IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS
FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS:
UNDERSTANDING HOW HIGH SCHOOL CONTENT TEACHERS EXPERIENCE THE
INSTRUCTIONAL SHIFTS

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Abstract

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in ELA/literacy call for increased rigor, close reading of complex texts, evidence-based argumentation in academic English, and collaborative conversations. For English language learners (ELLs), achieving the standards requires that they double their efforts to simultaneously learn both academic English and content. For ELLs to be successful, they need highly qualified teachers; however, many teachers feel unprepared to implement the standards for both content and language for ELLs. Using a dual theoretical framework that included social constructivism and academic language, this study sought to understand how teachers experience the instructional shifts from the earlier California standards to the CCSS, especially as they relate to working with ELLs. Using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology, this study engaged seven participants in three semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated six major themes, including: earlier mandates were constraining and left teachers open to the CCSS; teachers viewed the CCSS as an opportunity to build students’ competence; teachers needed more preparation for the instructional shifts; teachers experienced greater satisfaction with the instructional shifts; teachers described improved student engagement with the CCSS; and teachers experienced success teaching ELLs the CCSS. This study concludes that teachers’ experiences of the shift to the CCSS was primarily positive and provided superior learning opportunities for the ELLs with whom they worked; however, teachers initially felt unprepared for the shifts, particularly with ELLs, and were uncertain how they and their colleagues should make the shift to the new standards.

Keywords: CCSS, English language learners, ELLs, student-centered, academic language, constructivism, instructional shifts, teachers
Dedication

“Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation.”

-Angela Carter

I dedicate this research to all students who come from families with a language other than English, with the hope that they may have every opportunity to develop the skills that they need for the world ahead by the time they graduate from high school. I dedicate this study to all the teachers who work with English language learners and who continually strive to serve their students in the most compassionate way, develop their students’ skill set to the highest possible level, and advocate that their students receive the quality education and services they deserve. I dedicate this study to school leaders who understand the lasting benefit to students of providing teachers the full range of support they need, who have the vision to implement programs that support English language learners, and who comprehend the value of developing both first and second languages in students. Lastly, I dedicate this research to the parents of English language learners, who work relentlessly to provide for all their children’s needs, who entrust our schools to give their children a first-rate education, and who place hope in our education system to prepare their children for college and careers, ready to conquer any challenge that lies ahead.
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“Be strong, be fearless, be beautiful. And believe that anything is possible when you have the right people there to support you.” - Misty Copeland

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Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. 2
Dedication ............................................................................................................. 3
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................. 4
Table of Contents ............................................................................................... 6
List of Tables ....................................................................................................... 9
List of Figures ......................................................................................................11

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .............................................................................11
  Statement of the Problem .................................................................................. 11
  Significance of the Problem ............................................................................. 15
  Research Question ........................................................................................... 18
  Theoretical Framework .................................................................................... 18
    Social constructivism ....................................................................................... 18
    Academic language ......................................................................................... 22
    Justification for this theoretical framework ................................................ 26
  Summary .......................................................................................................... 29

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ...................................................................33
  Introduction ....................................................................................................... 33
  Foundations for a Student-Centered Pedagogy ................................................ 34
    The factory-model of schooling ..................................................................... 34
    The effects of standardized testing and accountability ................................ 37
    Preparing students for the 21st Century ......................................................... 40
  Discursive Practices that Engage Students in Learning .................................... 42
    Monologic and dialogic discourse ................................................................. 42
    Giving students a voice ................................................................................... 46
    Supporting English learners in developing academic discourse ................ 48
  Studies of Discourse Practices in High School Content Classes .................... 51
    Teachers’ flexible or inflexible models of instruction ..................................... 52
    Establishing phases for scaffolding academic discourse .............................. 53
    Using collaborative group work to engage students in academic discourse ... 55
  Summary .......................................................................................................... 61

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN .......................................................................63
  Introduction ....................................................................................................... 63
  Research Question ............................................................................................ 63
  Rationale for a Qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study Design .... 64
    Philosophical influences of IPA ..................................................................... 64
  Site and Participants ........................................................................................ 68
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction ................................................................. 161

Significant Themes ..................................................... 168
Theme 1: Earlier mandates were constraining and left teachers open to the CCSS ........ 172
Theme 2: Teachers viewed the CCSS as an opportunity to build students’ competence .... 174
Theme 3: Teachers needed more preparation for the instructional shifts .................... 176
Theme 4: Teachers experienced greater satisfaction with the instructional shifts ......... 180
Theme 5: Teachers described improved student engagement with the CCSS ............ 183
Theme 6: Teachers experienced success teaching ELLs the CCSS .......................... 186

Summary ................................................................. 189
## Table of Contents

- Revisiting the Problem of Practice .............................................................. 161
- Research Question ......................................................................................... 164
- Discussion of Research Findings ................................................................. 164
  - Findings in relation to the theoretical framework ....................................... 167
  - Findings in relation to the literature review ............................................... 173
- Implications for Practice ............................................................................... 181
- Conclusions .................................................................................................... 184
- Post Analysis Reflection on Findings ............................................................ 185
- Reflection of Positionality ............................................................................. 188
- Transferability Limitations .......................................................................... 191
- Future Research ............................................................................................ 192
- References ....................................................................................................... 194

## Appendices

- Appendix A: Letter of Intent to Superintendents .............................................. 216
- Appendix B: Letter of Intent to Principals ....................................................... 218
- Appendix C: Invitation to Participate to Teachers .......................................... 220
- Appendix D: Demographic Record Form ....................................................... 221
- Appendix E: Informed Consent Form .............................................................. 222
- Appendix F: Interview One – Life History of the Participants ....................... 225
- Appendix G: Interview Two – Details of the Experience ............................... 227
- Appendix H: Interview Three – Reflection on the Experience ....................... 230
- Appendix I: NIH Certificate of Completion .................................................. 232
List of Tables

Table 4.1: Training Opportunities Available to Participants

Table 4.2: Emergent Themes from Data Analysis
List of Figures

Figure 5.1: Major Shifts from Earlier California Standards to the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy
Chapter 1: Introduction

In the early 1900s, schools in the United States were developed to educate the population for the industrial age, and thus, the factory model of education was established (Clinchy, 1998; Doyle, 1992). Since then, much has changed. Business has become more global, technologies have advanced, and human mobility has increased. These changes include a greater need for all high school graduates to be equipped with 21st Century skills: the ability to think innovatively, work collaboratively with others, solve relevant problems, utilize technology and multi-media, and communicate effectively (Hummell, 2015; Soulé & Warrick, 2015). With the increased need for a more highly prepared populace, 42 states in the United States, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects between 2011 and 2015 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017a), which call for increased rigor, close reading of complex texts, evidence-based argumentation in academic English, and collaborative conversations (Burke, 2015; Fisher & Frey, 2013; Lapp, Grant, Moss, & Johnson, 2013; Olson & Scarcella, 2015; Polikoff & Struthers, 2013; Uecker, Kelly, & Napierala, 2014).

Achieving competency in the standards requires English language learners (ELLs), to double their efforts to simultaneously learn both academic English and content (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Vogt & Echevarria, 2015). Nonetheless, the standards provide “an opportunity to strengthen the schooling” (Olsen, 2014, p. 31) of ELLs as they position academic language within the study of academic disciplines. In this context, the standards call for:
• attention to language and literacy across the curriculum (Burke, 2015; Hakuta, Santos, & Fang, 2013; Olsen, 2014; Ramos, 2015);

• an explicit focus on the development of precise academic vocabulary (Baker et al., 2015; Goatley, 2012; Olsen, 2014);

• collaboration and teamwork as an essential component of instruction, and thus the development of the skills for collaborative engagement in academic work (Hakuta, Santos, & Fang, 2013; McCown & Thomason, 2014; Olsen, 2014);

• strategic instruction that is facilitated by effective scaffolding (August, et al., 2014; August & Fenner, 2014; Olsen, 2014);

• the view of language as a vehicle for constructing meaning, negotiating meaning, expressing ideas, and accomplishing academic tasks (Frantz, Bailey, Starr, & Perea, 2014; Olsen, 2014; Ramos, 2015);

• an increased focus on oral language and explicit instruction in the discourse patterns essential to academic participation (Frantz, Bailey, Starr, & Perea, 2014; Hakuta, Santos, & Fang, 2013; Olsen, 2014);

• the development of speaking and listening skills for all students through presentations, and constructive group work where students negotiate meaning (Aquino-Sterling, 2014; Hakuta, Santos, & Fang, 2013; Olsen, 2014).

While these shifts in instruction may elevate students’ readiness for college and career, the potential of the standards can only be fulfilled if teachers are prepared to make the shifts. Yet, many teachers are ill-equipped to expeditiously address the standards for both content and language for ELLs (Vogt & Echevarria, 2015). This is consistent with findings that major shifts in education have been accompanied by limited attention to the professional development of
teachers, especially those instructing ELLs (Fenner, 2013). Herein lies the danger – failure to attend to the specific needs of ELLs in the CCSS “could exacerbate the barriers and achievement gaps that have characterized the education of ELLs for too long—increasing the likelihood that English Language Learners will become Long Term [ELLs]” (Olsen, 2014, p. 31).

California, the state with the largest population and concentration of ELLs (1,521,772; 24.5%) in 2013, has faced an especially large task in preparing ELLs to achieve the CCSS (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015; Vogt & Echevarria, 2015; Whitenack, 2015). In light of this, California was the first state to develop an integrated English Language Arts/English Language Development (ELA/ELD) framework designed to provide a blueprint for the implementation of the California Common Core State Standards (CA CCSS) and the California English Language Development (CA ELD) standards (Vogt & Echevarria, 2015). This framework has guided “the development of curriculum, instruction, assessment, instructional materials, and professional learning to ensure that all California learners benefit optimally and achieve their highest potential” (California Department of Education, 2017c, p. 2). The research-based practices for integrating the literacy demands of academic English in both ELA classrooms and discipline-specific classrooms are a key highlight of this groundbreaking document.

The ELA/ELD framework is ambitious and emphasizes the need for instruction to be responsive and student-centered. However, studies have shown that most teaching in U.S. high schools is teacher-centered, where teachers impart their expertise upon students, and students receive the content as receptacles (e.g. Smart, Witt, & Scott, 2012). This carry-over from the factory-model of education is problematic in preparing students, especially ELLs, to be ready as 21st Century graduates. Discursive practices in schools are often enacted in ways that teachers dominate speech, provide few opportunities for students to speak and engage in meaningful
conversations (Lefstein & Snell, 2011), and fail to utilize diverse students’ linguistic and cultural capital (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Additionally, teachers of ELLs have tended to focus on low-level skills such as vocabulary and grammatical structures (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012; Hakuta & Santos, 2012). They have also provided a weak focus on academic language (Olsen, 2014) and have emphasized fact-based-questions, with less frequent efforts to seek elaboration from ELLs than mainstream students (Zwiers, 2007). Such practices contribute to an opportunity gap for ELLs that can ultimately stall their academic progress and lead to under-preparation for 21st Century global participation.

At the time this study was conducted, the CCSS were in the early stages of implementation. Consequently, very little research existed on the professional development underway to support teachers in preparing ELLs to achieve the rigor of the newly-established linguistic challenges. Major instructional shifts that apply to all students require that teachers take particular note of the needs of ELLs. Qualitative studies that provide insight into the challenges and successes of shifting instruction from traditional, teacher-centered modes toward more dynamic, collaborative modes that address the linguistic needs of adolescent ELLs were rare. The purpose of this research was to learn how high school content teachers experience the instructional shifts of teaching the CCSS for ELLs. This study took place in California; thus, it examined the particular experiences of California teachers with the California adoption of the CCSS for ELA/Literacy.

This study investigated how teachers experienced shifts in instruction that utilize discourse patterns that are learner-centered, collaborative, and inclusive of students’ linguistic and cultural diversity; it has the potential to inform policy makers, researchers, schools of education, school administrators, professional developers, and instructional coaches about the
implications of such shifts. Additionally, it aimed to inform teachers of ELLs of the expected challenges and successes the shifts can have for instruction and learning in their classrooms.

**Significance of the Problem**

ELLs are a rapidly growing segment of public school enrollment. According to national data from the U.S. Department of Education, ELL enrollment increased between the 2004-2005 and 2014-2015 school years, and by 2015 constituted nearly 4.6 million of all students enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Nationally, on average, ELLs make up nearly one out of ten students in the public school system, and in California, the state with the largest ELL concentration, they generally make up nearly one out of three students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). It is estimated that by the year 2025, ELLs will make up 25% of the total student enrollment nationally (National Education Association, 2008).

Historically, ELLs have not performed as well on standardized exams as English-dominant students (August, et al., 2014; Drake, 2014; Fry, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013a). The reasons for this are varied. ELLs have the dual challenge of acquiring proficiency in content while simultaneously learning the English language (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Teachers of ELLs are often less experienced and less prepared to meet ELLs’ needs (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Téllez & Waxman, 2005). In addition, teachers over-emphasize low-level skills, including vocabulary and sentence structure with ELLs (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012; Hakuta & Santos, 2012); they are more likely to ask ELLs fact-based-questions and are less likely to seek elaboration from ELLs than from mainstream students (Zwiers, 2007).

With ELLs comprising a large and growing portion of U.S. public school enrollment, it is critical that teachers engage in constructivist practices that appropriately address the needs of
ELLs and engage them in dynamic discourse that builds their academic language so that they can graduate both college and career ready. Schools are now evaluating students’ college and career readiness via the CCSS. During the 2016-2017 school year, 42 states assessed students, including ELLs, through CCSS testing in English language arts and mathematics (California Department of Education, 2017d). California administered its version of the assessment, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), in English language arts/literacy to students in 3rd, 8th, and 11th grades. Among 11th grade students, the results of the test indicated that only 9% of ELLs met or exceeded the standard, while 64% of English Only students met or exceeded the standard (California Department of Education, 2017d).

These results demonstrated an achievement gap of 55%. Viewing ELLs as simply unable to meet the standards, or viewing them through a deficit lens and consequently failing to engage ELLs in language and meaningful discourse, has proven detrimental to ELLs’ ability to achieve (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Franquiz, Salazar, & Passos De Nicolo, 2011; Goldenberg, 2013). To fulfill the expectations of the standards, teachers are challenged to prioritize the development of academic English for ELLs and engage students in meaningful, content related, academic conversations that elevate students’ awareness of how to articulate themselves effectively, construct evidence based arguments, and demonstrate understanding of complex problems.

Failure to prepare ELLs for 21st Century society can result in reduced employment, lower income earnings, and fewer college opportunities (Batalova & Fix, 2011; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Furthermore, students who do not pursue post-secondary education earn less and pay lower taxes, affecting federal, state, and local government budgets (Baum, Ma, & Pavea, 2013).
The high school years have the potential of equipping ELLs with the knowledge and skills needed for college and career success (Long, Conger, & Iatarola, 2012; National High School Center, 2012). Gaining solid academic skills during high school is especially important due to changing national trends in the United States workforce, where potential employees need to be more highly skilled and educated than in prior years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b). Highly qualified teachers can ensure that ELLs acquire academic gains in English and that they master the skills needed to narrow the education achievement gap (Amrein-Beardsley, 2007; Borman & Kimbal, 2005; Cadiero-Kaplan & Rodriquez, 2008). Furthermore, a shift in instructional methods for ELLs – from an emphasis on vocabulary and grammar to a focus on discursive language constructs that are learner-centered, collaborative, and inclusive of students’ linguistic and cultural capital – can provide ELLs an improved outlook and a broader spectrum of options as participants in a 21s Century society (Hakuta & Santos, 2012).

A paucity of research exists on the specific skills that teachers need to develop adolescent ELLs’ content knowledge (Faltis, Arias, & Ramirez-Marín, 2010), oral language (Samson & Collins, 2012), and academic language (Faltis, Arias, & Ramirez-Marín, 2010; Francis & Vaughn, 2009; Samson & Collins, 2012; Slama, 2012). Researchers have recommended a closer examination of how to train teachers who serve large proportions of ELLs to provide the necessary support so that ELLs can achieve grade-level standards in high school (Samson & Collins, 2012; Slama, 2012). This study contributes to the understandings of how teachers experience changes in instructional practices with the implementation of the CCSS, especially regarding how these shifts pertain to teachers’ work with ELLs.
**Research Question**

The research question that guided this study was: What is the experience of high school content teachers who are implementing the Common Core State Standards for English language learners?

**Theoretical Framework**

The implementation of the CCSS is still in the early stages. Furthermore, the implementation of the standards in social constructivist ways that develop ELLs’ content and academic language is an area that has been understudied. This study addressed this research gap, using social constructivism as the primary theoretical framework and academic language as the secondary theoretical framework. Key propositions in these frameworks included:

- Cognitive development results from social interactions (Vygotsky, 1962).
- Social interactions must take place with a more knowledgeable peer or teacher at a level that is slightly above the student’s independent level, or in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1962).
- Academic conversations build ELLs’ academic language (Cummins, 1979; Haneda, 2014), and constructive conversations require students to orally communicate to think and build new knowledge and understandings (Zwiers, O’Hara, & Pritchard, 2014).

**Social constructivism.** The primary theoretical framework in this study, social constructivism, was utilized because of its focus on the interactional aspects of learning
relationships, which served as a well-grounded foundation for understanding how ELLs develop language and content knowledge through collaborative conversations. Two key features of social constructivism are ZPD and sociocultural process. According to Vygotsky (1962), cognitive development stems from social interactions. These social reactions must take place with a more knowledgeable peer or teacher at a level that is slightly above the student’s independent level, best known as the ZPD for cognitive development to occur. Vygotsky’s (1935, 1978) theory of social constructivism emphasizes the importance of social interaction such as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. Schools can provide the setting for these learning experiences to occur. Contemporary research indicates that a key feature of a social constructivist learning environment is providing students “time to talk” (Adams, 2006, p. 249).

**Zone of proximal development.** Rejecting earlier theories of development and learning by Alfred Binet, Jean Piaget, and Kurt Koffka, Vygotski (1935, 1978) proposed the ZPD as a model that could more adequately explain the relationship between learning and development. Binet had postulated that development and learning are separate experiences; Piaget posited that learning and development are the same; and Koffka determined that learning and development are related (as cited in Vygotsky, 1935, 1978, pp. 79-81). As a result of a study that examined two students of equal chronological and mental age, Vygotsky (1935, 1978) found that two students, with the same instruction, achieved learning at different levels. Vygotsky (1935, 1978) labeled this range where learning can occur for a child as the ZPD. He noted, “the zone of proximal development…is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86).
Thus, the ZPD is the level that requires some instructional assistance from a teacher or peers who are more knowledgeable.

Vygotsky (1935, 1978) used the process of language acquisition to illustrate the theory of ZPD, noting that language develops through communication with others in the environment; then, through internal speech or reflection, a child learns to organize thoughts. From this, Vygotsky (1935, 1978) proposed, “learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (p. 90). This idea that children learn a second language through communication in the ZPD with the support of a teacher or more knowledgeable peers is cited in numerous works (i.e. Escandón & Sanz, 2011; McCafferty, 2002; Schwieter, 2010). Eaton (1947) noted that the responsibility lies with the teacher, who can identify “the best techniques to help students acquire oral fluency” (p. 138).

Sociocultural processes. Vygotsky (1962) explored the concepts of speech and intellectual development and how children develop thought. He proposed that verbal thought was not determined by early speech and intellectual development; rather, he asserted that it is determined by sociocultural processes, with schools serving as a major contributor to a child’s development of thought processes. According to Vygotsky, children use concepts, such as those taught in schools, as cognitive tools for creating meaning (as cited in Bylund, 2011).

Variations of constructivism. Yoders (2014) noted, “there is no single Constructivism theory of learning” (p. 12). In fact, Good, Wandersee, and St. Julien (as cited in Yoders, 2014) identified 15 different uses of the word in the literature. Despite the range of views, the term constructivism can be viewed as an umbrella for “a series of ideas that can be thought of as sharing some family resemblance” (Adams, 2006, p. 245). For this study, a useful definition of
constructivism is “the philosophy, or belief, that learners create their own knowledge based on interactions with their environment, including interactions with other people” (Draper, 2002, p. 522). This definition includes the understanding that (a) experience and environment have a large role in learning; and (b) language has a large part in learning (Draper, 2002). Additionally, four epistemological tenets of constructivism include: (a) learning is a result of actively cognizing; (b) learning is adaptive to the environmental context; learning may be more adaptive in certain environmental contexts; (c) learning occurs as one makes sense of experiences; (d) learning is a result of both biological/neurological construction and interactions that may be social, cultural, or language-based (Nezvalova, 2007; Von Glaserfeld, as cited in Nezvalova, 2007).

Over the years, constructivism has taken different forms, including cognitive constructivism, radical constructivism, and social constructivism (Nezvalova, 2007). Cognitive constructivism places greater emphasis on cognitive constructions of reality, while radical constructivism places emphasis on all of the tenets and is the most pure form of constructivism. It is an extreme form of a learner-centered pedagogy that is bottom-up in nature (Yoders, 2014). Alternatively, social constructivism places less emphasis on the mental construction of knowledge (Nezvalova, 2007). It is a non-radical, moderate constructivist approach (Yoders, 2014) that lies somewhere in the middle of the continuum of cognitive and radical constructivism (Nezvalova, 2007). This study utilized this variation of constructivism because it was more compatible with instructional design methods (Yoders, 2014). Furthermore, recent studies of ELLs have utilized social constructivism as a theoretical framework (i.e. Davin, 2013; Haneda, 2014; Kao, 2010).
**Academic language.** The secondary theoretical framework in this study, academic language, was utilized because it is an essential feature of the CCSS, and because access to academic language can ensure ELLs readiness for success in college and in the work place. Social constructivism establishes the type of learning environment where learners can thrive, while academic language establishes the specific form of language that ELLs need to develop and how they develop it. Cummins (1979) provided a distinction between two forms of language proficiency achieved by ELLs: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins (2014) argued that academic language teaching is critical for addressing student underachievement and posited that academic language be taught explicitly, connected to students’ lives, affirming of students’ identities, and scaffolded for comprehension and production of language across the curriculum (p. 150).

**Academic language.** CALP was coined by Cummins in 1979 to identify the dimension of language proficiency that relates to overall cognitive and academic skills. Alternatively, BICS identify the basic language skills that everybody develops in a first language, regardless of intelligence or academic experiences. Cummins (1979) noted that the cognitive/academic aspects of first language (L1) and second language (L2) are interdependent. In later works, Cummins (1984, 2014) offered a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement among ELLs. He clarified that the terms BICS and CALP were not intended to identify two separate processes that occur sequentially or independently; rather, the terms were meant to illustrate the salient linguistic features that develop as a result of contextual factors (Cummins, 1984, 2014). For example, all language learners develop BICS rapidly (i.e. accent and fluency), while CALP can only develop “within a matrix of human interaction” (1984, p. 4). More recent work on academic language
has proposed strategies to improve marginalized students’ academic success by “maximizing literacy engagement, teaching academic language explicitly across the curriculum, scaffolding students’ comprehension and production of language across the curriculum, connecting instruction to students’ lives, and affirming students’ identities in the context of academic work” (Cummins, 2014, p. 150).

**Language functions.** Researchers have contributed to the work on academic language learning and its vital role in the academic success of ELLs. For example, an accelerated approach to instruction that engages students in “the complex language of abstract and higher order academic thinking” (Dutro, Levy, & Moore, 2011, p. 339) permits language functions to connect thought and language. Furthermore, practice in language functions in academic communications – such as describing, explaining, elaborating, informing, sequencing, classifying, comparing and contrasting, identifying cause and effect, proposing/supporting, summarizing, and evaluating – can support the development of cognitive academic language (Chamot & O’Malley, 1987; Dutro, Levy & Moore, 2011).

**Academic communication.** Haneda (2014) examined theoretical perspectives on academic language and academic communication and suggested that academic language be perceived more broadly in terms of academic communication. For example, research on academic language has tended to rely more heavily on written language, yet academic oral language has significant importance; it is “vital for academic success” (Haneda, 2014, p. 130) and is tied closely to success in the wider society in areas such as business, law, and public relations. Thus, pedagogical practices for ELLs may need to include opportunities for participation in collaborative activities in different school subjects. This may better serve ELLs because it provides “extra linguistic scaffolding” (Haneda, 2014, p. 130).
**Scaffolding.** Other researchers have noted that ELLs face a daunting task when they embark upon learning cognitively challenging tasks in the second language (McGhie, 2007) and that they need support in classroom activities that entail the simultaneous learning of content and language (Schleppregrell & O’Hallaron, 2011). ELLs may need macro-scaffolding (the planning of support for development of L2) and micro-scaffolding (the necessary strategies that fully engage students in use of L2 and content) (Schleppregrell & O’Hallaron, 2011). Researchers have asserted that ELLs cannot develop the skills they need “through passively listening or unstructured interactions” (Dutro, Levy & Moore, 2011, p. 341). Rather, they develop fluency through frequent and structured scaffolding that puts learning within students’ ZPD (Davin, 2013; Kao, 2010; Lapp, Fisher & Grant, 2008).

Scaffolding for ELLs includes the provision of extensive support early on, and gradually removing it as learners gain proficiency in the task (Zwiers, 2006). It involves frequent opportunities to use spoken language for a wide variety of purposes (Haneda & Wells, 2012) because this can “strengthen students’ comprehension skills” (p. 11). Additionally, conversing serves as a scaffold because it can support writing skills. When students get immediate feedback from their peers regarding logic, support for ideas, or definition of terms (Haneda & Wells, 2012), they can make corrections or modifications to their thinking and use of language. Finally, conversing serves as a support to language development because when students work with partners, they are cognitively challenged more frequently to “put words together into sentences and connect those sentences to convey and clarify ideas” (p. 11).

One form of scaffolding noted in the literature is the gradual release-of-responsibility method (Lapp, Fisher & Grant, 2008). With this form of scaffolding, students gradually become more responsible for their own learning over time. Fisher and Frey (2014) provided a model of
gradual release of responsibility that includes teacher modeling through a focus lesson, whole class participation through guided instruction, student interaction through collaborative productive work, and independent work. In their findings, Fisher and Frey (2014) observed that the collaborative learning phase of instruction is often neglected. This is a critical phase of the learning model because it is during this time that students “consolidate their thinking and interact meaningful with the content and each other” (Fisher & Frey, 2014) p. 7). They practice negotiation, engage in inquiry, and use what they learned during the focused instruction and guided instruction learning phases.

**Constructive conversations.** Constructive conversations can be taught through focused activities, scaffolds, and opportunities for practice (Zwiers, O’Harra, & Pritchard, 2014). To ensure that conversations are constructive rather than non-constructive, it is important to focus less on short answers from students, and more on whole ideas. For example, simply asking students to define a vocabulary word only elicits a brief interaction and a minimal exchange of information; in comparison, asking students to communicate for a purpose or to put forth an idea that can be elaborated or challenged offers them a broader opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation. Additionally, focusing less on talking to and more on conversing with can have a positive impact (Zwiers, O’Hara, & Pritchard, 2014). The problem with talking to is that it is a one-way form of communication. It works in situations that call for the recall and recitation of information, such as giving definitions, reciting facts, or providing short answers. Alternatively, conversing with entails “building ideas together. It involves a two-way process in which students co-construct, co-fortify, and negotiate ideas to form new knowledge and understandings. It requires building students’ abilities to orally communicate with others in academic ways—to ‘think’” (p. 12).
Justification for this Theoretical Framework

This study combined the understandings of social constructivism and academic language as a theoretical framework. While this study might have focused solely on social constructivism as a theoretical framework, doing so would have excluded important ideas that are relevant to understanding the linguistic experiences that students have as they acquire language and build content knowledge.

Other researchers have combined a sociocultural perspective and functional linguistics to frame studies of collaborative learning (i.e. Francisco, 2013; Snyders, 2005) and studies that examine ELLs’ learning experiences (i.e. Shin, 2009; Si-Ho, 2012). The combination of a sociocultural perspective and functional linguistics was useful for examining language development of advanced language learners (Byrnes, 2009). In this study, the primary emphasis was the social construction of knowledge of ELLs that develops both academic English and content knowledge; hence, this study did not incorporate functional linguistics which places an emphasis on functional grammar. Rather, this study included academic English as a component to address students’ academic language development.

Zwiers (2007) built a theoretical framework that incorporated the fields of academic language, cognitive psychology, second language acquisition, and sociolinguistics in a study that examined teacher practices and perspectives for developing academic language in ELLs. This study most closely resembles the approach taken in Zwiers’ (2007) study, but it diverged by excluding cognitive psychology, as that would have entailed a more focused look at the individual learner and how cognition occurs for the individual. Additionally, this study did not highlight Krashen’s (1982) theories on acquisition, natural order hypothesis, monitor hypothesis,
input hypothesis, or affective filter hypothesis. While helpful to understanding what goes on within the mind on a language learner, such theories were outside the scope of this study.

The strongest, most well documented feature of this theoretical framework is the understanding of constructivism and social constructivism. These theories date back to the 1930s when Vygotsky proposed a means for understanding the social construction of knowledge. Although Vygotsky’s ideas were not known to Western researchers until the 1960s, his ideas have been employed in thousands of studies in such areas as learning, language acquisition, language development, teaching, assessment, and socialization (per a search on EBSCO Information Services). Furthermore, constructivism has served as a well-documented paradigm for research studies (Ponterotto, 2005) and as a source of understanding for such theoretical frameworks as social constructivism, sociolinguistics, and sociocultural and socio-cognitive perspectives. Additionally, Vygotsky’s ZPD has been utilized in over a thousand studies (per a search on EBSCO Information Services).

Cummins’ theories of cognitive/academic language proficiency are more contemporary, and are continuing to evolve, as Cummins and other researchers continue to advance understandings of how academic language is achieved among ELLs. While Cummins’ (1984) theory of cognitive academic language has been useful for understanding the cognitive and contextual demands that are experienced when learning a language, Cummins’ theory of BICS and CALP have been misinterpreted as occurring sequentially. This has led to CALP as language being considered superior, and this reasoning has been used to attribute cause for academic failure of minority students (Cummins, 1984). Cummins clarifies and responds to critiques of his theory, pointing out that “the theories were intended to draw educators’ attention to these data” (as cited in Cenoz & Jessner, 2000, p. 3). When examined closely, Cummins’
(1984) theoretical framework was clearly intended to show how language proficiency is key to a range of issues in the education of language learners. Cummins’ (1984) theory of cognitive/academic language proficiency provided a useful framework for this study, which examined how teachers understand the instructional shifts that need to be made to ensure that ELLs effectively develop in their proficiency of academic language.

Contemporary researchers of academic language have provided additional insight on how ELLs can be supported within their ZPD to gain academic language proficiency and content knowledge through scaffolding and collaborative conversations (i.e. Schleppregrell & O’Hallaron, 2011; Lapp, Fisher & Grant, 2008). These researchers provided a valuable added feature to the framework used in this study that pertains to the usefulness of specific strategies for making academic language accessible to ELLs.

The theoretical framework informing this study, which encompasses social constructivism and academic language, is aligned with the problem of practice — the need for opportunities in the secondary classroom for ELLs to engage in meaningful, productive academic conversations (Lefstein & Snell, 2011) that build their cognitive/academic language proficiency and content knowledge. Social constructivism was useful because it served as a foundation for the type of context that is critical for ELLs to learn. Academic language was useful because it serves as additional support for the specific type of language that ELLs need to develop in order to be academically successful.

The two areas of focus in the theoretical framework are complimentary to each other and, separately and combined, are useful to this study. First, Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism has been widely used in education studies (i.e. Nezvalova, 2007), including research that investigates ELLs’ academic achievement and language development (i.e. Iddings,
Risko, & Rampulla, 2009), and collaborative learning (i.e. Mirzaei & Eslami, 2015). Second, while Cummins’ (1984) theory of cognitive/academic language proficiency provides useful descriptions of the development of a second language, Vygotksky’s (1935, 1972) theory of social constructivism provides insight into the underlying process of language and cognitive development (Bylund, 2011) as well as the importance of social interactions with a more knowledgeable peer or teacher (Vygotsky, 1962). This study, which used a framework that included social constructivism and academic language, addressed the problem of practice through a lens that was attentive to the instructional needs of ELLs for engagement in content-based academic conversations that develop academic language and content knowledge.

The theoretical framework used in this study helped to examine the phenomena experienced by teachers implementing instructional shifts for adolescent ELLs who were constructing new knowledge and developing academic language in school through collaborative conversations. Social constructivism was useful because the CCSS are aligned with a method that is constructivist. This study utilized high school teachers as participants, and answering the research question posed revealed how teachers of ELLs determine methods for implementing collaborative instructional strategies that engage ELLs in academic, constructive, content-based conversations. Furthermore, this study revealed how teachers access and incorporate effective strategies into everyday practice to support learning, and how such practices were perceived as either challenges or successes.

**Summary**

At the time of this writing, 42 states in the United States had adopted the CCSS (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017a). The CCSS called for all students, including ELLs, to achieve at high levels and to be able to delve deeper into texts, build evidence-based
arguments, read closely, and engage in meaningful and content-based conversations using academic English. These expectations require the implementation of instructional practices that place the onus of knowledge-building on the students, thus implying a constructivist approach. Full implementation of the standards requires a shift in instructional practices, which have tended to be teacher-centered (e.g. Smart, Witt, & Scott, 2012) and have offered few opportunities for students to engage in meaningful conversations (Lefstein & Snell, 2011). The CCSS mandate states:

[S]tudents must have ample opportunities to take part in a variety of rich, structured conversations—as part of a whole class, in small groups, and with a partner. Being productive members of these conversations requires that students contribute accurate, relevant information; respond to and develop what others have said; make comparisons and contrasts; and analyze and synthesize a multitude of ideas in various domains (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017b).

