree in French and a Master’s degree in ESL. “Leah” has been teaching for five years in Belmont and taught two years prior to that in another district. She teaches elementary ESL. Leah has a Bachelor’s degree in English literature and a Master’s degree in Humanities with an emphasis in ESL. “Jessica” has been teaching for twelve years, but only the last three in Belmont. She previously taught sheltered kindergarten, but currently is an elementary ESL teacher. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice and a Master’s degree in Elementary Education.

All the teachers in the focus group have observed a change and growth in the English language learner population while they have worked in the district. Leah recalled when she came to the district, there were ESL tutors working with the English language learners. Melina remarked, “every year [the department has] been expanding and growing. And we’ve needed to because our numbers have been exploding.” Some of the teachers exemplified the growth they have witnessed. Jessica recalled in one year Melina and Leah added twenty students to their caseload. In her four years, Melina also noted Wellington Elementary school grew from twenty-
four or twenty-five ELL students to the seventy-two at the school this year. Leah added that the growth jumps at every school in the district. The student makeup has also changed, Charlotte remarked:

When I first started, I noticed that most of the kids were the children of professors in the area who were coming for short stints at a university and so most of the kids had really strong academic backgrounds. Now in the past two years, I've noticed we have sort of a split between families that are coming for that reason and families that are coming because of difficulties in the home country or for economic reasons. That's shown a really interesting divide between the students and has changed the classroom a lot and sort of what we need to provide in the classroom. So we have everyone ranging from kids with sort of unidentified learning disabilities and difficulties all the way through the child of the MIT professor who's sort through their education in their country.

Jessica stated the dominant language is Chinese, however the teachers have found more languages. Leah added, “when I came here, it was like, I used to have four predominant languages, but now I can have a big mix.” The teachers also brought up the growth again later in our discussion in talking about the challenges they face.

The teachers reported a desire to have more staff. Leah first pointed out that the “rapid growth of our population,” staffing, and budget “because that goes hand in hand.” Melina lamented that a consequence of not having more staff, the groups are larger than she would like, “I just don't feel like in 45 minutes I'm getting to what they need. When they're doing the writing activity, I'm sitting with this kid but there's nine others that are in this small group.” Charlotte pointed out that in this influx, more and more ELLs are coming with possible learning disabilities in their first language or haven’t had a strong academic background; it is challenging
to get the support that student may need because, as Jessica brought up, the response typically is “well, they’re ESL.” The teachers also agreed that keeping up with the state mandates about the education of English language learners is also difficult because Leah and Jessica remarked that it is constantly changing. The ESL teachers are responsible for meeting a certain number of service minutes per week depending on the language proficiency level of each ELL, but also are responsible for testing the new students at the beginning of the year and completing the ACCESS English proficiency testing midyear. Melina remarked, “I feel like I lose a month of instruction in the beginning of the year because we’re doing all of our pre-testing in September and then we lose all of our teaching time in January and into February because of ACCESS.” Charlotte pointed out that there it is helpful to test the students at the beginning of the year “so that way we know the kids, we know their language level before we place them and so when they get to us, they're really appropriately placed.” Due to the staffing numbers, most teachers are spread out

In discussions about the success the district has had in education their English language learners, the teachers in the focus group agreed it is a result of both the teachers and parents supporting the students. Jessica pointed out that Belmont is a “very affluent community” and families that come to Belmont are seeking the district. Melina recalled parents telling her, “I was told to move here or Newton.” Leah and Melina both talked about the role of supportive parents aiding the students’ success. Leah posited that “one of the reasons is because a lot of them come from educated backgrounds, professors as parents, and they’re very literate and education is stressed in the home.” Charlotte added that at the high school level, the families recognize English for future careers and “there’s already been this sense of how important education is for these kids.” Melina added that having a “good team” within the English learner education department also has aided in the success. Charlotte remarked that they haven’t always had a
good team, but “every new person who comes in fits well.” Leah agreed, that even though they are spread out, technology has made it easy to share as she relies on her colleagues for ideas and techniques. All the teachers acknowledged the importance that leadership support and trust to have freedom in teaching their students, Charlotte argued, “it has to be that way because [...] we have no idea where they’re coming from.” Both Melina and Leah offered that with the freedom of the curriculum, they can take care of the whole child.

The teachers discussed the practices used to support the needs of the ELL students. Jessica commented that the kids influence their instruction. She explained, “you will see a common error, whether it’s grammar, whether it’s vocabulary and you can take that and say okay this group needs to work on this.” Leah pointed out that the ESL teachers are still expected to follow “good teacher practice” including activators, post objectives, tickets to leave, and behavior management. Leah and Melina discussed how their practices are based on their students’ needs and their grade and level. Both elaborated that it was about giving the ELLs opportunities to use the language they would not otherwise have. Charlotte recognized the new history class for newcomers as a response to students’ needs, “I had a student come to me and say ‘can you help me? I have a test.’ ‘What’s it on?’ ‘It’s on the Vietnam War.’ ‘Do you even know what Vietnam is.’ ‘No, I don’t.’” Charlotte added that the class allows them to support the ELLs in history. Leah added that the summer camp program run from the Title III grant “makes a difference.” The summer camp allows the students to “have something” before school begins in September.

The teachers in the focus group described several activities organized to engage with the English language learners’ families. Jessica discussed the parent conversation groups she holds twice a month. She elaborated, “it serves [...] more purposes and I have more time with the
parents; [...] I can ask them personal questions about home.” Melina added the new mentor program helps connect families that speak the same language. All the teachers agreed that these aid in the students being comfortable in school, Melina reasoned, “it gives the kids confidence.” The teachers find the parents are kept “in the loop,” Melina also further explained, “just so they feel like they're a little bit more connected because sometimes they come in and they're coming in from another country and they have no idea. What do we do at a parent teacher conference?”

**Summary of Belmont Public Schools findings.** The Director of English and the teachers interviewed in the Belmont school district acknowledged that the ESL department has changed and grown in response to the increasing number of English language learners in the district. According to the Director, the district’s success in educating ELLs is the effect of hiring quality teachers who were inspired by the state mandated SEI endorsement. The teachers perceived the district’s success was also impacted by the students’ backgrounds. According to the teachers interviewed, the success was influenced by their students’ parents’ education and their value and support for English education. While the district has largely been successful, both the Director and teachers reported challenges including identifying possible learning disabilities in English language learners and dealing with large class sizes.

