Summer 8-7-2015

Perceptions of ESL Teachers' Roles within School Communities

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PERCEPTIONS OF ESL TEACHERS' ROLES WITHIN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2015

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I went into teaching English as a second language (ESL) expecting that the job

would be both rewarding and difficult. I knew that ESL, like all positions in education,

would present a variety of challenges. I anticipated most of these challenges would be

related to meeting a wide range of student needs, managing my classroom and working

with limited resources. While these expected challenges have been realized, so too has an

unexpected one. Understanding my professional role and how I fit within my school has

been an unanticipated challenge in my career as an ESL educator. I did not realize the

extent to which I would have to explain, clarify and defend my instructional role to other

teachers and school personnel.

The National Center on Educational Statistics (2014) reports yearly increases in

the numbers of English language learners (ELLs), yet the role ESL teachers have in

supporting ELLs varies significantly. My own teaching experiences across three districts

in the past five years, along with conversations I have had with several other ESL

teachers, mainstream teachers and administrators have made me recognize that the role of

the ESL teacher varies from district to district and school to school. Program models

guide the ways in which ESL services are provided to students and influence the ways in

which ESL teachers work. As a result, the expectations of ESL teachers can vary greatly.

Collaborative program models such as co-teaching are gaining popularity in an effort to

provide educational supports for a diverse range of students, yet the parameters of such collaborations and definitions of roles teachers have within them are often ambiguous.

This chapter will give an overview of my professional background, followed by an introduction to this study's guiding questions. I will preview some key issues related to ESL teachers' roles, specifically ESL teacher professionalism and marginalization. These issues will be further explored in Chapter Two's literature review. This chapter will also explain my role as the researcher for this project.

Background

Like many beginning teachers, my days were a series of ups and downs throughout my first year. I recall expressing to my mentor that there were times I felt confident in my instructional skills and role, while other times I felt truly perplexed about where I fit in supporting students. My mentor, who also taught ESL, phrased my confusion well when she said that it can be hard to know if we are wandering in the right forest, let alone if we are on the right path.

I remember some of my earliest attempts at co-teaching with mainstream teachers, which my first district was heavily advocating for at the time. I often took on the role of a teaching assistant or additional content teacher rather than a language specialist. I was frequently asked to sit with students to monitor how well they paid attention to the mainstream teacher, or help a small group of students complete a homework assignment from the night before. Other times I would work with small groups in the hallway, attempting to implement a language lesson only to be approached by a mainstream teacher requesting that I help the students with an impromptu class activity instead. I

frequently overheard other ESL teachers in the building express frustration when they felt they had been placed in the role of a teaching assistant for the past hour. On one hand, I was comforted to know that I was not alone in my feelings and experiences. On the other hand, the fact that we were not being seen as language specialists was becoming an increasing concern of mine. Looking back, I believe our own reluctance to advocate for ourselves and our strengths as language specialists, as well as external factors, resulted in being underutilized or misused staff members.

When I moved to a new school in a different district, I was disappointed when similar issues regarding the role of ESL teachers came up. Several mainstream teachers wanted to opt-out of ESL services for their students, under the assumption that ESL was an optional add-on program. ESL teachers were pulled from instructional time with students to monitor the lunchroom. Students, and sometimes their parents, asked if I were a real teacher. Most concerning was the day an administrator told me that as an ESL teacher, I should be getting coffee for the mainstream teachers or offering to tidy up their classrooms because I had the easy job in the school. Unfortunately, I am not the only ESL teacher to have had these experiences.

<center>ESL Professionalism and Marginalization</center>

As I began to do research for this project, I quickly discovered that I am one of many people who have considered ESL teachers' roles to be a topic worthy of investigation and academic discourse. Historically, the topic of professionalism has been of concern for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). For example, the presidential address at the TESOL convention in 1967 highlighted

challenges to the ESL profession while reinforcing the idea that teaching ESL is a specialized skill requiring professional training and linguistic competency, not simply knowledge to be picked up in a summer professional development course (Allen, 1967).