If teachers of ELLs continue to focus on low-level skills such as vocabulary and grammatical structures (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012; Hakuta & Santos, 2012) and on fact-based-questions, with little effort to elicit elaboration from them (Zwiers, 2007), ELLs will ultimately be under-prepared for 21st Century global participation, and the opportunity gap for ELLs will persist. To address this problem of practice, this study was led by the research question: What is the experience of high school content teachers who are implementing the Common Core State Standards for English language learners?

This study was guided by a theoretical framework that combined (a) social constructivism, which emphasizes the importance of social interactions for learning; and (b)
academic language, which refines the particular learning structures needed for ELLs to be academically successful. Key propositions of this dual theoretical framework include:

- Cognitive development results from social interactions (Vygotsky, 1962).
- Social interactions must take place with a more knowledgeable peer or teacher at a level that is slightly above the student’s independent level, or in the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1962).
- Academic conversations build ELLs’ academic language (Cummins, 1979; Haneda, 2014), and constructive conversations require students to orally communicate to think and build new knowledge and understandings (Zwiers, O’Hara, & Pritchard, 2014).
- ELLs need academic language to be scaffolded (Chamot & O’Malley, 1987; Davin, 2013; Kao, 2010; Dutro, Levy, & Moore, 2011; Haneda & Wells, 2012; Lapp, Fisher, & Grant, 2008; Schleppregrell & O’Hallaron, 2011; Zwiers, 2006).

The CCSS were in the early stage of implementation when this study was conducted which provided an ideal opportunity to develop understandings about how teachers experienced instructional shifts to methods that were more student-centered and constructivist. Social constructivism and academic language served to provide a theoretical framework that could help researchers, educators, and politicians to better understand what needs to be happening in the classroom for ELLs to achieve; this approach also offered an understanding of how academic language can be effectively scaffolded. In addition to gaining insight into how teachers experience the shifts, this study shed light on what was occurring in teacher preparation and in-service programs to prepare teachers to address the learning and language development needs of ELLs. Through this framework, this study investigated how teachers perceived the instructional shifts that are needed to implement the CCSS and how teachers: viewed their preparedness to address the CCSS for ELLs, regarded the challenges of implementing the strategies with ELLs,
made use of resources to support ELLs, and determined strategies that engage ELLs in meaningful, academic, constructive content-based conversations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The need to shift toward more student-centered instructional practices, especially for ELLs, is the core challenge of the instructional changes needed to successfully implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Analyzing this pressing need, this literature review begins with an examination of the foundations of a student-centered pedagogy, tracing its construct back to John Dewey’s 1897 foundational document, “My Pedagogic Creed.” In the literature, the terms student-centered, child-centered, and learner-centered are used interchangeably, and they are thus used as such in this review. The challenges to implementing a student-centered pedagogy in high schools are discussed, which include strongly established educational institutions that model the factory system of the Industrial Revolution era, as well as the recent period of accountability in high stakes testing brought about by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001. Discursive practices that engage students, particularly ELLs, as active learners, critical thinkers, and co-constructors of knowledge are then examined.

This literature review examines instructional practices as they have been understood and practiced with ELLs to provide a basis for understanding which approaches work or do not work for developing their academic language proficiency and content knowledge. The literature review is divided into three major sections: It begins with an examination of the foundations for a student-centered pedagogy, which is central to the social constructivist practices embedded within the CCSS. This section includes three sub-sections: the factory model of schooling, the effects of standardized testing and accountability, and preparing students for the 21st Century. The second major section of the literature review addresses discursive practices that engage students, particularly ELLs, in learning. This section includes three sub-sections: monologic and dialogic discourse, giving students a voice, and supporting ELLs in developing academic
discourse. The third major section covers studies of discourse practices in high school content classes, which provide a foundation for the type of practices that show promise in developing ELLs’ proficiency in academic language and mastery of content knowledge. Again, in this section, there are three sub-sections. These include: teachers’ flexible or inflexible models of instruction, establishing phases for scaffolding academic discourse, and using collaborative group work to engage students in academic discourse. Lastly, the literature review closes with a summary.

**Foundations for a Student-Centered Pedagogy**

In the industrial era, education was no longer the responsibility of the family as it had been in agricultural societies. Education had become the responsibility of the schools, and schools were designed to mimic the factories of the industrial era, where efficiency and cost-effectiveness were primary concerns. Fixed seating arrangements were common, and mechanical recitations were the preferred pedagogical practice of teachers (Waks, 2013). In the early 1900s, there was a movement to shift this trend, and in 1919, the Progressive Education Association set forth its principles of a progressive, student centered education (Little, 2013). One of these principles was the idea that the teacher is a guide, not a task-master. Similarly, John Dewey advocated in his “My Pedagogic Creed” (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2013) the necessity of a student-centered pedagogy in which students’ social and psychological development needs are the core purpose of education. In 1929, Dewey expressed his beliefs on education and schooling and wrote, “I believe that – all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race” (Dewey, 1929, p. 33). He continued to explain that the process of shaping a person’s being is a life-long process that enables one to gain the shared intellectual and moral resources of humanity. Through social participation, an
individual becomes an inheritor of the funded capital of civilization. Furthermore, Dewey stated that, “The only true education comes through the stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of social situations in which he finds himself” (Dewey, 1929, p. 33). Dewey’s beliefs were centered on the importance of the child experiencing meaningful interactions in the classroom. These interactions reflect a student-centered classroom, where active learning by the student is essential. He stated, “The active side precedes the passive in the development of the child-nature…The neglect of this principle is the cause of the waste of time and strength in school work. The child is thrown into a passive, receptive, or absorbing attitude” (Dewey, 1929, p. 38).

The ideals of a progressive education eventually fell out of favor in the 1950s as result of disagreements among its leaders, negative attitudes towards social reform movements, the load of progressive practices on teachers, a shift toward conservative political and social ideas in the post-WWII era, and the failure of schools to keep pace with the transformation of American society (Cremin, as cited in Little, 2013). As a result, during the 1950s through the early 2000s, instruction “trended toward a more traditional approach focused on the transmission of knowledge and the development of academic skills” (Little, 2013, p. 85). Teaching returned to more direct methods, with students being assessed on normative standards. The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 (ESEA), also known as NCLB, led to further emphasis on the use of these instructional methods, as they required states to “construct assessments in basic skills, and administer these assessments to all students in select grade levels in order to receive federal school funding” (Little, 2013, p. 85).

The failure of NCLB to attain its goals of significantly increasing graduation rates and preparing students for work after graduation led educators to realize that a narrow focus on basic
skills was not working. This led reformers to seek to help students develop the skills needed for a quickly changing and highly complex society (Hursh, 2007). Overwhelmingly, these practices pointed back toward a student-centered pedagogy. Valli and Chambliss (2007) suggested that a child-centered pedagogy included such practices as active engagement in reading, writing, listening, and speaking for clear purposes; the use of a wide-range of strategies that allowed students to comprehend and produce texts; development of vocabulary; and respect for students’ home language, culture, and prior knowledge. In a child-centered pedagogy, “teachers do more than implement a scripted curriculum. They successfully organize, or ‘orchestrate,’ the classroom environment for student learning” (Valli & Chambliss, 2007, p. 58). There is a focus on “bringing about conceptual change in students’ understanding of the world” (Peabody, 2011, p. 183). More important than what teachers do, is what students are able to achieve through their understandings. In a student-centered classroom, the teacher acts as a facilitator for student learning, directing students toward strategies that enable them to think about complex issues. Students are actively engaged, they make choices, and they have ownership of their learning. A notable benefit of student-centered instruction is that it holds greater potential in bridging “the apparent gaps in learning and achievement among culturally diverse students in many settings, by empowering learners and allowing them to construct meaning on their own terms” (Peabody, 2011, p. 183).

The student-centered practices outlined by Dewey and others provide a glimpse into how the CCSS can be implemented effectively for ELLs by calling for students to develop a range of broadly useful oral communication and interpersonal skills. Students must learn to work together, express and listen carefully to ideas, integrate information from oral, visual, quantitative, and media sources, evaluate what
they hear, use media and visual displays strategically to help achieve communicative purposes, and adapt speech to context and task (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017c).

Furthermore, the California English Language Development (CA ELD) standards, which were designed work in tandem with the CCSS, emphasize the importance engaging students in dialogue. The first of these standards calls for collaboration – engagement in dialogue with others – and requires that students participate in “exchanging information and ideas via oral communication and conversations” (California Department of Education, 2012).

**The factory model of schooling.** An examination of the factory model of schooling is foundational to this study because it has shaped instructional practices that continue to persist in schools, yet are contrary to the type of instruction called for in the CCSS. The factory model of education has been used to describe the current format of the American school system, which was designed to mimic the efficiency of the factory system in the 1900s during the Industrial Revolution (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Leland & Kasten, 2002; Serafini, 2002; Smart, Witt, & Scott, 2012). It was created as a “defense against the great waves of immigrants arriving during this time” (Leland & Kasten, 2002, p. 7). The goal of the system was to prepare the masses of immigrants for factory work, where “compliance, punctuality, cleanliness, and knowing one’s place in society” (Cuban, as cited in Leland & Kasten, 2002, p. 7) were the valued characteristics of an educated populace.

In the factory model of schooling, students are sorted by grade and subject, and they learn standardized material. The core curriculum consists of essential knowledge that all must know, and it aspires to uniformity and a hoped for equity among students. Students become the standardized product of the school system. They are passive recipients of the knowledge that
teachers impart (Serafini, 2002). Teachers wield considerable power as the foremen of the factories, demonstrating their authority in various ways. This power and authority in the classroom needs to be understood for contemporary discourse and curriculum to change (Donnelly, McGarr, & O’Reilly, 2014); it is also fundamental to an exploration of how high school content teachers experience the instructional shifts of teaching the CCSS for ELLs.

Leland and Kasten (2002) proposed a more relevant 21st Century learning model for students – the inquiry model. In the inquiry model, the purpose of education is to develop critical thinkers and innovators who are prepared to learn information from various sources and use technology. Additionally, it includes curriculum that is flexible and multifaceted, and that emphasizes problem solving. Furthermore, the learner’s role is active, as students co-construct knowledge. This model exists “not to silence students but rather to provide opportunities for hearing their voices” (Leland & Kasten, 2002, p. 11). Leland and Kasten’s (2002) learning model is relevant because this study examines how teachers experience instructional shifts that move away from the factory model towards inquiry models that engage students in more active roles of thinking, communicating, and problem-solving that develop academic language and content knowledge.

The effects of standardized testing and accountability. The push toward standardized testing and accountability during the industrial era negatively impacted student-centered teaching (Little, 2013). By the 1950s, knowledge acquisition was measured by multiple-choice tests that could quickly and accurately be scored by machine “without the involvement of teachers or the complications of asking students to produce and defend their own ideas” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 4). In the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the push for standardization strengthened, with NCLB placing an extreme emphasis on student achievement and
accountability for administrators and teachers. This caused a narrowing of the curriculum, which neglected to address students’ full spectrum of learning needs, as well as a reduction in student-centered pedagogy and an increase in teacher-centered pedagogy. Social learning structures that had been established in many classrooms were scrapped in favor of more efficient transmission modes of instruction. Teaching and learning became more impersonal and stressful for both teachers and students, causing some teachers to rethink teaching as a profession and leading some to leave the field altogether (Ravitch, 2010; Sloan, 2007; Valli & Chambliss, 2007). Such transformations had their largest negative impact on traditionally disenfranchised students, especially ELLs (Menkin, 2010; Sloan, 2007).

This is an important contextual feature of this study, considering that the teachers who participated in this research had experienced two sets of standards and two types of standardized testing. The earlier set of standards emphasized a wide range of content that often entailed low-level skills and rote memorization. Alternatively, the later CCSS emphasized critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving (Phillips & Wong, 2010). Researchers examining how pedagogical practices and curricular decisions were impacted by the earlier set of standards demonstrated that an increased emphasis on these standards undermined teachers’ “knowledge of more complex, culturally responsive views of literacy” (Sloan, 2007, p. 26); they noted that teachers’ literacy-based expectations for Latino students simultaneously decreased. Valli and Chambliss (2007) illustrated this in an ethnographic study where they observed the teaching practices of an exemplary teacher, Ms. Gabriel, in two settings: her regular reading class and her intervention reading class.

In the regular reading class, of which one-third of the students were current or former participants in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class, Ms. Gabriel engaged
her students using a wide range of student-centered strategies, which included the selection of a curriculum based on knowledge of students’ cultural backgrounds, home lives, interests, personal needs, and literacy needs. She provided students opportunities to work in groups because, in her words, “everybody can be a star” (Valli & Chambliss, 2007, p. 62). She taught vocabulary in the context of meaningful text and comprehension in a complex and responsive manner that maintained the rigorous goal of improving student writing.

In contrast, when Ms. Gabriel taught her intervention class, which included twice the number of recent completers of the ESOL program, her primary objective was to prepare students for the standardized state test. Hence, she selected instructional material based on its similarity to the structure of the test, not based on how it could connect to students’ lives. Consequently, she used a packet of sample problems, rather than rich and purposefully selected literature. She taught vocabulary out of context and gave students low-level skill tasks such as examining items on a sample test. Her approach was more direct, or teacher-centered. Students engaged in less dialogue and instead gave shorter, one-word utterances to complete the close structures she offered.

This study (Valli & Chambliss, 2007) indicated that placing emphasis on the earlier standards negatively impacted instruction for ESOL students, as the standards put teachers in a position to lean toward teacher-centered instructional practices. The CCSS standards emphasize the kind of learning that is more conducive to a student-centered classroom; thus, it has been anticipated that teachers shifting to the CCSS would employ more student-centered practices, which are more conducive to the language development and learning needs of ELLs.

**Preparing students for the 21st Century.** Leland and Kasten (2002) argued that more dynamic, engaging practices are necessary to prepare students for the kinds of skills and critical
thinking needed in 21st Century democratic participation. Such 21st Century preparation includes the ability to use language flexibly and in many contexts. Noddings (2013) offered additional ideals for a progressive, 21st Century curriculum, which would include: the ability to communicate effectively; the ability to work as a team member; flexibility; preparedness to face changes and challenges; preparedness to face and solve problems; skills in analysis and conceptualization; an ability to question, challenge, and innovate; willingness and the capacity to assume personal responsibility; and the capacity for self-reflection and self-management (p. 401). In 21st Century classrooms, dull practices that are performed for the primary purpose of attaining higher tests scores would be set aside for practices that better engage students in the skills they need to step into and succeed in jobs that demand planning, problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Noddings, 2013).

Establishing classrooms that are more oriented toward 21st Century goals provides additional benefits for ELLs, who are frequently relegated to classroom settings that offer less rigorous, less engaging, and mono-cultural experiences (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012; Hakuta & Santos, 2012; Pennington, as cited in Sloan, 2007; Zwiers, 2007). Even classes that are labeled advanced may be less rigorous for minority and low-income students (Long, Conger, & Iatarola, 2012). Schaps (as cited in Cloud, Lakin, & Leininger, 2011) noted several benefits of student-centered classrooms that cultivate positive and supportive relationships for ELLs, including higher attendance levels, higher academic achievement levels, and fewer behavioral problems. In addition to these improvements, Meece, Herman, and McCombs (2003) found that students who participated in student-centered learning environments where they perceived their teachers as “promoting higher-order thinking, honoring student voices, and creating supportive relations, and adapting instruction to individual needs” (p. 458) reported a stronger focus on mastering the
material. This study took this fully into account, and the researcher focused on how teachers engaged ELLs in student-centered instructional practices that involved them in constructive, content-based conversations to develop essential 21st Century skills.

**Discursive Practices that Engage Students in Learning**

Freire (2000) underscored the problems in teacher-centered classrooms that limit discourse between teachers and students, and that thereby oppress students. The narration in such classrooms is one where the teacher provides the content to be learned and the student passively receives it, as in a banking system. The teacher is the expert, and therefore does the thinking, while students are simply recipients of the information taught. The discourse in such a classroom is one where “the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly” (Freire, 2000, p. 73). Students have no choice in the content or their actions, and they are expected to comply with the expectations laid out for them by the teacher. Teachers have authority, and students have none. The teacher is the subject, while the student is the object. In such a system, as Freire (2000) observed, students are unable to develop critical consciousness or act as transformers of their world.

**Monologic and dialogic discourse.** Instruction in classrooms may be organized monologically or dialogically (Christoph & Nystand, 2001). In a monologic classroom, similar to a teacher-centered classroom, the teacher dominates most of the talk and limits instruction to lecture, recitation, and seatwork. Discussion is rare, with less than one minute of discussion occurring per day. In contrast, in a dialogic classroom, similar to a student-centered classroom, there are fewer teacher-posed questions, and more discussion episodes occur during which teachers and students contribute their ideas to the conversation. Ideas to be achieved are not preset by the teacher; rather, ideas evolve from the discussion. A dialogically organized
classroom is characterized by: (a) discussion, (b) authentic questions, (c) follow-up questions, and (d) high level evaluation” (Christoph & Nystand, 2001, p. 250).

Numerous studies have illustrated that over the past 30 years, the dominant patterns of discourse in classrooms have been displayed in monologic ways where teachers lead most discussions, determine what is to be discussed, determine who has a turn and when, and make judgments of students’ contributions (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Christoph & Nystrand, 2001; Lefstein & Snell, 2011). Researchers found that “discourse is one-sided, following a pattern of teacher question, response, and teacher evaluation of the response” (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003, p. 689). Within this pattern, the questions initiated are usually close-ended and are intended to assess students’ recall of previously transmitted information. A student provides a brief answer or response, followed by the teacher’s evaluation of the response. The teacher may praise the student with a “well done” or “good job.” In the case where the response is incorrect, the teacher may provide a correct answer, reprimand the student for not paying attention, or simply indicate incorrectness. This pattern of discourse, referred to as initiation-response-evaluation (I-R-E), provides students little room to explore their own ideas or to develop deeper understandings.

Applebee et al. (2003) noted that this type of discourse might be especially disadvantageous to non-mainstream students, including ELLs, because it fails to utilize the capital of students. Documented methods that serve ELLs more effectively are those that create a safe environment and that accept, value, and permit the native language as part of the classroom discourse (Janzen, 2008). Additionally, teachers respect and value the diversity of their students, expect the best from them, are supportive of students, and encourage students to speak. There is no fear among students of ridicule or criticism. Furthermore, teachers “create
authentic reasons for all students to communicate” (Whisett & Hubbard, 2009, p. 44). This is crucial for ELLs because it moves them “from receptive, semantic processing (listening to understand) to expressive, syntactic processing (forming words and sentences to communicate)” (Whisett & Hubbard, 2009, p. 44). In this study, it was valuable to learn whether or not teachers have found that the new CCSS have provided a more viable platform for instructional practices that engages students in dialogic discourse, in which students are primary contributors to the conversations, and where conversations are distinguished by meaningful discussion, authentic questions, follow-up questions, and high-level evaluation. Identifying the opportunities for this occurring was a key contribution of this study.

While monologic and dialogic methods seem counter to one another, teachers commonly alternate between monologic discourse and dialogic discourse to emphasize key instructional concepts, but also to draw students into the learning process. Scott, Mortimer, and Aguiar (2006) examined this alternation between monologic and dialogic discourse in a Brazilian high school science class and found it to be complimentary to building a dynamic dialogue with students. Rather than adhering to the traditional I-R-E pattern of discourse, the teacher employed open chains of interaction, with no evaluative feedback, that elicited open-ended answers and that drew in responses from multiple students. In an open-chain of interaction, a pattern of initiation-response-prompt-response-prompt-response-prompt (I-R-P-R-P-R) transpires, with no evaluative statement at the end. In one example, the teacher prompted, “Can you explain that, please?” (Scott et al., 2006, p. 616) which led four students to respond. The teacher’s questions were probing, requiring students to delve deeper for their responses and to employ more critical understandings. Another prompt used was, “Do you agree with that?” (Scott et al., 2006, p. 615). The tone of the teacher’s prompts was neutral and required students to fully communicate
their ideas. In one situation, for example, the teacher prompted, “Well, you must justify your ideas” (p. 614). In another episode, the teacher asked students a series of questions, and kept coming back to the question, “Why?” (p. 618). With such prompts, the students are expected to elaborate so that their ideas are fully articulated, with substantial justification. This is important because it moves students away from brief, one-word, rote answers, toward more sophisticated and fully articulated understandings of the content, and it provides the opportunities for students to thus develop critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving skills.

When it came time for the teacher to present accurate scientific information, she transitioned from an open-chain of interaction to a closed-chain of interaction. Such a chain ends with an evaluation (i.e., I-R-P-R-E). While this creates some tension for the teacher, it moves the students from their personal understandings to comprehension of scientific concepts.

Researchers claim that when teachers adopt an interactive-dialogic communication approach, they create a climate for productive, discipline-based communication (Scott, et al., 2006). Students are given opportunities to make “substantive contributions to the discussion” (p. 616); they gain entry into academic discourse through the articulation of their personal beliefs and understandings, which allows them to “have the opportunity to position the authoritative discourse of the disciplinary knowledge to their everyday views…so…they are better…placed…to make it their own” (p. 617). This keeps them accountable and leads them to take ownership in the curriculum because of their active participation in the disciplinary discourse.

Goldenberg (2008) reported that instruction that uses a combination of interactive and direct approaches has been shown to be most effective with ELLs. ELLs benefit when teachers actively promote “students’ progress by encouraging higher levels of thinking, speaking, and
reading at their instructional levels” (p. 18). Additionally, ELLs need teachers to provide direct instruction and give explicit directions and information. ELLs benefit when teachers model, deliver instructional input, offer corrective feedback, and guide students during practice so that they acquire knowledge and skills efficiently. The literature on monologic and dialogic discourse provides additional insight into instruction with ELLs, indicating that a comprehensive approach that includes scaffolding (direct instruction, modeling, and guided practice) is necessary for ELLs to develop language and content. This comprehensive approach is foundational to the theoretical framework in this study, which incorporates social constructivism and the importance and use of academic language, positing that ELLs need to engage in academic conversations and academic language to be scaffolded within the ZPD.

**Giving students a voice.** In classrooms where only traditional discourse practices are maintained, the diversity of students’ backgrounds and voices is not engaged with as an asset, and thus, non-mainstream students suffer. Their experiences living on the margins of culture and language commonly locate them as disenfranchised *nobodies* (Sennett & Cobb, 1972) who cannot fit into the school environment (Delpit, 1988; Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Taines (2014) examined how educators choose either to support or silent student voice in the schools to identify a starting point for more inclusive receptiveness among educators in building student leadership. The author found that, in some cases, student voice for change is viewed receptively, but in others, it is perceived as a threat, as illegitimate, or as oppositional to maintaining institutional order.

To ensure that classroom discourse is optimally engaging for students, it is essential that students’ voices are heard. Whether students’ are speaking in their primary language or in English, or whether they are sharing ideas or arguing for change, students’ voices add value and
engagement to learning. Curran (as noted in Zuengler, 2011) asserted that students’ personal experiences contribute to content learning by building deeper, more critical understandings of the material. As co-constructors in the learning community, incorporating these experiences might improve students’ interest in the subject. When co-construction is denied, students may define the course as “boring and exploitative” (Zuengler, 2011, p. 62). Zuengler and Miller (2006) deemed that one of the most important factors to consider when designing a content lesson for non-mainstream students is the extent to which discourse practices are affirming or not of students’ identities; affirmation can enhance students’ interest in the content. When a teacher engages in dialogic teaching that demonstrates both content knowledge and empathy toward the student’s contribution, “classroom existence…becomes…a shared event” (McGonigal, 2004, p. 123). This form of discourse allows the student to be seen as equally important to others; by providing time and acknowledgement, the teacher gives the student the opportunity to see himself or herself from the outside and to “author a higher self, one more worthy of respect and of greater potential than he or she suspected” (p. 124).

Violand-Sanchez and Hainer-Violand (2006) suggested that encouraging ELLs to speak and write from experience can provide them the means for bringing their voices to the classroom, thus capitalizing on the linguistic and cultural strengths they possess. Wassel, Martin, and Scantlebury (2013) extended this idea in a study that investigated how cogenerative dialogues can support ELLs. Cogenerative dialogues are discussions that a teacher arranges with a small group of students to learn how to improve teaching and learning. The dialogue adheres to three rules: “1) speaking is voluntary, 2) no voices are privileged, and 3) what is discussed stays in the group” (p. 761). While this study is designed to learn how teachers experience the instructional shifts with the CCSS in order to improve teaching and learning for ELLs, the body of literature
on giving students voice illustrates the transformative power of privileging students’ voices and incorporating their ideas are incorporated as positive changes in the classroom.

Supporting English learners in developing academic discourse. To improve the performance of minority and low-income students in high school, there must be a stronger focus on student learning through interaction between students and teachers (Corcoran & Silander, 2009). Instruction, as opposed to teaching, is narrower and implies responsibilities such as “guidance, supervision of students, and curriculum development” (p. 158). Vygotsky’s (as cited in Bylund, 2011) theories of language development and Cummin’s (1981) theory of BICS and CALP provide a framework for understanding the value of engaging students in academic discourse. Vygotsky (as cited in Bylund, 2011) noted that language develops along a continuum, with basic structures learned early and more advanced structures and uses developed later. The final stage of language development is one where people are able to use concepts. It is at that final stage that one is able to engage in higher-level cognitive activities. Vygotsky (as cited in Bylund, 2011) noted that, “a child’s ability to use verbal thought as a cognitive tool develops as s/he accumulates a widening range of word meanings and forms a framework or structure connecting the concepts represented by those words” (p. 4). Similarly, in the CALP stage of language acquisition, language learners are able to conceptualize challenging academic ideas both verbally and in writing. When students are developing CALP, they are “developing communicative and academic language skills as they learn new concepts and content knowledge” (Fu, 2004, p. 10). This literature underscores key tenets of the theoretical framework that informs this study, particularly those that assert that cognitive development results from social interaction, and academic conversations build ELLs’ academic language.

Monologic teaching practice is especially limiting for ELLs, who need to have abundant
experiences engaging in meaningful academic conversations (Olsen, 2010). Vygotsky (as cited in Williams, 1989) noted that social interaction is a crucial aspect in children’s cognitive development. Vygotsky’s ideas are foundational to the tenet of constructivism that ideas are co-constructed with another person through conversations and interactions (Bodrova, Davidson, Davidson, & Leong, 1994). Other researchers have emphasized the benefits of a constructivist framework for ELLs. For example, Ortiz and Pagan (2009) proposed a set of nonnegotiable premises for effective school reform for culturally and linguistically diverse students. The first premise, active learning, posits “knowledge is best acquired when learners actively participate in meaningful activities that are constructive in nature and appropriate to their level of development” (p. 2). This argument aligns with constructivist thought, closely matching Vygotsky’s ZPD which asserts that students learn when the material to be processed is slightly above their independent learning level (Bodrova, Davidson, Davidson, & Leong, 1994).

Unfortunately, in classrooms where the majority of students are ELLs, teachers and students often “resort to coping strategies that reduce knowledge demands and language literacy problems by minimizing oral and written interaction and the co-construction of understanding that it can facilitate” (Kramer-Dahl, Teo, & Chia, 2007, p. 168). This contradiction to what theory indicates may, in practice, be part of the challenge in closing the achievement gap for ELLs. For students to increase their cognitive academic abilities, they need to have access to a wide range of cognitively demanding academic tasks, yet they are not sufficiently presented with these opportunities. This may signify a need for more cognitively demanding communicative activities in the classroom.

When communicative approaches are central to the learning of real-world issues, it is useful to allow ELLs to draw upon their background knowledge. Scholars have documented that
accessing and making connections to background knowledge is a beneficial strategy for ELLs (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2010; Cowan & Sandefur, 2013; Watts-Taffe, Later, Broach, McDonald Conner, & Walker-Dalhouse, 2013). Strategically planning instruction for ELLs to include such processes can improve the outcomes of instruction. For example, Smart, Witt, and Scott (2012) suggested following the tenets of Biggs (1996) for effective instruction: (a) begin by connecting content with students’ lives, (b) present content in a manner that shifts students’ cognitive models gradually, (c) address gaps in students’ background knowledge, and (d) give students opportunities to work in collaborative groups (Smart et al., 2012, p. 401).

Additionally, in classrooms with English learners, educators need to consider how various languages are welcomed in the discourse. Teachers must be cautious of linguistic surveillance, which can legitimize or delegitimize students’ contributions (Miller & Zuengler, 2011). Linguistic surveillance is when a teacher or school controls both their own and students’ language production. It can be used to tell students which language or linguistic format is acceptable to use, and which is not. Administrators and teachers are the primary sources of linguistic surveillance, but students may also enact it. In a study of ELLs in a sheltered civics class, the teacher interrupted, kiddingly, to direct students to provide responses in English only. In one instance, this linguistic surveillance caused a student to become silent, while other, more proficient students capitalized on her idea and engaged in discourse with the teacher (Miller & Zuengler, 2011).

The literature on discursive practices – including monologic and dialogic teaching practices, giving students a voice, and supporting ELLs in developing academic discourse – grounds this study; it outlines the importance of engaging ELLs in meaningful, student-centered conversations that are constructivist in nature, an approach that is coherent with the CCSS and is
conducive to developing students’ skills in critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving. It also aligns with a primary aim of this study – to gain an understanding of how high school teachers identify, select, and implement collaborative and student-centered strategies that engage ELLs in meaningful, academic, constructive, content-based conversations.

**Studies of Discourse Practices in High School Content Classes**

Studies are limited that examine discourse practices utilized in high school classrooms to facilitate academic content learning. Also lacking are studies that investigate how ELLs engage in academic discourse in the secondary setting to develop both their language proficiency and their content understandings. Duff (2002) studied content and turn-taking in one classroom’s discussions to determine how knowledge, identities, and differences were established and maintained within the classroom community. The teacher in this classroom had previously established her expectation that students “come to class ready to participate in discussions, debates, conversations, group work and individual work” (p. 301). In one lesson observed by the researcher, the teacher used a whole-class approach to instruction, and students were expected to add their ideas to the discussion by raising their hands. Despite this expectation, newcomer and nonlocal students rarely raised their hands to offer contributions to class discussion. Instead, louder, more vocal local students raised their hands frequently, and they sometimes blurted out their ideas. The degree of teacher-dominated speech was evident in the data collection: the teacher took 160 turns to speak and produced a total of 6,540 words. Turn-taking among students was also highly unequal. One dominant local female student took 65 turns and contributed a total of 1,326 words. In contrast, four of the quieter and nonlocal students took as few as 10 turns to speak, contributing as little as 4 to 132 words each (Duff, 2002, p. 301). In an attempt to ensure equitable contributions, the teacher called on specific students, but ultimately
those efforts could not totally level the students’ participation. Duff (2002) noted that creating a cohesive learning community is a noteworthy but difficult goal. Often some students’ voices are dominant, while others become subdued or even silenced. Quieter students and those who are marginalized may become “disconnected and disengaged from peers, curriculum, activities, and discourse in the mainstream” (Duff, 2002, p. 290). For this reason, it is critical, that teachers “provide opportunities to create constructive, cohesive communities in which differences are accommodated and bridged, and where students and teachers negotiate their identities and subject-matter knowledge together in culturally respectful and meaningful ways through social interaction” (Duff, 2002, p. 290).

This study sheds significant light on the dynamics of discourse patterns in classrooms with ELLs. It also explores the complex dynamic that a teacher may intend to be equitable in the classroom, yet s/he may not fully achieve this goal without putting into place structured opportunities for ELLs to engage in mainstream discourse that is also culturally respectful. This study contributed to the literature reviewed by addressing the challenges teachers interviewed experienced in implementing the CCSS for ELLs and how they engaged ELLs in academic discourse to develop language proficiency and content knowledge.

**Teachers’ flexible or inflexible models of instruction.** This study examined teachers’ shift to new instructional methods that were student-centered. For that reason, it was helpful to examine research on the viability of teachers’ flexible or inflexible models of instruction. Various researchers have examined flexible/inflexible models of discourse in high school classrooms. Agee (2000) published a multiple case study of five teachers, examining the teachers’ extent of student-centered pedagogy, priorities for instruction, classroom practices that engage students in critical discourses of content, student reflections, and self-assessments of their
effectiveness. The findings in the study indicated that teachers with inflexible models of instruction that focused narrowly on texts and analysis “had the most difficulty making use of evidence that suggested they were less effective than they hoped” (p. 341). Additionally, teachers with inflexible models tended to dismiss dissonant student feedback and attributed low levels of student engagement to external factors, such as student passivity or immaturity. In contrast, teachers with flexible, student-centered models for instruction were more likely to use student feedback to find ways to make strategic changes to their instruction. When classroom outcomes were not as desirable as these teachers hoped, they looked at themselves and their practices, and determined what they might do differently the next time. Agee (2000) argued that these findings indicate the importance of teachers encouraging student interpretations of text using varied approaches to instruction. Furthermore, Agee (2000) claimed that teachers can benefit from substantive professional development that creates situations for them to collect student feedback, and then use that feedback to make changes in instruction. This literature informed this study by documenting the effectiveness of teachers who utilize a flexible, student-centered approach in their instruction.

**Establishing phases for scaffolding academic discourse.** Wachira (2013) examined one teacher’s use of strategies to promote classroom discourse over an entire school year. In this study, the teacher used distinct phases to scaffold academic mathematics conversations among students. The first phase, Establishing Expectations, took place in the beginning of the school year during the first six weeks and was characterized by the teacher communicating expectations regarding how to talk and write about mathematics. The second phase, Mathematics Language, took place during weeks seven through 12, and was characterized by the students’ use of language that was partially informal, and partially formal. The third phase, Mathematics
Community, took place during weeks 13 through the end of the school year and was characterized by greater confidence among students to use more formal mathematical language. In the fourth phase, Establishing Formal Discourse, which took place from week 19 through the end of the school year, students “exhibited a sense of mathematical empowerment and [communication of] ideas using formal mathematical language” (p. 8).