**Newton Public Schools**

Newton Public Schools is a Title III district in the Greater Boston region of Massachusetts. There are twenty-two schools in the district: sixteen elementary schools (grades PreK-5), four middle schools (grades 6-8), and two high schools (grades 9-12). In the 2016-2017 school year, there were 12,827 students enrolled in the district, with 6.7% identified as English language learners. There has been a steady increase in the ELL population in the last decade.
According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Newton Public Schools has been successful in teaching their ELLs in both academics and English language proficiency. The district has met all three of the Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives from 2012-2016. Additionally, the district has had a large number of their ELLs score advanced and proficiency on the state standardized assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science.

Table 3

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<tr>
<td><strong>Mathematics</strong></td>
<td>58*</td>
<td>54*</td>
<td>73</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Science</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The asterisk denotes PARCC results for Grades 3-8. The rest are MCAS results for all grades.*

**Director of English Language Learning.** Allison began her career as a middle school ESL teacher. After fifteen years as a teacher, she transitioned to administration and worked as the Coordinator of ELL in another district before coming to Newton. This is Allison’s first year as the Director of English Language Learning; two years prior, she served as the Assistant Director. The interview with Newton’s Director of English Language Learning took place in her office at the Community Education Center. Prior to our interview, Allison was observing teachers. As the director, Allison explained that she evaluates and supervises all the teachers in the “south district” and handles the budget including Title III.

The Director of English Language Learning described the makeup of the English language learners in the district. The district has experienced a growth in the population over the
years. Allison compared the numbers, seven years ago there were about 600 English language
learners in the district and now there are around 850. The dominant languages spoken by the
ELLs are Mandarin, Spanish, Hebrew, Portuguese, and Russian. In discussing the demographics
of the English language learners, Allison characterized the ELLs as having a higher
socioeconomic status than ELLs coming to other districts in which she has worked. She posited,
“...students from China, Sweden, Japan, Korea, where their socio-economic status is much higher, the level of education of parents is much higher.” In general, the district encounters a diverse group of students coming from different backgrounds and experiences.

The program model in Newton is particular to the level. Allison first explained the high school: there are two programs based on the students’ needs. One model is the “non literacy, average ESL program.” In this model, the students are put into ESL classes by their English proficiency levels. There are ESL history classes and academic support block for those that need that support, but typically go out to mainstream classes. The other program features a similar model of classes, but is for the lower proficiency students or those that have come with interruptions in schooling and low literacy. In this model, students take all of their content classes within the ELL program. At the middle school level, the English language learners are split by proficiency level. Two schools are designated for beginners and two schools are for those ELLs with English proficiency levels of 3, 4, and 5. At this level, ELLs attend ESL classes and the students receive support from pull out or push in in mainstream content classes. Lastly, in the elementary schools, Allison reasoned the program model will look different according to the number of English language learners receiving services and that she is “fairly hands off about how it needs to be structured.” One elementary school could have as little twelve English
language learners whereas there are seventy-eight in the school with the largest population. The ESL teachers may push in or pull out at the elementary schools depending on the expectations of the principal and the school climate.

The English Language Learning department supervises forty ESL teachers and twenty-nine aides in the district. Allison is the director and shares supervisory duties with the assistant director. Both the Director and Assistant Director are primarily in the English Language Learning Program office at the Newton Community Education Center. The Director and Assistant Director divided the evaluating and supervising of ESL teachers in the district. Allison also handles the budget and Title III funds. This year, the Assistant Director has focused on coaching and professional development. Additionally, the district has a family liaison who handles new registrations including intake testing. The liaison also helps the district manage the state required procedural documentation. In response to students coming who are “fragile” or have experienced trauma, the district employs a bilingual social worker who speaks Spanish and language liaisons who speak Chinese and Korean. Allison commented there has not been much change in the staff numbers in the district though she did trade two aides for another ESL teacher. The Director emphasized the importance of a highly-qualified staff, “I’m really trying to move towards highly qualified staff. Continuing to move forward that our students are getting instruction from the most qualified person.”

The Director posited Newton’s success in educating their English language learners is the product of the high-quality staff they have hired. Specifically, in the ESL department, Allison has focused on hiring teachers whose primary certification is in ESL and therefore have a desire and passion to educate English language learners. According to Allison, “our ESL staff is highly motivated, problem solving, wanting to figure out what to with this kid, that kid.” She
elaborated Newton seeks to hire teachers that are “really smart, capable, and really focused on problem solving.” Allison posited that the teachers have ownership of their students and work to have every one of their students succeed.

Newton teacher focus group. The Newton teacher focus group included six teachers from the elementary and secondary levels. The focus group took place at one of the high schools in the district in a classroom of the English language learner program. All the teachers identified as Caucasian, female, and native English speakers. Additionally, two teachers speak Spanish fluently. “Erica” is in her seventh year as a high school literacy teacher in Newton. She also has been an elementary and elementary ESL teacher. “Juliette” has taught SLIFE students in the literacy program for the last seven years since its inception. She helped to develop the curriculum for the program. Previously, she was an elementary teacher in Newton and another district. “Deidre” is a secondary ESL science teacher. Previously, she taught Spanish to children. “Tia” has been teaching elementary ESL in the district for six years. Prior to coming to Newton, Tia taught all levels including college including teaching overseas and has taught in bilingual programs. “Annabelle” was an elementary Spanish teacher until the district eliminated the bilingual program and now teaches elementary ESL. “Amber” is a secondary teacher in the ESL literacy program and teaches an ESL history class. Amber first taught high school ELL many years ago and then supervised ELL teachers at a university in Massachusetts until she returned to the district.

The teachers acknowledged changes in both the number and demographics of their English language learners. Tia recalled, in her six years in elementary, she has seen an increase in her caseload from “38 to 82 or 3.” Deidre had “increases of 50 to 70 to 83” in her last year. The teachers described a diverse population of ELLs throughout the district: Spanish,
Portuguese, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Ugandan, etc. Amber remarked that she has quite a few Chinese speakers in her classes, “we have a quite a large Chinese speaking population.” She also noted “our Portuguese speaking [Brazilian] population has grown quite a bit.” Annabelle and Deidre posited the growing populations is a result of people communicate back to their home countries “and they’ll say move here.” The teachers also identified an increase in the number of students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Juliette commented, at the beginning of the literacy program “it was three [SLIFE] students, by the end of that particular year we were up to eight. But typically for the last four years, we’ve had at least twelve students every year.” The teachers described specific SLIFE students in their classrooms. Annette had a student who stopped going to all day to school because they could not afford it. Deidre and Tia had students that attended religious schools in their home countries and as a result of simply memorizing the Quran, they struggled with their learning and literacy skills. While the number of SLIFE students has increased, Annabelle quipped, “on the other side too we have some very highly educated people here. We’re teaching kids whose parents are here at the universities and for business.”