Brown (as cited in Edstam, 1998) reported on the results of a 1992 survey asking TESOL members to define the biggest problem facing them as ESL teachers. Professional recognition and acceptance ranked near the top. In a more recent position statement from the TESOL organization, recognition of ESL teachers as professionals was still a major concern (*Position Statement …*TESOL, 2003). The organization noted that in many places, ESL teachers do not receive the same level of professional treatment other teachers receive, and their distinct discipline is not respected as a professional practice. Testing is one area disparities are realized. The testing environments ELLs experience while taking the annual ACCESS test to measure their growth in English often differs significantly from the environment they experience when taking statewide reading and math tests such as the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs). When students take the MCAs, they are prepped for weeks and every effort is made for them to perform their very best. They are often served a special breakfast at school while hallways are shut down to ensure silence. When ELLs take the ACCESS test, it often takes place in a public space such as a cafeteria.

The fact that ESL teachers and programs often receive a different level of professional treatment highlights the need for ESL teachers to raise awareness to their profession and make their specific work around language development public in a way that can be understood and valued by others. This is one of many themes pertaining to

ESL teachers' professionalism (Edstam, 2001; Pennington, 1992; *Standards for the Recognition …*TESOL, 2010). Additional themes include being knowledgeable of relevant research and the field's history; serving as a resource to other teachers; being an advocate for students; building family partnerships; embracing professional development; being a collaborative staff member and developing a specialized teaching skill set specific to the needs of ELLs (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013).

ESL teacher training is designed to provide a specialized skill set and knowledge base to teachers. I once heard an analogy that mainstream teachers are to general medical practitioners as ESL teachers are to brain surgeons. I am fairly certain that brain surgeons' specialized knowledge is recognized more than ESL teachers'. Most people do not assume they are capable of performing a surgical procedure just because they know how to use scissors, yet many people believe they are capable of teaching ESL simply because they know how to speak English. Unfortunately, the task of teaching ESL is often oversimplified and reduced to the notion of common sense and good intentions by teachers outside the field of ESL as well as ESL teachers themselves (Harper & de Jong, 2009).

<div align="center">Role of Researcher</div>

My role in this study was as a participant researcher. I engaged with other ESL teachers as well as mainstream teachers and administrators through surveys, interviews and a focus group to learn about experiences they have had that have helped shape their perceptions of the professional roles of ESL teachers.

As my background may have indicated, I am going into this study with some biases. I am assuming that there will be some differences in the way ESL teachers conceptualize their role versus the way mainstream teachers and administrators do. I am approaching this study with the assumption that ESL teachers *are* professionals, whose professionalism is not always recognized.

Guiding Questions

Over the course of my career, I have been intrigued by the wide range of perceptions and expectations other people have regarding my role as an ESL teacher. As a result, these experiences have led me to this project, in which I am studying perceptions of the role of ESL teachers. Specifically, I want to know the following:

1) What do mainstream teachers and administrators perceive the roles of ESL teachers to be?

2) How do ESL teachers see themselves as defined by their colleagues?

3) How do ESL teachers define themselves as professionals?

4) What discrepancies exist between mainstream teachers, administrators and ESL teachers in the way the role of the ESL teacher is perceived?

Summary

This research study will focus on how the professional role of ESL teachers is understood and defined by mainstream teachers, administrators and ESL teachers themselves. I have worked in three different districts now, and I still feel as though I am learning how and where I fit within my school community. The number of students who qualify for ESL services continues to increase (National Center for Educational Statistics,

2014), yet ESL teachers' roles often remain undefined. At times I have been expected to work only with beginning English speakers through small pull-out groups. Other times, I have been expected to work with all students who qualify as ELLs by going into their mainstream classrooms, either to support whole-group instruction or work quietly in a corner of the room with a small group of students. I have spent entire weeks administering reading tests. At times I have been expected to implement reading interventions for any student who was struggling, whether or not they qualified for ESL services. I have been expected to be an on-call substitute teacher, interpreter and last minute homework helper. Many of these roles and duties have been outside what I have understood my role as an ESL teacher to be.

The professional recognition of ESL teachers and the work they do has been a topic of concern among those in the field for several decades. Teaching ESL requires a specialized skill set and knowledge base, which, unfortunately, often goes unrecognized to those outside the field (*Position Statement …*TESOL, 2003).