During a lesson in the Establishing Formal Discourse phase, the teacher explicitly told the students that they would be doing the talking, while the teacher would be listening. The teacher asked students to take turns and provide meaningful contributions. An important aspect of this study was that the teacher was explicit about what meaningful contributions could include: explaining, justifying, validating or challenge statements of their peers, and asking thought provoking questions (Wachira, 2013, p. 23). Less than meaningful contributions would include “unsupported claims, private side conversations, impulsive whispers, off task behaviors, distracting interruptions, and random comments” (p. 23). To ensure a fair distribution of turn-taking, the teacher gave the students a beanbag to pass around when it was their turn to talk. Students would risk losing points if they spoke without the beanbag. These two features of the teacher’s instruction, providing explicit examples of what meaningful contributions are and creating an atmosphere of equity for turn-taking, resulted in a lesson, observed by the researcher, where students were engaged in making meaningful contributions.

When academic language is not strategically phased into instruction over an extended period, with regular practice, teachers may encounter challenges or resistance from students. In one study, Qhobela (2012) examined how the promotion of argumentation might support science learning. While the study did highlight the potential for incorporating greater use of meaningful language in the classroom, it also revealed the challenge that can occur when such an
instructional shift is attempted within a brief implementation phase. While this study did have three distinct episodes, these episodes were timed very closely, within one unit of study. Thus, because the students in this study were not used to argumentation, the quality of their contributions and justifications were not optimal. This suggests that a period of introduction, practice, and performance might be beneficial to scaffolding the skill of argumentation for students.

A second challenge revealed in Qhobela’s (2012) study was that students sometimes argued scientific facts inaccurately or omitted important scientific principles from their arguments. This may highlight the importance of greater student preparation before argumentation is expected or of a period of interruption, where the teacher steps in to provide direct guidance (as in Wachira, 2013). Finally, students’ justifications were brief. This may imply a need for more practice or the explicit use models of what substantial arguments should look like, so that students know how to offer a strong argument or justification, as research indicates that syntactic complexity and sentence length increase when the learner has had ample opportunity to actively engage in the topic (McLean, 1980, 2012).

While these scholars examined the shift needed in instruction to move towards scaffolded academic mathematics conversations among students, it used mainstream English-only students, not ELLs. The study that is the focus of this thesis added to this by addressing whether the experiences of teachers with ELLs parallel or diverge from that of teachers with only English speaking students.

**Using collaborative group work to engage students in academic discourse.** Drawing on previous research, Rance-Roney (2010) offered ideas for improving the facilitation of student talk for ELLs within the context of small groups in the classroom. Rance-Roney (2010) first
emphasized that the early conception of using group work to facilitate language practice has been beneficial; however, the use of group work to engage students in construction of knowledge or negotiating for meaning has had mixed results because students sometimes resist the expectations and remain silent. Resistance may be a consequence of student “personality, sense of agency, and collaborative orientation” (p. 19). To optimize the effectiveness and attainment of the instructor’s objectives in student talk in collaborative groups, Rance-Roney (2010) suggested that new conceptualizations of how to arrange students in groups to offer solutions to some of the challenges teachers face.

Rance-Roney (2010) proposed that instructors establish flexible groups at the start of the school year. Creating multiple groups to which students belong allows learners to gain “a diversity of viewpoints and language interactions” (p. 21). Pre-established and long-lasting flexible groups provide the safety of a fixed group, where students are able to establish relationships and trust over a long period of time, but they also provide the additional benefit of working with a large variety of students within the class. The types of grouping arrangements that Rance-Roney (2010) recommended include: oral language proficiency, personality, controlled affiliation, common first language, and academic orientation (pp. 22-24).

In oral language proficiency groupings, students are arranged homogeneously in the target language by similar ability. The rationale for this is, while heterogeneous groupings offer the benefit a more proficient speaker in each group who can support a less proficient student, this can be problematic when the proficient speakers dominate the speaking opportunities, giving less proficient speakers fewer possibilities to speak.

Personality groupings are based on the degree of students’ typical active participation. Dominant speakers would be grouped homogenously, and quieter students would be grouped
homogenously. Rance-Roney’s (2010) rationale for this arrangement is that dominant speakers can quickly stifle less vocal participants. When students are arranged homogenously, quieter students are in a safer setting. Rather than trying to compete with louder, charismatic, and more energetic participants, less assertive students can interact in a quieter, more casual, and comfortable setting. This can be especially helpful when the group is expected to achieve consensus or determine a solution to a problem. This grouping arrangement can “maximize chances for all group members to engage in conversation” (Rance-Roney, 2010, p. 23).

The third arrangement, controlled affiliation grouping, involves setting up students according to similar or dissimilar interests or backgrounds. At times, it is optimal to group students who are dissimilar when diversity of perception enhances the dialogue. This approach “nurtures the growth of a class community as individuals get to know and trust one another” (p. 23). However, there may be instances when grouping by similar backgrounds and interests are preferable to ensure healthy conversations. For example, when the topic to be discussed is emotionally charged or controversial, it may be more conducive to place students according to similarity in to ensure a safe space for uninhibited discussion. For example, Rance-Roney (2010) described a situation in which students were asked to discuss Maya Angelou’s (1971) I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. For this assignment, she placed students according to gender so that sensitive issues could be dealt with among peers in a safe setting that could allow for “deeper and more authentic literary analysis” (p. 23).

Rance-Roney (2010) also advocated first language groupings as another option for arranging students. When students are separated from peers who share their first language, they are forced to use the English language to communicate. In some situations, however, it may be desirable for students to use their primary language to address challenging academic tasks that
have been presented in English. By allowing ELLs to access their first language via code-switching among peers, ELLs may be able to achieve greater analytic depth in their tasks.

Academic orientation grouping is the last arrangement suggested by Rance-Roney (2010). In this type of grouping, students with stronger academic ability (regardless of language proficiency) are distributed among all the groups. In this way, group members with greater academic preparation can scaffold academic understandings to group members with less developed academic competencies. Their content expertise provides the knowledge base that allows all group members to attain the content mastery expectations.

In addition to recommendations about flexible grouping, Rance-Roney (2010) noted that planning interactional group tasks is essential to engaging students in rich and thoughtful discussion. Teachers must consider tasks that move students beyond “simple language practice” to tasks that “also support content learning, foster critical thinking, and develop … [a] supportive classroom community” (p. 24). Tasks can range from: (a) fostering a sense of community, belonging and safety; (b) maximizing opportunities for rehearsing and practicing in the language; (c) utilizing functional language to accomplish a linguistic, academic, or managerial task; (d) increasing awareness of other cultures and tolerance for diverse personalities, to (e) developing new knowledge about a content, or engaging in critical thinking and problem solving (Rance-Roney, 2010, pp. 24-25). To ensure accountability and participation of all group members, Rance-Roney (2010) suggested that teachers plan individual tasks. These tasks can include a leader-facilitator (ensures the group completes the learning objective and stays on task), scribe (takes notes, does the writing), reporter (presents findings to the whole class), vocabulary monitor (develops a list of new vocabulary and shares the list with the group the following day),
and time monitor (watches the time and makes sure the group finishes the discussion/task within the allotted time) (Rance-Roney, 2010, pp. 24-26).

The insight from Rance-Roney’s (2010) study provided the researcher with an understanding of the types of student group arrangements that are possible and how they can be supportive for ELLs’ learning and language development needs. During the in-depth interviews conducted for this study, teachers were asked to describe the types of group arrangements that they were using and elaborate on how such arrangements supported ELLs’ learning and engagement.

Structuring lessons within the context of groups can ensure improved academic discourse. Engle and Conant (2002) offered additional principles for fostering productive disciplinary engagement including: “a) problematizing subject matter, b) giving students authority to address such problems, c) holding students accountable to others and to shared disciplinary norms, and d) providing students with relevant resources” (p. 399). Problematizing subject matter refers to the act of encouraging students to address content-based problems and entails a shift from asking students to simply understand, recall, and apply information to them being able to ask questions, make proposals, and challenge ideas. It means that students actively construct meaning of the content. Giving students authority involves regarding their voices as valid and crucial to the classroom learning community. Students are regarded as “authors and producers of knowledge” (p. 404). By regarding students this way, students are held to a high level of expectation, and when students achieve the expectation, they may be viewed as classroom experts. The next principle, holding students accountable to others and to shared norms, entails the maintenance of expectations that students must consult others in constructing their understandings of the content. They cannot disregard the work of others without
justification. Thus, students must show that they are responsive to the views of others. This creates a learning community where students’ knowledge is not held in isolation; rather, it is valued as a contribution to the intellectual wealth of the classroom. Finally, providing relevant resources pertains to the necessity that teachers provide students what they need to carry out intellectual, content-based collaborative tasks. This may mean giving students sufficient time to complete a project in class, supplying texts, making online resources available, or providing access to disciplinary experts.

Engle and Conant (2002) argued that following through with these four principles benefits students by advancing their learning in a rigorous manner. By creating opportunities for students to participate in problem-based work, students are “positioned in more active, intellectual roles, which may encourage them to be more engaged” (p. 408). As students gain ownership of their authority through participation, their “quality of work may reflect on their identities, potentially motivating them to engage more productively than they might otherwise” (p. 408).

How teachers organize and facilitate group work in order to motivate discussion and collaboration is an important aspect explored in this study. Cooperative learning structures have been found to be effective in helping high school ELLs gain knowledge and language practice in a broad range of subjects (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). In cooperative learning settings, English learners are given “regular opportunities to discuss the content and to use the language of school in a safe context” (p. 111). Establishing safe groups, within which ELLs can discuss, practice the language, and construct meanings provides an important and much needed space for many ELLs who are “shy or reluctant to speak up for fear of being laughed at” (p. 113).
Furthermore, research indicates that classes that utilize cooperative learning score higher than those that do not (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011).

**Summary**

The literature indicates an overwhelming trend among teachers to employ a teacher-centered style of instruction in their classrooms, despite the numerous arguments and significant evidence in favor of a student-centered pedagogy that engages students as active learners, critical thinkers, and co-constructors of knowledge. To a considerable degree, teacher-centered practices are played out in ways where teachers dominate the talk, limiting student involvement. Such practices restrict opportunities particularly for ELLs who need to engage in using English for academic purposes to build their cognitive academic language proficiency in English and to learn to construct meaning from the content.

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers experience shifts in instruction that utilizes discourse patterns that are learner-centered, collaborative, and inclusive of students’ linguistic and cultural diversity. Such a study can inform policy makers, researchers, schools of education, 9th through 12th grade school administrators, professional developers, and instructional coaches about the implications of these shifts, such as the types of resources, curriculum, or professional development that can effectively support teachers of ELLs. Additionally, this study informs teachers of ELLs about the types of challenges and successes the shifts can have for instruction and learning in their classrooms.

This qualitative study moves the literature forward by taking a close look at secondary teachers’ experiences during their transition to the CCSS to learn first-hand from them about the challenges or successes they were experiencing in teaching ELLs. The study was positioned in an opportune moment of inquiry, conducted during the time when teachers were moving from
the earlier California standards, which were heavily skills-based, to the new standards, which focused more heavily on critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving. This study examined an area of inquiry rarely addressed in the literature.

This study utilized an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology. By interviewing these teachers using the IPA methodology, this thesis represents one of the first studies to examine the phenomena of the shifts that secondary content teachers have been experiencing with the implementation of the CCSS for ELLs. It also sheds light on teachers’ level of preparedness for the implementation, and identifies the tools, resources, and support systems described as helpful in increasing their knowledge, abilities, and practices to address the academic and linguistic development of ELLs. Furthermore, it outlines how teachers identify, select, and implement collaborative and student-centered strategies that engage ELLs in meaningful, academic, constructive content-based conversations to build students’ content knowledge and academic language.
Chapter 3: Research Design

The implementation of the CCSS requires teachers to shift from teacher-centered to student-centered pedagogical practices. For ELLs, such a shift can promote meaningful engagement in both the content and the use of academic language. Carry-over practices that were once useful for preparing students for an industrial economy call for updating to reflect the needs of educating students who are prepared for both college and career in the 21st Century. Using social constructivism as the primary theoretical framework and academic language as the secondary theoretical framework, this research study examined how high school content teachers experience the implementation of the CCSS for ELLs, including how they describe the challenges they faced, what resources they accessed to improve their instructional practices, and how they created collaborative and student-centered strategies that engaged ELLs in meaningful, academic, constructive, content-based conversations.

The primary goal of this study was to gain an understanding of how high school teachers were making meaning of the instructional shifts that are needed to implement the CCSS, especially as this pertained to adolescent ELLs in California. Such an understanding can inform policy makers, researchers, schools of education, school administrators, professional developers, and instructional coaches about the implications of such shifts, such as what supports need to be in place to ensure that high school content teachers are prepared to meet the CCSS for ELLs. Additionally, it can inform teachers of ELLs of the expected challenges and successes the shifts involve and their implications for instruction and learning in the classrooms.

This study addressed an academic gap in the research by deepening the understanding of how teachers perceive the instructional shifts that are needed to support ELLs in successfully implementing the CCSS, namely the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy. At the time of this
study, very little research existed on this topic or on the professional development underway to support teachers in preparing ELLs to achieve heightened rigor under the new standards. The major instructional shifts applied to all students and required teachers to take particular note of the linguistic needs of ELLs. As a qualitative study, this thesis provided insight into the challenges and successes involved in the process of shifting instruction from traditional, teacher-centered modes toward more dynamic, collaborative modes for teaching adolescent ELLs.

**Research Question**

This study was guided by the following research question: What is the experience of high school content teachers who are implementing the Common Core State Standards for English language learners?

**Rationale for a Qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study Design**

The primary objective of this study was to understand how high school content teachers experienced the phenomena of making instructional shifts as they implemented the CCSS for ELLs. To address the research question, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate because qualitative studies do not attempt to analyze the causal relationship between variables but rather to “seek to understand phenomenon in naturalistic settings” (Golfashani, 2003, p. 600). More specifically, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology was also chosen as appropriate for this study because it provided a useful system for collecting and analyzing interview data and interpreting it.

When this study was conducted, IPA was a fairly new methodology of qualitative analysis. A branch of phenomenology, IPA originated in 1996 with the publication of “Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology” by John A. Smith, published in *Health and Psychology* (Smith, 1996). Smith described IPA as a “qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people
make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). Larkin, Eatough and Osborn (2011) later identified IPA as an approach “which is committed to understanding the first-person perspective from the third-person position” (p. 321). Originally, this methodology was used in psychology, especially health psychology, but over time, the use of IPA has branched out into other areas of research, including social psychology, and other social sciences, including education (Brocki & Weardon, 2006; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is appropriate for studies where the researcher wishes to know how subjects make sense of experiences or phenomenon.

**Philosophical influences of IPA.** The philosophical influences of IPA include phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. A description of each of these philosophical underpinnings follows.

**Phenomenology.** Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that emphasizes the essence of experiences. Major contributors to phenomenology include Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Dowling, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The early beginnings and roots of phenomenology are traced to Husserl, who based his ideas on Franz Bretano’s conceptualization of intentionality, or the principle that every act of cognition is related to some object, and “all perceptions have meaning” (Dowling, 2007, p. 132). Furthermore, all thinking is about some object, and as a result, intentionality is the “internal experience of being conscious of something” (Dowling, 2007, p. 132). In Husserl’s phenomenology, subjects’ experiences are understood pre-reflectively, without the interpretation of the researcher, who is expected to bracket his or her opinions, biases, or preconceptions. Those are expected to be made explicit in the study, so that they can be contained and held separate from the phenomena being studied. Another feature of Husserl’s philosophy is
phenomenological reduction (Dowling, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This is a process whereby the researcher engages in the study using a series of different lenses. Each different way of looking at the phenomena causes the inquirer to rule out distractions and to move closer to the essence of the phenomena.

Heidegger, a student of Husserl, diverged from Husserl and questioned whether knowledge could exist without interpretation. Heidegger was concerned with a worldly perspective that is physically grounded and intersubjective. He proposed that human beings are part of a world that includes objects, relationships, and language. Humans are always perceiving or relating to something; in this context, interpretation is integral to understanding people’s meaning making (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Merleau-Ponty was also influenced by Husserl, but, similar to Heidegger, he acknowledged one’s existence in the world, the importance of context, and the “interpretive quality of our knowledge about the world” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Merleau-Ponty added the influence of body-in-the-world to phenomenology, which places humans as entities that may attempt to observe another person, but can never fully understood another person’s lived experience due to the observer’s situated context. Each person’s experience is unique and can only be understood by that individual.

Sartre provided the fourth major influence to phenomenology, drawing in the importance of a changing self: “An existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming,” he asserted (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Furthermore, Sartre understood that an individual does not perceive the world independent of others; rather, one’s perception of the world is shaped by others and the activities they engage in. Both the presence and absence of others can influence one’s perceptions of the world.
Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre each contributed to a new direction in phenomenology, which was originally mostly descriptive and transcendental in nature. The philosophers brought to phenomenology a greater emphasis on interpretation, which is key to IPA.

_Hermeneutics._ Hermeneutics is the second major philosophical underpinning of IPA. Originally, hermeneutics, also the theory of interpretation, was used to study biblical texts to ensure a more accurate interpretation. This was followed by use in a wider scope of texts, including literary and historical texts. Hermeneutic theorists are concerned with the methods and purposes of interpretation, the intentions and original meanings of an author, the relation between the context and the development of a text, the context from within which a text is interpreted, and the text’s current relevance (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Three theorists, Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer, established hermeneutical premises that are useful in IPA. Schleiermacher saw interpretation not as a mechanical process, but rather as an art form requiring a variety of skills as well as intuition to apply. Thus, due to the interpretive analyst’s ability to perceive a text from a vantage point of a larger data set, she or he is believed to be able to provide interpretation that the original author of the text did not see. Heidegger’s contribution stemmed from his concern with things, which he asserted are hidden and then raised to light through analysis. Heidegger also noted that fore-conceptions cannot be avoided; instead, they always exist and can interfere with interpretation. This argument relates to assertions that bracketing might be considered something that cannot fully be achieved. Lastly, Gadamer, while primarily interested in the interpretation of literary and historical texts, further grounded IPA in hermeneutics. Gadamer’s two key positions included (a) pre-judgment, and (b) universality (Dowling, 2007). Gadamer, like Heidegger, asserted that preconceptions play a role in
interpretation; however, he posited that the interpreter cannot fully know his or her
preconceptions until the interpretation is underway. It is during this phase that the interpreter
gains knowledge of personal influences of interpretation. Through repeated examination, the
interpreter may revise his or her preconceptions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Finally,
universality rests on the idea that people who express themselves and those who understand them
are connected by human consciousness (Dowling, 2007).

A discussion of hermeneutics must also include the discussion of the hermeneutic circle.
This is a key feature of IPA methodology. It involves a shifting of thinking about the data
between the part and the whole. As one shifts between the part and the whole, one’s relationship
with the data also shifts. This iterative process is foundational to IPA.

**Idiography.** The final philosophical influence that shaped IPA is idiography. Ideography
is an emphasis on the particular. Traditional studies in psychology generally aim to provide
generalizations that apply to the group or the population level. Idiography diverges from this and
seeks a more particular level of analysis. Because it is committed to a more particular level, it
can be examined in greater detail and through deeper analysis. Additionally, because IPA is
committed to a more particular level of study, that of an experiential phenomenon, researchers
attend to the “perspective of particular people, in a particular context” (Smith, Flowers, &
Larkin, 2009).

**Site and Participants**

In qualitative research, random sampling is not appropriate because the purpose of a
qualitative study is not to generalize findings to whole populations. Consequently, random
sampling, in IPA, is considered to be ineffective in “gaining an understanding of complex human
issues” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). This study, thus, utilized purposive sampling, which has been
used widely “in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). Qualitative researchers have noted that “sample selection has a profound effect on the ultimate quality of the research” (Coyne, 1997, p. 632). Patton (as cited in Coyne, 1997) identified 15 types of purposive sampling, including: extreme or deviant case sampling; intensity sampling; maximum variation sampling; homogeneous samples; typical case sampling; stratified purposeful sampling; critical case sampling; snowball or chain sampling; criterion sampling; theory-based or operational construct sampling; confirming and disconfirming cases; opportunistic sampling; purposeful random sampling; sampling politically important cases; and convenience sampling. While all of these sampling methods provide value for various studies, the sampling method the researcher deemed most useful and appropriate for collecting data in this study was the criterion sampling method. Among the various types of purposive sampling, criterion is the most frequently used method for implementation research (Palinkas, et al., 2015) and is considered an appropriate sampling strategy for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013).

In criterion sampling, the researcher identifies participants who have experienced the phenomena and who all meet specific criteria for inclusion (Palinkas, et al., 2015). In this study, criterion sampling was used to identify high school content teachers who have experienced the phenomena. To insure that each of the participants had experienced the phenomena of implementing the new standards, which required a shift in instruction, participants were screened to meet the following criteria: had at least six years of experience teaching, were currently implementing the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy, and had prior training in working with ELLs. The CCSS were adopted in 2010, and the California ELD standards were adopted in
2012. Consequently, only teachers who had taught six or more years would have experienced the phenomena. Newer teachers would likely only be familiar with the new standards, and thus, would not have experienced a shift.

Phenomenological studies typically include five to 25 participants (Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, Smith and Osborn (2007) explained that there is no correct number for an IPA study. It can be as small as one, or it can be over 15. Qualitative research does not require large sample sizes, as there is little to be gained from large populations (Marshall, 1996). Rather, the ideal sample size “depends on the parameters of the phenomenon under study” (Marshall, 1996, p. 522). In IPA, researchers typically seek to find a fairly homogeneous sample of participants who fit within a defined group and for whom the research questions are relevant (Chapman & Smith, 2002). IPA researchers lean toward small sample sizes to sufficiently situate, describe, and interpret the cases. It is important that the sample utilizes subjects for whom the research question is significant.

This study identified seven participants who had diverse perspectives, which was manageable for one researcher. Good qualitative research includes perspectives that range over a spectrum of viewpoints (Creswell, 2013). For that reason, the researcher accepted participants from various grade levels – (9-12), and from core subject areas, including English, social studies, and science.

**Recruitment and access.** In order to recruit at least six participants, eight to 10 individuals were sought. The researcher secured permission from three school districts in southern California where high school teachers were implementing the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy in core classes. Each district had a population of ELLs who were mainstreamed into general education content courses. After securing permission from district level personnel
overseeing research studies, the researcher proceeded to make contact with four high school principals. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and requested access to the teachers. She discussed possible methods of inviting teachers into the study with the principals, such as making an announcement at a general staff meeting, sending an email, or placing fliers in teachers’ mailboxes. The invitation, whether oral or written, included the purpose of the study, the anticipated time commitment needed for the initial interview (one hour), the possible need for follow-up interviews, how participants’ identity would be protected, and how the data would be used. Additionally, the invitation to participate included the offer of a $25.00 gift card as compensation for time invested in the study. Each of the four high schools had at least a 15% ELL population. The schools were similar demographically and had provided trainings for the implementation of the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy as well as professional development opportunities for working with ELLs. This ensured that teachers were able to articulate their experiences with the phenomenon of the instructional shifts from the earlier standards to the current CCSS and that they could discuss how effectively they were able to address the needs of ELLs under the new standards.

In the fall of 2016, the researcher initially identified eight California high school content teachers who had completed the Demographic Record Form (DRF). The DRF on these participants indicated that they had each taught for six or more years, taught a core subject, and had ELLs in their classes. After interviewing one of the participants, the researcher realized that this individual, although a core subject teacher, was not implementing the CCSS, but rather a different set of standards, the International Baccalaureate (IB) standards. Consequently, this individual’s transcripts were not used in the analysis of the study. The remaining seven participants possessed the ability to describe instructional shifts as a result of the implementation
of the CCSS. The seven teachers selected represented three different school districts and four high schools in southern California. The participants included two English teachers, three social studies teachers, and two science teachers.

**Data Collection**

The collection of data from the participants was exclusively through conducting semi-structured interviews. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews are the most common form of data collection in IPA studies (Brocki & Wearden, 2006) because they allow “the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of participants’ responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise” (Chapman & Smith, 2002, p 127). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher is able “to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon” (Kvale, 2007, p. 6). This study followed a common structure for qualitative in-depth phenomenological interviewing, which includes a schedule of three interviews (Seidman, 2006). The purpose of the first interview was to gather information about the life history of the participant, the second interview gathered information on the details of the experience, and the third interview sought reflections on the meaning by the participant. Each interview was 30 to 90-minutes in length and was characterized by open-ended questioning using a pre-established interview protocol that attempted to gain data that pertained to the research question. The interviews started with a question asking about an episode or an experience to help them become comfortable talking (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Later, questions that delved deeper into the participant’s meaning-making of the experiences were asked.
Interviews can be treated as static or dynamic. Kvale (1996) proposed two metaphors for understanding how interviews may be understood: the miner and the traveler. The miner metaphor treats the interviewer as one who “seeks nuggets of essential meaning” (p. 3) from the subjects who possess knowledge that is waiting to be mined. The nuggets of information are pure and remain constant in their essential meaning from their first discovery to their transcription. Alternatively, the traveler metaphor provides a view of the interviewer as one who leaves home to journey and take in experiences through conversations with people in new lands. The conversations may be conducted through a planned method, or they may be more spontaneous in nature. Along the way, the traveler “asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). The traveler returns home to describe and reconstruct the stories through his interpretations. An important aspect of the traveler metaphor is that the journey and reflection may cause the interviewer to change and come to “new ways of self-understanding” (p. 4).

Similarly, Beer (1997) proposed that open-ended interviewing serves as an exploration that is “more like writing and deciphering a poem than … like picking up discrete bits of information and depositing them in some sort of data-recording bucket” (p. 112). In this study, the researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews much like both the traveler (Kvale, 1996) and the artistic explorer (Beer, 1997). She included a set of pre-established questions that sought an understanding of the participants and the participants’ experiences of the phenomena, and was flexible enough to be able to follow up on participants’ answers and gain more specificity and elaboration of their experiences.

The interviews were audio recorded, in compliance with IPA’s requirement for verbatim transcripts (Dowling, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Each recorded interview was
given a confidential code to maintain the anonymity of the participant and was stored and backed up digitally. A third party transcription company completed a word-for-word transcription of the interviews. Each line in the transcripts was numbered so that later references to the transcript could be identified. Raw data from the recordings and transcripts were kept in a secured locked location to be destroyed five years after the study.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data for this study included standard protocol for IPA studies which includes “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (Creswell, 2013, p. 179). The researcher used an inductive analysis process that included first and second cycle coding, jotting, analytic memos, and within and cross-case analysis, or constant comparison (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The purpose of this method was to discover themes within and across the transcripts that illustrated the ways in which the participants made meaning of their experiences in implementing the CCSS for ELLs. According to Smith (as cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), data analysis and coding is an iterative and inductive process that (1) requires a line by line analysis of each participant’s claims, concerns, or understandings (2) the identification of emerging themes, (3) an understanding of the meaning for the participants in their context, (4) the development of a structure that frames the relationship between the themes, (5) organization of the data that permits a flow from initial to final phases of analysis, (6) the use of strategies that allow for auditing for the plausibility and coherence of interpretations, (7) the creation of a narrative that extracts quotes, while also providing a themed presentation of the data, and finally (8) reflection by the researcher of his or
her perceptions, conceptions, and processes. A data analysis program, MAXQDA11, was used to organize, code, and analyze the interview data throughout the entire analysis process.

**First cycle coding.** First cycle coding began by reading each transcript line-by-line. The focus during this reading was on capturing wording from the interviewee, not the interviewer. During this cycle, statements were read and codes were created to capture the essence of the words. Saldaña (2013) stated that a code is “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Codes can be assigned to a single word or to a passage as long as a full page. In this analysis, descriptive codes were used at the paragraph level of text. A descriptive code “assigns labels to data to summarize a word or short phrase” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Creswell (2013) noted that codes can be names that the researchers use “that seem to best describe the information” (p. 185). Some sections of text called for more than one code, and, in those instances, multiple codes were used.

**Second cycle coding.** Second cycle coding is also referred to as pattern coding. During this cycle, the full list of codes was grouped into smaller categories, or themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). During this phase, the researcher examined each code, looked for something similar, and sorted the codes into groups. Then the researcher selected a label or code that most appropriately encompassed the sub-codes.

**Narrative Analysis.** The narrative analysis stage included jotting and analytic memos. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), jotting is “a piece of writing that could literally fit onto the space of a small square piece of paper” (93). Jottings were conducted by using the “Comments” option in MAXQDA11 for each selection of text that was coded. The
researcher clicked through each of the codes, re-read each selection of text, then jotted a brief note that further described the text in a brief, but useful manner.

Next, the researcher wrote analytic memos. MAXQDA11 served as a tool to create memos, which were added to sections of text that had one or more codes already attached. Memos are brief or extended narratives that express the researcher’s understandings of the data. Saldaña (2013) explained that analytic memos can be much like journal entries or a blog. They are a place for the researcher to essentially unload their brain about “perceptions, phenomenon, or process under investigation by thinking and thus writing and thus thinking even more about them” (p. 41). While analytic memos can also be reflections, Saldaña (2013) preferred to call these memos analytic because they provide additional data to the study that can also be coded, organized, and searched. The memos provided a more reflective and detailed narrative from the researcher’s perspective about the meaning of the participants’ statements.

**Constant comparative analysis.** The final step in the data analysis process was within- and cross-case analysis, or constant comparison. The benefit of conducting a cross-case analysis is increasing the generalizability of the study to other contexts. While some researchers might consider the goal of generalizability inappropriate for qualitative studies, this is debated, and it is becoming more common for qualitative researchers to use multiple cases in their studies to enhance this outcome (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Boeije (2002) described how constant comparative analysis is used in grounded theory. The process includes five major steps, which were adapted for this IPA study during the data analysis process: (1) comparison within a single interview, (2) comparison between interviews within the same group that includes individuals who share the same experience, (3) comparison of interviews from groups with different perspectives but involved with the subject understudy, (4) comparison in pairs of
interviews with two partners belonging to a couple, (5) comparing interviews with several couples.

Because the sample size in this study was small, with only seven participants, only the first two steps in Boeije’s (2002) constant comparative analysis procedure were followed. Each transcript was read through as an iterative process. After a code was noted within one transcript, the remainder of the text was read through for additional instances where the code might be present. Next, the researcher read each transcript to identify instances where one code reoccurred across transcripts. The researcher repeated this process for each code.

In conclusion, the data analysis process included the following steps: (1) organizing and reading the transcripts, (2) first cycle coding, (3) second cycle coding, (4) narrative analysis, (5) constant comparative analysis. Through these steps, six themes from the interviews emerged. The analysis helped to answer the research question, which sought to understand the experience of high school content teachers who were, at the time of the study, implementing the CCSS for ELLs.

**Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness**

Interpretive qualitative research is vastly different from positivist quantitative research that views the world “as comprising discrete, observable elements and events that interact in an observable, determined and regular manner” (Collins, 2010, p. 38). Ontologically, positivism asserts that the world has objects that are “apart from a human knower who can use language and symbols to accurately describe and explain the truth of this objective reality” (Angen, 2000, p. 380). In qualitative research, the goal is to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena being studied. Thus, evaluating qualitative research according to principles of positivist qualitative research that seek to establish validity and reliability are controversial (Maxwell, 1992) and
problematic because they are often simplified down to prescriptive “easy-to-use checklists” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 180). Furthermore, Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (as cited in Creswell, 2013) noted that using positivist terminology is inadequate for addressing the work in qualitative research and “muddies the water” (p. 246). Thus, alternative terms are more suited for naturalistic research (Lincoln & Guba as cited in Creswell, 2013).

Rather than using the term *validity*, which emphasizes whether the study is actually measuring what it was intended to measure, Eisner (as cited in Creswell, 2013) suggested using the term *credibility*. Eisner states that credibility is what “allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions” (Creswell, 2013, p. 246). This is crucial to a qualitative study because there is a general consensus in the research community that qualitative researchers need to demonstrate credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition, in place of the term *reliability*, which refers to whether a study can be replicated, Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Creswell, 2013) suggest the term *dependability*. Dependability encompasses the understanding that results can be unstable and subject to change. For this reason, the qualitative researcher seeks to find confirmability in establishing the value of the data through the process of auditing the research process (Creswell, 2013). In alignment with these qualitative researchers, the researcher conducting this study took the following steps to ensure credibility and dependability.

**Credibility.** To address credibility, Creswell and Miller (2000) offered nine strategies for qualitative researchers, and recommended that at least two procedures be used to ensure a study of high quality (Angen, 2000). Three of the strategies from this list (disconfirming evidence, member checking, and rich, thick descriptions) were employed to increase credibility in this study. These three strategies are appropriate for researchers who view their research through a constructivist or interpretive lens.
Disconfirming evidence. Disconfirming evidence is a strategy whereby the researcher first establishes themes or categories in a study, then proceeds to search through the data to identify examples of evidence where the data negates or disconfirms the themes. This is done to engage the researcher in examining the evidence through an alternate lens, and to enable the researcher to shift from her perspective and to account for other possibilities. This process advances the credibility of the study “because reality, according to constructivists, is multiple and complex” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). In this study, the researcher reviewed each transcript, line-by-line, after the six themes had been identified, to seek disconfirming evidence. Such instances were reported in the analysis.