The teachers felt that the district provides and supports quality professional development. Tia gushed, “the learning opportunities, things that are offered to us for free […] there’s no comparison.” Deidre added, the district is “generous” in reimbursing teachers who seek professional development trainings outside of the district. Annabelle and Juliette felt that over the last decade the model for professional development has improved: the model changed to more school based workshops, focused on the curriculum used with colleagues. Annabelle remarked there is a lot of collaboration after professional development. Colleagues often share what they have learned; “my students did a history project on ibooks and used the same
technology that Deidre brought in.” The district also has the teachers work in professional learning communities (PLCs), a group of teachers that meet regularly to discuss a topic and work on a product that will improve student learning.

The constant collaboration is one component of Newton’s success. Amber posited the teachers’ working together creates “an atmosphere for the students to feel comfortable and want to be a part of it.” The teachers who work in the same building not only talk and share plans, but also can be found eating lunch together. Tia remarked at the elementary school, “we’re a really tight knit group. We’re like family.” Deidre agreed, “I love my colleagues.” Collaboration is important outside of the department, particularly in the elementary schools where the ESL teachers push in, “their space is sacred so you have to build that relationship.”

Another component of the district’s success, as perceived by the teachers, are the resources. Annabelle began the discussion “we have resources, we have people, and we have materials.” In addition to ESL teachers, the district has hired interpreters, behavior interventionists, and social workers. Many of their English language learners, particularly SLIFE students, need additional supports and the people help “take away things from outside of our job that we’re dealing with so that we can really focus on our job.” The teachers continued discussing the money used to buy the resourced. Newton receives Title III money and an important resource for their ELLs is the summer enrichment program. Amber and Deidre agreed the Summer program was essential to continue the English language learning, “we noticed that the kids, the following September, had not lost as much English.” Annabelle commented a lot comes from grants, she gave the example of a debate club for third graders, “I feel like we had a lot of grants written that allowed us to purchase materials and staff these kind of after school activities.”
Summary of Newton School District findings. According to the Director and educators, Newton is home to families who have a higher socioeconomic than most other districts. The background of the English language learners is believed to be one factor in reflection of the district’s success. Both the Director of English Language Learning and the teachers in the focus group attributed the education background of the ELLs’ parents as well as the value they place on education and English learning as a contributing factor. Furthermore, Allison, the Director, credits the quality teachers the district employs. They look for ESL teachers invested in and having a passion for educating English language learners. The teachers commented on their frequent collaboration and teamwork and they posited it had an impact on the success of their students. However, in addition to ESL teachers, both the Director and teachers remarked they were grateful the District had access to many resources including support people: behavior interventionists and social workers. Newton receives Title III money which in part is used to support a Summer enrichment program. The Summer program helps the district’s ELLs continue to use the English language, which the teachers felt was noticeable at the start of a new school year.

Winchester Public Schools

Winchester Public Schools is a Title III district located in the Greater Boston region of Massachusetts. There are seven schools in the district: five elementary schools (grades PreK-5), one middle school (grades 6-8), and one high school (grades 9-12). In the 2016-2017 school year there were 4,623 students enrolled in the district, with 3.6% identified as English language learners. There was an influx in the English language learner population from the 2010-2011 school year to the 2011-2012 school year. For the last few years, the population has stayed steady. The English language education department has nine teachers including the coordinator.
According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Winchester has been successful in teaching their ELLs in both academics and English language proficiency. The district has met all three of the Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives from 2011-2016. Additionally, the district has had a large number of their ELLs score advanced and proficiency on the state standardized assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science.

Table 4

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<th>2016</th>
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<td>Science</td>
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</tr>
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**English Language Education Coordinator.** Laura is a female, Caucasian, native English speaker who is in her fifth year as the Coordinator of the English Language Education department. The interview with Laura took place in her classroom at the high school. This is her first year at the high school, previously she was at the elementary school. Her role is split as .6 teacher and .4 coordinator. She has two Bachelor degrees in English and in Teaching English as a Second Language. Laura began her career in Thailand before coming back to the United States. She worked in adult education and at elementary schools in other districts before coming to Winchester.

Since coming to the district, the English language education department has developed. Five years ago, there was a Curriculum Program Review in the district and in response, the district hired a coordinator and ESL teachers. Previously, there were tutors working with the
ELLs. Currently, there are nine ESL teachers in the district including Laura who serves the dual role of teacher and coordinator. She has not seen large growth in their ELL population. The predominant language is Chinese following by Korean. Additionally, there are French, Brazilian, and some African students. The coordinator reported the bulk of their English language learners are at the elementary level, specifically in kindergarten and first grade. While other districts and states may have incidences of long term ELLs in the program, Laura noted that their district doesn’t seem to have an issue. The district has been moving towards a co-teaching model at the elementary level, but at the secondary level, the students are pulled out of a foreign language class for ESL services.

The English learners department in Winchester has a budget from the district and receives additional money from the Title III grant. Laura proclaimed, “if you want something and you can articulate it, the money is there.” The department has materials and books for the teachers including the Reach curriculum. The Title III money funds a Summer program and after school programs. Additionally, the grant funds professional development including workshops and conferences attended by the ESL teachers. The Coordinator acknowledged the district didn’t always provide a budget for the department, “I think [Winchester has] done much more so than any other district I've worked, and better than what they were doing when I first got here. I think when I first got here it was more, well, what do you need, and you got back, and then they wouldn't say anything, but now they've made a concerted effort.”

To support the English language learners, the Coordinator remarked it is important to look at the strengths the students bring into the classroom. Particularly in the elementary level, Laura has witnessed the teachers working to meet the individual needs of the students, “I think that’s where Winchester does a really nice job working with the kids individually within the
context of the classroom.” She believes it’s essential to not try to assimilate the ELLs, “we don’t want to necessarily change them or make them American but we do want them to achieve in the classroom and be successful.” According to Laura, the teachers have continued looking for strategies that support the ELLs. The district has seen the response to the co-teaching model used for special education and are looking to try it with their English language learners.