Chapter Overviews

This chapter included an introduction to key issues regarding the role of ESL professionals, my personal background as an ESL teacher and role as a participant researcher in this study. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature related this study. ESL professionalism, teacher preparation programs and ESL program models are topics that will be explored within the literature review. Chapter Three outlines the qualitative research method and data collection techniques I used for this study, which included surveys, individual interviews and a focus group. Chapter Four presents themes

that emerged based on the results of data I collected from mainstream and ESL teachers and administrators. Chapter Five discusses the key findings from this study, which include how mainstream teachers view ESL teachers' interactions with ELLs differently than ESL teachers do, as well as how the role of language within content instruction is unclear to many mainstream teachers, resulting in the role of ESL teachers remaining not well defined.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study investigates perceptions of ESL teachers' professional roles held by mainstream teachers, ESL teachers and administrators. This chapter provides an overview of other work that has been done in relation to this topic. Themes that will be addressed in this chapter include ESL professionalism, teacher preparation programs and ESL program models. These topics relate to perceptions of ESL teachers' roles and provide the context for my specific research questions; they are, however, all worthy of more extensive discussion than is appropriate for the breadth of this project. This chapter will also will also identify gaps in the current research.

ESL Professionalism

This study is an investigation into perceptions of ESL teachers' professional roles. In the broadest sense, professionalism refers to a person's competency or skills needed to effectively perform their professional duties. Teachers show professionalism through ethical conduct, service to students, advocacy, decision making and compliance with school and district regulations, with duties often involving delivering effective lessons, maintaining accurate student records, communicating with families and showing a commitment to their own development as an educator (Danielson, 2007). For the purpose of this study, ESL professionalism will be defined as a commitment demonstrating best practices in language teaching to provide ELLs with meaningful instruction, to serve as a

resource for mainstream teachers and to be an advocate for ELLs and their families. This is to be accomplished by reflecting and drawing upon a recognized knowledge base and specialized skill set in order to promote the academic achievement of ELLs.

ESL Teacher Preparation

Professionalism is woven into a teacher's entire career, beginning in the pre-service stage. In a collaborative work between TESOL and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), five Teacher Education Program Standards have been designed to prepare ESL teachers. Professionalism is situated at the core of this document, which is used in ESL teacher education programs. Professionalism is tied to all four other standards, which are language, culture, instruction and assessment. Professionalism is defined as an understanding of ESL research and its history. This includes being aware of relevant Supreme Court decisions, such as *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), as well as current state and federal guidelines. TESOL and NCATE suggest ESL professionals should serve as resources to other teachers, be an advocate for ELLs to ensure they receive equitable access to resources and also build partnerships with families. The last area of professionalism, as recommended by TESOL and NCATE, is that ESL teachers embrace professional development opportunities and collaborate with other teachers through a variety of models so that ELLs may benefit from best practices in ESL instructional methods and strategies (*Standards for the Recognition …*TESOL, 2010).

The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) has developed standards that are used across the United States to help prepare new teachers

seeking licensure. Similar to TESOL and NCATE, InTASC also includes a standard on professional learning and ethical practice. Many of the suggestions that TESOL and NCATE offer are echoed in the InTASC standards. For example, TESOL, NCATE and the InTASC standards all underscore the importance of ongoing professional development and learning, collaborating with colleagues and knowledge of laws and policy. InTASC additionally emphasizes the role of reflection and use of student data in their conceptualization of teacher professionalism (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013).

Currently, there are more than four million students in the United States classified as ELLs. This equates to approximately nine percent of all students in the country (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). This is an increase of over 57 percent in the past decade. Changing demographics are increasingly affecting classrooms across the country (Ballantyne, Sanderman & Levy, 2008).

Most ELLs spend the majority of their school day in their mainstream classroom with a teacher who may or may not be trained in teaching students with specific language and cultural needs (Harper & de Jong, 2009; Penfield, 1987; Staehr Fenner, 2013). As of 2008, only 20 states had ESL training requirements for all teachers. It should come as no surprise then that over half of mainstream teachers report feeling as though they need more training in order to effectively teach their ELLs (Ballantyne, Sanderman & Levy, 2008).