Member checking. Member checking involves the solicitation of participants’ perspective of the findings and interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2013). It is one of the most important strategies for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, as cited in Creswell, 2013). Researchers who use this strategy take the raw data (transcripts) and the findings back to the participants in order to confirm the credibility of the data (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher in this study used member checking by having participants verify the accuracy of the transcript data after each interview. Participants’ responses and ideas for redefining the themes were incorporated into the narrative analysis of the findings. By including the participants in this way, an additional level of credibility is reflected in the analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Rich, thick descriptions. Another method that was used to ensure credibility was the use of rich, thick descriptions. Thick descriptions are those that provide “deep, dense, detailed accounts” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). Rich descriptions are those that provide “abundant, interconnected details” (Stake, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Such detailed descriptions
allow the reader to gain a strong sense of the described phenomena, and potentially provide readers “the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study” (Creswell & Maxwell, 2000, p. 128). This strategy increases credibility through the lens of the readers who are “transported into a setting or situation” (Creswell & Maxwell, 2000, p. 129). In this study, the researcher provided multiple quotes that illustrated each theme that was presented. Through the presentation of relevant and meaningful transcript data, the researcher endeavored to help readers trust that the findings were credible.

**Dependability.** Dependability, fundamental to trustworthiness in a qualitative study, refers to evidence that the findings are consistent and can be repeated. Creswell (2013) noted that Lincoln and Guba’s criteria for trustworthiness is frequently used in qualitative studies. A key feature of the criteria is dependability. The primary strategy for establishing dependability is to provide an inquiry audit, also referred to as an independent audit (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). An inquiry audit requires that the researcher maintain rigor throughout the research process and store all data in a manner that would allow another researcher to follow the study “from the initial documentation through to the final report” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 183). By creating an audit trail, the researcher can engage individuals who are external to the study in the process of examining a study’s trustworthiness (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Creswell & Miller, 2000) noted that the audit is often used in dissertations. Dissertation committees hold the researcher up to standards for demonstrating the trustworthiness of their study through careful review of the documentation provided by the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To create the audit trail for this study, the researcher documented the inquiry process through “journaling and memoing, keeping a research log of all activities, developing a data collection chronology, and recording data analysis procedures
clearly” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). An experienced faculty member in the graduate education program at Northeastern University served as the researcher’s advisor and ensured that the study followed appropriate protocol. Additionally, the study was evaluated by a second Northeastern University faculty member who served as a reader throughout the entire writing process. Lastly, a practitioner with an earned education doctorate and who was serving as an education leader in a California school district served as a third reader. Prior to embarking, the study’s protocols were evaluated by the Northeastern University Internal Review Board, and, at its completion, by the thesis defense committee. These measures ensured the credibility and dependability of the study, as well as the feasibility of replication.

Threats to internal validity. Maxwell (1992) identified five types of problems that can occur in establishing validity in a qualitative study: descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability, and evaluative validity. Problems in descriptive validity occur at the outset of the initial descriptions presented by the researcher. These can stem from mishearing, mistranscribing, or misremembering statements made by participants. Problems in interpretive validity occur in the researcher’s subjective attempt to interpret the participants’ meaning-making of the phenomena being studied. Errors in interpretation can occur as a result of researcher bias, or they can be caused by the researcher’s failure to probe and delve deeper into a participant’s responses. Problems in theoretical validity have to do with incoherence among the concepts of the theory that frame the study or how the concepts are applied to the phenomena. Problems with generalizability refer to the extent to which the researcher can apply the findings of the study to other settings. Lastly, problems with evaluative validity derive from the researcher taking a stance of evaluation, rather than one of that is descriptive or interpretive.

Yardley (as cited in Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) provided a set of four principles that
can address the varied issues of quality in a study. These principles include: (a) sensitivity to context, (b) commitment and rigor, (c) transparency and coherence, and (d) impact and importance. Sensitivity to context requires that the researcher recruit purposive samples for the study and demonstrate appreciation for the interactional nature of IPA data collection. This involves such measures as attentiveness to establishing a comfortable setting for the interviewee by showing empathy, noticing potential difficulties in explaining by the interviewees, and addressing the power relationship that can occur between the researcher and participants. It also requires that the researcher utilize a considerable amount of exact quotes from the transcripts to give a voice to the participants and provide the reader the opportunity to check the interpretations that are made by the researcher. Sensitivity to context also comes from the researcher’s use of the literature to orient the study and the findings. The researcher in this study maintained an awareness of the need to be sensitive to context throughout the study and made continuous efforts to be sensitive to the needs of the participant. She worked to build trust with the participants, and she incorporated a substantial portion of the participants’ exact words into the final thesis. Furthermore, the researcher used the member checking strategy to ensure that preliminary themes were consistent with the meaning-making of the participants.

The second principle, commitment and rigor, is demonstrated in the study through the researcher’s efforts to ensure high quality in-depth interviews that ask appropriate probing questions, and in the researcher’s effort to include a complete and thorough analysis of the data. The descriptions are “sufficiently interpretative, moving beyond a simple description of what is there to an interpretation of what it means” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 181). Additionally, the researcher contextualized the background information about the individual participants as well as the themes they shared. Each theme was supported with sufficient quotes
to fully illustrate its accuracy.

The third principle, transparency and coherence, is demonstrated in the study by the researcher’s clarity in the descriptions of the steps taken in each stage of the study. The researcher thoroughly documented the data collection and analysis process in order to create an audit trail. Additionally, the researcher addressed ambiguities and contradictions in the findings. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) noted that coherence does not mean contradictions should be excluded; rather, they provide “the richest part of the text” (p. 182). The researcher thus skillfully and coherently analyzed and documented contradictions that were found in the data. Furthermore, the researcher demonstrated a commitment to IPA and the nuances of presenting an interpretative report in an IPA study. The researcher’s writing presented the sense-making of the participants’ experiences with the phenomena.

The fourth principle, impact and importance, is demonstrated through the presentation of the problem of practice and significance and through the discussion in Chapter 5, where the researcher addresses how the study might offer something that is “interesting, important, or useful” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 183) to the readers.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study took place in four California high schools where the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy were being implemented for all students, including ELLs. Because this study utilized a small sample of seven participants, the study cannot be generalized to all other high school settings; although it is possible that the findings may be applicable in and useful to high school settings where the specific context is highly similar. Generalizing is not the goal in qualitative interpretative studies; rather, the goal is to provide an examination of how people make sense of their lived experiences. The study followed the protocol of constant comparison
(Boeije, 2002) to increase the potential for generalizing, yet the small sample size of the study makes generalizing to other education contexts limited.

Another limitation is that the researcher in this study was a novice in using the IPA methodology, which requires considerable skill development and experience in conducting high quality interviews that effectively engage the participants in fruitful conversation that sheds light on how they understand their experiences of the phenomena. IPA also requires a double hermeneutic approach that requires the researcher to dually “make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 3). To accomplish this, the researcher must maintain discipline throughout the study and be self-conscious and systematic. While the researcher followed recommended procedures for IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), this study was, nonetheless, a new venture for the researcher.

Protection of Human Subjects

To rigorously protect the participants in this study, participation was voluntary. At initial contact, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and were asked to sign an informed consent form. Volunteers were assured that they would not face undue risk, and that they could opt out of the study at any time. Additionally, the consent form explained how the data would be collected, how anonymity would be preserved, and how the data would be used. To reduce issues of power imbalances that could occur between the researcher and the participants during the interview process, the researcher selected high schools that were not her own place of work. Furthermore, there was no coercion or pressure for participants to sign consent forms.

In the research interview situation, an unequal balance of power exists between the interviewer and the interviewee. In an interview, the researcher comes to the interview with a
scientific and scholarly advantage, which enables the interviewer to control the situation. The interviewer “determines the interview topic, poses questions, and decides which answers to follow up, and also terminates the conversation” (Kvale, 2007, p. 15). To lessen the threat of control or power in the interviews, the researcher was fully transparent with the interviewees about the research topic beforehand and was open to any questions about the goals of the research. The researcher shared her own educational and professional background and explained her interest in the research topic to build trust before the initial interview. Another consequence of the power asymmetry is the possibility that a manipulative dialogue will transpire in which the interviewer seeks information of which the interviewee is unaware. This type of hidden agenda was minimized by having all the interview questions pre-screened by experienced faculty at Northeastern University as well as by the Northeastern University Internal Review Board.

Another risk that can be posed to the participants in the study is discomfort in answering particular questions that they find threatening or that put them in a vulnerable position. To mediate this, the researcher assured each participant at the beginning of each interview that they always had the option of not answering any questions that were uncomfortable, that they could request that the interview be discontinued at any time, and that they were under no obligation to continue if they found the interview experience dissatisfying in any way.

Summary

This study used the IPA methodology to collect and analyze the data on how high school teachers made meaning of their experiences of implementing the CCSS for ELLs. IPA is a qualitative methodology that is an offshoot of phenomenology, which seeks to understand how participants make meaning of life experiences or phenomenon, rather than achieving the greater goal of learning the essence of phenomenon. It is characterized by influences of
phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, 1996). In IPA, it is understood that it is impossible to fully bracket the experiences of the researcher, as those experiences continually influence the researcher’s interpretation of data; however, through reflection and the iterative process of the hermeneutic circle, the researcher comes closer to understanding the authentic meaning-making of the participants. IPA studies are typically small, with as few as one participant, or as many as 15. This study included seven participants, who were recruited using criterion sampling to ensure that all had experienced the phenomena of making instructional shifts in order to implement the CCSS for ELLs. The study collected data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that followed a schedule of three interviews, and that used open-ended questions to address the research question. The interview data was analyzed through an inductive process that included first and second cycle coding, jotting, analytic memos, and constant comparison (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Through this process, six significant themes emerged, and the researcher developed a narrative-like report of the themes, using extensive quotes from the participants. Various measures were taken to ensure credibility and dependability, to minimize threats to the validity, and to ensure the quality of the study.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to understand how California teachers experienced instructional shifts as a result of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), especially in relation to work with English language learners (ELLs). This chapter begins with an introduction, which includes the purpose of the study and the organization of the chapter. Next, each of the participant’s profiles is highlighted, providing information about each participant’s years of teaching, subject area, experiences as a high school student, influences to become a teacher, initial teacher training, and recent trainings to work with ELLs. The following section, provides the context for the research study, and includes a table of the types of trainings available to teachers at the school sites as well as a description of each of the four school sites. Next, the research question that guided the study is presented. The next section includes the significant themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. The significant themes and subthemes are presented visually with a table and through the narratives of the participant transcripts. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary.

Participant Profiles

This study included seven participants. Only teachers who taught in the core areas of English, science, or social studies; who had been teaching for at least six years; and who had ELLs in their classes were selected. The participants in this study were:

Mr. B. Mr. B had taught social studies for 22 years. At the time of the study, Mr. B was teaching three college prep level world history classes and two honors level world history classes. His prep level classes had intermediate level ELLs. When he was in high school, Mr. B said he was a hard-working student, had a high grade point average, was involved in student
government, and excelled in social studies. He recalled that his classes were taught through a traditional pedagogical approach:

[I]t was usually the lecturer format, where the teacher was up there giving lecture and the students taking notes…You sit in the straight rows, the teacher is basically lecturing. Book work, a lot of bookwork and lecture. There would be some partner group work, but it wasn’t like today…we didn’t do [that] a whole lot that I recall. It was more individual…I just loved it. For me, a teacher standing up lecturing to the class is exciting…I love that.

In regards to participation in classroom discussions, Mr. B was hesitant because he worried, “What if I’m wrong?” Nonetheless, he shared, “I would usually have something to say.” Mr. B described himself as a motivated student for whom accuracy was important.

Mr. B went to the university on a scholarship and wanted to become a social studies teacher, but his father discouraged him from it, telling him, “There’s no money in that.” After completing a degree in business and working in that field for a few years, Mr. B ultimately found his way back to his original plan and completed the requirements to become a social studies teacher. As he entered the profession, Mr. B reflected, “I [had] always been lectured to, so I thought, ‘For another student who doesn’t like history, how can [I] as a teacher…give them some interest in it, see how important it is?’” While Mr. B was a student who preferred a lecture format of instruction, he realized that he would need to find a variety of more innovative ways to motivate students in his subject area.

During Mr. B’s teacher preparation, training for ELLs was not required, but he did get Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) training seven years prior through
the district. He said his greatest challenge in working with ELLs was the year he was given a sheltered section of United States History:

I had one U.S. class several years back and that was the ELL class. They threw me in there, and let me tell you, that was the one of the hardest years I’ve had…I kind of felt like I was thrown in there without much training. I didn’t really have much training or experience with ELL kids at that time.

With little training or preparation, Mr. B struggled the year he had a sheltered section of history.

**Mr. L.** Mr. L had taught social studies for the past 10 years. At the time of the study, Mr. L was teaching three college prep world history classes, one IB class for juniors, and one IB class for seniors. His college prep level world history classes had the widest range of students, and Mr. L said he felt some of them were not properly placed. He stated:

Some of them are poorly put into the class; they should be taking an advanced class…

Some of them are placed properly and those are probably the kids who find the class most beneficial and most interesting because it’s at a level that they can engage and understand and then the students [at] the lower level probably shouldn’t be in the class, but there is no other class of them.

Mr. L’s description of the challenge of teaching a class with a wide range of ability provided insights into the challenges of managing students with a wide range of ability levels.

As a high school student, Mr. L said he was focused on athletics, interested mostly in English and social studies. Although he was an advanced student, he stated, “I never really applied myself in high school. I just kind of showed up, went through the motions.” Instruction while he was in school, he said, also followed a traditional format:
I always wanted to be called on when I was in high school; most of the education was read the book, answer a worksheet, listen to the teacher give a lecture. There wasn’t a lot of engagement or a lot of activities like that. In some of my advanced classes, the teacher would facilitate discussions but it wasn’t like Socratic seminars. It wasn’t what you think; it was more to see if we understood content of the material.

Mr. L described discussions as a means to check whether students understood the content. His reflections illustrated that he had experienced a typical teacher-centered learning experience while he was a high school student. Years later, this experience informed his teaching practices.

When Mr. L went to college, he majored in history, with the plan to become a lawyer. Once he graduated; however, a relative shared the realities of law school with him, and he decided instead to follow the path of his mother and sister and go into teaching. His early objective of going into teaching was to share “knowledge with people” and to share “interesting things that are going on in the world.” He stated that his own background of being highly capable but not highly motivated informed him of the following:

There are different ways to assess or know if a student understands something…how else can I figure out if they know the material or what if they don’t know the material because they are not interested in it? So it just let me know that a grade that a student gets in a class isn’t a true reflection of what it is that they actually know.

Overall, Mr. L’s own history was a resource that later would help him better understand his students’ learning processes. When describing his training to work with ELLs, Mr. L stated he had practically zero. When I was going through the preparation program, they talked about English language learners and theory, but practical applications, almost zero. They
would give us English language development books and they would talk about SDAIE strategies and that’s pretty much it. Through my ten years of education like other than somebody throwing SDAIE strategies at me or going to a one hour class once a year where the English language development would give me tips, very little training when it comes to English language learners.

He further explained:

After you get away from the credential program, after you get away from BTSA [Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment], the sites that I have worked at…English language learners has not been the focus…For example, this year all of the training that we’ve had so far we had one hour, not even one hour, it was about a 45 minute class of some strategies to help with your English language learners.

Mr. L expressed having received limited professional development or training to work with ELLs after finishing his teacher training and BTSA program.

**Mrs. R.** Mrs. R had taught English for 21 years. Her first 13 years were at a private school, and the eight years prior to the interview, she was in the public school system. At the time of the study, Mrs. R was teaching five sections of ninth grade college prep level English. She had found that many of her students had experienced social promotion, or passing a grade level with no required minimum level of academic achievement, “so part of what I have to do is train them with the idea that, you know, that everything they do, that their grades and credits, right from the beginning, that they matter.” Mrs. R described her effort to change students’ understanding of how they needed to perform in school. Throughout some of her students’ education before high school, failure in a class or several classes did not mean that they could not
progress to the next grade level. In high school, she tried to help students understand that it was critical to do well and pass all classes in order to graduate.

Mrs. R recalled her experiences as a high school student who attended a selective, all-girls private school:

I was a high achiever in high school. I went to a private, all-girls school and achievement was sort of the norm there. I graduated number two in my class…I liked school. I found it easy. I took the toughest classes and had absolutely no trouble in school, so I was a high-achieving student.

In regards to engagement, “I participated frequently. If there were questions that were asked, I would be happy to participate. I liked to participate.” The classes, she said, engaged students:

We did a lot of discussion. I think, you know, with that kind of a population…99% of the students had done the work. Had read the stuff they were supposed to read…and would love to…do analysis or do the problems…Everybody’s opinion was valued and everybody…There was no right answer, kind of thing, so that was really valued…

As this and subsequent sections of the interview revealed, the strong engagement Mrs. R experienced in high school shaped her commitment to bringing enthusiasm and an affirming approach to teaching.

Mrs. R went to college as a pre-med major, but during her second year, she said she felt that she had reached her capacity in math and sciences. Seeing some friends at the university who had chosen to pursue teaching, Mrs. R decided to make a change:

I decided to change my major, my favorite classes and the ones I did best in were English classes and so, I changed my major to English. Then, [the university] had a great teaching credential program that many of my friends were planning to go to, and so, I
looked into it and thought ‘I can do that’…I ultimately knew I wanted to have a family and stuff, so at the time I thought, ‘If I am a teacher, and I’m home on summers and vacations with my kids, I would like that.’

The data indicated that Mrs. R’s decision to become a teacher was influenced by several factors, including how successful she felt in her major, choices her friends were making, and the type of lifestyle she hoped to live. Going into teaching, Mrs. R hoped to be an influence to her students:

I was a good student and I loved my teachers, you know, especially a couple of English teachers that were my favorite; I think one of my objectives was to be like them, and to influence students like those teachers did. I thought that I’d really like to be like them…

Additionally, teaching content was also a motivating factor. She said she wanted “to teach novels and things like that, I love that kind of material so that part of it as well.” In short, Mrs. R said she desired to influence her students in a positive manner as some of her own teachers had influenced her.

Mrs. R described her experiences in regards to the teacher preparation program and training to work with ELLs:

I got my credentials almost 30 years ago, when there was no such thing as, you know, CLAD or CTEL or any of those things, so it was not built into my credential. Then I taught where there were no English language learners for 13 of my 21 years, so 13 of those years I taught where there was…no need for language strategies or anything. Then when I went to work at the school where I am now, and it was a cornerstone of the curriculum, I had to basically learn it on my own, but with the help of a lot of great colleagues.
Mrs. R’s experience was unique in that her teaching experience was divided between two schools, one where teaching ELLs was not an issue because there were no ELLs, and a second site later where teaching ELLs was essential.

**Mr. S.** Mr. S taught science for 17 years. During the time of this study, the participant was teaching three geology classes and two physics classes. Mr. S described the students in the two courses as very different. Regarding the physics students, he stated, “I think a lot of them are in the AVID program. They are planning on going to college.” In contrast, describing the students in the geology classes, he explained:

[Y]ou got some students who for one reason or another just don’t like math; they want to take something without math in it…geology I think is a lot simpler curriculum than physics or chemistry or IB biology or anything like that. The geology students aren’t planning on going to college…I think some just want to graduate from high school.

Mr. S described a teaching load that included students with different outlooks on their futures.

In high school, Mr. S said he was an average student who was able to take both college prerequisites and electives such as auto shop and metal shop. He remembered being exceptionally shy, stating, “I would say extremely quiet. So I wasn’t very good at classroom discussion. I don’t remember classroom discussions. I don’t know if that was a strategy too many people used back then.” Yet, he recalled circumstances during which he would choose to participate, “I guess if I felt comfortable with a topic, I would feel comfortable giving my opinion or giving my information.” Finally, he recalled that instruction was traditional: “There was lecture and there was question and answer.” Although he was shy, Mr. S described his participation in school as primarily related to his level of comfort with the content.
After high school, Mr. S joined the U.S. Navy and then went on to college with the plan of becoming an electrical engineer and working for a power company in California. When he graduated college, however, it was “during a recession and so there were no power company engineering jobs available.” After a few years working in management, he remembered a teacher recruitment letter he had previously received from a large school district, “I tore it up real quick and threw it away…But it was still in the back of my mind…then I just couldn’t reject it anymore and I became a teacher.” That recruitment letter resonated with Mr. S; it eventually led to him seek a teaching position.

Mr. S said he did take classes that specifically addressed the needs of ELLs during his teacher preparation program. He recalled: “It was fairly new at the time but [the university] saw it coming and knew we were going to have to get it, so they just required everybody to get it early. That’s why I’ve got [the CLAD certification].” The CLAD program at the university was new, yet required:

The strength was requiring everybody to do it. I think that was a good strength because I heard there were some teachers who wanted to opt out…They were pushing it and they were very strong about it so I guess the strength was the willingness to implement the program and make it work even though they were just starting out.

While Mr. S said some students in the teacher preparation program were resistant to the CLAD component, he viewed it as a strong point in his formation and training that the university required all students to go through the certification.

**Mrs. J.** Mrs. J, when interviewed, had taught English for fifteen years. At the time of the study, she was teaching all senior-level English classes, with one of them targeting all ELLs. She noted that “most of my ELL students are pretty high level. They don’t seem to be having
too much of a problem understanding.” Regarding her experience as a high school student, Mrs. J said:

I was terrible. I was not the best student. I was really good in the subject that I teach, English. That just made perfect sense to me, so I had no problems in English at all. Otherwise I basically went to high school to have fun. I wanted to see my friends. I wanted to have a good time. I never failed anything, but there were some classes if I got a D I was happy. I was passing. That was good, and I was fine with it.

Furthermore, when it came to engagement in classroom discussions, Mrs. J shared that:

[a] lot of times it was the teacher and my relationship with the teacher. I had some teachers in high school who didn’t even know who we were. They had no idea what our names were. They wouldn’t even recognize us as a student in their classroom, but I had some really amazing awesome teachers, too, who just brought school to life, brought the curriculum to life, and they knew who we were. We had a good relationship with them, and those teachers I wanted to make proud. I would do anything for those teachers.

Mrs. J’s statement illustrated that her willingness and motivation to participate in classroom discussions was directly related to the extent to which her relationship with the teacher was positive.

Mrs. J went to college as a psychology major with the goal of becoming a social worker; she said she had no intention of becoming a teacher:

It was kind of a fluke. I never wanted to be a teacher at all. I remember sitting in my eleventh grade English class and our English teacher telling us about her job, and somebody was asking her how much she gets paid, and I thought, you know, it is just not worth it.
When she was nearly finished with her undergraduate degree, a friend told her that a nearby
district was hiring substitutes. Through that experience, she found her calling to teaching. She
explained:

I had no idea I would enjoy high school. I’m glad I had that experience because it led me
in the right direction. I had no idea that was going to be where my life took me, and I
think I definitely landed in the right place.

Mrs. J described that her early objectives as a teacher were to “…make sure not to screw up, and
hopefully make sure the kids were successful. I feel like when I look back on those days I feel
like I had no clue what I was doing.” Mrs. J’s statement revealed her concern to do well so that
her students could succeed.

Mrs. J stated that her teacher preparation program did provide her some training to work
with ELLs, but she had a few caveats, including:

I don’t feel like I’ve had all that much. I feel like most of my training came from my
credential, and I completed that maybe 14 years ago. That was a long time ago. I don’t
feel like I’ve ever really had any updated training. Not a whole lot to be completely
honest with you.

Mrs. J’s statement illustrated the limited and inconsistent training provided to teachers working
with ELLs following initial preparation programs.

Mr. C. Mr. C, when interviewed, had taught social studies for 12 years. At the time of
the study, Mr. C was teaching five sections of college prep level government to senior students.
All of his classes had ELLs with various levels of English proficiency.

In high school, Mr. C remembered being a high performing student, involved in sports.
Neither of his parents attended college, so getting a college degree was never a topic at home. In
school, Mr. C said he was engaged and motivated, that he wanted to learn: “I was the one that always wanted to get involved. It wasn’t looking for attention; it’s just that I wanted to be smarter. Something drove me.” He remembered a traditional, teacher-centered type of instruction when he was a student stating:

There were no real discussions. Not in the days that I went to school, not like now, where there are groups, there’s the pair-share who like to get their input and have the students analyze articles. We didn’t do that. It was just a quick read with the instructor, and there was really no positive feedback…You didn’t get that motivating feedback to keep trying. It’s a lot different now.

In sum, Mr. C described a high school experience that provided him limited discussion opportunities.

After high school, Mr. C earned his associate of arts degree and worked for 16 years at a high school as a maintenance worker, school bus driver, and coach. His inspiration to become a teacher came from a physical education teacher while he was working as a coach:

What motivated me is as a coach, I could see the connection I was making positively with my athletes. There was one particular physical education teacher; she asked me, ‘Why don’t you become a teacher?’ I [had] never thought about that. That’s what got me going…not only that…the difference you can make. I saw it on the athletic field…That was a great motivator…I felt like I was wasting my talents of my ability to connect with kids.

Mr. C’s early objectives going into teaching were to “teach these kids life lessons, as well as the content. Using the content for life lessons, and just to nurture these kids that don’t have it.” Mr.
C expressed a hope of reaching beyond the content to support students in providing them with lessons on life.

In Mr. C’s teacher preparation program, including strategies for working with ELLs, was embedded throughout his coursework. As he described:

It wasn’t like we went every single day to learn about it, it was just a few probably weeks, then we would go to something else. We’d actually learn how to implement it. I wouldn’t say it was extensive…it was just part of that credentialing program.

Mr. C recalled that his teacher preparation program had provided what he referred to as periodic lessons that addressed the needs of ELLs. For example, describing the effectiveness of his teacher preparation program to address the needs of struggling students and ELLs, Mr. C stated:

It was really well put together and explained very thoroughly how you can use it and why you use it, and how this would connect, these different strategies…it actually made me aware of other students’ struggles that I wasn’t aware of, just that language barrier, and how to use different tools to get to them…That opened my eyes. I said, ‘I’m going to use those when I become a teacher’…I did use it later. In fact, in my student teaching, I used a lot of that.

One year prior to the interview, Mr. C said he had attended a full-day AVID training with other social studies teachers that provided him with effective strategies to teach the CCSS. He recalled: “Last year we went to a really good AVID training…The students enjoy…the hands on analysis of coming up with their own ideas, working with groups instead of just [me] sitting in a chair lecturing.” Mr. C said he found that the AVID strategies in which he had been trained effectively prepared him to work with and motivate his students.
Mr. N. Mr. N had taught science for nine years when interviewed. His first seven years of teaching were at Catholic middle school. His last two years were at a public school at the high school level. In both systems, he was held accountable to teach the California standards. At the time of the study, he was teaching four sections of college prep biology and one section of IB biology. All of his college prep level classes had some ELLs.

As a high school student, Mr. N. said he was a high performing student who always earned good grades. However, he stated that he faced limitations:

I took mostly college prep. I didn’t really take any honors courses at the time, mainly because I wasn’t really offered, I think. Wasn’t in that group. I just felt like there was a group of people that were always offered but I was never in that group. I don’t know why.

He was involved in student council and recalled his participation in class having much to do with how comfortable he was with his teacher. He described this dynamic stating:

It depended a lot on the teacher. With the teachers that were more strict, I’d always be quiet, hardly speak. I think I was more on the shy end overall. Some of those where I felt more comfortable, I was constantly involved in speaking.

Overall, he recalled high school classes as being taught through traditional and teacher-centered approaches. He described, “I think back in those days, it was more teacher talking and students listening or writing, for the most part, at least from what I remember.” Mr. N’s experience in high school regarding his recollections of how classes were taught was consistent with the experience of most of the other participants.

Growing up, Mr. N said he enjoyed playing school with his younger siblings, where he would act as the teacher:
I remember playing school and always being the teacher. I think I’ve always liked that idea. Then somewhere along the line everyone says, ‘If you’re a teacher you don’t make any money’…towards senior year of high school I was like, ‘Oh, I can’t be a teacher. I’m going to go into science. I’m going to be a doctor or I’m going to do something with science.’

After college, Mr. N worked as a microbiologist for a period of years, but became disillusioned by some of the unethical practices he had observed. He had planned to become a lawyer and had started law school, but a serious eye injury and near blindness set him back. Ultimately, he said, he heard his calling to become a teacher through his priest, “My priest actually said, ‘We need science teachers and I need you to come in and teach.’” For Mr. N, this calling came at the right time, and he answered by applying for the position.

With regard to training in working with ELLs, Mr. N remembers his teacher preparation program. He said it provided

…a lot of the multi-cultural and the Language Learners [methods] built into every course.

We always had at least one unit diving into how to make sure they understand this, how to teach vocabulary, SDAIE, all of those different methods.

Additionally, he stated:

There was at least one full semester-long course that I took on this. It was a multi-cultural and Language Learner class integrated together…We went through all those different strategies and how to incorporate culture and how to incorporate the different strategies.

In the district where Mr. N works, he said, “They do have some things like that but as far as [English] Language Learners and that, I haven’t seen too much of it.” In fact, when Mr. N first
started working in his district he said he was “given the class and it said ‘sheltered’ and I didn’t even know what sheltered meant. What does sheltered mean? They didn’t tell me sheltered was ELL. I didn’t know that.” As a new teacher in his school district, Mr. N was assigned a class with primarily ELLs, without any explanation of the student make-up or what the word “sheltered” meant.

**Context Analysis**

This study took place in southern California in three school districts, in which a total of four high schools were represented. All of the high schools were large, ranging from 2,000 to 3,000 students. Each of the high schools served ELLs, and a majority were from Spanish-speaking families. The percentage of the school population that was ELL at each site ranged from 14.1% to 18.4%. Many of the students at each school were of a low socioeconomic status and qualified for free or reduced lunch. The percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged students ranged from 77.7% to 95.0% at the four high schools. Additionally, many of the students in the communities represented were slated to become the first in their families to attend college.

Participants described parent engagement in the schools as limited, possibly due to lack of confidence or to the feeling, as one teacher expressed, that education would be “handled at the school.” Another teacher described her perception of parent engagement:

I think that some of the issues they might have stem from, you know, families who are working really hard but don’t have the time and/or the skills to assist their student at home. They’ve got to depend on what they get at school.

All of the schools had Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID) programs to provide college readiness for students who would be the first in their families to attend a four-year
college. Each site was implementing its own form of professional development for teachers that addressed the CCSS. The next section provides descriptions of the high schools and the context from which each one implemented the CCSS.

The following table represents the various training opportunities that were available at each of the four high schools, as described by the participants during the interviews:

Table 4.1

*Training Opportunities Available to Participants*

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<th>Training Opportunity</th>
<th>High School 1</th>
<th>High School 2</th>
<th>High School 3</th>
<th>High School 4</th>
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<td>Writing Across the Curriculum</td>
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At all four of the high school, common professional development opportunities included achievement teams or professional learning communities (PLCs) and SDAIE strategies. Other areas of professional development varied across the schools. The following section provides detailed descriptions from the participants regarding the types of professional development for ELLs that was available at the school sites.

**High School 1.** High School 1’s major professional development initiative was the use of PLCs for teachers within departments to collaborate about topics such as the CCSS, instructional methods, and student needs. Within a few years, each PLC across the district was provided a three-day training in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), which provided specific strategies for addressing the needs of ELLs. “Last year, we went to I think it was three trainings at the district where we had sub-coverage and went to the SIOP [training]…That helped because what I like is I like to see the strategy.” SIOP is a research-based model for delivering instruction to ELLs developed by leading scholars studying English language learners and English language development methodology, specifically Jana Echevarria and Mary Ellen Vogt from California State University, Long Beach, and Deborah J. Short from the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington D.C.

High School 1 did not have an English Learner (EL) Coordinator or an English Language Development (ELD) teacher who was readily accessible to provide teacher support; rather, for the two years before interviews were conducted, the site had a full-time English Learner (EL) Coach. During the first of the two years, the EL Coach spent a great deal of time at the district office for her own training as a coach, “Our EL coach is in her second year now doing it…She was going to a lot of trainings that the district was offering. She was there, but she was off site a lot more. They were giving her training.” Though in her second year, one participant noted, “I
think she’s kind of underutilized. I don’t think teachers really take advantage of it…the teachers, including me, could probably make better use of her.” While the site had invested in an EL coach, that individual’s role was still being established.

**High School 2.** High School 2’s major professional development effort was building teacher capacity to address the CCSS through PLCs, “When I first watched and attended the PLC training…I thought, you know what? It seems to work for them. What I’m doing is not working. Something’s got to change. I need to be open minded.” The professional development trainings at the site tended to be geared for the general teacher population, and not specifically towards instructing ELLs, “We don’t ever really go to training…for our ELLs population…It’s more in general and it’s useful for this.” While the training was not specifically targeted for ELLs, teachers said they did develop skills for supporting all students.

While ELL trainings were limited at the site, the school boasted a variety of personnel that teachers could go to for support, including the EL Coordinator, the EL Coach, and a teacher that taught an EL support class, “If I really need something, I can always go to our EL coordinator. She’s always helpful.” Another participant commented:

I will definitely go to my EL coach. Thankfully this year, we do have one…the one we have this year is truly amazing…We also have our EL English teacher. She worked with the EL students for a support English class. She’s amazing because she knows pretty much all of our EL students. She can pretty much tell you anything that you need to know about the students individually, give you ideas on how to help them.

This participant saw the potential value and helpful expertise of having an EL coach at the site.

**High School 3.** High School 3’s major professional development initiative was addressing the writing expectations of the CCSS through writing across the curriculum, using the
widely adopted Step Up To Writing method, which had been developed in the mid-1980s by Maureen Auman, a former middle school teacher. Auman’s method provides students with tools to organize their writing such as color-coding of sentences and graphic organizers. At High School 3, teachers were collaborating in PLCs to review writing samples within subject areas. One participant shared, “In the writing…a lot of students aren’t very good at writing.” This comment acknowledged the need for teachers to address writing at the school under the CCSS. 

High School 3 typically offered one specific training for teaching ELLs per year to staff; it was voluntary. Besides that, the school offered trainings that were geared to all students that also served the ELL population. As one participant commented, “You know, at some of the training I received here, it seems like it’s embedded…we have a high population [of ELLs]…If you wanted more, you can receive it.” At the beginning of the school year, teachers could select an ELL training that they felt would be helpful, “There’s only been the few that I’ve seen that are voluntary.” One teacher shared, “we’ve met with the ELD teacher for about 45 minutes. She’ll give us some strategies that she uses with her ELD kids. But that’s it.” This teacher’s comment illustrated limited training opportunities for teachers to become proficient in ELL strategies.