Laura posited family and community support has contributed to the success of their English language learners. Laura reported families are coming to Winchester because they expect good schools. The parents set high expectations for their children-prior to coming to Winchester, the students were enrolled in private or bilingual schools in their home countries. The ELLs have tutoring opportunities in their language and in English, she recalled a group of Korean students whose parents hired a tutor and they spent hours studying every day. “The Chinese community in particular has a very strong presence in town,” the coordinator explained, the Chinese community meets regularly and has a school which offers classes; “that connect to their heritage language [...] really impacts their learning.” The coordinator commented that the teachers highlight the student's’ strengths from their home language and family. “We don’t want to necessarily change them or make them American, but we do not want them to achieve in the classroom and be successful.” Additionally, in the community there is the Winchester Multicultural Network which tries to build community. The organization arranges activities, provides language classes, and broaches issues affecting the different cultural groups in town. Within the district, the English language education department organizes get-togethers. Laura expressed it was important that at their events, kids were welcomed so the parents would come as “sometimes that’s where the connections are made.” Laura added the events are well attended.
According to the Coordinator, sustaining professional development has been a challenge in the district. Laura reasoned, “because the kids are so high performing the teachers don’t pay attention to it.” Some of the teachers in the district have done the RETELL and some have opted for the test. Additionally, the district offers professional development workshops which include trainings on ESL. Laura reported the feedback has been mixed about the professional development opportunities. She has observed some teachers changing their instructional strategies or using different pedagogical strategies they learned. While the coordinator believes that it is important to seek out trainings, “it’s not something you can just say you’ve been trained and move on. You need it constantly.” Some teachers have reported that there has been too many ESL trainings or the information is similar to what they have learned in other workshops. Laura concluded, “if there’s no mandatory buy in [...] they don’t see it as a priority because the kids do so well.

**Winchester teacher focus group.** The Winchester teacher focus group included three teachers. The focus group took place at in a one of the participant’s classrooms at an elementary school. All the teachers identified as Caucasian, female, and native English speakers. “Valerie” has taught fourth grade in the district for the last eight years. In her current class, nine out of seventeen speak another language at home, but all have transitioned out of ESL services. “Cameron” is an elementary ELL teacher. Cameron’s teaching career spans more than twenty years and includes several districts teaching elementary and ESL. “Barbara” received a Master’s degree in Statistics. She was a statistician before changing to a teaching career. She has taught fourth grade and now teaches sixth grade math at the middle school.

In reflecting about the success of their English language learners, the teachers all agreed the students’ backgrounds and family life was a big influence. Barbara described the major
languages spoken by the ELLs in the district as Chinese, Korean, Russian, and Hebrew. Valerie characterized the parents of the English language learners as “very involved” and “the family really values education.” Cameron suggested the district is popular for English language learners because “[Winchester] tends to rank highly in the MCAS. I think that’s a priority.” Barbara agreed, “education is definitely valued,” citing her experiences with the Asian culture: she lives in town and adopted her daughter from China. Valerie shared an anecdote about a student’s father who inquired about the student practicing writing more over the Summer. Valerie’s response asked if the child wanted to practice more and she expressed concern that the extra practice might “ruin writing” for her. The father thought her response was “very American” because as Barbara elaborated “learning is not a choice in their country.” In town, the Chinese community attend a school on the weekend and receive additional English practice and instruction there.

While their English language learners have excelled, the teachers expressed challenges they encounter. Barbara shared the middle school teachers met with the Coordinator as there was a miscommunication about the content of the ESL classes. The general education teachers did not understand why the ESL teachers were not using the same textbook until Laura, the Coordinator, explained the difference between English as a subject and the English as a second language class. Both Cameron and Barbara commented there is a scheduling issue at their schools. Cameron remarked at the elementary level, the English language learners will be clustered to accommodate the ESL teacher pushing into the classroom. The teachers also divulged they have had issues with parent communication. Barbara recounted an ELL student came to school last year when the district had cancelled school due to snow. Cameron commented, “even though sometimes they may say, no thank you I don't need a translator,
sometimes they really do.” Valerie pointed out she has had to reread and edit her newsletters to parents for idioms, “that parent communication sometimes it's really hard.”

The teachers reported the professional development focused on educating English language learners influenced their pedagogical practices. Barbara did not complete the RETELL courses and instead opted to take the ESL teacher test. While studying, she created charts to remember how to scaffold work by English proficiency level. Cameron and Valerie expressed interest in the charts and requested Barbara email them a copy, which she obliged. Cameron and Valerie agreed they learned vocabulary strategies from the RETELL courses; Cameron quipped those strategies were good for all students. Valerie felt that there has been too much training required. Cameron agreed, but argued the teachers are familiar enough with the theories of educating ELLs and need more hands-on training, “they've been to differentiation classes, but when you are in the moment and you have a student who is frustrated because you're doing a read aloud and he doesn't understand, you need something concrete that you can go to that child and say, okay why don't you do this.” Both Barbara and Valerie lamented their ELLs have often appeared to “be getting it,” but there are often gaps they need to go back and fill in.

The teachers described the ESL program model in Winchester as a work in progress. Valerie and Cameron agreed, while it is known the district is moving towards a co-teaching model, it has not yet been explained or communicated. For now, they are calling it “push-in.” As the ESL teacher in the focus group, Cameron explained, the ESL teachers have been working on slideshows to give the content teachers information about the new model. At the middle school, the model is still pull-out according to Barbara since there is only one ESL teacher to around fifty ELLs. Barbara remarked the students are missing “an exploratory:” band, music, art, etc. However, she added with the schedule, the ESL teacher can collaborate at the team
meetings weekly. Valerie and Cameron shared at the elementary schools, there is no regular collaboration or meeting time between the ESL and content teachers. They concluded the time to meet is important to work closer together.

**Summary of Winchester School District findings.** Families move to Winchester to receive a quality education. Both the Coordinator and teachers described their English language learners as having strong family support to learn academics and to learn the English language. The largest population of ELLs is Chinese who has a large community presence and a school students attend on the weekends or after school. The Coordinator accurately represented the teachers’ sentiments towards professional development as “too much.” Laura would like to see more sustained professional development and one teacher wished there was more hands-on training. It is still uncertain on the exact timeline, but the district will be moving towards a co-teaching model; the ESL teachers are developing information for content teachers to understand it; currently most ESL teachers push-in to their students’ classrooms.