Many schools in the United States seek to address the needs of ELLs by hiring ESL teachers. The role these teachers have, however, in meeting the needs of schools'

growing ELL population is often ambiguous. One element that confounds the role of an

ESL teacher is the variance in preparation programs. Just as there is no national standard

for mainstream teachers working with ELLs, there is no national standard for ESL

teachers. Qualifications vary state to state and there is a wide range of requirements.

Some states offer ESL as a stand-alone license and require candidates to complete 40 or

more hours of graduate level coursework as well as pass a series of licensure exams.

Other states do not offer ESL as a license on its own, but instead consider it to be

supplemental, or something only to be added on to a preexisting license (Staehr Fenner,

2013). Add-on certification programs generally require less coursework and field

experience than initial licensure programs. For example, Georgia's ESL add-on

endorsement addresses language, methodology and culture through a total of only three

classes (Reeves, 2010).

The requirements for earning ESL as an add-on endorsement can vary even within

the same state as different colleges and universities design their programs. Organizations

such as TESOL and NCATE offer guidelines for institutions to follow when designing

teacher preparation programs, but these standards are open to interpretation, and as a

result there is limited uniformity and a lack of consistency in the preparation of ESL

teachers (Reeves, 2010). This wide variation in ESL teacher preparation programs has

contributed to a sense of ambiguity for ESL teachers across the country. Without a clear

role, ESL teachers are often asked to provide services or fill other roles that are not

directly tied to the language development of ELLs (Staehr Fenner, 2013). ESL teachers

might be used as reading interventionists, interpreters, substitute teachers, testing aides or

extra content area teachers. While these roles are often seen as important for general routines and No Child Left Behind guidelines, assigning them to the ESL teacher can negate the needs of ELLs and invalidate the role of a language development specialist. Using ESL teachers to fill unrelated roles reinforces the misperception that instruction specific to language development is less than essential for ELLs.

Specialized Knowledge

Researchers have repeatedly highlighted the fundamental relationship between a specialized knowledge base and professionalism (Freeman, 1992; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Pennington, 1992). ESL, like other academic disciplines, requires its own base of specific knowledge. ESL teachers develop specific linguistic, cultural and pedagogical knowledge in order to effectively teach ELLs (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2010).

As part of their specialized preparation programs, ESL teachers typically receive training in areas such as second language acquisition, linguistics, language pedagogy, assessment, literacy development and methodology. Knowledge of these topics puts ESL teachers in a position to recognize ELLs' specific language needs and then respond with appropriate instructional methods and strategies (Staehr Fenner, 2013).

Professionalism within an educational context also involves a teacher's ability to respond appropriately to situations and problems as they arise (Pennington, 1992). Problems that ESL teachers might encounter include scheduling, collaborating with reluctant mainstream teachers or having limited access to curriculum and other resources, such as a permanent teaching space or technology. An example of an unpredictable situation many ESL teachers have experienced is being in the middle of a lesson in a

public space, such as a hallway or breakout space, only to be interrupted by a class and told they have to leave and finish their lesson elsewhere. Unpredictable situations and opportunities to problem solve will arise for all teachers. ESL teachers, like others, have to use their knowledge and skills to handle these circumstances effectively so student learning remains at the forefront. For instance, an ESL teacher who is confronted with the problem of being routinely asked by an administrator to perform job duties that detract from meeting the needs of ELLs may need to share his or her knowledge of federal or state guidelines for serving ELLs.

Building Others' Awareness of ESL

Another component of professionalism is making one's work public and understood by others (Freeman, 1992; *Standards for the Recognition …*TESOL, 2010.) This is especially critical for ESL teachers, as the task of teaching ESL is commonly misunderstood and overly simplified (Harper & de Jong, 2009). Conversely, being an effective ESL teacher means having the aforementioned specialized knowledge base and skill set most mainstream teachers are not equipped with (Staehr Fenner, 2013). Without clear recognition, understanding or appreciation, ESL is at risk of being a marginalized service, or seen as relating more to remedial education rather than language instruction. Language acquisition and instruction are complex processes which can appear simple, or merely intuitive, to those who have not studied these particular areas of education (Elson, 1997).