High School 3 did not have a site EL Coach, but it did have a supportive EL Coordinator who taught ELD classes, “I know our ELD teacher. She’s great. I’m sure if I went up to her and asked for help and resources she would be more than willing to help me out. It’s just not something that I’ve done,” one participant shared. While High School 3 did not have an EL Coach, the EL Coordinator was an available source of knowledge and support for teachers at the school.
**High School 4.** The major initiative at High School 4 had been using Achievement Teams (similar to PLCs) to provide a space for teachers who taught the same subject to have opportunities to collaborate on CCSS units developed by district teachers. One participant observed: “We’ve had a lot of collaboration on Common Core. We have worked on some strategies to make it accessible to the students, but I don’t think we’ve addressed it specifically [for] ELLs.” Teachers’ at that site spent time collaborating, which had notable impact, as one participant described:

The one thing that I have noticed is that the level of collaboration amongst the teachers on my team and the benefit that that has provided for the students is really responsible for the leap in the success of our students. The commitment that we have to making sure that we implement the standards, that commitment has really been a benefit as well.

While the Achievement Teams did not specifically address ELL needs, they had proved to be a positive influence and had an important impact at the school site.

High School 4 also did not have an on-site EL Coach, but teachers they did have access to EL support teachers, an EL Coordinator, and a District EL Coach. ELL instructional strategies were provided to all staff at two faculty meetings per year. According to one teacher, “We have EL presentations as well by our amazing professionals from the district and from our school…she had a foldable with eight sides…She said it could help anybody.” Participants described that AVID teachers had also provided useful strategies: “Our AVID team, I think, has provided, interestingly, the greatest number of strategies I would say.” While High School 4 also did not have an EL coach, there were ELL trainings each year as well as AVID trainings for teachers.
**Research Question**

The research question that guided this study was: What is the experience of high school content teachers who are implementing the Common Core State Standards for English language learners?

**Significant Themes**

After the first and second cycles of coding and analysis, six significant themes emerged to answer the research question: What is the experience of high school content teachers who are implementing the Common Core State Standards for English language learners? These themes provide insight into how teachers experienced the shift from the earlier California standards to the CCSS. The significant themes and subthemes are detailed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Emergent Themes from Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Earlier mandates were constraining and left teachers open to the CCSS</td>
<td>• Dense standards pressured teachers to move through a rushed timeline</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Accountability measures forced a test-focused form of instruction</td>
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<td>• Rapid pacing and test-focus led to superficial learning</td>
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<td>Theme 2: Teachers viewed the CCSS as an opportunity to build students’ competence</td>
<td>• Critical thinking and analysis were emphasized</td>
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<td>• Primary source documents were essential</td>
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<td>• Writing had a renewed focus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Creativity was prioritized</td>
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<td>• Project-based learning was important</td>
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<td>• Students would be college and career ready</td>
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<td>Theme 3: Teachers needed more preparation for the instructional shifts</td>
<td>• Teachers felt unprepared for the instructional shifts</td>
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<td>• Teachers felt challenged in addressing the CCSS with ELLs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teachers viewed colleagues as lacking understanding of the instructional shifts</td>
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<td>• Trainings were limited in availability and not substantial or sustained</td>
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<td>Theme 4: Teachers experienced greater satisfaction with the instructional shifts</td>
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<td>• Teachers felt less pressure to rush and prepare students for a test</td>
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<td>• Teachers experienced more flexibility in selecting learning topics</td>
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<td>• Teachers were able to engage students more deeply in content</td>
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<th>Theme 5: Teachers described improved student engagement with the CCSS</th>
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<td>• Teachers created student-centered classrooms</td>
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<td>• Students participated in more collaboration</td>
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<td>• Students took greater ownership of their learning</td>
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<th>Theme 6: Teachers experienced success teaching ELLs the CCSS</th>
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<td>• Teachers observed student success when they created a safe learning environment for ELLs</td>
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<td>1. Establishing comfort</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Developing trust</td>
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<td>3. Building confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teachers observed student success when they used discussion strategies that worked for ELLs</td>
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<td>1. SDAIE strategies</td>
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<td>2. Accountable Talk® and sentence stems/frames</td>
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<td>3. Socratic seminars</td>
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<td>• Teachers saw student success when they gave ELLs needed supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Scaffolds</td>
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<td>2. L1 use as an option</td>
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<td>3. Period of practice</td>
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<td>4. Differentiated instruction</td>
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**Theme 1: Earlier mandates were constraining and left teachers open to the CCSS.**

With the earlier California state standards, all of the teachers in the study experienced varying levels of stress or pressure due to strict timelines or pacing guides to get through the dense standards to adequately prepare their students for the state test. Teachers described this time as one with a heavy test focus where only superficial learning could be accomplished. Indeed, the constraint of these earlier mandates left teachers open to the approach adopted under the CCSS.
Dense standards pressured teachers to move through a rushed timeline. During the era of the earlier California standards, teachers described immense pressures of being rushed, adhering to a pacing guide, and preparing the students to do well on the state test. For example, Mr. B shared, “With the old standards I felt a rush. Oh gosh, you guys have to be here at this point and somebody told me I was behind. You felt like you had to really rush.” Mr. C described the pressure as the …push to get through. We had a pacing guide. You had to get through this, this and this and this. We really didn’t go back…because the district and the admin wanted data, so we had to get this done. There wasn’t really a focus or even any respect to, “Wait, we’re leaving students behind. They’re not getting this.” Meanwhile, Mr. L stated, “It was a rush to try and get everything in to the students, and get some kind of assessments back.” Mrs. R also described how similar pressures affected her:

If there was something that was missed or something that we couldn’t fit in [during] the time period, then I felt like, especially because of the high stakes testing…like, uh oh, what if that’s on a test and I didn’t hit it well enough, or something like that. Testing was a big thing…It felt like it was an overwhelming number of pieces to put together into a curriculum.

Likewise, Mr. S stated:

I guess it did feel rushed and overwhelmed sometimes because the list was long…I could have used more time. Or a shorter list…Time, you just ran out of it because you had this long laundry-list of things to cover, and you had to get it done by a certain date. You would just roll through it. It was misery; it was very militaristic in a way…Sometimes I
was...discouraged...because you just had to teach that topic, and then even if you ran out of time you had to move onto the next thing. It was kind of discouraging.

Clearly, the need to move rapidly through the standards, regardless of whether all students had mastered the content was a pressure that teachers experienced.

Not surprisingly, the quality of instruction and the ability to engage students in conversations was affected by the need to rush through curriculum, as articulated by the participants. Mr. N shared:

A lot of times though, we’re limited on time because of those standards we have to hit for testing, and everything is test, test, test, test. Sometimes when they want to have a conversation that you really think could become a good conversation, you might veer away from that and back to the topic because you don’t want to spend the next 15 minutes talking about that when I have all of this lesson I have to cover.

The need to move through each of the standards rapidly ultimately limited teachers’ ability to engage students in meaningful discussions, inhibiting their capacity to help students develop critical analytical skills.

Time for engaging in hands-on projects was simultaneously stymied due to the pressure to rush through curriculum. As Mr. L stated:

Time wasn’t necessarily something that we had a lot of. If you’re in a unit you might have been able to do one kind of cool project or one kind of cool activity. But that was just about it because you were worried about moving on to what you had to cover next. It was difficult to really engage students at a deeper level.

As a result of the pressure to cover content, project-based learning and activities that engaged students in collaborative learning were kept to a bare minimum, if they happened at all.
Additionally, the ability to offer ELLs the type of instruction they needed was significantly affected. Mr. L stated, “Those students were definitely at a disadvantage because with the multiple-choice testing, with just the information dumps that were given, a lot of times language development just wasn’t [happening]…It was just hard to fit into the instruction.”

With the primary focus that teachers cover all the standards, attending to needs of ELLs was a challenge.

Teachers explained how this also affected their students. Mrs. R noted:

I think my students were challenged just because…A lot of them hadn’t had any rigor in their curriculum before, and there was a lot to do for them, and a lot to learn. I think it challenged them just to be in the classroom where there was so much to get done and so many things that probably their teachers had gone very slowly on before, and we had to try to fit things in and maybe go more quickly than they were used to. Sometimes, more quickly than we should have, I’m sure.

Mr. S used a metaphor to describe how he saw students struggling with the format of instruction that was necessary during the time of the earlier standards, “I think my students were challenged with trying to take a sip of water from a fire hydrant that was on full-blast. It was just a lot of information really fast.” While the standards meant pressure for the teachers, they also created stress for students as well that they cover an overwhelming amount of curriculum at a fast pace.

Only Mrs. J did not express frustration regarding the pressure and stress of keeping pace with fast-track guides for the standards because she chose not to adhere to them:

When we had our pacing guides, we’re supposed to do this…this day, and this is the day it’s due. I decided, you know what, maybe that’s not worth it. Maybe that’s not working…I basically just started ignoring that and doing my own thing and letting the
kids, if [they were] not ready to turn it in this day, maybe three days from now. Can you get it in? “Yeah, okay,” let’s get it in then. I started noticing over time, things were getting better and improving. I found that works better. That was still while we had our former state standards.

Although Mrs. J was able to lessen her stress during the era of the earlier California standards, most teachers did endure the pressure to keep a fast past in order to cover all of the material required to meet the standards and to keep up with their pacing guides.

**Accountability measures forced a test-focused form of instruction.** The teachers interviewed for this study described a heavy test-focus with the earlier California standards. With the heavy test-focus, teachers described the pressure to prepare students to do well, knowing that the students’ scores reflected powerfully on them and on their schools. They expressed that they felt limited in what they could do in the classroom, both content-wise and creatively, and they consequently used strategies that were geared primarily for performance on a discrete, multiple-choice test. As Mr. B stated:

I felt like there was way too much emphasis on testing…I think because there always was that kind of reflection on the teacher also, there was pressure [on] the teacher to cover the material very quickly and not as in-depth just so that they’d be ready to answer those questions, multiple-choice questions. I just felt like it hindered us a lot. I think that it hurt my teaching and it also kind of hurt the students overall… I just felt like I could have been a lot better if I would have had more time and didn’t feel so rushed. It was almost like get this material out so that they can memorize it and then review it right before the test, so hopefully they retained enough. I think it stymied my creativity overall. I never
really looked on it as a period of great pride in my teaching because I could have done a lot better.

Mrs. R also described stress resulting from the focus on testing, stating that is was

…frustrating because the emphasis that was put on testing, to me, [that] was a roadblock to good teaching. In my district and school, in particular, they even printed test-prep materials for us to use in our classrooms and our department head said, “We need to use these booklets and get the kids ready for the test.” We spent a lot of time on that, which I felt was not the most effective teaching-learning situation…It was so stressed in a school like ours, which was in program improvement. Meeting scores was so critical for so many areas, to increase funding for opportunities and things like that. Test scores were really important…it was so much more likely that teachers were giving information, lots of it, and just making sure that the students, “Did you learn this? Do you know this? Can you say it and can you give me an example?” And then checking it off a list, kind of a thing.

Mr. L also reflected on how the focus on testing impacted teaching and learning:

The CST revolved around multiple-choice tests. There was a lot of drill and killing…For history, you can be successful on standardized tests if you drill and kill. What’s the best way to drill and kill? Make them memorize vocabulary words. Make them copy down notes and give them multiple-choice questions to reinforce. Make them read stuff out of the textbook and find answers to questions. Those are still things that can be done in a history course…They just needed to be able to identify the right answer on a multiple-choice test…It was just the way that I thought it had to be. We wanted to get good scores on the CST—at least for history. It was important to make sure that the students were
aware of the information. It was important that they were familiar with taking multiple-choice tests. Giving them those kinds of opportunities in the classroom is what could help them do well on the CSTs.

In general, the teachers’ ability to teach creatively and find ways to motivate students was hindered by the testing demands of the earlier California standards. Mr. C commented:

There was really a push for us to teach to the test, which I didn’t like because it took a lot of individuality out of the students and it didn’t seem to really motivate them. We weren’t really instructed to create groups and let them figure things on their own. We had to feed it to them. We had to make sure that we were giving them what they were going to be tested on. It really tied our hands as teachers. That’s what I felt…It took almost your individual personality out of it. There wasn’t a lot you can do with the way it was set up, “Here’s the standards. You’ve got to teach these standards,” instead of leaving it open to where I can add my own things back. When I tried to add my own little twist and do groups, it was criticized. “What are you doing? They’re not doing that over there.”

Mr. N also shared:

I think the constant push for testing tends to be a limit overall, because it narrows the focus in a lot of ways…there was…a cost. The cost is narrowing the focus, and also leaving off some stuff…You leave off some of the things that maybe are not so heavily tested, but might actually do more to encourage the kids to go into science…It was always a race to get to those facts on the list in order to test, so that was limiting.

The focus on state testing also impacted teachers’ ability to address the needs of ELL students.

Regarding ELLs, Mr. C noted:
They all had to be on the same page, which was impossible. You couldn’t have it that way. It just didn’t work. It was a battle to try to change that but it wasn’t going to be changed until finally that test was gone.

In sum, teachers’ efforts to provide quality instruction during the era of the earlier California standards was undermined by the need to address an extensive amount of curriculum in order to prepare students for the state test. Because ELLs were learning both language and content simultaneously, this was even more difficult for them.

**Rapid pacing and test focus led to superficial learning.** Teachers expressed that they also felt stressed under the earlier California standards because they were not able to go deeply into the curriculum; they were only able to touch on topics and then move on, even if all students had not learned the material. As Mr. B stated, “I felt like I was really not going into a lot of depth when they came in.” In a similar manner, Mr. C stated, “To get in-depth, there wasn’t the time allotted to do that. It was quickly expose them to the information, let’s go to the next section. I didn’t like that.” Mrs. R shared, “Maybe the only thing that didn’t serve the needs of the students was trying to hit so many things, there was not a way to go into any great depth with lots of them.” Likewise, Mr. N stated:

> I think it was a lot more of teaching them to recall, rather than to apply. A lot more of basically going down a list of facts, especially in science…Basically, the standards at the very beginning, it was more like a list, and it was more like, “They need to know this fact, and this fact, and this fact.” Teaching them to basically regurgitate information, more than applying it into a situation, or creating a letter that argues a position, or any kind of actual application…Before it was just, again, more facts, “Here’s what you need to know.” It’s almost like you could give them a study guide and say, “This is all you
have to really learn.” They could memorize a bunch of facts, and make flashcards and learn things.

Similarly, Mr. L explained:

It was very much here’s the standard. This is what I want the students to know. This is how I’m going to do it. The depth of knowledge, at least for history, it didn’t have to be very deep. They just needed to be able to identify the right answer on a multiple-choice test…going in-depth with the old standards was very hard. Going into depth of knowledge three and depth of knowledge four. Those types of activities just took more time. Time wasn’t necessarily something that we had a lot of.

The need to move through so many standards led to a teaching format that focused on learning facts, while deeper learning, which included application of ideas and critical thinking, was neglected.

For teachers, having only time to cover the content in a superficial manner meant teaching, and learning suffered. Regarding all students, Mr. B stated, “Sometimes I think I really didn’t help meet their needs that much.” Regarding ELLs, he shared:

I felt like I didn’t have the time so it was kind of more superficial teaching, not a very in-depth level…Again, I probably lost a lot of the English learners because, again, I was rushing through it…I think they needed more student-centered activities, to work together, to learn the information with each other.

Mr. L shared how the standards impacted the way he taught writing:

The writing, when I did it, it tended to be just really short response, nothing in-depth at all…Unfortunately I think that was across the board with most teachers. Most teachers among us social studies teachers tended not to. We had the intentions of doing it but then
we didn’t. We felt the time constraint really. And then ultimately the state tests…was just multiple choice and they were not going to test the writing on that.

Teaching in such a superficial manner that limited pedagogical creativity caused a sense of dissatisfaction for teachers. Mr. B summarized this point:

I just felt like I could have been a lot better if I would have had more time and didn’t feel so rushed. It was almost like get this material out so that they can memorize it and then review it right before the test, so hopefully they retained enough. I think it stymied my creativity overall. I never really looked on it as a period of great pride in my teaching because I could have done a lot better, I think. Again, it’s just that pressure of a timetable and knowing that, “Oh, by this time I’d better be on this chapter, and if I’m not there, then I really just have to rush through some sections or whatever.” I think the creativity was lacking in it overall. I think that’s where it hurt the most…because [teaching at] the surface I didn’t feel a sense really of satisfaction.

In summary, during the era of the earlier California standards, teachers experienced stress and the pressure to move at a quick pace through the curriculum with a heavy focus on best preparing the students for the state test, even though such teaching was not the most effective in getting students to learn the material deeply, critically, or meaningfully. The heavy emphasis on addressing all the standards in order to prepare students for the state tests was constraining to teachers’ ability to teach effectively or feel satisfied, and it consequently provided teachers an open minded attitude towards the student-centered approach espoused by the CCSS.

**Theme 2: Teachers viewed the CCSS as an opportunity to build students’ competence.** In various ways, teachers interviewed for this study expressed ideas that the CCSS would provide an opportunity to offer more effective instruction that could help students develop
the capacities they needed to be better prepared for college and careers. These ideas included an increased emphasis on critical thinking and analysis, the essential use of primary source documents, a strong focus on writing, creativity as a new priority, and project-based learning and collaboration as an important instructional method.

**Critical thinking and analysis were emphasized.** With the shift to the CCSS, teachers described a new emphasis on critical thinking and analysis. Mrs. R stated:

We’re not just scratching the surface of things, we’re able to get the front loading of the material, use it, and then implement in some type of a project. They get to just work with it more, they get to do more with it, and they have more processing time.

Mr. L shared:

Now the style of teaching that I have is I take a lot of time on subjects. The cool thing about the Common Core State Standards is I’m able to perhaps reach a depth that I didn’t do when I was teaching the [earlier California] standards…It’s allowing them to work more and use more critical thinking.

In regards to critical thinking, Mr. S noted, “I think they are getting a lot more thinking skills and how to think things out, and how to make decisions for themselves.” Mr. B stated, “I think now I can engage students in more critical thinking, which a lot of students need because they’re not used to that.” Mr. B also noted:

I’m spending a lot more time…teaching them how to analyze a document, what you need to look for…A hard job for a historian is when you analyze documents you’re going to have to think of, for instance, what pieces are valid and why, which are more reliable?…It’s hard because…they’re not used to that, thinking critically.
The CCSS allowed teachers to teach in a way that was different from the earlier California standards. Teachers could now delve deeper into the curriculum and ask students to think critically and to learn to analyze.

This shift also allowed teachers to address learning needs of ELLs. Mr. L described how he was able to combine teaching both academic language and content to ELLs by having them engage in discussion and analysis:

I know some teachers like to focus on academic language and the content separately. I just like kind of mix them together. By having discussions or Socratic seminars or writing prompts that ask them to think then that’s a way that they can develop. One thing I try to do at the tenth grade level, even with English language learners, [is tell students] “Hey, one way that you can analyze something is telling what you think and why you think that.”

Under the earlier California standards, teachers had to rush through the curriculum. In contrast, the CCSS allowed teachers to slow down and provide opportunities for students to discuss and analyze concepts and to develop critical thinking skills.

*Primary source documents were essential.* The CCSS led teachers to utilize more articles and primary source documents. As Mr. C stated, “They want more articles brought in to talk about government but let the students take time to break that down.” Mr. L also noted, “We read more informational texts, not just the textbook. I don’t think we’ve used that textbook.”

Mr. B described his use of primary source documents:

Right now [there] has been more discussion because I’ve been doing a lot more document-based stuff, analysis…I’ve given them documents, primary sources, a lot of that. Usually…I start off with questions so they need to pull out the information from the
text…I’m having them do it together…we read it together as a class, they read it by themselves, and then any words they don’t know circle them, and then I have them underline so they can discuss it together.

Mrs. R shared similar enthusiasm for the use of primary documents:

We allow them to work in a group and come up with the articles that they want to work with, and then what kind of material they would like to present in an essay, and let them come up with the topic. We try to give them choices within certain parameters. That’s how I’m implementing it now. I know I have a long way to go, but I’m trying to get them to come up with their own questions before they do the research, instead of saying, “Here’s what you’re researching.”

In this study, teachers described a learning environment in which the CCSS permitted them to engage students in the analysis of various primary source documents and articles. According to the participants, such a learning environment was more conducive to engaging students in thinking more broadly about a topic, developing interpretations, and having meaningful content conversations.

**Writing had a renewed focus.** With the earlier California standards, writing was kept to a minimum because of the need to rush and prepare students for multiple-choice tests. With the CCSS, teachers described how they were addressing writing skills with students, including ELLs. For example, Mr. S remarked, “In the writing we’ve found that…especially the ELL…a lot of students aren’t very good at writing. I can understand why there’s a push to get them to write in every classroom.” Regarding the writing standards, Mrs. R noted:

They’re pared down to the core elements of the writing process, and we stick with that structured writing through the whole freshman year, so that they get good at that…I’m
able to work [with students] individually so that some of those core pieces, my English language learners can learn those…so, if we can get them to have a topic sentence, to introduce a quote or their concrete detail, and explain just those blocks of the writing process. I felt like our English language learners before were falling through the cracks because we had so many things to do. Now, we actually spend time with those pared down chunks of the writing…I’m able to spend more time individually with students who struggle with that.

Mr. N also described how teaching writing under the CCSS had improved, “I think it’s just more about making sure that they can communicate and justify, more than anything, rather than [as with] the previous [standards] where it was all about restating facts.” The CCSS allowed teachers to shift from having students only write short answers, to writing more fully developed ideas with justification and evidence.

**Creativity was prioritized.** Teachers described the CCSS as leading to a shift that provided teachers more freedom in what they did in the classroom. The teachers said this freedom had given them a greater ability to tap into the interests and talents of the students. Mrs. J said her teaching had become

…more student-centered. I allow them to have as much creativity as possible to take learning into their own hands. I basically just frontload the information. I want to see where they can go with it…I’m excited about it. I think it leads to more creativity within the classroom, more flexibility. I think it’s going to lead the kids in a better direction for their future: one where they can take more control of their education as long as the districts will allow that. I just see so many great things with the new standards, Common Core standards…I’ve seen so many successes with it, excitement with not only me, but
the kids. The things that kids do with the Common Core Standards and what they’re allowed to come up with and create is just so amazing to me…I think I’m much more satisfied now than in the past because it’s just more fun when you can see that light bulb going off and to see what they come up with and create on their own.

Similarly, Mr. C commented on how students were responding to opportunities to collaborate and work on creative projects together, “They love it. They get involved, they can show their talents and they’re really proud of that.” With the shift toward greater levels of creativity in the classroom, the teachers said that students showed signs that they were thriving, and the teachers described their own satisfaction with this change.

**Project-based learning was important.** The shift away from the previous California standards to the CCSS has provided teachers the opportunity to engage students in more group assignments, collaboration, and project-based learning assignments. Mrs. R shared, “Instead of just doing the rote practice, we have an opportunity to work on projects and collaborative activities that allow them to go into depth with the material, to do more with it.” Mrs. J, meanwhile, noted:

> I like that they put more emphasis on the kids working together and that there’s more emphasis on them inventing…to adapt to the new Common Core standards and to find ways to have the kids work together collaboratively, come up with more project-based ideas. That was really interesting because we had never really had time to do projects before. I did a lot of research on just different types of projects, to even bring to the table for the kids. I wasn’t sure if the kids were going to know what to do when I first talked to them, because the kids weren’t really used to doing a lot of projects…The things that they
came up with totally blew some of my ideas that I found out of the water. I think the Common Core standards have just allowed for so much more flexibility and fun.

Mr. B described the important implications – and challenge – of providing project-based learning activities:

I think on the one hand it does give you a lot more room for creativity, and you can do projects. You can do more in-depth stuff, but you’re going to have to model and teach students how to think critically. It’s difficult.

Mr. S considered how learning is affected by getting students more deeply involved with the content and doing hands-on projects:

I think I’m the more hands-on, hands-on lab based [type]. I think that’s going to help them. I see that they physically touch it. With certain sciences you can physically touch things and have them press into each other, or bounce off. They’ll see how the different laws of physics are everyday things. I’m not sure how I would identify it. I just think that it’s going to work better for them, because they can’t always put into words in their mind how things work, physically, and in the real world.

When it came to working with ELLs, Mrs. J also asserted the benefits of engaging students in project-based learning and emphasized how it encourages peer-learning:

I like to have them work on projects together. I like them to work collaboratively together. It’s not necessarily a strategy…I just found having them work together has been very helpful. That way, they can actually talk to each other if they’re struggling with something, it’s not just me that they’re coming to. They have each other to lean on. Sometimes they feel more comfortable with each other. Sometimes there are things I don’t know how to explain to them, because of that cultural divide or language barrier.
In sum, when reflecting on this sub-theme, teachers described how the shift to using more project-based activities with the new approach to standards provided students the opportunity to learn more deeply, take ownership of their learning, show their creativity, and support one another.

*Students would be college and career ready.* Teachers described the CCSS as providing students greater preparation for college and career than the earlier California standards. Mr. L stated, “I think students that have the goal to go to college will then…They’re going to be better prepared to go to college if that is their goal…it definitely will help with those critical thinking and analytical skills.” Mr. C noted, “I have my students do a lot of presenting. [I tell my students], ‘You need to be ready for college, you’re going to talk in every class…You get up and better be ready to talk.’” Rather than simply preparing students for a state test, the interviews revealed that the new standards allowed teachers to help students develop a more comprehensive focus on preparing for life after high school.

In regards to career and life readiness, Mr. N stated, “I think it’ll create more opportunities, because the standards will be more broad but more applicable to…solving problems and real life application. I see it as positive, and I think it’s opportunity coming.” In regards to the new focus, Mr. L said he was able to help the students grasp how what they were learning would have practical and meaningful application in the future:

Students that are like, “Why are we reading this? Why are we taking out important information?” I say, “Well, if you get a job at the factory there might be a manual that you have to read. Even if you work at McDonald’s you’re going to have to know how certain machines work.”
Mr. N also summarized his impression of how the CCSS could prepare students for life after high school:

One reason I like the standards is because I think it’s teaching them real world skills, using 21st Century skills and applying it to their learning, and to their writing, and to doing something, not just learning those specific facts…The way I’ve approached my class now, what I tell them is that basically, science is teaching them how to think logically to solve problems, and that’s something you need no matter what field you go into, no matter what subject you go into.

Similarly, Mr. S stated, “I’ve heard it said this way: School is for everybody because it adds tools to your toolbox because you don’t know what you’re going to be doing in the future, right?” The interviews revealed that the shift to the CCSS provided teachers the opportunity to help students become ready for both college and career.

**Theme 3: Teachers needed more preparation for the instructional shifts.** The teachers interviewed for this study ranged in how much their instructional practices had already shifted as a result of the CCSS, with some making that shift early-on, some still in a state of transition, and others still hesitating. For those most hesitant, the need for preparation was the most evident barrier to implementation.

*Teachers felt unprepared to make the instructional shifts.* The data from the interviews revealed that teachers felt unprepared to make the instructional shifts required under the CCSS. Mrs. R described her difficulties with the transition to implementing the CCSS:

I feel not as prepared as I want to be. I would say adequately prepared. I’m working on improving all the time to create that student-centered environment. I find it difficult…I know I have a long way to go, but I’m trying to get [students] to come up with their own
questions before they do the research, instead of saying, “Here’s what you’re researching.”

Mr. L talked about his experiences, particularly during his initial year of implementing the CCSS:

Now I feel a lot more comfortable. I would say maybe the first year, maybe not so much. There was kind of a transition phase of what… Do I just stop teaching all the standards and just totally go with this Common Core? For the first year for history we weren’t really sure what testing was going to look like. We didn’t know what the SBAC was going to look like. Even now a lot of us still don’t… We don’t know what that history component is going to be on. I know some teachers that still try and hit all of the standards. For me I’ve taken the approach that I don’t. I’m not worried about hitting all of the standards.

The CCSS challenged teachers to teach in a way that was different from what they were accustomed to under the earlier California standards. Teachers described both being unprepared individually and uncertainty about what the new state assessments would look like, as well as confusion regarding how these would affect the ongoing shift in pedagogical practices.

**Teachers felt challenged in addressing the CCSS with ELLs.** Teachers described a variety of challenges in making the instructional shifts needed to implement the CCSS for ELLs. For example, according to Mr. B, ELL students sometimes complained about a student-centered classroom where they had to participate in discussion:

I hear students complain all the time about how I teach is so boring, “It’s talk, talk, talk.” I said, “Well one thing probably that’s going on is you’re not doing your part.” If there’s conversation going you’re not going to get the teacher talking as much, you don’t need
to. So I said, “It’s a two way street with that. You’re just going to have to get used to it, because you’re really not used to it. You’re more used to just listening to the teacher, take notes, try to get this information in and that’s it, digest it, and recall.”

Similarly, Mr. S shared the resistance he faced from students in his class under the new approach:

Some of them would balk on it, because they’re like, “I don’t understand this. How are we supposed to think about this and do this? You’re supposed to teach us first. Then we’re supposed to do it.” Then I go, “Yeah I know, but this is inquiry. This is different. You’re supposed to think about it.” They’re like, “I don’t know how to think about it. That’s not how I’ve been learning.” It’s true. They haven’t been learning that way. They’ve been taught something and given a procedure on how to do it, and then do it. It’s going to be different for everybody, kind of difficult. It’s going to be a little painful for everybody.

Sometimes students, particularly in the case of ELLs, were not fully resistant to the instructional shifts, but just hesitant. As Mr. B shared, “They’re hesitant to work with each other a lot of the time, they’re not really willing to discuss. I’m hoping I see that improve.” In short, the interviews revealed that teachers faced the challenge of making the shift toward a student-centered classroom, which was not accepted in a positive manner by all students, particularly ELLs.

Mrs. R described that her challenge with the CCSS and ELLs was related to a perhaps new expectation that students make an effort before seeking help from the teacher:

My philosophy is, you have to do something first before I’m going to help. You’ve got to try by yourself before I help you. Not that I won’t answer a question, but I’m not
going to start giving you the answers. You can’t just say, “I don’t get it,” or, “I don’t know how to do this.” You have to try. Sometimes they don’t know how to start, my ELLs and some of my struggling students.

Mr. S shared the challenge he experienced working with ELLs when they represented only a small percentage of the class:

I can see how different classrooms full of students and you have just a small amount of ELLs…It’s difficult to think about them all the time. If you think about all your students…you’d probably treat all your students as if they’re ELL that probably wouldn’t help all of them. You get some variation.

Teachers faced a variety of challenges in their efforts to make the instructional shifts of the CCSS for ELLs, including resistance or hesitancy from students, students giving up before they started, maintaining the expectation that students put forth effort before seeking help from the teacher, and addressing the needs of ELLs when they composed only a small percentage of the class.

**Teachers viewed colleagues as lacking understanding of the instructional shifts.**

Teachers noted a need amongst colleagues for a better understanding of the instructional shifts indicated by the CCSS. Mr. B stated, “I know a lot of other teachers are probably freaking out about it a little bit because they thought, ‘Oh my gosh, cooperation, putting in groups,’ which some teachers are very hesitant [to do].” Mr. S noted, “Our problem is not every teacher is a writer and they’re teaching writing somehow which I don’t think is…I think [administrators] understand that, that’s why they’re giving us more training on writing and how to put writing into the curriculum.” Additionally, Mrs. J shared:
I still [see] a lot of my colleagues sticking with the lectures and the note taking. It’s been very hard, even now with the Common Core, they’re still trying to fit everything into a very traditional old state standards box, when they shouldn’t.

Mr. S also emphasized the magnitude of the changes and the need for greater preparation:

In my opinion I think I’m not prepared. I think very few people are prepared. I’m not going to tell them that, but my perspective is this is quite a shift. I think all of us that I work with…I don’t think we are prepared. But, I think we’re going to come to a point where prepared or not we’re going to have to jump on it with both feet…Eventually we’ll have to do that. Hopefully we’ll get some transition into it and plenty of training to ease the burden.

While some teachers had an understanding of what they needed to do to make the instructional shifts, they described some of their colleagues as lacking that same understanding and therefore accented the need for additional training.

**Trainings were limited in availability and not substantial or sustained.** When it came to describing the trainings that were available to address the CCSS, especially in regard to addressing the needs of ELLs, teachers said they had received limited or no training in that area. In instances where the training did occur, teachers described it as not substantial or sustained. Mrs. R stated that although teachers “had a lot of collaboration on Common Core” and had “worked on some strategies to make it accessible to the students,” she still did not “think we’ve addressed it specifically for ELLs.”

Regarding working with ELLs and the CCSS, Mrs. J stated, “I don’t really recall any real training. I wouldn’t be surprised if we had some, but obviously it wasn’t very meaningful. Mr. S also described the limited training, “With the CCSS in mind, we do collaborate in our
department, but I don’t think we’ve talked about the ELLs for quite awhile.” Thus, while teachers noted a lack of training in general, this dearth was particularly severe in regards to the needs of ELLs with the CCSS.

Another finding from the data was that teachers viewed the instructional focus and training as coming from site or district administration, without a great deal of consultation regarding the teachers’ needs. Mr. L stated:

It would just have to come down to…the principal’s…vision or what they want to do with the school. Anytime that you have some kind of training that’s provided by the administration, they’re the ones that plan it. The way that they plan their staff meetings, the way that they plan staff development, it has to focus around the needs that they feel. Mrs. J described a similar frustration with having limited influence in shaping what trainings were available:

They ask us what we would like to see. We tell them what we want to see, and then we get trainings that we’ve had before that we feel are useless to us. We’d like to see other things.