**Prominent Themes Across the Districts**

To answer the major research question, what organizational and environmental elements do various stakeholders in highly successful Title III districts in Massachusetts attribute to the success of the ESL program in their district, the researcher completed a thematic analysis, as outlined in chapter 3, of the data collected from interviews and focus groups with participants from Belmont, Newton, and Winchester school districts.

Table 5

*Themes According to the Research Question*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1:</th>
<th>Increase in Qualified ESL Teachers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 2:</td>
<td>Title III Funded Summer Program</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Theme 3:** Parent and Community Support and Engagement
**Theme 4:** Collaboration

**Theme 1: Increase in quality ESL teachers.** All three participating districts reported hiring ESL teachers to replace “tutors” in response to a Coordinated Program Review (CPR) by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Furthermore, the participants noted additional ESL teachers have been hired in response to the growing ELL population in the district. The Belmont Public School District had nine ESL teachers in the 2016-2017 school year, Lindsey, the Director of English remarked, “when I first came here we had fewer than one hundred ELLs and there were tutors. We have [since] increased our staffing […] every year.” Leah echoed Laura’s statements, “when I first came, seven years ago, there were no teachers, there tutors.” Melina also concurred that the district has added more ESL teachers over the years, “every year we’ve been expanding and growing and we’ve needed to because […] our numbers have been expanding. The Newton Public School District had forty ESL teachers in the 2016-2017 school year. In response to the question, has the number of ESL teachers changed, both Annabelle and Deidre confirmed it had. The Winchester Public School District had nine ESL teachers in the 2016-2017 school year. The Coordinator of the English Learners, Laura remembered when she came to the district, “They had just had a CPR and [hiring teachers] was all in response to that. Prior to it they had tutors, not ESL teachers.”

The three districts remarked part of their success educating English language learners was hiring quality ESL teachers. In discussing the ESL staff, Lindsey boasted “they’re all amazing.” Melina also commented the ESL teachers have made an impact on the program’s success, “I think our team growing and with qualified teachers and experienced teachers, I think has been really helpful.” Lindsey also contended all of the teachers in Belmont were influential, “I know
Belmont has incredibly high quality teachers […] if you just go to the teachers and say guess what the current state on how [ELLs] are performing can you do something about that? They’ll do something about that.” Allison echoed the sentiments of Lindsey when reflecting about the ESL staff in Newton, “our ESL staff is highly motivated, problem solving, wanting to figure out what to do with this kid, or that kid.” According to Allison, the district seeks problem solving, smart people when hiring. Laura, in Winchester, acknowledged the teachers, “do a great job of meeting the individual needs of the kids.”

**Theme 2: Title III funded Summer program.** In all three districts, participants commented on using some of the Title III grant money for a Summer enrichment program. Several teachers noted the impact of the Summer program was noticeable the next school year. Belmont’s Director, Lindsey contended the Title III grant is important, “we cannot make it without Title III.” With some of the money they offer a Summer camp and offer after school enrichment, “so the kids get more.” According to Leah, “I think the Summer camp makes a difference for those beginners.” The teachers in Newton also reported the Summer program made an impact on the success of their English language learners. Deidre insisted, “I think [the Summer program] is a really essential piece. I think we notice that the kids, just immediately the following September, […] had not lost as much English. They hadn’t lost anything; they gained it as a result.” Annabelle commented the Summer program also helped the English language learners meet other kids and make friends. The Coordinator of the English Learners department also mentioned the Summer program “done collaboratively” by the teachers with a large part of the Title III grant money they receive.

**Theme 3: Family and community support and engagement.** In interviews with the participants, the importance of family and community in the success of English language learners
emerged as a prominent theme. Participants in all three districts commented on the influence of the English language learners’ socioeconomic status, though the districts also observed demographics were changing. The Director in Belmont commented, “it used to be that most of our ELLs […] were coming with families who were researchers doing sabbaticals at Harvard […] and had a lot of support at home.” Charlotte also remarked, “most of the kids were children of professors […] so most of them kids had really strong academic backgrounds. In Newton, Allison also observed the socio-economic status of the English language learners in their district is higher compared to others, “the level of education of parents is much higher.” Moreover, Laura posited the success of Winchester’s ELLs comes from their socioeconomic status “there’s part of it they’re not stressed about going home or where they’re going.” Similarly to Lindsey’s comments, Cameron noted the ELLs in Winchester have supportive parents, who “have high expectations for their kids.

The three districts acknowledged the efforts they took and the importance of engaging families and community events. Belmont organizes conversation groups, which Lindsey noted “is language practice but there’s usually a topic like how to use the library.” Both Lindsey and Melina acknowledged the family mentor program organized by the Belmont Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the English language learner department. Melina contented the mentor program was important, “so [the ELL families] feel a bit more connected because […] they’re coming from another country and they have no idea.” In Newton, Allison proclaimed, “there is a high expectation of our teachers to be involved with families and to be communicating with families.” According to her, the family and community engagement is a factor in their success, she reckoned, “I don’t know if it’s a quantifiable thing but I do think that if we didn’t have a welcoming presence and our teachers didn’t enjoy interacting with families, I think it would
make it harder.” Allison also discussed the resources in the community: “The Newton Community Education Foundation, the library, they all run programs for families; they do a lot of outreach.” In Winchester, Laura acknowledged the strong community support for their ELLs. “The Chinese community in particular has a very strong presence. They have a Chinese school in a very organized Chinese community that meets on a regular basis. [That connection] I think impacts their learning.” There’s also the Winchester Multicultural Network, Laura asserted, “it’s a phenomenal group. They touch on different issues in town and they do a lot of activities. They provide language classes […] [and] try to build community.”