Just as ESL teachers bring their own areas of expertise to the classroom, mainstream teachers operate from their specific skill sets and knowledge bases.

Differences in teacher preparation programs between ESL teachers and mainstream teachers generate different areas of awareness, as well as gaps in knowledge, which lead to different experiences for ELLs. Harklau (1994) found that mainstream teachers, while providing a more authentic language atmosphere, were less likely to adjust their speech in a way to make it easier for ELLs to understand. ESL teachers, on the other hand, were much more likely to adjust the speed and grammatical complexity of their speech in order to make it more comprehensible. They were also more likely to supplement their speech with visual supports or realia. Additionally, ESL teachers were more intentional about creating opportunities for student interaction. Not surprisingly, when ELLs in the mainstream experienced difficulty understanding the teacher and had limited opportunities for interaction, they paid less attention and were less engaged in learning.

Given the fact that most ELLs spend the majority of their school day with mainstream teachers (Harper & de Jong, 2009; Penfield, 1987; Staehr Fenner, 2013), it is important that mainstream teachers develop an understanding of some of the essential elements of language acquisition. Wong Fillmore and Snow (2000) outline what all teachers should understand in their report *What Teachers Need to Know about Language*. Within this report, the authors describe the importance of what they refer to as educational linguistics. They argue that it is critical for mainstream teachers to understand the way academic language functions within various content areas.

ELLs are most successful when they have frequent opportunities to interact directly with people who are not only familiar with the English language, but are able to break it down and explain it at a level that is appropriate for learners. Wong Fillmore and

Snow suggest that in order for teachers to be able to do that, they need training in areas of language and linguistics, cultural diversity, sociolinguistics, language development, second language teaching and learning, language of academic discourse as well as text analysis. This is precisely the kind of training ESL teachers often receive. It is also material that is typically left out of mainstream teacher preparation programs (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Several states across the country are currently participating in edTPA, an assessment process for pre-service teachers. Minnesota formally adopted edTPA in 2011, which requires new teachers across all content areas to demonstrate skills in academic language, in addition to other areas that are traditionally covered in pre-service assessments such as planning, instruction, assessment and analysis of teaching (edTPA Minnesota). While steps are being taken to equip mainstream teachers with additional knowledge to help them meet the language needs of ELLs throughout the day, this should not be at the expense of students' opportunities to work with ESL teachers, as their knowledge and understanding of linguistics and language demands presented through content areas will be much deeper (Harper & de Jong, 2009).

Different Program Models

In 1974 the Supreme Court stated, "There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). In the wake of the *Lau v. Nichols* ruling, the Supreme Court mandated that school districts accept responsibility for supporting students who spoke limited English and providing them with access to curriculum they can understand.

However, no specific directives were made. This left the Court's ruling up to much interpretation and as a result there is no national consensus for ESL programming (Hakuta, 2011). Consequently, the way in which ESL teachers deliver instruction to their students can vary significantly from state to state, district to district, school to school and even teacher to teacher within the same building.

Pull-out Programs

Most types of services ESL teachers provide can be classified as pull-out, push-in or a mix of the two. At the elementary level, ESL service is often delivered through a pull-out model, also referred to as separation (Featro, 2010). Pull-out programs are used for students whose instructional needs differ from other students in the mainstream classroom, or students who might benefit from a different teaching approach. Within this model, students leave their mainstream classroom to work with another teacher for part of the day (Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003). The strengths of a pull-out program are that it is a proficiency-based, personalized learning environment, in which the focus is on explicit language development. The primary drawback of a pull-out program is that students miss instructional time with their age-level peers in the mainstream classroom (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011; Penfield, 1987). Mainstream teachers can find it frustrating having ELLs miss class time, feeling pressure to catch students up on the missed content instruction and activities. ESL teachers may find pull-out models inadequate due to the limited amount of time they get to work with ELLs and the breadth of language and content to cover (Duke & Mabbott, 2000).