Along these lines, Mr. C shared, “Specifically just doing ELL training, we’ve had them come in, the district will come in and teach us all at once.” The general perception among the teachers was that training priorities originated from site and district leaders, and those opportunities stemmed from what the leaders viewed as most needed by the teachers.

While teachers said they were provided with some opportunities to be trained to address the needs of ELLs, they said those trainings were often short or not sustained over time. As Mr. S noted:
It’s minor in-services, mostly during the summer or from time to time during our required training throughout the year we’ll have some meetings. Right now we’re focused on writing, getting students to write. So everything else seems to be pushed out of the way and we’re just trying to get students to write more and more every chance we can get them to write.

Mr. L described his understanding of how an effective training model would be implemented:

I mean if you want that to be a focus you have to have multiple training and multiple meetings with teachers and modeling and ideas and teachers need to feel that it’s going to be looked for and it’s not.

Mr. N explained his view of the deficiencies in the way professional development was developed and offered to the teachers:

I’ll tell you, the PD here we have that little hour and a half meeting after school.

Sometimes it’s just announcements and we’re in one room and they call it PD. Other times we have little breakout sessions and it’s the principal going over data from the test, and they call it PD. I’ve gotten some good strategies from…the ELL coordinator. She’s given some good stuff, but it’s not really training, PD training. I haven’t really seen very formalized training for it, anything that we can choose to take advantage of.

Overall, the teachers perceived the training made available to them as not substantial, consistent enough, or sustained.

**Theme 4: Teachers experienced greater satisfaction with the instructional shifts.**

While the teachers in the study noted some challenges in shifting to the CCSS, their underlying response once they had gotten over the hurdles of making instructional changes was a feeling of greater satisfaction with teaching and learning. This stemmed from less pressure to rush through
the curriculum and prepare students for a test, greater flexibility in selecting learning topics, and the ability to engage students more deeply in the content.

**Teachers felt less pressure to rush and prepare students for a test.** With the shift to the CCSS, teachers noted reduced pressure to move quickly through the curriculum to get students ready for the state test. Mr. S remarked, “I think I am a little more pleased with the new type of instruction versus just going through everything really fast.” Mrs. J stated, “What I’ve seen them do, I’m very, very pleased with thus far. I’m happy with where it’s going.” Mr. B described how having more time enhanced teaching and learning:

[I’m] not so held to a timetable where I feel like I’m rushed, have to be there at a certain time. I think it does allow for a little more creativity because [we’re] going more in depth. I like that part because really if the teachers do it right, I think it lends itself to more critical thinking.

Mr. C also explained how slowing down instruction allowed him to support and encourage students:

Supporting [the learning] and breaking it down to them slowly, there is no rush, we’re not in a race and [I] just keep encouraging and I go around to those particular students, I know who they are. “That’s a good job,” that encouragement alone, you know, it feels good to [them], it feels good to me.

Teachers expressed that shifting instruction to a slower pace provided them with greater satisfaction.

**Teachers experienced more flexibility in selecting learning topics.** Another reason the teachers described satisfaction with the shift in instruction was they were able to have greater
decision making regarding what to teach. Teachers could select topics that they thought would be more interesting to themselves and their students. Mr. L explained:

I’ve been pleased. It’s more enjoyable to be a teacher knowing that you can take the class in the direction that you’re more interested in. I hated teaching about the French Revolution but I used to have to teach it because there were the standards. Ever since Common Core State Standards came along, I don’t have to teach about the French Revolution anymore. For me, that’s pretty cool.

Regarding topics that interested students, Mr. S remarked, “If the students are interested in something, they start asking questions and then we can get into it. That’s how it starts.” Along these lines, Mr. L stated:

Figuring out what the kids are interested [in] and what they’re not interested in. Figuring out if it’s effective or not. There’s definitely a lot of trial and error…It’s finding the information and presenting it in a way to the students that they’ll be able to grasp it and understand it…It just makes it more interesting as a teacher.

Later, Mr. L went on to say:

I think it’s exciting. For me, teaching history, it is exciting because now I don’t have as many content standards. I can focus more on things that I’m interested in and in subjects that the students are interested. I don’t feel that I need to get through an entire year of content standards because the common core is more, especially with regard to history, is more skills based, documented analysis, analysis, critical thinking. I can spend more time on subjects that I’m interested in and that the students are interested in. I don’t feel the pressure to get through all of the content standards. For me, it’s exciting. For me, it’s innovative as well, because there’s part of the standards that I’ve cut out for history.
Most world history classes, they’re going to learn about the French Revolution but in my class they don’t because I feel [there are] other things that students are more interested in. That’s why I think it does lead to some innovation because it’s giving teachers the opportunity to focus on content that they feel is interesting, [while using] the common core skills and applying the content to that.

With the shift to the CCSS, teachers described experiencing enhanced enjoyment in teaching because they could choose what to focus on in their classes.

**Teachers were able to engage students more deeply in the content.** With the implementation of the CCSS, teachers found that they could delve more deeply into the curriculum. Mrs. J noted, “I find that with Common Core, it’s been much more successful with the learning and the engagement.” Mr. N expressed his satisfaction with the shift in instruction:

> Overall, I would say pleased…It’s a change, and I think I have a little more experience and a little more background with it that I’m more of a positive one. I’m looking forward to the standards, actually, especially because I think it’s going to take the curriculum we have, toss it out, and let us pick a whole new set of, “We need to do this, this, and this.”

Mrs. R explained how she saw the CCSS as providing an opportunity to take students further in their learning:

> I felt like it worked so much better than the old standards…There were a lot of things that are the same, it’s just that we have more opportunity to take them a little bit further and to spend some more time on them.

Mr. B, however, talked about frustrations that had surfaced and the need to have patience with the shift in instruction:
I like the fact that we can go in in-depth. I think the frustration is just that you’ve got to be patient because you’re trying to create this mindset, we’re not just doing the surface learning but we are going to look deep into it, especially with history, and how to analyze the documents. It’s going to be frustrating…You’re going to have to persevere; you have to have the patience for it. I like it. I think you’re going to have to accept that a lot of the [assignments] they hand in are not going to be the greatest at first. You’re just going to have to accept that…you’re trying to get students to get this completely different mindset in their learning.

Finally, Mr. B went on to describe how his persistence in teaching the standards led to enhanced student learning and competence, and to his own satisfaction as a teacher:

I was reading a lot of the essays, a lot of them were way off track, but there were a few that as I read to myself, I thought, “Wow, I mean they got it. They really justified their answer by picking out the text from the document.” I mean it was a few of them, but I thought, “Okay so some got it now, and it should be work by the end of the year,” but I was pleased with it because it actually worked after a while.

In general, teachers described satisfaction with the instructional shifts brought on by the CCSS because they felt less pressure to rush through the curriculum and prepare students for the state test, more flexibility in choosing what to teach, and the ability to dive more deeply into the content.

**Theme 5: Teachers described improved student engagement with the CCSS.**

With the adoption and implementation of the CCSS, the participants in this study described an overall improved level of student engagement as a result of shifting from a teacher-
centered mode of teaching to a student-centered mode of teaching, more student participation in collaboration, and increased student ownership in learning.

*Teachers created student-centered classrooms.* Based on participating teachers’ interview data, implementing the CCSS meant shifting from a teacher-centered classroom toward a student-centered classroom, which led to increased student engagement. Mrs. R described how she was making the shift toward a student-centered classroom:

I am working on, to the best of my ability, a more student-centered classroom. The speed at which we had to “get things done” in the earlier state standard and the focus on the high-stakes testing really lent itself, in my opinion, to a teacher-led classroom…I’m trying to get away from that. Any time I can revisit that teaching style or understand that that’s the way I used to do things, so now I have to do it differently, it can help me to be a different and better teacher, basically.

Mrs. R noted that the shift meant getting away from a fast-paced format of instruction that previously focused on tests, and how the new approach allowed her to become a better teacher. Mr. B described similar changes in the dynamics in his classroom:

The engagement, I think, is really important. They’re so used to the directed teaching …where it’s the teacher just doing the PowerPoint, giving notes, and then maybe asking a couple of questions here and there, and then tending to have the same students answer them. What I do like is when I see the discussion going on, even if they’re not quite catching on or getting it right away, I do like that I feel more satisfied because I do see the interaction with the material. To me, that’s great.
Even though it was a slower process, teachers generally expressed that students were challenged and engaged in interaction with the content. For example, Mr. S. described engagement in his student-centered classroom:

That means that they will be involved with what they’re supposed to be learning and they’ll be kind of like active that way so time will go by faster than you [expect]…I really like it when I hear the student say, “Wow, this period went by fast!” I like to hear when they say that…when the period is over, and I’m surprised, too, I’m like, “Oh the period is over!” Or the students ask, “What did we do Mr. S? This went by so fast,” and they’re learning and they’re engaged, it definitely feels like success, success for that period or success for that day…for that week.

Although the pace of instruction was slower, delving more deeply into the curriculum proved to also deeply engaging for the students to the extent that class time passed quickly.

Mr. L described his shift toward student-centered instruction, “I think the students enjoy the class more. I think they’re better writers and critical thinkers than they were in the old system.” Mr. L went on to say:

It just goes back to trying to find better ways. I mean moving to a more student-centered and a more engagement-centered [classroom] for students, it’s then the trick of finding out okay, what engages students? What do they find interesting? Am I able to present that information? For me, it’s just trying to figure out the students and types of activities that students enjoy, just trying to find a balance with that and understanding that students learn in different ways. I might have students love when we take notes and students that don’t love when we take notes. I know that there’s students when we do group assignments they like it. There are other students that don’t like group assignments. One
of the problems with student-centered instruction is that not all students learn or enjoy learning the same way. Even making that shift, it’s still making the appropriate shift so that different learning modalities are met.

This illustrated an important concern about making sure different types of learners, especially those who prefer a teacher-centered type of classroom, were still getting their needs met. Mr. L also expressed the benefits he saw for ELLs under the new approach:

Obviously, with regards to the EL, it is necessary because one of the ways that you can acquire and develop language is by speaking. The shift into discussions, the shift into more student-centered “What do you think?” it is a good thing.

As a result of the implementation of the CCSS, teachers described instructional practices that were more student-centered. This, according to the teachers, led to increased student engagement and to ELLs developing new skills, in part, because of the incorporation of stronger discussion into classroom practices.

**Students participated in more collaboration.** Teachers interviewed for the purposes of this study described instructional practices that had shifted as a result of the CCSS, particularly including an increase in activities such as group work and group projects, Socratic seminars, and collaboration. Mr. B described how he shifted his instruction to include a greater amount of student collaboration:

I’ve been having them in small groups. It has been more collaborative learning, which is what the Common Core calls for. Where students learn from each other, they take more responsibility…I just think they do learn better from each other sometimes if they can sit there and discuss it. Even when I give them, like for instance, directed instruction I will stop after so much information and say, “Think-Pair-Share: Okay, ask your partner two
questions about the material.” Then I give them like a minute and then I have the partner ask two other questions… My first few weeks… 80% of the time they’ve been in small groups already. Which probably last year…I didn’t have them in small groups as much. I am making the conscious effort to really do that. I’m not used to that so I’m really trying to get used to it. I think it’s overall, it’s working pretty good. Most students are staying focused.

After shifting toward more collaboration, Mr. B noticed both improved learning and increased focus. Mrs. J also described the benefits she perceived resulted from her efforts to engage students in collaborative work:

I like to have them work on projects together. I like them to work collaboratively together…I just found having them work together has been very helpful. That way, they can actually talk to each other if they’re struggling with something; it’s not just me that they’re coming to. They have each other to lean on. Sometimes they feel more comfortable with each other. Sometimes there are things I don’t know how to explain to them, because of that cultural divide or language barrier.

In short, the benefits of having students collaborating included: students supporting one another, which increased their comfort levels, and students learning the information from a peer who could perhaps make the content more accessible. Mrs. J described additional benefits of engaging students in collaborative work:

Having them work together instead of, “Okay, nobody’s allowed to talk, nobody’s allowed to work together, you all do your own individual thing.” I personally think that has been the most helpful thing I’ve ever started doing…just allowing them to work
together in groups that they feel comfortable with, and really developing that relationship
with them.

Increasing students’ participation with one another led to an improved student-teacher
relationship in the classroom because students’ desire to communicate with peers was valued and
thoughtfully incorporated into instruction.

As described by Mrs. J, the opportunity to talk lent itself to an improved level of comfort
among students. Mrs. J also described how student collaboration resulted in increased focus on
the content:

They actually really enjoy it. I find it so much fun to walk around and listen to them,
because they get so into their conversations when they’re discussing it, and the things that
it leads to, they get into these big debates and discussions, they’re just so fascinating.
Yeah, they’re really good about staying on topic, which I was surprised about at first. I
thought I would have a hard time keeping them on topic.

Mr. N described a similar experience and explained his understanding of how students were fully
engaged during a collaborative discussion:

I had a really good class discussion the other day and after they left I just felt like, “This
is why I teach.” That was what I want for all my classes…the way that…everyone [was]
participating, everyone sharing ideas. It was a good conversation…they’re
communicating and they have opinions and they’re asking questions and they’re feeding
each other ideas. That, I think, is where I’d really like my class to be more often…the
discussion I think is where a lot of real learning occurs because they’re engaged
completely when they’re driving that discussion.
Additionally, Mr. L noted how shifting toward more collaboration in the classroom provided a more effective means for ELLs to engage with the content with one another than through previous instructional methods:

With the new standards it leads [them] to having more Socratic seminars, more discussions. Helping the development that way: it leads itself to more group work or more group projects that English language learners can work [on] together. It allows them, maybe not standing up in front of the class and teaching the class, but [having] more development than just sitting there and copying the board and listening to me talk, or trying to find the answers from a textbook. I think in that regard it does help them more than the old way.

Teachers described the use of collaborative activities as leading to greater engagement, which included how comfortable students felt to participate, how well focused they were, how they could support one another, and how deeply they could learn the content.

**Students took greater ownership of their learning.** The teachers in the study noted a significant increase in student engagement as a result of implementing the CCSS. They said they thought this was partly due to students taking greater ownership of their learning. For example, Mr. B shared how he made an effort to shift learning into the hands of students:

I’m trying to teach them that, “You need to take more responsibility for your learning. You’ve got to put the time in, I’m there to facilitate, to impart some knowledge to you,” but basically what I’m trying to do is get them to learn how to think critically and more in-depth. “You’re going to be working with each other more on that.” I am kind of constantly trying to do more cooperative type activities.

Mr. B further remarked on his major effort to shift responsibility and ownership to the students:
So far I’ve consciously been giving them more student-centered [activities], giving them more responsibility. My first few weeks there, five weeks or so, 80% of the time they’ve been in small groups already. Which probably last year they had been in small groups … first semester I didn’t have them in small groups as much. I am making the conscious effort to really do that. I’m not used to that so I’m really trying to get used to it. I think it’s overall, it’s working pretty good. Most students are staying focused. When it’s just the teacher up there talking, the students get tuned out. I would say over 80% has been more student-centered and I’ve been more of a facilitator, which is kind of nice in a way.

Mr. L, meanwhile, said he thought the shift to a student-centered classroom allowed students to demonstrate their knowledge in unique and varied ways:

[My instruction is] more student-centered. It’s just giving the students opportunities to show what they know. Understanding that students learn in different ways. Some students, they might be able to write a couple paragraphs and just knock the answer out of the park, while other students need to create some kind of poster in order to show that information.

Mrs. R explained how the shift had allowed her to improve her teaching and be more responsive, spending time on the things students truly wanted to learn and engage in:

The shifts, to me, mean that I have a chance to be a more effective teacher. I have a better opportunity to have a student-centered classroom and to find creative ways to get the students to think. With things like the students learning new technology or working with the technology, I have time to help them with that rather than to go, nope, we don’t have time for that. We’ve got to take the test, take the test, take the test. I feel like the
shifts do give me an opportunity for better success and [they give] my students an opportunity for better success.

Mrs. J’s experience coincided with the other participants. She described how helping students take ownership in her classroom improved engagement and learning:

I want them to...learn on their own what can [they] come up with, what can [they] create, what can [they] show me that [they’ve] learned? I want to see them creating those projects...It was stagnant before where [it is] now, it’s more flexible and allows the kids to come up with new things on their own. I think that has been very helpful to not only our ELL students, but all of our students really, because it does allow them to take their education into their own hands and find what works for them, so I really like that personally.

Mrs. J also shared her observation that students were more excited to learn, could apply what they learned, and remembered more:

The kids seem more excited to learn because they can take their part in it and they seem to actually walk away with more information and retain it better than they have in the past and they can utilize it more. It’s not just they memorized a bunch a stuff. They actually can take whatever it is they learn and implement in it in some other way and I think that’s valuable, not just I remember what this term means. “Well, how else can you use this term or whatever the case may be?” Being able to see them learn it and use it in a variety of ways, I think is a positive thing where before it was more, “Hey, did you memorize what this thing meant?”

Thus, in general, student engagement, creativity in teaching, and collaboration emerged as key positive components of the implementation of the CCSS.
At a greater level of detail, regarding articulating ideas, Mrs. R spoke about how the new approach improved her role as a facilitator for students and enhanced her support of their efforts to attend closely to how they used language to accurately express their ideas and to convey meanings with clarity…This is one of the essential 21st Century skills slated to be highly valued by employers in the global economy:

As far as the student-centered part…they’re able to have their own part in it, but they get significant help if they need it, in terms of explaining. For my part, then I walk around with the groups and focus on those students while I’m standing there or working with that group, just with the actual language things. “Let’s see, how can you say this more precisely? What kinds of words would make this either more interesting or more direct or are you really answering the question here? Let’s look at the actual words.” I try to do that while the rest of the group is working.

While these successes are clear, Mr. C did express some concerns regarding shifting ownership to students:

How are [students] going to know what to teach if I don’t teach it to them? I’m going to say I’m still a little ahead of that. I would even go like 60% teacher, 40% of the student. They just don’t know. How are they going to teach what they don’t know? I can’t just say, “Here, teach it.” It almost seemed like that has been almost proposed. Let them teach it. I know my colleagues have said, “How can they teach this? They don’t know.” I know but it’s not going to work that way.

This statement illustrates a certain unease also expressed by other teachers regarding the shift toward a student-centered classroom where students take ownership of the learning. For example, Mr. L stated:
I think the shift, while it is a good shift…it’s still going to take time for teachers, including myself, to find that proper balance between teacher-directed and student-centered. The old content standard system…could be very easily manipulated through a teacher-centered and teacher-directed instruction. At least for me, the transition, though it’s been beneficial and enjoyable, it’s still a balancing act.

While for most teachers the instructional shift was positive and meant a greater deal of engagement, some teachers appeared worried that it meant handing instruction entirely over to their students. Despite this, most teachers noted the benefits of students gaining ownership of their learning. These included: increased focus, creative opportunities, more excitement about learning, deeper learning, and enhanced capacity for the teachers to facilitate and support students as needed.

**Theme 6: Teachers experienced success teaching ELLs the CCSS.** The data in this study indicated that teachers experienced successes and challenges in teaching the CCSS to ELLs. The successes involved creating a safe learning environment that was characterized by establishing comfort, developing trust, and building confidence in students. More specifically, it involved utilizing discussion strategies that worked, including SDAIE, Accountable Talk®, Socratic seminars, sentence frames, strategic grouping, and differentiation. It also included a renewed capacity to provide students with appropriate support, including scaffolds, a period of practice, peer support, and L1 support.

**Teachers saw student success when they created a safe learning environment for ELLs.** The data revealed that teachers experienced success in teaching ELLs the CCSS when they had established a classroom environment where the students felt comfortable, garnered trust toward the teacher and their peers, and had confidence that they could meet the teacher’s expectations.
The implementation of the CCSS generally enhanced these components of teaching practices, according to the participants.

*Establishing comfort.* One feature of creating a safe learning environment was establishing an appropriate level of comfort for the students, in which they felt free to express themselves and take risks. Mr. B explained the dynamic that developed when students did not feel comfortable:

Sometimes it’s challenging, you have to really be on top of it because students can…veer off…When you put them into groups you do find some students come and they say, “Mr. B, a couple of them aren’t saying anything,” and I say, “Yeah, that’s going to happen sometimes.” Maybe they’re uncomfortable, maybe they really don’t know what to say. They’ll hopefully get used to it, [hopefully] they’ll be able to start participating. I hope it’ll help them because I think it will in the long run.

Mr. B explained that placing ELLs with other ELLs or with a more proficient bilingual speaker helped to increase students’ level of comfort:

I think they feel more comfortable with other ELLs because they’re familiar with each other…I had one girl last year that barely spoke any English in my government class. One of my really good students, she sat next to her because she can speak Spanish…She had a little bit of a hard time understanding. She spoke very little English and then sometimes…the other girl would help me with that. I said, “Fine, I’m going to have you right by her.” She ended up with an A in the class.

Mr. B also shared how placing ELLs with non-ELLs challenged students’ level of comfort but that, ultimately, it supported their learning:
[T]oward the end of last year… I kind of moved them away and put them with another student they weren’t familiar with… I told them, “You have got to get out of that comfort zone sometimes.” So then I would mix them up and I found that works… I basically started switching the groups a little bit and purposely putting the ELL student with a non-ELL. What I did notice is that they tended to participate quite a bit and I think it kept them a little bit more focused… That worked for them.

Overall, creating a safe learning environment where students felt an appropriate level of comfort was beneficial to ELLs’ learning under the CCSS teaching approach.

*Developing trust.* In addition to providing an appropriate level of comfort, teachers found that developing trust with students was beneficial to ELLs’ learning. Mrs. L described how the new standards helped her develop a classroom environment where trust thrived and students were able to be open and participate more actively:

In my classroom, I try to keep it more family oriented. I really try to develop that relationship with the kids that this is a family. We’re going to be tight knit. We’re going to be able to trust each other. We’re going to be able to open up to each other. Say whatever we want to each other… We’re having a discussion or debate. You can say whatever it is you need to say… We try to build that trust with each other.

Mr. C explained how he attempted to use the shift to support students to develop trust:

If you give them support and you’re there with them… you’d be surprised how that opens [the students] up. These kids will perform for you and then the thing that I do that I notice they really like is at the end of the day, if they were involved with maybe some reading if they did that, I say, “Okay, thank you, you, you and you for reading. That was beautiful.”
They’re like, “Oh, all right.” That support, you’ve got to have that or they will shut down.

Teachers’ described the need to develop a safe learning environment during the shift from the previous teaching model to the CCSS, where there was trust so that students would open up and participate.

*Building confidence.* Building confidence in students was another feature teachers described helped to create a safe learning environment that supported ELLs’ learning under the CCSS. For example, Mrs. R described how she built confidence in her students through encouragement:

I definitely implement it on a case-by-case basis, because some students, when they’re working on something on their own, they do much better than working in a group. If we’re talking about the collaborative things, then I just have to… make sure… each of those students is comfortable with what they’re doing. If they’re not, then they have no confidence in their skills. I find that if I give them… even just a little help, “What if you tried it this way?” and it’s different for each kid… For a lot of them, all it takes is a little bit of confidence, and then they can come up with something on their own.

Mrs. R also described how talking to students as they got started on a task and providing encouragement provided a catalyst for them to moved forward more independently in learning activities:

There’s that little support that’s needed to get them started… because they don’t want to start if they don’t think it’s right. If I can help them get started and say, “See, now you’re on the right track,”… just little confidence builders.
By offering support and encouragement, teachers were able to build students’ confidence in themselves; thus, enabling them to participate classroom learning activities that were in many ways new given the implementation of the CCSS approach.

**Teachers observed student success when they used discussion strategies that worked for ELLs.** As they implemented the CCSS, teachers that used effective strategies were successful in engaging students in meaningful discussions about content. Strategies that teachers said they effectively used to achieve this included: SDAIE strategies, Accountable Talk®, Socratic seminars, sentence frames, and strategic grouping.

**SDAIE strategies.** Teachers often spoke of SDAIE as part of their training to teach ELLs and about using SDAIE strategies to effectively provide the support needed for ELLs to remain engaged in the learning process through the CCSS. To choose how to effectively work with students, Mr. B, for example, was able to draw upon his earlier SDAIE training:

I think it was more of the SDAIE training probably and seeing those strategies modeled. …In the past, I was more of a teacher-directed teacher. Now, I like the students taking more responsibility for their learning. It will be a work in progress because they’re just not used to it.

Mr. N explained how he used partner discussion strategies to support and engage ELLs in his class:

Sometimes to get them engaged if it’s a question and I’m asking them to answer, I’ll do more of a pair and share, [and I will] make sure there’s somebody…bilingual…that can translate…so they can say it for them. That’s one way that I’ve tried to bring them into the conversation of whatever we’re talking about, by doing a pair and share first. Or I
have a question, then have them pair and share and then share it out, and then we discuss it…

The interviews revealed that teachers consistently drew upon SDAIE strategies while making the shift, particularly to support ELLs.

*Accountable Talk® and sentence stems/frames.* Accountable Talk®, a newer system of engaging students in meaningful conversations and enabling students to expand upon their peers’ contributions or elicit more information or clarification, designed by the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburg, was used to effectively support and engage ELLs in content discussions. The use of this system increased with the implementation of the CCSS and helped students learn to use appropriate academic language. As Mrs. J shared:

Basically, whatever it is we’re discussing…I give them sentence stems…and there’s lots of different ones to choose from. Basically, they have to have discussions about whatever it is we’re focusing on and do their best to use their Accountable Talk® stems to have an academic discussion and discuss the topic.

Mrs. J described her use of Accountable Talk® as a tool that was useful in helping students self-monitor their discussions:

I also have this…talking chip. Basically, they have to mark off how many times each person says something…I have taught them, “[T]his is something to help not only me monitor you guys, but for you to monitor each other. If you notice that hey, if I have my group here and Jesus is talking too much, Jesus likes to talk a lot, maybe Kelly needs to tell him to hold back for a second, so she can say something because she’s really quiet”…It’s a simple thing for the kids to follow…It’s been successful with all of my students.
Mrs. J described a card with sentence stems that students used when they were having their Accountable Talk® conversations:

They have one side that’s shorter; there’s maybe 10 [sentence stems]. Then they have the other side that, I think there’s probably 30. I basically tell them, you can use either side, whatever side you feel more comfortable with is completely up to you. You go with whichever one you feel like. They do whatever they feel more comfortable with, as long as they’re practicing and using their academic language and Accountable Talk®…They actually have fun with it. Their conversations are amazing. They stay on topic.

Mr. L described his use of sentence frames to facilitate content discussions:

One thing that we would do is…sentence frames. If I wanted to facilitate a discussion I could throw a question up on the board and throw a sentence frame underneath it. Have the kids write down their answer and the call on people to share them.

Mr. L saw this as a valuable support for ELLs, stating, “You’re still using that classroom discussion. You’re just modifying [with] the sentence frame…Something like that would work. It worked with the ELL students.” Teachers said they found the use of Accountable Talk® and sentence stems/frames as effective strategies in engaging ELLs in content discussions under the CCSS.

Socratic seminars. Socratic seminars are content discussions where students study a complex content topic or issue and potential open-ended questions about it in advance. They then come to the classroom and are arranged in two concentric circles. Using discussion norms and referencing the text, the students in the inner circle discuss the prompts with one another. During the seminar, students are expected to elicit information, expand the ideas of their peers,
and ask for clarification. Meanwhile, the students in the outer circle take notes. Mr. L shared his successes with engaging his ELLs in Socratic seminars:

Last year I did a lot of Socratic seminars…the way that I was taught at a training. You put the room in circles and you have people on the inner circle and the outer circle. You give them a prompt…I would give them a prompt ahead of time. For the Spanish speakers, I would have it translated in Spanish…I would let them know that when they were in the inner circle or the outer circle when they wanted to share, they’re more than welcome to share in English [or] in their native language. What was important is that they were sharing what they thought with the class…It was effective that way. Most of the time the English language learners would share out.

Mr. L described the need to be persistent and patient when incorporating an increased number of Socratic seminars:

When we were doing Socratic seminars, the first couple times it’s rough. The first couple times it doesn’t go as smoothly as it does time nine, 10 and 11…It just goes back to reflecting on what works. Before we’re doing it again, telling them. “Okay. This is how we’re going to get better.” The same thing happens with class discussions and sentence frames…The more that the students do it the more that they’re comfortable doing it. I don’t know if it becomes easier for them or maybe they just understand what I expect more.

Teachers found Socratic seminars another way to successfully engage ELLs in academic conversations, a strong focus of the CCSS implementation.

Strategic grouping. Teachers described how they grouped students strategically to facilitate academic conversations. They explained that this sometimes meant allowing students
to self-select their groups; other times it meant placing students in heterogeneous groups based on language ability; still other times, grouping was based on skill level or even degree of completion on a project. Mrs. R described how she aggregated students strategically:

I set up… I definitely set up for my EL students, I set up a group where they have one of our students who is able to… understand things and explain it… I work them differently for different groups on projects… I try not to have the groups always have the same leaders…

I have a variety of leaders for different types of groups. When I’m working with something where the language support is critical, I’ll put certain students together and one student is the team leader, a student who I’ve already identified will be able to explain.

She continued, explaining how she facilitated the groups:

I’ll explain it, and then as I walk around, I’ll explain it one way, and then I’ll say, “Okay, why don’t you explain it again?” Just hearing it two times, I try to do that. When the students are working together, I just make sure that everyone has their own section that they have to do, so that no one feels like someone took over their part of it. The ELL students, I find, are able to ask questions of the leader student, but still come up with their own items.

Mr. N also described how he grouped students strategically:

Depends on the strategy. How complicated is it that they would have to have practice? Sometimes if it’s a group learning strategy, they’re working in groups… For example, I tried to make strategic groups… All three levels in one group, to see if that would help support those who needed it most. Then I would do something like a jigsaw method, and
getting them to understand even their part was difficult, because they hadn’t seen it yet.

Again, having those key students who would translate for them, to help them understand what they’re supposed to be doing, or having the bilingual aide there to translate, to help understand what it is that they need to do.

Teachers saw success in students when they were mindful of their diverse needs and abilities, and particularly when they used these insights to group students strategically, all techniques that the shift to the CCSS facilitated.

*Teachers observed students’ success when they gave ELLs needed supports.* The data indicated that under the CCSS, providing ELLs with supports, including L1 support and a period of practice, was crucial to meaningful engagement and meeting the challenges of the CCSS.

*Scaffolds.* Teachers described how they use scaffolds and how this method supported students’ learning. Mr. N shared how he implemented scaffolds:

I always scaffold everything, so as much as I can, any strategy that I would implement for anything, I would try it out with specific groups, or try it out with a specific class, one class, or even try it out in one lesson, see how it goes and continue to do it, or build on it if necessary.

Mrs. J spoke about how she used scaffolding with Accountable Talk® and vocabulary:

Like I was saying, the Accountable Talk®, they think that’s kind of funny at first, and it’s a little awkward, but eventually they get the hang of it and they know what they’re doing, so they get used to it. Scaffolding, yes, I will do that with the kids. It depends what it is. Vocabulary, we’ll do scaffolding with that, where it gets a little bit more complicated each time we work on something. We also review it daily to help them get used to the words so that they can build upon it.
Mr. C described his method of scaffolding as beginning with something basic and working towards building background knowledge to move students towards greater complexity:

I’ll talk about the women’s suffrage, I’ll introduce it with an article, let them create a timeline out of the article… I’ll show them the movie about it, brings all that to life. Then they will write a paper about that, as well. We’ll go from something small, make a timeline, to the movie and then [they] give me an essay. Some other ones, I will model it. I keep examples from previous years so they say, “Oh, this was a protest poster”… You need to… show them what you’re expecting and then they’ll do it.

The teachers generally said they found that using scaffolds helped to support ELLs in their learning to meet the requirements of the CCSS.

**L1 support.** Teachers described using L1 as an important means of support for ELLs in their learning of content. Mr. L discussed how he encouraged student responses in L1 during Socratic seminars in his world history class:

They rose to the occasion… we would do Socratic seminars probably every three weeks. Last school year we did somewhere between 10 to 12 of them. A lot of [my ELLs] were able to share what they thought. If it was in Spanish or English, it didn’t really matter to me. Even with a student who spoke Vietnamese and the other student who spoke Arabic. If they wanted to share it in their native language that was fine… When students would have to get in groups and do group work they could write the answers in their native language. I was looking more for understanding [and not] how it was transmitted.

Mr. L explained how the students would progressively use more English over the course of the year:
In the beginning most of them would speak…in their native language. There were some students who, they’d only been living in the United States for one or two months before they were put in tenth grade world history. For them, the language just wasn’t there yet. That’s why some of them…would only share in their native language. Some students started in their native language and by the end of the year they felt more comfortable and they would share what they thought in English.

Mr. L also described how he served as the translator to students who chose to use Spanish when they shared during Socratic seminars:

In the Socratic seminars after they said it [in Spanish] I would just say, “Oh this is what Angel said,” so that they could understand. Part of the Socratic seminar is that you can respond to what somebody else said. Usually with the English language learners, I would make sure that they were in the inner circle together…There were times when they would have an entire conversation in Spanish. They would bounce ideas off of each other.

Allowing ELLs to use L1 during discussion in the classroom was an important support in students’ learning and discussion of content, under the teaching approach used through the CCSS.

*Period of practice.* Providing students opportunities to practice was also described as an important method of supporting ELLs’ learning. For example, Mr. L stated:

The more opportunities you can give any student to understand a concept they’re going to benefit from it. The general population [of] English language learners…The more you do something, the more comfortable they become doing it…I just think the more you consistently do something the better the students become at it.

Mrs. R shared that she found student practice important for improving presentations and writing:
Especially if it has to do with presenting any kind of speaking thing or anything that requires anything in front of the class, definitely. With writing…I think practice helps. The more essays we do through the year, but for each individual writing type of assignment, a lot of times they just need…[practice to] get them to where they need to be.