**Theme 4: Collaboration.** Collaboration was perceived to be another factor that contributed to the success of the ESL programs in the districts, although some expressed the desire for more time to collaborate. Belmont’s Director remarked, “they communicate well […] just checking in with each other or over email.” Leah commented, So I really rely on colleagues for ideas and techniques and getting an idea. We use Google Drive, which we're kind of trying to clean up, but it makes for easy sharing.” Belmont also works to collaborate and communicate with the ELLs’ other teachers. Due to scheduling, the ELL teachers cannot go to team meetings with their students’ teachers, however to overcome that challenge, Jessica noted during those meetings, “they type everything up and they’re sending it to all of us: ELL, reading, special ed. so we know what’s going on.” Amber, a teacher in Newton, declared, “we really worked hard to open up to all the different departments. [The teachers] get support from us and ideas from us. There’s a lot of collaboration.” Deidre acknowledged that collaboration was important, “collaboration is key. [With classroom teachers] you have to build that relationship.” Both the Director and teachers in Newton also commented on the other people available to assist with the English language learners: behavior interventionists, liaison, and social workers also work
together if the student needs services, particularly for English language learners that are recognized as SLIFE. In discussing collaboration with colleagues, the teachers in Newton also commented on the professional learning communities in which they meet and work together monthly on a goal. Winchester’s Coordinator, Laura, mentioned her district was considering moving towards a collaborative co-teaching model. At the elementary school there is more collaboration, “they work with the classroom teacher at their comfort level.” However, Laura confessed at the middle and high school due to the number of teachers the students have the collaboration is “willy-nilly. Some teachers will come in. It’s all done online. It’s all emails.” The teacher participants echoed Laura’s remarks on collaboration, “we would love to go to all common planning times for each grade level, but there is not enough time in the schedule.” Cameron noted however, every Friday the ESL teachers can go to some team meetings. The ESL teachers collaborate in a professional learning community like the ones mentioned by the teachers in Newton.

Summary

Chapter four presented the data collected according to the perspectives of administrators and teachers and analyzed by the researcher from three highly successful Title III districts in Massachusetts. Each district was profiled and then the data collected from the administrator interviews and teacher focus groups was presented. Sixteen educators were interviewed over several meetings to provide their perspective. Four themes across the three districts emerged after analyzing the collected data in response to the primary research question which sought the perspective of various stakeholders in the district as to the factors of their ESL programs’ success. The prominent themes: an increase in quality ESL teachers, Title III funded Summer
program, family and community support and engagement, and collaboration, across the three districts were identified at the end of Chapter four with supporting excerpts from participants.
Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

Chapter five will discuss the key findings of the research study, exploring the practices of three successful ESL programs in Title III suburban districts in Massachusetts. First, the chapter will revisit the problem of practice and methodology of the study. Next, the researcher will present the major findings, discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework, and discussion of the findings in relation to the literature review. Finally, the researcher will draw conclusions based on the findings of the study, discuss the limitations and consider implications of the study for other districts and future research studies.

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

The English language learner population has been growing over the last couple of decades. In Massachusetts, the number of students participating in English language learner programs grew from 48,098 in 2004 to 70,212 in 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In 1974, in *Lau vs Nichols*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that school districts must take affirmative action to help students overcome language barriers so they can participate in the class meaningfully. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act put a special focus on ensuring that states and schools improve the performance of certain groups of students such as English language learners. Districts in Massachusetts with one hundred or more English language learners receive appropriated grant money from Title III of NCLB. Furthermore, the districts are required to meet two English language proficiency annual measurable achievement objectives and a third academic achievement AMAO based on adequate yearly progress on the state standardized assessment. Despite the accountability measures, English language learners are still not closing the gaps with their English proficient peers and districts are failing to meet the AMAOs set by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
This qualitative multiple case study sought to explore the practices, strategies, resources of three successful ESL programs in Title III districts in Massachusetts. The study examined both organizational elements and environmental factors that were attributed to the success of these programs as perceived by administrators and teachers in the school districts. The findings of the study could provide recommendations for other Title III districts to improve the achievement of their ESL programs.

**Review of Methodology**

This multiple case study explored the organizational factors and environmental elements of successful ESL programs in three Title III suburban school districts in Massachusetts. The study was guided by the following research question:

What organizational and environmental elements do various stakeholders in highly successful Title III suburban districts in Massachusetts attribute to the success of the ESL program in their district?

The researcher selected three Title III school districts in Massachusetts – Belmont, Newton, and Winchester – that had successful ESL programs. These school districts met the three Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives from 2013 to 2016 set by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as required by Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act. Moreover, the districts had a higher percentage of their English language learners scoring proficiency and advanced on the state standardized assessment from 2013-2016. The researcher conducted interviews with an administrator in charge of the ESL program and focus groups with teachers in each district. The interviews allowed the administrators to share his or her perception of why their district has been successful in educating ELLs. The focus groups allowed the teachers to share and discuss their perceptions of why their district has been successful in
educating English language learners. The data collected from the interviews and focus groups was transcribed and analyzed using descriptive and in vivo strategies and reviewed to form emergent themes across the three school districts.

**Discussion of Major Findings**

After analyzing the data collected from interviews with administrators and focus groups with teachers, two major findings were identified from the themes presented in chapter four:

1. **Successful districts employ highly qualified ESL teachers who collaborate together and with other educators to meet the needs of ELLs.**

2. **The ELLs in highly successful districts have support which extends beyond the school day.**

**Successful districts employ highly qualified ESL teachers who collaborate with other educators to meet the needs of their English language learners.** Belmont, Newton, and Winchester originally had tutors in their districts to support the ELLs. All three districts reported they have increased the number of ESL teachers in their district over the last few years as the number of English language learners grew in their district. Belmont’s Director of English shared, “when I first came here we had fewer than one hundred ELLs and there were tutors. We have [since] increased our staffing [every year].” Melina, a teacher in Belmont agreed, “every year we’ve been expanding and growing and we’ve needed to because […] our numbers have been expanding. Two teachers from Newton confirmed they have observed an increase of ESL teachers over the years. Laura, the Coordinator of the English Learners in Winchester, remarked they also have hired more teachers. When she first came to the district, the district “had just had a CPR and [hiring teachers] was all in response to that. Prior to it they had tutors, not ESL teachers.
The administrators in the three districts commented that the success of their ESL programs was in part the product of the high-quality teachers employed. Lindsey remarked, “they’re all amazing.” According to her, the teachers are effective problem solvers. “if you just go to the teachers and say guess what the current state on how [ELLs] are performing, can you do something about that? They’ll do something about it.” Allison, the Director English Language Learning also discussed the quality of the staff employed in Newton, “our staff is highly motivated, problem solving, wanting to figure out what to do with this kid, that.” In Winchester, Laura commented the teachers “do a great job of meeting the needs of the kids.”