Mrs. J explained how practice with Accountable Talk® allowed students to get used to talking with one another and building off each other’s contributions, a dynamic that was fundamental in the shift to the new standards:

They think it’s funny at first, because they’ll be like, “So, what do you think about the topic?” The other one will be, “Well, I think.” They’ll give their opinion. They’re laughing about it at first, but after about five, ten minutes, they really get the hang of it. The next few times, it’s not that big of a deal. They just go get in their groups and they know what to do and they just do it. The first time, it’s a little awkward and they think it’s a little funny, but they get used to it…After that two or three times, they’re pretty good about it…

When given the needed support of practice, ELLs were successful in a variety of learning activities under the CCSS instructional approach, including speaking, presenting, and writing.

*Differentiated instruction.* Teachers were effective with students when they were flexible regarding the level of support that they thought they should give students, what they believed the students needed to produce, and the timeline they perceived a product needed to be completed. Mrs. R described how she considered her ELL students on a case-by-case basis to determine which strategies would be effective:

I implement them on a case-by-case-basis, because I don’t just strictly look at, here’s an ELL list and here’s what these students have to do that’s different…or…in addition to
what other students do. Some of my ELL students don’t have the same language obstacles or don’t face the same challenges. Some of them are identified as ELLs, but they don’t tend to have any trouble at all.

Mr. B discussed how he became increasingly attentive to when students might need extra help from him, given the shift:

I think I’m making a conscious effort to be aware…if they’re struggling to give them a little bit more individual help, so if they’re in their groups coming…around to their groups a little bit more and give them more, I would say, a little bit more attention if they need it. I’m more conscious of what they’re doing, and if they’re struggling, and trying to provide time. I do provide a lot of time. Basically I’m there after school. I’m there at lunch…I’m conscious of who they are and the struggles they are going through.

Mrs. R described some of the specific strategies she used to differentiate instruction for ELLs:

[I] allow them the benefit of extra resources and material strategies in order to access it.

[I] will break down things in steps or give an extra graphic organizer or map it out…if it’s something that is causing them difficulty. I find out that when I break things down to the components, a step-by-step approach, [it] will work with my ELL students. When it’s finally put together, I would say they know it just as well as any other student in the class.

In implementing the CCSS, teachers described their use of differentiation as an important strategy for supporting the academic success of ELLs during and after the shift.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the analysis of interview transcripts from an IPA study. The chapter began with an introduction, which included the purpose of the study and the organization of the chapter. Next, each of the participant’s profiles were highlighted, with
information about each participant’s decision to become a teacher, initial teacher training, and recent trainings to work with ELLs. The following section provided the context for the study and included a table of the types of trainings available to teachers at the school sites as well as a description of each of the four school sites. The next section presented the research question that guided the study: What is the experience of high school content teachers who are implementing the Common Core State Standards for English language learners? The final section included the significant themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes were: (a) Earlier mandates were constraining and left teachers open to the CCSS; (b) Teachers viewed the CCSS as an opportunity to build students’ competence; (c) Teachers needed more preparation for the instructional shifts; (d) Teachers’ experienced greater satisfaction with the instructional shifts; (e) Teachers described improved student engagement with the CCSS; and (f) Teachers experienced success teaching ELLs the CCSS. The six significant themes answered the research question and illustrated teachers’ experiences with implementation of the CCSS for ELLs.
Chapter 5: Summary of the Findings and Recommendations

This study examined the experiences of seven core subject high school teachers in southern California who were implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), specifically the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy with their classes. In particular, the study examined teachers’ experiences addressing the standards with English language learners (ELLs).

This chapter begins with an introduction, followed by a section that revisits the problem of practice. This is followed by the research question. Next the findings are presented, first in a general manner, then more specifically in relation to the theoretical framework, then in relation to the literature review. Next, the implications for practice are discussed. Next, conclusions are presented. Following the conclusions, the chapter provides a post-analysis reflection of findings, a reflection of positionality, and clarification of transferability limitations. Finally, the chapter ends with future areas for research.

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

The enrollment of ELLs in U.S. schools has grown rapidly and continues to represent a sizable percentage of students in the public school system. Between the academic years 2004-2005 and 2014-2015, ELL enrollment increased and comprised nearly 4.6 million of all students enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). When this study was conducted in 2017, ELLs made up nearly one out of ten students in the U.S. public school system; in California, ELLs made up a significantly greater percentage, with nearly one out of three students entering school as an ELL (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Statisticians estimated that by 2025, ELLs would make up 25% of the total national student enrollment (National Education Association, 2008).
ELLs have consistently underperformed on standardized exams in comparison to English-dominant students (August, et al., 2014; Drake, 2014; Fry, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013a) due to the dual challenge of gaining and comprehending content as well as learning the English language (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2012; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). They also frequently have less experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Téllez & Waxman, 2005), are approached with instructional practices that emphasize low-level skills, including vocabulary and sentence structure (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012; Hakuta & Santos, 2012), and learn from teachers who are more likely to ask ELLs fact-based-questions and to avoid seeking elaboration from ELLs, as compared to mainstream students (Zwiers, 2007).

With ELLs representing a large and growing portion of U.S. public school enrollment, it is crucial that teachers engage in constructivist practices that appropriately address the needs of ELLs and engage them in dynamic discourse that builds their academic language so that they can graduate both college and career ready. Students, including ELLs, were, at the time this study was conducted, increasingly being evaluated for college and career readiness. In 2017, when this research took place, 42 states were testing students on the CCSS in English language arts/literacy and mathematics (California Department of Education, 2017d); accordingly, California was administering the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) in grades 3 through 8 and 11. Results of the ELA/literacy component of the test showed that only 9% of ELLs met or exceeded the standard, while 64% of English-only students met or exceeded the standard (California Department of Education, 2017d).

The results of this test illustrate an achievement gap of 55%. It is critical that this gap be addressed. Simply viewing ELLs as unable to meet the standards or through a deficit lens places them at risk. For them to advance in learning both English and content, it is of timely essence
that ELLs be fully engaged in language and in meaningful discourse to succeed (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Franquiz, Salazar, & Passos De Nicolo, 2011; Goldenberg, 2013). For ELL students to meet the challenges of the rigorous standards, teachers need to prioritize the development of academic English for ELLs and engage students in meaningful, content-related, academic conversations that elevate students’ awareness of how to articulate their ideas effectively, to construct evidence based arguments, and to demonstrate understanding of complex problems. Consequences of not preparing ELLs for 21st Century society include: reduced employment, lower income earnings, and fewer college opportunities (Batalova & Fix, 2011; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Additionally, students who do not achieve a post-secondary degree will earn less and will consequently have lower taxable income earnings. This affects federal, state, and local government revenues (Baum, Ma, & Pavea, 2013).

The high school years are an opportune time to equip ELLs with the knowledge and skills they will need for college and career success (Long, Conger, & Iatarola, 2012; National High School Center, 2012). It is especially important that ELLs gain a solid academic skill set during their high school years because of the increased need for a more highly skilled and educated U.S. workforce (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b). Teachers who are highly qualified can prepare ELLs to develop the English skills that are needed to narrow the education achievement gap (Amrein-Beardsley, 2007; Borman & Kimbal, 2005; Cadiero-Kaplan & Rodriguez, 2008). Furthermore, a shift in instructional methods for ELLs from an emphasis on vocabulary and grammar to a focus on discursive language constructs that are learner-centered, collaborative, and inclusive of students’ linguistic and cultural diversity, holds potential for guaranteeing ELLs an improved outlook as participants in a 21st Century society (Hakuta & Santos, 2012).
As Chapter 2 documented, limited research existed in 2017, when this study was conducted, on the specific skills that teachers need to develop adolescent ELLs’ content knowledge (Faltis, Arias, & Ramírez-Marín, 2010), oral language (Samson & Collins, 2012), and academic language (Faltis, Arias, Ramírez-Marín, 2010; Francis & Vaughn, 2009; Samson & Collins, 2012; Slama, 2012). This study adds to the understandings of how teachers experience changes in instructional practices with the implementation of the CCSS, especially as it pertains to teachers’ work with ELLs and the teaching of language and content simultaneously.

**Research Question**

The research question that guided this study was: What is the experience of high school content teachers who are implementing the Common Core State Standards for English language learners?

**Discussion of Research Findings**

In relation to the research question, “What is the experience of high school content teachers who are implementing the Common Core State Standards for English language learners?” this study indicated six significant themes that illustrate a shift away from the earlier California state standards that implicitly called for a teacher-centered and test driven learning environment toward a more student-centered learning environment that called for deeper learning, collaboration, project-based learning and content-discussions. Teachers described a more stressful teaching environment with the earlier standards, primarily because they tried to cover an extensive amount of material in a relatively short time to prepare students for a multiple-choice test. Though teachers said they felt they and their colleagues needed more training to be effective with the instructional changes, teachers were more satisfied, saw greater student achievement, and described enhanced success in teaching ELLs by implementing the new
standards. The following figure illustrates common experiences that teachers described with the shift in instruction from the earlier California standards to the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy.

Figure 5.1

*Major shifts from earlier California standards to the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy*
As illustrated, teachers in the study described their experience with the earlier California state standards as stressful. This had much to do with the design of the standards, which necessitated a heavy test focus. In order to best prepare students for the state test, teachers had to cover a comprehensive and packed curriculum in a short period of time, and consequently they were unable to go deeply into the curriculum. In essence, teachers had to teach in a superficial manner, primarily just giving students the facts, without much reasoning or reflection. To cover the greatest quantity of material possible in time for the state test, teachers rushed through the curriculum and tended to teach in a teacher-centered manner, typically delivering content in a lecture-style format. Accordingly, students rarely had opportunities to engage with the material or hold discussion in meaningful ways because giving students time to question, debate, or deepen their knowledge of the content would result in lost time to cover the material and to be on target with curriculum pacing guides. One significant outcome of this manner of teaching, according to the teachers interviewed for this study, was that ELLs received limited support. Engaging ELLs in the full spectrum of language, which includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing, had been neglected under the previous standards; teachers explained that the most efficient method of delivering content was to give students notes via lectures, with little student interaction. Because of the constraints teachers felt with the earlier California standards, teachers were more open to the CCSS.

With the implementation of the CCSS teachers described a shift in their teaching experiences in terms of how satisfied and how effective they felt. With the new standards, teachers described more freedom to be creative and teach in ways that could engage the students more deeply in the curriculum. They could spend more time on specific topics that interested them and their students, and were able to give students opportunities to think critically and
analyze, use primary source documents, and write more. The move to the CCSS, the teachers described, allowed them to better prepare students for college and career, as it provided students with more opportunities to engage in 21st Century skills like critical thinking and real-life application. Teachers also described their experience with the CCSS as challenging and expressed a need for more preparation, both for themselves and for their colleagues, particularly in how to address the CCSS with ELLs. Teachers also shared how their teaching style had changed, how student engagement had increased, and how they were able to more effectively provide support to ELLs. Teaching methodology reflected an overall shift from teacher-centered to student-centered, and teachers provided students more frequent opportunities for collaboration, projects, and content conversations.

Findings from this study revealed six themes:

• Theme 1: Earlier mandates were constraining and left teachers open to the CCSS
• Theme 2: Teachers viewed the CCSS as an opportunity to build students’ competence
• Theme 3: Teachers needed more preparation for the instructional shifts
• Theme 4: Teachers experienced greater satisfaction with the instructional shifts
• Theme 5: Teachers described improved student engagement with the CCSS
• Theme 6: Teachers experienced challenges and successes teaching ELLs the CCSS

Findings in relation to the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework that guided this study included key ideas from social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1962) as well as important ideas from research in academic language (Cummins, 1979; Haneda 2014), constructive conversations (Zwiers, o’Hara, & Pritchard, 2014), and ELLs’ need for academic language to be scaffolded (Chamot & O’Malley, 1987; Davin, 2013; Kao, 2010; Dutro, Levy, &

**Social Constructivism.** Social constructivism posits that cognitive development is generated from social interactions, and it emphasizes the importance of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where students achieve learning when social interactions take place with a more knowledgeable peer or teacher at a level that is slightly above the student’s independent level (Vygotsky, 1962). The findings in this study indicate that teachers who worked with ELLs understood these concepts and instructed in a manner consistent with this theory. In various ways, the teachers were cognizant of students’ language abilities, and, as a result of the implementation of the CCSS, they made attempts to support students in ways that engaged them in interactions with peers through group work, collaborations, and various types of speaking opportunities. Teachers also provided support to students that allowed ELLs to work with a more knowledgeable person, whether that was the teachers themselves, a bilingual instructional aide, or another student with a more advanced knowledge of English.

**Cognitive Development.** Findings from this study supported Vygotsky’s (1962) theory that cognitive development results from social interactions. In this study, teachers shifted away from the earlier California standards, which had positioned them to teach in a way that was low level, and did not engage students in higher-level thinking. With the shift to the CCSS, teachers expressed that they felt that teaching moved from a superficial level to a deeper level. This shift resulted in deeper cognitive engagement with students, which better supported students in their language development. As a consequence of this change, teachers described their instruction as more effective. They noted that students were more engaged and focused. Furthermore, they expressed a sense that students learned the content more deeply.
Zone of proximal development. Vygotsky’s (1962) theory of the ZPD posits that in order for learning development to occur, students need to communicate with others through their environment, and they must be challenged at a level that is slightly above their independent level. This typically occurs with a teacher or more knowledgeable peer. Data from the interviews indicated that teachers frequently supported ELLs in their ZPD. The teachers often spoke about supporting students, frequently checking for understanding, and pairing students with another student who was slightly more capable or proficient in English. In this context, the teachers were having ELLs work with a more skilled student who could offer immediate support when needed. In other instances, teachers were able to place bilingual instructional aides with groups of ELLs to offer instructional support in English. As facilitators of collaborative learning, teachers also took enhanced responsibility to support students themselves. They circulated around the classroom as students worked, and then stopped to provide more individualized support to students who were struggling. Consistent with the theory of ZPD, the findings in this study indicate that teachers were cognizant that ELLs needed be challenged within an appropriate level of difficulty and readily supported by either a student who was more knowledgeable, a bilingual instructional aide, or by the teacher.

Academic Language. According to academic language theory, ELLs’ Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) can only develop “within a matrix of human interaction” (Cummins, 1984, p. 4). Data from this study indicate that teachers’ practices had shifted in ways that were more supportive of the development of academic language for ELLs. In this study, teachers had shifted from a teacher-centered stance, where the teacher does the majority of the talking, toward a student-centered format, where the students interacted more with one another as part of partner work, group work, collaboration, project-based learning,
inquiry, or Socratic seminars. This shift was necessary in order to implement the CCSS. Teachers described their instructional shifts as providing more opportunities to engage ELLs in a manner that would support language development. Thus, the data from this study revealed that teachers experienced a greater degree of application of academic language theory as a result of their implementation of the CCSS.

*Language functions.* According to Dutro, Levy, and Moore (2011), students need to know the specific language functions that allow them to engage in “the complex language of abstract and higher order academic thinking” (339). Examples of language functions are describing, explaining, elaborating, informing, sequencing, classifying, comparing and contrasting, identifying cause and effect, proposing/supporting, summarizing, and evaluating (Chamot & O’Malley, 1987; Dutro, Levy & Moore, 2011). In this study, the findings show that teachers utilized language functions through the use of sentence stems, sentence frames, or Accountable Talk® to help students access and engage in the academic language they needed to participate in academic conversations. By utilizing these techniques, teachers were able to engage students in academic language, which according to academic language theory is essential to language development.

*Academic communication.* Haneda’s (2014) theoretical perspective is that academic language must be perceived more broadly in terms of academic communication. According to this perspective, oral academic language is essential to academic achievement and to success in various career areas, including business, law, and public relations. Accordingly, the CCSS call for students to “work together, express and listen carefully to ideas, integrate information from oral, visual, quantitative, and media sources, evaluate what they hear…and adapt speech to context and task” (CA CCSS, 2012, p. 7). In this study, the teachers’ shift to the CCSS was
characterized by providing students more opportunities to participate in the types of learning activities that engaged them in academic communication. These academic communication strategies included: partner interactions, group work, project-based assignments, and inquiry assignments. Within these arrangements, students were expected to do more than simply recite vocabulary or participate in lower-level learning activities. Rather, they were challenged to work with peers to delve deep into the content and demonstrate through collaborative learning that they understood important concepts in the core content. These findings indicate that teachers had aligned instruction both to the expectations of the CCSS as well as to the tenet of academic language theory that calls for students to engage in academic communication.

*Scaffolding.* An important feature of academic language is providing scaffolds to ELLs to make opportunities available for language access. According to this feature of academic language theory, ELLs need support in classroom activities that require the simultaneous learning of content and language (Schleppegrell & O’Hallaron, 2011). Furthermore, ELLs cannot acquire proficiency in academic language by passively sitting and listening to instruction, rather they need to be actively engaged in structured scaffolding that provides them with opportunities to engage in language within their ZPD (Davin, 2013; Kao, 2010; Lapp, Fisher & Grant, 2008). This can be promoted by ensuring that students get immediate feedback from their peers regarding logic, support for ideas, or definition of terms (Haneda & Wells, 2012) so that they can make corrections or modifications to their thinking and use of language. In this study, teachers created scaffolds for students when they permitted students the opportunity to give answers in their first language (L1), or when they used Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), or Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID) strategies. They also demonstrated the use of scaffolds when
they used the gradual release of responsibility, which moves from the teacher modeling how to complete a task, to the whole class doing the task, to small groups working collaboratively, to students working independently. Teachers in this study regularly used scaffolds to support ELLs with language and content development, strengthening the scaffolding feature of the academic language theoretical framework. Teachers described the nature of the CCSS as more conducive to providing the scaffolds that were needed by ELLs because they were not rushed to move through content quickly; rather, they could spend more time helping students to learn and develop their understanding of the content.

Constructive conversations. Zwiers, O’Hara, and Pritchard (2014) posited that constructive conversations are those that focus less on short answers and more on lengthier, whole ideas. To achieve this, teachers need to ask students to communicate for a purpose or to put forth an idea that can be elaborated or challenged in a meaningful conversation. Furthermore, in constructive conversations, it is preferable that students engage in conversing with peers as opposed to talking to their peers because talking with implies a stronger level of focus, listening skills, and appropriate responding. The findings in this study indicate that, with the shift to the CCSS, teachers had adopted instructional practices that provided opportunities for students to engage in constructive conversations. Teachers shared that they had students participate in Socratic seminars, which require studying a topic prior to the lesson to have sufficient knowledge to engage in an in-depth conversation with peers. Additionally, Socratic seminars provide students with a structured setting in which they are not merely talking to a partner or their group; rather they are conversing with their peers. According to Zwiers, O’Hara, and Pritchard (2014), conversing with peers provides students opportunities to develop understanding, explore new ideas, and develop new analyses of knowledge through academic
language. The findings in this study indicate that the shift to the CCSS propelled teachers to move towards engaging students in constructive conversations. In addition to Socratic seminars, teachers reported an increased use of collaborative assignments. Furthermore, they noted that such methods resulted in increased engagement and focus on content. According to the teachers in the study, when students were driving the discussion, they were learning more. This supports the constructive conversation feature of academic language theory.

**Findings in relation to the literature review.** According to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, understandings of the need for a student-centered pedagogy originated in the early 1900s as a response to teaching methods that were designed to prepare students for industrial society, where order and efficiency were of utmost importance (Flinders & Thornton, 2013). Having students seated and having them memorize and recite were common classroom practices, largely because such methods were viewed as effective in preparing students for the type of work that was ahead for them (Waks, 2013). Early progressives in education advocated providing students a more active role in their learning to prepare them for a changing world (Little 2013). During the Progressive Era in the United States, progressives had taken an active role in society addressing social issues such as poverty, work conditions, women’s rights, and immigration. A founding premise of Dewey’s progressive education was that “the purpose of education is progress and that students should learn through democracy by engaging in learning that fosters the development of democratic citizens” (Pecore & Bruce, 2013, p. 11). Dewey pushed forward this cause in his writing of “My Pedagogic Creed” (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2013) expressing the importance of social participation, as well as meaningful interactions. While education in the 1900s had intended to prepare students to enter the industrial workforce, education in the United States saw another revival of this type of instruction with the passage of
No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001. This policy was the result of heavy influence of the business model of schooling, which prepares students for the corporate world. Prompted by corporate leaders, with little or no educational experience, schooling shifted to a model that emphasized accountability through high stakes testing (Pecore & Bruce, 2013). The CCSS, meanwhile, offered a return to the tenets of the progressive model of education that prioritized the development of a “critical, socially engaged intelligence appropriate to democracy” (Pecore & Bruce, 2013, p. 13). The findings in this study indicate that teachers’ shift to the CCSS led to changes in their teaching that moved from a teacher-centered method to a student-centered method. All the teachers in the study described their earlier teaching practices, prior to the CCSS, as being more teacher-centered. The implementation of the CCSS opened the door to teachers’ ability and need to shift their style of instruction. In the study, teachers frequently described their role in the classroom as one of a guide or facilitator. This finding is consistent with the literature of progressive education and the call for a student-centered pedagogy.

Foundations for a student-centered pedagogy. During the 1900s, the factory model of schooling was developed to educate the masses of immigrants that were arriving in the United States so that they would be prepared for work in industrial society. The findings from this study showed that, prior to the CCSS, the teachers in the study leaned toward a factory-model of schooling in their classrooms, not because it was viewed as an effective means to educate immigrant students, but because it was the most efficient way to cover a lot of material in a short period of time. In a factory model of schooling, teachers are regarded as the foremen who wield great power over the workers, or students, who are expected to learn a standardized curriculum to be prepared for the workforce (Serafini, 2002). Similar to the literature, the findings of this study show that, under the prior California standards, teachers were pressed to teach in a manner
that was teacher-centered, rushed, fact-based, and focused on preparing students for a test. Additionally, under the earlier standards, teachers in this study described their methods as teaching from a list, “drilling and killing,” and relying heavily on lectures, with little student discussion. Alternately, with the implementation of the CCSS, teachers moved away from the factory model and toward a student-centered classroom. In the findings, teachers noted that with the shift to the CCSS, they were more focused on ensuring that students learned material more deeply, were more cognizant of students’ needs and interests, and were able to step away from utilizing a knowledge delivery method that relied primarily on lectures, toward a more engaged method where students took greater ownership and responsibility for their learning.

Consistent with the literature, the shift to the CCSS was beneficial in the sense that it better prepared students for the 21st Century. The literature noted that one model of 21st Century learning is the inquiry model. This model is flexible and is based on the premise that students co-construct knowledge through investigation and problem solving (Leland & Kasten, 2002). In this study, teachers had moved in this direction as a result of the implementation of the CCSS, and they had begun to put students at the center of learning through inquiry lessons where students took ownership of problem solving through collaborative conversations, use of technology, and creating. Teachers noted that this led to more excitement for learning for both them and the students. The shift toward inquiry and student-centered practices was not always smooth or easy because many students had become accustomed to a more passive role in which they were simply required to take notes; they were thus resistant to changing their ways of engaging in learning. Yet, teachers described the overall experience as positive because they recognized that, after they had succeeded in getting students to engage meaningfully in the curriculum, students were able to meet their objectives and the high expectations of the CCSS.
As noted in the literature by Schaps (as cited in Cloud, Lakin, & Leininger, 2011), numerous positive outcomes result from a student-centered classroom for ELLs, including the cultivation of positive and supportive relationships, higher attendance levels, higher academic achievement levels, and fewer behavioral problems. The findings in this study support the literature regarding these positive outcomes. Indeed, teachers experienced success with ELLs when they created a student-centered learning environment that felt safe and comfortable to students, and where students they knew they could trust the teacher and their peers and thus felt encouraged. Teachers emphasized that these features of instruction were the cornerstone of their effectiveness with ELLs.

**Discursive practices that engage students in learning.** Monologic and dialogic discourse. According to the literature on monologic and dialogic discourse, monologic discourse follows a predictable pattern of initiation-response-evaluation (I-R-E) in which the teacher initiates a question, the student responds, and the teacher follows-up with an evaluation of the response. In monologic discourse, teachers dominate the talk and limit student talk to close-ended answers or short responses. Applebee et al. (2003) found this pattern had been particularly disadvantageous to ELLs. Teachers interviewed for this study described their experiences with the CCSS as shifting away from a teacher-centered format of instruction that relied heavily on an I-R-E format of discourse to a more open format of discourse that provided students greater voice in the classroom. In this study, the CCSS indeed provided a more viable platform for students to engage in dialogic discourse. Teachers had moved toward engaging students in deep discussions of the content, as participants in the larger class and in small group collaborations. This shift, which positions students as the primary contributors to the conversation and include exchanges distinguished by meaningful discussion, authentic questions,
follow-up questions, and high-level evaluation, is described in the literature as dialogic discourse. From teachers’ descriptions, the discourse patterns in their classes had become more dialogic and based on the literature, this pattern is more beneficial to the language development of ELLs.

*Giving students a voice.* In the literature, Zuengler and Miller (2006) found that giving students a voice in their learning experiences is critical for building deeper, more critical understandings of the material. Additionally, it is important to provide ELLs opportunities to affirm their identity, because this is essential for them to build a high level of interest and motivation in a given subject. In this study, teachers described their instruction with the CCSS as better allowing them to give students opportunities to use their voices. Teachers expressed that, under the CCSS, they had more room in their instruction to: (a) provide students opportunities to share and exchange ideas, (b) allow students to articulate their positions on an issue, (c) permit students to use their primary language and relate personal experiences, (d) give students choices, (e) use curriculum that interested students, and (f) offer opportunities for creativity. In these varied ways, teachers had achieved what the literature indicated is conducive opportunities for ELLs to learn content at a deeper and more critical level.

*Supporting English learners in developing academic discourse.* According to the literature, it is essential that ELLs have access to a wide range of cognitively demanding academic tasks for them to increase their cognitive academic abilities (Chamot & O’Malley, 1996). Additionally, ELLs need to have abundant experiences engaging in meaningful academic conversations to develop cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Olsen, 2010). Teachers had made a shift away from a heavy reliance on basic skills, rote memory, and recall activities to incorporate strategies that engaged students in higher order thinking, collaboration,
and creative projects. Instructional strategies that developed stronger proficiency in English also increased. These instructional strategies that created opportunities for students to engage in academic discourse included: focusing on vocabulary development that increased in complexity over time; developing sentence stems/frames so that students had the academic and linguistic structures for discussing the content; utilizing Socratic seminars where students had to study the content in-depth in advance of the seminar and be fully prepared for a meaningful conversation; and allowing access to background knowledge and L1 during group work and Socratic seminars.

The implementation of the CCSS triggered a shift amongst the teachers toward instructional strategies that were better suited for engaging students in critical thinking and problem solving, which provided rigorous opportunities for developing academic language through discourse. Importantly, the shift to using these instructional strategies aligns the type of engagement the literature has indicated are best practices for supporting ELLs in developing academic discourse.

*Studies of discourse practices in high school content classes.* Teachers’ flexible or inflexible models of instruction. According to the literature, teachers that have a flexible approach to instruction utilize a student-centered approach, are willing to listen to student feedback, and tend to be responsive to student feedback in ways that are strategic and that better meet the needs of students (Agee, 2000). Consistent with this literature, teachers in this study described themselves in ways that illustrated that they had begun to implement a flexible model of instruction. Teachers noted that, with the shift to the CCSS, they were able to develop lessons that encouraged student creativity, addressed their own curriculum interests, and matched lessons to their students’ interests. Alternatively, with the earlier California standards, teachers described a need to adhere strictly to a narrow curriculum that prioritized effectively preparing the students for the state test. Additionally, Mr. L described a “balancing act” he had worked to
developed and believed other teachers would need to continue to find between providing teacher-centered instruction when needed, and student-centered instruction when needed. This example of alternating between direct instruction, and then moving to a student-centered stance, where students drive their learning, further illustrates teachers’ flexible models of instruction, and demonstrates that the shift to the CCSS created an opportunity for teachers to become more flexible in their teaching practices, similar to what the literature indicated was beneficial to students.

*Establishing phases for scaffolding academic discourse.* The literature demonstrated that establishing phases for scaffolding is beneficial to students when they will be expected to engage in academic discourse (Wachira, 2013). In this study, teachers who were implementing the CCSS with ELLs noted that students had some resistance and/or hesitancy to engage in academic talk, and using scaffolds helped support them in achieving the rigorous expectation that they engage deeply in the content with their peers. This was demonstrated when Mrs. J’s provided strips of paper to her students with sentence stems that they could select from on either side. When Mrs. J did this, initially students thought it was funny, but eventually and after some practice, using academic language became more comfortable to the students. This is similar to Qhobela’s (2012) findings that when expectations for academic language use are not strategically phased in, students may exhibit resistance. Lapp, Fisher and Grant (2008) demonstrated that the gradual release of responsibility was an effective scaffold for preparing students for academic discourse. Teachers in this study used this technique, which entails a process of shifting from a high level of teacher support to minimal teacher support. For example, Mrs. R described her expectation that students are eventually able to answer their own questions before they come to her for support. Additionally, Mr. L noted that providing students a period of practice was key to
them effectively knowing how to hold a Socratic seminar and engage confidently in academic discourse with their peers. In this study, the CCSS provided an environment for promoting the language development of ELLs. Furthermore, teachers provided a variety of scaffolds to support student development of academic discourse, which aligned with the literature.

*Using collaborative group work to engage students in academic discourse.* Rance-Roney (2010) suggested that teachers should create flexible groups for optimum success. These flexible groups include oral language proficiency, personality, controlled affiliation, common first language, and academic orientation. While teachers interviewed for this study did group students in different ways, none of the teachers created all of the flexible groups that Rance-Roney (2010) suggested. The participants in this study described the use of the following group structures to engage ELLs in academic discourse:

- Working with partners. This could be as simple as students sharing with the person sitting next to them;
- Homogenous groupings. In some cases, teachers grouped all the ELLs with one another in order to increase their comfort level;
- Heterogeneous groupings. Some teachers were intentional about placing ELLs with a proficient bilingual student.
- Student-selected groupings. In some cases, students were permitted to choose which other students they wanted to work with.

In the literature, Engle and Conant (2002) offered four principles for fostering productive disciplinary engagement: “a) *problematizing* subject matter, b) giving students *authority* to address such problems, c) holding students *accountable* to others and to shared disciplinary norms, and d) providing students with relevant *resources*” (p. 399). Teachers in this study
addressed these principles. For example, in Mr. C’s senior government class, students collaborated to propose a utopian society. Students had authority in their group to address all the problems they could foresee in such a society; they had to abide by norms and contribute to the project within their group; and they had access to resources to complete the project, including the classroom text, the library, and the internet. In Mrs. J’s class, students often worked in groups to develop creative projects. In her class, Engle and Conant’s (2002) four principles were fully addressed as well. These examples demonstrate that as a result of the implementation of the CCSS, the teachers in this study were applying effective strategies, as described in the literature, to engage ELLs in meaningful content conversations.

**Implications for Practice**

This study has implications for various groups of practitioners, professionals, and policymakers, including state legislators, district administrators, site administrators, teachers in leadership and coaching positions, and teachers in general.

**Implications for legislators.** At the state legislative level, this study provided an examination of how teachers experienced the instructional shifts that are a major part of the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy. At the time this study was completed in 2017, the California Department of Education (CDE) had concurrently unveiled the California School Dashboard, a new accountability system designed to address inequities in the education system for the schools and for students it served. The Dashboard replaced the Academic Performance Index (API), which was the primary accountability measure for California Schools from 1999 through 2013 (California Department of Education, 2017a). As the result of the adoption of the CCSS, it was necessary to develop a new assessment tool as well as a new accountability system that examined schools in a more holistic manner. Interestingly, this Dashboard reported progress on
10 indicators of performance, with one of the indicators providing information on ELL progress (California Department of Education, 2017b). Also around the time of this study, the latest version of the English language proficiency assessment, the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC), aligned to both the 2010 California CCSS for ELA/Literacy and the 2012 California English Language Development (ELD) Standards, was expected to be officially administered for the first time in spring of 2018 as a summative assessment. This administration of the exam was slated as an opportunity for legislators to evaluate the extent to which ELLs were having access to learning experiences that were challenging them to achieve the rigor and expectations of both the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy and the California ELD standards. Similar to the findings of this study, that process may also reflect the extent to which districts and schools have made the necessary instructional shifts to the CCSS.

With these concurring events, this study points to a need for districts to examine both their implementation of the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy and their implementation of the California ELD Standards, which offer direction regarding what both scholars and policymakers have determined is important for the instruction of ELLs. This includes the expectation that ELLs:

- participate in sustained dialogue on a variety of topics and content areas; explain their thinking and build on others’ ideas; construct arguments and justify their positions persuasively with sound evidence; and effectively produce written and oral texts in a variety of informational and literary text types…contribute actively to class and group discussions, asking questions, responding appropriately, and providing useful feedback in advanced English (California Department of Education, 2012, pp. 9-10)
This statement points to the direction towards which instruction must shift to align with the prescribed model of what education should look like for ELLs. In regard to Speaking and Listening, these standards also prescribe expectations for ELLs to:

- develop a range of broadly useful oral communication and interpersonal skills. Students must learn to work together, express and listen carefully to ideas, integrate information from oral, visual, quantitative, and media sources, evaluate what they hear, use media and visual displays strategically to help achieve communicative purposes, and adapt speech to context and task (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2017c).

In both the California ELD standards and the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy, students are expected to work together using oral communication to engage in thoughtful discussions that delve deeply into the content and require higher order thinking skills, such as evaluation.

Whether or not all students achieve this, and whether or not ELLs achieve this, as well as what conditions support or oppose the achievement of these standards, are areas for future study.

**Implications for district and site leaders.** At the level of district and site leaders, this study points to the need for investment in well-designed and sustained professional development for teachers who are making the major instructional paradigm shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. It also indicates the need for providing enhanced support and professional development for teachers facing this challenge; the teachers in this study indicated that they felt unprepared for the shift and were challenged in supporting ELLs in achieving the expectations of the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy.

**Implications for teacher leaders and instructional coaches.** For teacher leaders and instructional coaches, this study implies a strong need for professional development that is collaborative and hands-on, and that provides effective strategies for helping students to engage
in meaningful and dynamic academic conversations. The strategies that were described as effective included: creating a safe learning environment, using language frames, Accountable Talk®, Socratic seminars, scaffolds, a period of practice, and access to L1. This study indicates that professional development needs substantial and sustained over time to provide teachers opportunities to incorporate these strategies in a student-centered learning environment that engages students in critical thinking, analysis, use of evidence, collaboration, project based learning, and an enhanced use of technology.

**Implications for teachers.** For teachers of ELLs, this study offers assurance that the implementation of the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy can be accomplished with rigor and that it can be effective for all students, including ELLs. This study can encourage teachers by affirming that, while the shifts may be challenging, with effective training and pedagogy, strategies, scaffolds, and practice, teachers and students can aspire to meet the high expectations that are laid out in the standards.

**Conclusions**

This study indicates that teachers’ experiences of the shift to the CCSS were primarily positive and characterized by the provision of superior learning opportunities to the ELLs with whom they worked. Aspects of the positive experiences included: reduced stress, greater focus on the content, more freedom to be creative and responsive to students, greater support for ELLs, and the ability to provide more engaging lessons for students. These lessons, the teachers stated, delved deeper into the content; incorporated critical thinking; and used primary source documents, technology, academic conversations, and collaborative learning. While mostly a positive experience, teachers said that they initially felt unprepared for the shifts, particularly with ELLs, and that they were uncertain how they and their colleagues should make the shift to
the new standards. Trainings available to teachers at the four high schools in the study varied. Teachers noted that, when opportunities for professional development existed for implementation of the CCSS with ELLs, these were limited and not sustained.

In addition to the shifts to the CCSS providing a more positive experience for teachers, when effectively implemented, teachers appeared to be more effective in addressing the content and language learning needs of ELLs. In this study, teachers shifted from a teacher-centered format to a student-centered format, offered lessons that included collaboration, and created lessons that delved more deeply into the content. These changes, along with creating a safe learning environment and effective strategies for ELLs – such as SDAIE, Accountable Talk®, scaffolds, L1 use, a period of practice, and differentiated instruction – assured success for ELLs in aspiring to the challenges of the CCSS.

This study illustrates the promise the CCSS hold for preparing ELLs for the 21st Century. Districts and schools are seeking ways to equip all students to graduate both college and career ready, particularly by cultivating their ability to think innovatively, work collaboratively with others, solve relevant problems, utilize technology and multi-media, and communicate effectively (Hummell, 2015; Soulé & Warrick, 2015). This study strongly suggests that teachers may have confidence that aligning curriculum and instruction with the CCSS will have positive results in achieving successful outcomes for ELLs, as long as districts provide professional development and teacher support to help teachers move toward a student-centered teaching style. Indeed, districts and the state must invest robustly in building teacher capacity to instruct ELLs.

**Post-Analysis Reflection on Findings**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) calls for the researcher to use a double hermeneutic approach in which both the participants are trying to achieve understanding of the
world, while the researcher is trying to achieve understanding of the participants’ meaning making of a given phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Additionally, because the researcher continually examines the data, the researcher may revise his or her understandings (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). After the completion of this study and having had time to take a step back, reflect, and review its entirety, there were additional understandings that emerged for the researcher.

In reflecting back to the teachers’ professional development experiences, teachers received varied professional development at their sites, depending on what was viewed as priority by site or district administrators. While there was a range of professional development opportunities that honed in on the CCSS, reading, writing, listening, speaking, collaboration, critical thinking, and addressing the needs of ELLs, none of the participants articulated that they had meaningful professional development that was explicit in addressing both the CCSS and the needs of ELLs in a coherent manner. Teachers received training in one area or the other, but not in a manner that combined both. In several cases, participants stated that trainers might at some point during a workshop claim that the training was good for all students or the training was also good for ELLs, but trainings they received were not specifically designed to address the CCSS for ELLs. Despite the absence of training that intentionally addressed both the CCSS and ELLs, teachers articulated the clear benefits of the CCSS and shifting to a student-centered style of instruction for the learning needs of ELLs. Though not necessarily intended, this positive consequence was enlightening and illuminates the benefits of providing instruction that includes a greater emphasis on communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. The shift to CCSS provided a more communicative and deeply engaging classroom environment for ELLs, offering meaningful opportunities to discuss academic content and develop their understandings. This
shift away from practices that tended to rely heavily of direct instruction and lecture had powerful benefits for ELLs, as language development for ELLs depends heavily on using academic language in meaningful ways (August & Shanahan, 2006; Cummins, 1979; Haneda, 2014; Zwiers, 2007).

California schools hold tremendous potential in addressing the needs of the ELL population with the English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Schools: Kindergarten through Grade Twelve (California Department of Education, 2015a). This document provides comprehensive guidance and thorough examples and vignettes on how educators may implement the CCSS and the California English Language Development (ELD) standards. Coupling this framework with effective strategies for professional learning for teachers (Bishop, Darling-Hammond, & Jaquith, 2015) may be the key to fully addressing the needs of ELLs. According to Bishop, Darling-Hammond, and Jaquith (2015), professional learning for teachers should:

- be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice;
- build strong working relationships among teachers and include time to collaborate;
- be designed around major instructional shifts;
- address instructional gaps in student knowledge;
- provide meaningful tasks based on analysis standards based tasks and student work;
- assess student conversations in classroom for evidence of understanding.

In this study, teachers noted that the most meaningful professional learning experiences they had were those that were ongoing, tied to practice, relevant to their experiences and context, and collaborative. Participants’ descriptions support the literature on effective professional development (California Department of Education, 2015b; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, &
Gardner, 2017; Foster, 2017; Garcia, Arias, Harris Murri, & Serna, 2010; Molle, 2013) and indicate an important direction that needs to be considered for the professional development of teachers who are expected to make instructional shifts for all students, including ELLs, as a result of the new standards. The participants in this study represented only three school districts. However, if their experiences mirror the wider practices of California teachers, this study indicates that California teachers need stronger support in integrating the CCSS and ELD standards to bolster their practices toward the benefit of ELLs. Failure to do so may exacerbate the current gap for ELLs and English only students. It is, therefore; of vital importance that schools and districts provide effective professional learning support for teachers who are faced with the challenge of implementing the CCSS for ELLs.

**Reflection of Positionality**

As a research-practitioner, it is crucial that I identify my positionality to make clear any biases I hold that might have influenced my analysis. Scholars have argued that researchers cannot be wholly objective, for the researcher naturally has a perspective based on experiences and where she is situated (Haraway, 1988, 1999; Smith, 1974). My ethnicity, culture, gender, age, employment, experiences, and role as a researcher automatically bias me to some degree. I grew up in K-12 school systems that provided me a decent education, but they did not provide me everything I needed culturally to feel valued or heard. I was a minority in schools that were taught and led by predominantly White teachers and leaders. Beneath my insecurity as a student was an implicit understanding of my “otherness”. In the classroom, I experienced instruction that was primarily teacher-centered, and included very little student voice. Consequently, I relate to some of the challenges that ELLs face in desiring a cultural connectedness to schooling. Briscoe (2005) argued for an inclusive representation in the research of groups that have been
oppressed and I feel that, though I did not experience my education as an ELL, I have sufficient understanding of the subject matter as well as cultural experiences that provide broad perspective in my research.

Over the years, I have fought the low achievement of Latinos by opening doors of opportunity for others and myself. I became the first in my family to earn a bachelor’s degree; I have helped others pursue their education; and I continue now, to engage in actions that are transformative and push forward issues of social justice for Latinos. I have over 20 years of experience as an educator and have taught in a range of lower and upper middle socioeconomic contexts, have taught social studies, English language arts, reading, and English language development to culturally and linguistically diverse students. I began teaching prior to the implementation of the earlier California State Standards, and after their implementation, saw the impact they had on shifting instruction away from student-centered practices. When the Common Core State Standards were adopted, I studied them and viewed them as potentially moving education in a direction that would better serve ELLs.

I care deeply about the education of ELLs and see myself as a social justice change agent for more effective, constructivist, student-centered teaching practices, especially as they relate to ELLs. As such, I have served in numerous capacities as a practitioner (i.e. teacher, ELL coordinator, ELL parent organizer, teacher trainer, support provider) to provide education opportunities that ensure equity for ELLs. My position as an ELL Coordinator as well as my former position as a beginning teacher support provider afforded me numerous opportunities to observe teachers, see patterns in teaching practices, and develop assumptions about how teachers address the needs of ELLs.
Through my observations and conversations with teachers prior to this study, I found a greater occurrence of teaching methods that provided ELLs access to the content (i.e. visuals, media, graphic organizers) or academic vocabulary, and minimal use of strategies that engage students in practice and meaningful use of academic English. These observations were consistent with the literature (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012; Hakuta & Santos, 2012; Lefstein & Snell, 2011; Zwiers, 2007). Because of my experiences and understandings of the literature, I was aware of potential bias I might bring into this study. While I recognized that discursive practices that are student-centered are not commonplace, I monitored myself in order to not automatically assume that every teacher was not engaging in such practices. I strove to ensure the participants in the study could fully represent their ways in which they engaged their ELLs in rigorous, academic, and collaborative discussions.

To ensure that my study was as unbiased as possible, I listened attentively to the participants, asked questions that dug deeper into their perspectives, understandings of ELLs, knowledge of best teaching practices for ELLs, teaching objectives, and challenges with instructing in accordance with the CCSS. I understood that teachers develop along a continuum: while some may be further along in their practices in regard to engaging ELLs, some may have just begun to explore what they can do to help ELLs develop their academic proficiencies. As a qualitative researcher, it was imperative that I not attribute causes to why teachers might or might not engage in student-centered practices (Creswell, 2003, 2012).

As a social justice educator and research practitioner, I was constantly aware of my own positionality and the positionality of those I interacted with in order to promote honesty and a willingness to understand and learn from the participants. In this study I sought to understand how teachers experience the instructional shifts prompted by the CCSS, especially as they related
to ELLs. This study was an extension of my social justice practices, which reach beyond being fair and equitable: this study attempted to shed light on practices that can potentially close the learning gap experienced by ELLs.

**Transferability Limitations**

This study included the results of a small sample of participants (seven total) that worked in four California high schools where the CCSS, specifically the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy, were being implemented for all students, including ELLs. Since the sample was small, this study cannot be generalized to teachers of ELLs in all other high school settings. Nonetheless, it is possible that the findings may be applicable in high school settings where the specific context is highly similar. Qualitative interpretive studies seek not to generalize; instead they aim to provide an examination of how people make sense of their lived experiences. To increase the potential for generalizing, the study followed the protocol of constant comparison (Boeije, 2002); however, the small sample size of the study limits the extent that this study may be transferred to other contexts.

Lastly, it must be noted that the researcher in this study was a novice in the use of the IPA methodology, which requires practice and proficiency in conducting high quality interviews that are attuned to the nuances of participants’ behaviors to flexibly shift the conversation as needed to acquire data that sheds light on how participants understand their experiences with the phenomena. IPA requires a double hermeneutic approach that allows the researcher to make sense of the participants’ thought processes that led to their understandings and interpretations of what happened to them (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). To achieve this, the researcher maintained discipline throughout the study and was fully self-aware and systematic. The
researcher stringently followed the recommended procedures outlined in IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009); however, it was still a new experience for the researcher.

**Future Research**

This study examined the experiences of secondary teachers who had shifted from the earlier California standards to the CCSS, in particular the California CCSS for ELA/Literacy, especially in regard to their work with ELLs. Studies that examine the extent to which teachers are receiving support in the transition to the CCSS, particularly with regard for ELLs, may indicate an urgency for providing accountability measures to ensure that effective training is offered. Additionally, to further the understanding of this type of instructional shift, future research could examine teachers’ experiences of shifts to the CCSS for mathematics or the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Studies similar to this one could also be applied in different contexts, such as middle schools, rural and farm-working communities with migrant ELLs, or in other states, examining the particular variations of the CCSS adopted there.

In this study, certain instructional strategies stood out as helpful for engaging ELLs in academic conversations. Common across all sites in this study was the use of achievement teams and of Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). Also, described as helpful was the use of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) strategies for literacy with ELLs, Accountable Talk®, language frames/sentence frames, and Socratic seminars. While these strategies were documented as part of the teachers’ experience, none of the strategies was the sole focus of this study. Other studies could delve deeper into how teachers capitalize on these and other strategies for ELLs.

Additional studies could also utilize the IPA approach to document the perspectives of students, parents, or administrators. Examinations from these varied viewpoints would broaden
the understanding of the impact of the instructional shifts that have taken place in schools. A study from the students’ perspective could highlight reasons students resist a student-centered approach. Meanwhile, a study from the perspective of administrators could address their experiences – particularly structural opportunities and constraints – involved in getting teachers onboard for an instructional shift that supports the needs of ELLs. Additionally, a study that examines the experiences of ELL high school graduates who have moved on to college or the work force might reveal whether or not and to what extent the CCSS instructional methods prepared them for college and career. Finally, studies that utilize other approaches, including case study, narrative, or quantitative methods, could provide additional understanding of the instructional shifts that have resulted from the implementation of the CCSS.
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Appendix A

Letter of Intent to Superintendents

[Date]

Dear Superintendent [Name],

I am a graduate student in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program as well as an English Language Development teacher in the Chaffey Joint Union High School District. I am currently in the early stages of my dissertation work. The study that I am undertaking investigates teachers’ experiences with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, especially as they pertain to working with English language learners. Specifically, I am examining the successes and challenges that teachers experience as they shift from the earlier California Standards to the current California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. I intend to interview approximately 10 teachers from various high schools in Southern California to learn about their experiences with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

I have identified your district as a potential research site because your district has a large percentage of English language learners. I am asking for your permission to contact the high school principals so that I can invite teachers to be possible participants. Interviews would be set up according to teachers’ convenience, possibly on the high school campuses, but not during instructional time. With your permission, I would like to contact principals to inform them of the study and to ask them for their assistance in contacting teachers to interview, perhaps extending the invitation through a department or faculty meeting and/or via an email, depending on what the principal feels is the best method of communication. Interviews would take place during the fall semester of 2016. I want to assure you that the interviews will in no way disrupt the education of students. I plan to share the results of the study with the teachers, principals, as well as with you.

If you have questions or concerns regarding my study, please contact me at segovia.me@husky.neu.edu. If you are willing to permit me to interview some of the teachers in your district, please indicate by copying the paragraph below onto district letterhead and providing your signature. For your convenience, you may email a scanned copy to the email address above, or you may send a hard copy to:

Merianne Segovia
[Address]

Additionally, you may contact my advisor for this study, Dr. Sara Ewell at S.Ewell@neu.edu.

Sincerely,

Merianne Segovia
Permission to Conduct a Research Study

[Date]

I hereby grant permission for Merianne Segovia to conduct interviews with high school teachers in my district for the purpose of her doctoral study on teachers’ experiences with the instructional shifts of teaching the Common Core State Standards (ELA) to English language learners.

Signature of Superintendent
Appendix B

Letter of Intent to Principals

[Date]

Dear Principal [Name],

I am a graduate student in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program as well as an English Language Development teacher in the Chaffey Joint Union High School District. I am currently in the early stages of my dissertation work. The study that I am undertaking investigates teachers’ experiences with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, especially as it pertains to working with English language learners. Specifically, I am examining the successes and challenges that teachers experience as they shift from the earlier California Standards to the current California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. I intend to interview approximately 10 teachers from various high schools in Southern California to learn about their experiences with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

I have identified your high school as a potential research site because your high school has a large percentage of English language learners. I am asking for your permission to invite teachers to be possible participants. Interviews would be set up according to teachers’ convenience, possibly on the high school campus, but not during instructional time. With your permission, I would like to contact teachers to inform them of the study, extending the invitation to participate at a faculty meeting, department meetings, and/or via an email, depending on what you feel is the best method of communication. Interviews would take place during the spring semester of 2016. I want to assure you that the interviews will in no way disrupt the education of students. I plan to share the results of the study with the teachers, you, and the superintendent. I have already secured permission for this study with Superintendent [name].

If you have questions or concerns regarding my study, please contact me at segovia.me@husky.neu.edu. If you are willing to permit me to interview some of the teachers at your site, please indicate by copying the paragraph below onto school letterhead and providing your signature. For your convenience, you may email a scanned copy to the email address above, or you may send a hard copy to:

Merianne Segovia
[Address]

Additionally, you may contact my advisor for this study, Dr. Sara Ewell at S.Ewell@neu.edu.

Sincerely,

Merianne Segovia
Permission to Conduct a Research Study

[Date]

I hereby grant permission for Merianne Segovia to conduct interviews with high school teachers at my school site for the purpose of her doctoral study on teachers’ experiences with the instructional shifts of teaching the Common Core State Standards (ELA) to English language learners.

__________________________________________
Signature of Principal
Appendix C

Invitation to Participate to Teachers

[Date]

Dear Teacher,

I am a graduate student in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program. I am currently in the early stages of my dissertation work. The study that I am undertaking investigates teachers’ experiences with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, especially as it pertains to working with English language learners. Specifically, I am examining the successes and challenges that teachers experience as they shift from the earlier California Standards to the current California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.

I have identified your high school as a potential research site because your high school has a large percentage of English language learners.

If you choose to participate, we will meet three times for approximately 60-90 minutes each to talk about your experiences with the shifts in instruction to the Common Core State Standards, especially as they pertain to working with English language learners. The interview will be audio-recorded and will take place in the spring semester at a time and place most convenient to you. The interviews will be conducted outside of regularly school hours at any location you choose. No interviews will be done in my home or work place. You will choose a pseudonym, which I will use to conceal your identity in my study.

I intend to interview six to ten high school content teachers for this study. I am seeking teachers with at least six years of experience teaching and who have at least five English language learners in their classes. If you are interested volunteering to participate in this study, please click the link to the attached demographic form. By submitting this form, you are expressing interest in participating in the study, but you are not obligated to participate should you be selected.

If you are selected to participate, I will follow up with you to discuss the study in greater depth, have you sign an informed consent form, and schedule our interviews. You may withdraw from the study at any time. For your participation, I can offer you a gift card of $25.00 to Barnes and Noble or Starbucks. If you have any questions or concerns regarding my study, please contact me at segovia.me@husky.neu.edu. Additionally, you may contact my advisor for this study, Dr. Sara Ewell at S.Ewell@neu.edu. You will not be contacted again regarding this study.

Sincerely,

Merianne Segovia
Appendix D

Demographic Record Form

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the following form and email to segovia.me@husky.neu.edu or mail a hard copy to:

Merianne Segovia
[Address]

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<th>Demographic Record Form</th>
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<td>First name: _________________________ Last name: _________________________</td>
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<td>Male: ______ Female: ______</td>
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<tr>
<td>School: ______________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total years of teaching experience: ______</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department/Subject Area: _________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approximate percentage of ELLs in your classes:</td>
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Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University College of Professional Studies
Doctor of Education Program

Principle Investigator (PI): Dr. Sara Ewell, Northeastern University
Student Researcher: Merianne Segovia, Northeastern University

Title: Implementing the Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners: Understanding How High School Content Teachers Experience the Instructional Shifts

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study:
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it in further detail. You may ask the researcher conducting the study, Merianne Segovia, to answer any questions that you have regarding the process or the content of this study. When you are ready to make a decision regarding your participation, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being recruited because you are a high school teacher in California who is teaching the Common Core State Standards, you have taught at least six years, and you have English language learners in your classes. For this study, it is important to find participants who meet these criteria, as the study will examine how teachers experience the instructional shifts of the Common Core State Standards, especially as they relate to teaching English language learners.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to learn how high school content teachers experience the instructional shifts of teaching the Common Core State Standards to English language learners.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in a series of three interviews.

- Interview 1: The first interview will ask about your background and educational experiences prior to teaching, ongoing teacher training, and context for teaching.
- Interview 2: The second interview will ask about your experiences with the instructional shifts with the Common Core State Standards for English language learners.
- Interview 3: The third interview will ask you to reflect on the meaning of your experiences.

Each of the interviews will be 60 to 90 minutes in length. For the first three interviews, the researcher will come your site so that you will not need to travel.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The three interviews will be at any location you choose outside of normal work hours. Each interview will take 60 to 90 minutes.
Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
This study poses minimal risks, harms, discomforts, or inconvenience to you. The primary risk in this study is the asymmetry of power in the interview situation, whereby the researcher comes to the interview with a research background, which enables the interviewer to control the situation. In order to lessen the threat of control or power in the interviews, the researcher will be fully transparent with you about the interviews, about the research topic, and will be open to any questions about the goals of the research. The researcher will share her own educational and professional background and explain her interest in the research topic in order to build trust before the initial interview. Another consequence of the power asymmetry is the possibility of a manipulative dialogue in which the interviewer seeks information of which the interviewee is unaware. This type of hidden agenda will be minimized by having all the interview questions pre-screened by the faculty advisor, Dr. Sara Ewell and the Northeastern University Internal Review Board.

Another risk that can be posed to you in the study is discomfort in answering particular questions that you find threatening, or uncomfortable to answer. To mediate this, the researcher will assure you at the beginning of each interview that you always have the option of not answering any questions that you are uncomfortable with, that you may request that the interview be discontinued at any time, and that you are under no obligation to continue if you find the interview experience dissatisfying in any way.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, potential benefits include insight to how content teachers of ELLs teachers are experiencing instructional shifts as a result of the implementation of the CCSS. These findings may be representative of a larger phenomenon. It may show that there is a high comfort level in the shifts or that there are certain areas of challenge for teachers. Such findings can be helpful in pinpointing areas of strength as well as the types of additional support or training that may be helpful to teachers. This study can inform policy makers, researchers, schools of education, 9-12 school administrators, professional developers, and instructional coaches about the implications of these shifts, such as the types of resources, curriculum, or professional development that can support teachers of ELLs.

Who will see the information about me?
Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can directly identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

In order to maintain confidentiality in this study, your school site will not be identified. Additionally, the researcher will use a pseudonym of your choice to present your data in the study.

The audio recordings and transcripts for this study will be labeled with your pseudonym. They will be kept on a personal computer in the home of the researcher. No one else will have access to this computer or its data. Upon completion of the study, the data will be stored in a locked safe for five years. After five years, the audio recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board.
What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
There are no anticipated threats to injury or harm from this study. This study is based on interview data. Each participant’s identity will be concealed and each participant will only be identified by pseudonym.

If there is any discomfort by you, you may withdraw from the study at any time.

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a teacher.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Merianne Segovia at her personal cell number (909) 851-4401 or segovia.me@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Sara Ewell at (617) 373-2400 or S.Ewell@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
You will be given a $25 gift certificate to Barnes & Noble or Starbucks as soon as you complete the interviews.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There is no cost associated with participating in this study, other than the commitment to participate in three interviews.

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must be a high school teacher in California who has taught at least six years, is teaching the Common Core State Standards, and have English language learners in your classes.

I agree to take part in this research.

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<th>Signature of the person agreeing to take part</th>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of Merianne Segovia, student researcher</td>
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Appendix F

Interview One – Life History of the Participant

Thank you for participating in this study. I want to remind you that during the interview, if there is ever a time that you feel uncomfortable, you may opt to stop the interview or simply not answer questions that are not comfortable. **Do you have any questions or concerns?**

In order to collect accurate data from you, **may I take an audio recording of our session?**

*If yes, begin recording.*

Thank you for agreeing to allow me to interview you for my doctoral study. The purpose of this study is to understand how teachers perceive the instructional shifts that are needed in order to implement the Common Core State Standards, especially in regard to English language learners. I believe that the findings for this study will be useful to researchers because it will fill a research gap in what is needed to develop ELLs’ content knowledge, oral language, and academic language. Furthermore, it will add to the understandings of how teachers experience changes in instructional practices with the implementation of the CCSS for ELLs.

This interview will be the first of three interviews. It is important that I gather information from you over a period of time so that I can reflect on what you say and so that I can come back to ask questions that help me understand your perceptions of the phenomenon more deeply. All of the information that I gather will be strictly confidential. Information that could identify you will not be used, and only pseudonyms will be used. You may select a pseudonym if you would like. **Would you like to select a pseudonym?**

Please also know that if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you may ask that I skip that question. Also, if at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so. My small incentive that I can offer you if you complete the study is a $25.00 gift card.

My first interview with you is mostly to gain a better understanding of you and what led you to teaching. In our following interviews, I will ask more specific questions that inquire about how you perceive the instructional shifts that are necessary in order to implement the common core, especially in regard to English language learners.

**Are you ready?**

Okay, let’s begin.
Question 1: Please tell me about your experiences as a student.
Possible prompts:
- Were you high achieving? Struggling? Middle of the road?
- Did you engage in discussion? Talk only when called upon? Try to hide?
- What contributed to your choices as a participant in classroom discussion?

Question 2: Please tell me about the influences that led you to become a teacher.
Possible prompts:
- Did you always know you wanted to become a teacher, or when do you first remember wanting to?
- What were your early objectives, going into teaching?
- Was there a particular teacher or other mentor who encouraged you to become a teacher? What message about teaching do you recall from this person?

Question 3: Please tell me about your instructional context.
Possible prompts:
- What do you teach?
- Tell me about your students.
- What is significant to know about your students, their families, and their community?
- What is the school culture, and in what ways does it support the cultural and linguistic diversity of your students? Or, in what ways does the culture of the school not include the cultural and linguistic diversity of your students?

Question 4: Please tell me about training you have had in working with ELLs and what effect that has had on your instructional practices.
Possible prompts:
- Do you have any special certifications in working with ELLs?
- When was the training?
- How extensive was the training?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the training?
- To what extent has training or implementation of strategies been sustained? And explain how.

Question 5: Please tell me about the structures that are in place to support ELLs in your educational context?
Possible prompts:
- Do ELLs have the equal access to content, opportunities, and academic resources as non-ELLs? If so, what mechanisms are in place to ensure this? If not what is missing? Specifically, what programs exist or need to exist?
- What teacher trainings are available to teachers in regards to working with ELLs?
Appendix G

Interview Two – Details of the Experience

Thank you again for participating in this study. This is our second of three interviews in my study. I want to remind you that during the interview, if there is ever a time that you feel uncomfortable, you may opt to stop the interview or simply not answer questions that are not comfortable. Do you have any questions or concerns?

In order to collect accurate data from you, may I take an audio recording of our session?

If yes, begin recording.

You may recall, the purpose of this study is to understand how teachers perceive the instructional shifts that are needed in order to implement the Common Core State Standards, especially in regard to English language learners. I believe that the findings for this study will be useful to researchers because it will fill a research gap in what is needed to develop ELLs’ content knowledge, oral language, and academic language. Furthermore, it will add to the understandings of how teachers experience changes in instructional practices with the implementation of the CCSS for ELLs.

This interview will be the second of three interviews. It is important that I gather information from you over a period of time so that I can reflect on what you say and so that I can come back to ask questions that help me understand your perceptions of the phenomenon more deeply. All of the information that I gather will be strictly confidential. Information that could identify you will not be used, and only pseudonyms will be used. During our last interview you asked that I use the pseudonym _______________. If I address you during this interview, I will refer to you by your pseudonym.

My first interview with you was mostly to gain a better understanding of you, what led you to teaching. In this interview, I will ask more specific questions that inquired about how you perceive the instructional shifts that are necessary in order to implement the Common Core, especially in regard to English language learners.

Are you ready?

Okay, let’s begin.
**Question 1:** Please describe to me your instructional practices or style of teaching prior to the CCSS?
Possible prompts:
- How did the prior California teaching standards guide your instruction?
- What were your experiences teaching to those standards?
- How did instruction for those standards meet the needs of your students?
- Were you pleased or discouraged by the type of instruction that was influenced by those standards?
- Did those standards create opportunities for you and your students or did they limit you or your students?
- In what ways were you or your students challenged?
- People who study teaching often describe it in two ways: teacher-centered and student-centered. How would you describe those styles?
- Would you describe your teaching style during that period to more teacher-centered or more student-centered? Did you lean toward one or the other more? Explain how so.
- How much were you able to address the content learning needs and language development needs of ELLs with the earlier standards?
- How often were you able to engage your students in in-depth, content-based conversations? What did those conversations look like? Were ELLs able to participate in the conversations equally? What factors supported or limited the participation of ELLs? (i.e. time, scaffolds, environment, confidence, practice, background knowledge, limited vocabulary)

**Question 2:** Please describe, as you understand them, the instructional shifts that are needed to implement the Common Core State Standards.

**Question 3:** Please describe how well prepared you feel to implement the kind of student-centered teaching strategies needed to make the instructional shift to appropriately implement the CCSS for ELLs?

**Question 4:** Please describe your use of tools, support personnel, or support systems to increase your knowledge, abilities, and practices to address the academic and linguistic development of ELLs?
Possible prompts:
- Are there school-wide or district-wide strategies in place to support ELLs? What kind?
- Do you have access to instructional coaching, EL coaching, trainings or other professional development that assists you with any needs that come up pertaining to instructing ELLs? Have you used such supports?
- Have you had opportunities for collaboration with colleagues on the topic of supporting ELLs in meeting the challenges of the CCSS?
- Have you had opportunities for collaboration with colleagues on the topic of supporting ELLs in their language development?

**Question 5:** Please tell about your experiences with creating collaborative and student-centered strategies that engage ELLs in meaningful, academic, constructive content-based conversations.
Possible prompts:
- How do you identify collaborative strategies that you think will work in your classroom with your ELLs?
- How do you implement the strategies? Does it work well the first time? Do you use any kind of scaffolding with your students? Do you find that the general population or ELLs need a period of practice or other supports?
**Question 6:** Please describe to me your current instructional practices or style of teaching?

Possible prompts:
- How does the CCSS guide your instruction?
- What are your experiences teaching to these standards?
- How does instruction for these standards meet the needs of your students?
- Have you been pleased or discouraged by the type of instruction that is influenced by these standards?
- Do these standards create opportunities for you and your students or do they limit you or your students?
- In what ways are you or your students challenged?
- Would you describe your teaching style now to be more teacher-centered or more student-centered? Explain how so.
- How much have you able to address the content learning needs and language development needs of ELLs with the new standards?
- How often are you able to engage your students in in-depth, content-based conversations? What do those conversations look like? Are ELLs able to participate in the conversations equally? What factors support or limit the participation of ELLs? (i.e. time, scaffolds, environment, confidence, practice, background knowledge, limited vocabulary). In other words, which parts of this process are easier for them, and which parts are more difficult? Are ELLs able to participate equally? What factors support or limit them?

**Question 7:** Please describe your challenges or successes as related to implementing the CCSS for ELLs.

- Can you give a specific example of the success or challenge you or your students are experiencing with the implementation of the CCSS?
Thank you for participating in this study. I want to remind you that during the interview, if there is ever a time that you feel uncomfortable, you may opt to stop the interview or simply not answer questions that are not comfortable. **Do you have any questions or concerns?**

In order to collect accurate data from you, **may I take an audio recording of our session?**

*If yes, begin recording.*

You may recall, the purpose of this study is to understand how teachers perceive the instructional shifts that are needed in order to implement the Common Core State Standards, especially in regard to English language learners. I believe that the findings for this study will be useful to researchers because it will fill a research gap in what is needed to develop ELLs’ content knowledge, oral language, and academic language. Furthermore, it will add to the understandings of how teachers experience changes in instructional practices with the implementation of the CCSS for ELLs.

This interview will be the third of three interviews. It is important that I gather information from you over a period of time so that I can reflect on what you say and so that I can come back to ask questions that help me understand your perceptions of the phenomenon more deeply. All of the information that I gather will be strictly confidential. Information that could identify you will not be used, and only pseudonyms will be used. During our last interviews you asked that I use the pseudonym _______________. If I address you during this interview, I will refer to you by your pseudonym.

My first interview with you was mostly to gain a better understanding of you and what led you to teaching. In the second interview, I asked about your experiences with the implementation of the CCSS and the instructional shifts caused by the new standards, especially as they pertained to teaching ELLs. In this interview, I will ask that you reflect on how you understand the meaning of your experiences. As an Interpretative Phenomenological Study (IPA), both your and my interpretations of your experiences are crucial for the analysis of the study.

**Are you ready?**

Okay, let’s begin.
**Question 1:** In our last interview you had the chance to tell me about your experiences with the earlier California state standards and your teaching style during that period. My question now is what does that experience mean to you?
Possible prompts:
- What does that time period of your teaching mean to you?
- As you reflect on that time, was it one of pride, struggle, complacency, effectiveness, success, engagement, creativity, etc.?
- What words describe that period to you? Tell me why you choose those words.

**Question 2:** In our last interview you had the chance to tell me about your understandings of the shifts needed to address the CCSS. My question now is what do the shifts mean to you?
Possible prompts:
- What does this new period of teaching mean to you?
- Would you describe this as a time of excitement, dread, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, success, struggle, demands, newness, etc.?
- What words best describe this period to you? Tell me why you choose those words.

**Question 3:** In our last interview, you shared about your preparation to teach ELLs and the tools, resources, and support systems you are able to access. Now, I would like to ask you what does working with ELLs now, in the context of the CCSS, mean to you?
Possible prompts:
- What is your impression of how you are meeting your ELLs’ needs?
- How are you able to develop ELLs’ academic language and/or content knowledge?
- How successful do you feel and why?
- How are your teaching needs met?

**Question 4:** What does the shift in instructional practices with the new CCSS, toward more student-centered practices, that engage students, including ELLs, in meaningful, academic, constructive content-based conversations mean to you?
Possible prompts:
- What does it mean to your instructional practices?
- What does it mean to your satisfaction with teaching?
- What do the challenges and successes mean to you?
- What do student learning and student engagement mean to you?
Appendix I

NIH Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Merianne Segovia successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 11/09/2014

Certification Number: 1614303