Across the three districts, the participants concurred not only was it important to have high quality teachers, but the ESL teachers needed to collaborate with each other and other educators. Deidre, a teacher in Newton posited, “collaboration is key.” The ESL teachers in Newton commented about the importance of building a relationship with classroom teachers. Amber, a teacher remarked, “we really worked hard to open up to all the different departments. [The teachers get support from us and ideas from us.” Furthermore, the district has behavior interventionists, liaisons, and social workers to support the students. Together, they all work on the “whole student.” In Winchester, the ESL teachers are moving towards a co-teaching model in the content classes. Weekly, the ESL teachers can go to a team meeting, but there is not enough time to go to every grade level. In Belmont, the ESL teachers cannot go to team meetings due to scheduling conflicts, but the teachers share notes. The ESL teachers also use google drive to collaborate and share ideas with each other.

The ELLs in highly successful districts have support which extends beyond the school day. The three districts commented on the socioeconomic and education background of the students’ families, though Belmont and Winchester have noticed a change in their
demographics. Laura, attributed the success of ELLs in Winchester due to their higher socioeconomic status, “that’s part of it.” Cameron, a teacher in the district noted the parents have high expectations for the kids. The Director of English in Belmont observed, “it used to be that most of our ELLs […] were coming with families who were researchers doing sabbaticals at Harvard […] and had a lot of support at home.” Charlotte, a teacher in Belmont, agreed “most of the kids were children of professors […] so most of the kids had really strong academic backgrounds.” Allison, in Newton, observed a higher socioeconomic level than other districts; “the level of education of parents is much higher.”

The schools and community support the English language learners through organized events that foster language and social support. Teachers in both Winchester and Newton commented on independent organizations in the community that set up events for the different cultural groups in town. The districts also shared events they organize to engage and connect with families. Some of the programs included a family mentor program and conversation groups. The participants acknowledged the difficulties of being in a foreign place and the outreach was important to make families feel more connected and welcomed.

A portion of the Title III grant money provided to the districts afforded a Summer enrichment program. The teachers in all three districts commented on the discernable difference it makes at the beginning of the next school year. Deidre, observed “I think [the Summer program] is a really essential piece. I think we notice that the kids, just immediately the following September, […] had not lost as much English.” Another teacher remarked the importance for the kids to interact with other kids and make social connections.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**
The researcher used the Casual Model of Organizational Performance and Change, also known as the Burke-Litwin Model (Burke & Litwin, 1992) as the framework to examine the organizational and environmental components attributed to the success of the ESL programs in these districts. The framework was selected because the model addresses twelve organizational elements which can be analyzed both for organizational performance or how they can be changed. The authors describe the model as a means that represents “…the primary variables that need to be considered in any attempt to predict and explain the total behavior output of an organization, the most important interactions between these variables, and how they affect change” (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The model demonstrates cause-and-effect relationship from a systemic perspective and therefore aligns with the purpose of the study to examine how elements of an organization and external factors contributed to the success of the ESL programs in three Title III districts. Furthermore, Burke & Litwin (1992) discerned transactional (easily changed factors) and transformational change (more significant changes). All twelve elements affect each other, but the elements that are connected have a stronger link.

**External environment.** The Burke Litwin Model (1992) posits the importance of the external environment as a transformational factor which affects organizational performance and effectiveness. Prescott (1986) also demonstrated how environment influences strategy and performance. The participants attributed external environment as a past change agent and as a factor of effectiveness.

All three districts experienced an influx of English language learners within the last decade. The administrators and teachers reported the influx of English language learners influenced their district to replace tutors with highly qualified ESL teachers. Additionally, as the
population continued to grow, the districts hired more ESL teachers to support the English language learners.

The external environment was also observed as a factor in the districts’ success. Multiple participants in the three districts commented on the socioeconomic status of their English language learners. Most ELLs came from families that set high expectations for their children and were very involved. Participants reported the socioeconomic status of the English language learners was higher than other districts. The participants remarked the students were the children of professors at prestigious universities in the area or doctors who came to the district for a “good education.”

Family and community engagement is another factor of the external environment that was attributed to the success of the ESL programs in these districts. The participants reported the English language learners were supported by community organizations that held events to promote social interaction and promoted language practice. Further, Winchester’s Chinese families are a part of a community that meets regularly and offers classes at a school.

**Work unit climate.** Burke & Litwin (1992) described work unit climate as the collective current impressions, expectations, and feelings members of an organization have that affect their relations with others. The researcher found that collaboration between the ESL teachers and between the ESL teachers and other educators was a factor in the success of the ESL programs. One participant posited the collaboration made the English language learners more comfortable. Working together supporting the ELLs’ academic achievement and English proficiency also promotes synergy, when the performance of people working together is greater than the performance of the individuals. The teachers remarked they would meet in person or use
technology to share ideas. One participant also commented that her colleagues were like her family.

**Task requirements and individual skills and abilities.** The administrators declared the teachers their districts employed were highly qualified teachers. Newton’s administrator specifically commented that the ESL teachers were hired because ESL was their passion. The administrators also remarked their teachers were problem solvers.

**Individual and organizational performance.** Individual and organizational performance is the indicator of effort and achievement (Burke & Litwin, 1992). All three districts were considered for the research study because of the success of their ESL programs. Success was defined by the scores of the English language learners on the Massachusetts standardized tests and meeting the annual measurable achievement objectives set by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for English language acquisition and academic achievement of their ELL students.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

The literature review presented in chapter two focus on what the literature says about how ELLs learn and how districts educate them. In this section, the findings of the study are related to the literature. While the findings do not directly relate to the literature review, the findings resonate with some previous literature and presents new ideas to the literature.

**Accountability for English language learners.** The three districts in the study were chosen based on their success meeting the annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs) as required by Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The Act requires states to set high standards and establish measurable goals to evaluate ELL students’ progress in meeting
those standards. Districts with one hundred or more English language learners must satisfy three AMAOs which are calculated by the state:

- AMAO 1: annual increases in the number or percentage of children making progress in English
- AMAO 2: annual increases in the number or percentage of children attaining English proficiency
- AMAO 3: making adequate yearly progress on the state standardized test.

The accountability has made motivated the districts to focus on creating goals each year to improve areas they are lacking and analyze student performance data (Fuhrman, 1999; Goertz, Floden, and O’Day, 1995; O’Day and Bitter, 2002).

Highly qualified teachers. The study found that the districts employed highly qualified teachers, in particular ESL teachers who had experience and/or education background in ESL. Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in Massachusetts declared “closing the proficiency gap depends on teachers having the skills and knowledge necessary to instruct ELLs.” DESE requires ESL teachers to receive certification by verifying their knowledge on a test.

Family and community engagement. In the literature review, the researcher found that student success was enhanced when schools promoted parent engagement (Rennie Center, 2007). In this qualitative study, the researcher found that successful districts were connecting with families through organized event such as mentor programs and conversation groups. Both the administrator and teachers from Newton, in particular, expressed the importance and expectation of their teachers to engage with the families of their English language learners.

Implications of the Findings
The primary audience of this study are other Title III suburban districts in Massachusetts who are not meeting their annual measurable achievement objectives nor are they observing their English language learners achieve proficient or advanced on the state standardized achievement test. The findings from the three districts in this study could be used to implement changes in other districts, depending on their current practices.

Systemically, the districts should consider hiring enough highly qualified ESL staff to appropriate schedule service times with the English language learners in the district. While there is no set ratio of ESL teachers to ELLs determined by state mandates, the participants found more teachers improved student achievement. Also, systemically, the districts want to encourage collaboration between ESL teachers and content teachers. While schedule conflicts could present a barrier, the participants found other ways to collaborate including using google drive and sharing notes from team meetings. Title III districts are required to appropriate funds from the Title III grant to enrichment programs and family engagement, school districts should consider how they can improve or increase the summer program and/or events organized to engage with the families of English language learners.

Furthermore, the findings could also inform policy for educating English language learners. The study found that successful districts had increased the number of highly qualified ESL teachers employed by the district. State mandates and guidance documents do not provide how many teachers districts should employ to provide service hours or how many students teachers can service together. Furthermore, the study found that districts used federal Title III grant money to provide the Summer enrichment program and activities that engage the English language learners’ families. Title III money is only granted to districts with one hundred or more
ELLs. Policy makers could consider other grant opportunities for any district with ELLs to provide enrichment activities to promote their success.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to understand the organizational elements and external factors that were perceived to impact the success of the ESL programs in three Title III districts in Massachusetts. The research used a qualitative multiple case study to understand the primary research question, what organizational and environmental elements do various stakeholders in highly successful Title III districts in Massachusetts attribute to the success of the ESL program in their district?

The researcher gathered data through interviews with administrators and focus groups with teachers in three Title III school districts in Massachusetts: Belmont Public Schools, Newton Public Schools, and Winchester Public Schools. The data was transcribed and coded to identify themes across the cases. The themes were analyzed to produce two major findings.

Both findings answered the major research question and informed the researcher how the participants perceived their districts were successful in educating their English language learners. The first finding was that successful districts employ highly qualified ESL teachers who collaborate with other ESL teachers and with other educators to meet the needs of ELLs. The second majoring finding was the ELLs in highly successful districts have support which extends beyond the school day. The findings could inform the practices in other Title III districts who are not as successful in educating their ELLs.

Limitations

The findings of this study are limited to successful Title III districts in Massachusetts. The study included just three districts who were meeting their three AMAOs from 2013-2016.
and had a higher percentage of ELLs performing proficiently or advanced on the state standardized assessments. The socioeconomic status of the English language learners in the districts was not considered in the selection of research sites. Given that teachers and administrators remarked the socioeconomic status of ELLs was higher in their districts than others, the findings may not be consistent with other Title III districts. Participants in all three districts remarked that families came to those towns for the education system and the families pushed their students to do well in school. The backgrounds of ELLs may be different in urban communities.

Another limitation of the study is the number of participants from each district that provided their perspective. Only one interview with an administrator and one focus group with teachers took place within each school district. The views in the study were limited to the administrator who oversees the ESL program and the sample of teachers who agreed to participate. In the focus group, sometimes there was one teacher from each school level or one content teacher which may not represent the views of other teachers in that content area or grade level. Additionally, the perspective of the ELL students and their families were not considered. Future research studies could include multiple focus groups with elementary teachers and secondary teachers and/or focus groups with ELL students.

**Future Studies**

The following list is a recommendation for continued research into ESL programs and their practices.

- multiple case studies with different socioeconomic statuses. Since this study did not consider the socioeconomic status of the families in the district and found that the families in the three districts had a higher socioeconomic than most other districts.
• multiple case studies could consider districts with less than one hundred ELLs that do not receive Title III funds. The study found the districts who participated appropriated funds to provide enrichment activities.

• multiple case studies in underperforming school districts. This could be informative by obtaining a different perspective to compare the practices of both successful and not as successful districts.

• research could also include students’ perspectives. As the subjects of the practices and resources in these school districts, it would be interesting to understand their perspective of why they perform well.

Personal Commentary

Growing up, I was always fascinated with foreign languages. I would watch the Spanish channel and then pretend to speak Spanish. In middle school and high school I studied Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin. Upon graduating high school, I went to college in Madrid, Spain where I had the opportunity to experience living in a different country and immersing myself more into the Spanish language and culture. During my time overseas, while I did not experience culture shock, I did experience “language shock”. I recall taking a trip to England and forgetting the word for chocolate chips at the Starbucks counter and writing my homework and switching between Portuguese and Spanish without realizing it.

I became an exploratory foreign language teacher. In my first couple of years, I had several English language learners in my classroom. Even as the “foreign language teacher” and as a person who had lived and studied in another country, I still struggled to educate them. The school had no resources and no answers. I decided to pursue a Master’s degree in Applied Linguistics focusing on English as a second language. During my program, I realized there was
a disconnect in linguistic research and education policy. Since I first began teaching, there has been even more focus on educating English languages in my district and in the state, however, English language learners are still behind their English-speaking peers after years.

My desire to find a policy to educate English language learners that considered linguistic research drove me to apply to this program and further influenced by research. Looking at the data, there are districts that successfully educate their English language learners and I wanted to explore why. I would like to continue to explore the best practices in educating our English language learners to create a framework for districts of different socioeconomic status and different population numbers. I would also like to explore districts that are not successful and do a comparative. There is a lack of research data studying the effects after Massachusetts implemented sheltered English immersion on ELLs’ English proficiency and academic achievement. As a linguist and educator, it is my desire to inform district decisions and policy with continued research in this area. The English language learner will continue to grow and schools will continue to have to be accountable in their success.
References


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