Inclusion Models

An alternative to a pull-out program is push-in, also called an inclusion model (Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003). Within an inclusion model, ELLs stay in their mainstream classroom, and the ESL teacher *pushes in* to join them. Advantages of this model are that ELLs remain part of their classroom community and do not miss mainstream instruction. ELLs may also benefit from an inclusion model as it often represents a more authentic language environment and allows for frequent linguistic interactions with native English speaking peers. Additionally, an inclusion model helps eliminate the possibility of ELLs feeling stigmatized for being pulled out of their regular classroom (Harklau, 1994). An inclusion model is usually more convenient for mainstream teachers' schedules; however it comes with a host of challenges, and unfortunately often underutilizes ESL teachers' specialized knowledge and skill sets (Duke & Mabbott, 2000).

Challenges with Inclusion Models

While little evidence exists to support a strong case for inclusion models for ELLs, the past few decades have shown growing favoritism for this method (Duke & Mabbott, 2000; McGlure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010; Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003). Many believe that this ideology may be rooted in the Civil Rights Movement along with the Americans with Disabilities Act, in which there was a push for people with disabilities or other special needs to be integrated into mainstream settings as much as possible (Platt, et al., 2003). This is problematic for ELLs because having limited English proficiency is not comparable to having a cognitive disability, and while significant

research has been done on co-teaching within a special education context, little has been done with ELLs in mind (McGlure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). While some may see pulling ELLs out of their mainstream classroom in order to receive specialized instruction as unnecessary segregation because it separates them from their English proficient peers, the Office for Civil Rights states that separating students from the mainstream in order to better meet their academic needs is not discriminatory. Rather, to deny students the support and services they need would be grounds for discrimination (Office for Civil Rights, 1991). An inclusion model is also more likely to take a one size fits all approach to teaching. Specific needs can easily be overlooked. Some researchers have likened the needs of ELLs in inclusion-based mainstream classrooms to white elephants: students are physically present but systematically ignored (Harper & de Jong, 2009).

Co-teaching

One method of inclusion that is gaining popularity is co-teaching, in which an ESL teacher works with a mainstream teacher in the same classroom with ELLs and non-ELLs to provide students with both language and content instruction (McGlure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). When teachers have adequate planning time and training, co-teaching can be an effective way to deliver instruction. However, without careful planning and intentional monitoring of roles and considering each teacher's professional status, it runs the risk of being ineffective for ELLs and minimizing the role of the ESL teacher as a language specialist (Christenson Norton, 2013; George, 2009; McGlure & Cahnmann, 2010). Instead, the ESL teacher may become a second content-area teacher, or an aide for the mainstream teacher (Davison, 2006; Staehr Fenner, 2013).

The Professional Status of ESL Teachers

Even in states with stand-alone ESL teaching licenses or other preparation programs that fulfill TESOL's standards, ESL teachers' specialized knowledge bases and skill sets still often go unrecognized by those outside the field. Further, ESL teachers often do not receive the same level of professional treatment as teachers of other disciplines (*Position Statement* …TESOL, 2003). The term *marginalization* occurs repeatedly throughout the literature that has been written on ESL teachers and professional status (Breshears, 2004; Elson, 1997; George, 2009; Ligget, 2010; Lin, 2010; McGlure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). Marginalization can be experienced in a variety of ways by ESL teachers. ESL teachers might feel a sense of marginalization or exclusion when their specialized knowledge is not consulted or perceived as important. The omission of ESL as a core academic content area under the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 is one example of exclusion on the national level (Staehr Fenner, 2013). Additionally, ESL teachers might feel marginalized when their role is likened to that of a tutor or a glorified paraprofessional (Edstam, 1998).

Physical space is another area where ESL teachers can experience a feeling of marginalization. The space that is given to ESL teachers is often located in a place that was not originally intended for teaching. For example, ESL teaching spaces are often confined to a hallway, library, lunchroom, storage area or a temporarily empty space. Teaching in these spaces always carries the possibility of having to leave unexpectedly. This, along with frequent interruptions due to being in common spaces within the school,

can lead to compromised lessons and delivery of service for ELLs (Edstam, 1998; Liggett, 2010).

Even though ESL teachers participate in training programs to equip them with highly specialized knowledge and specific skills, too many of them downplay their unique strengths and areas of expertise (Elson, 1997; Pennington, 1992). This has been documented in a report focused in the state of Florida, where ESL teachers have been providing mandated professional development to mainstream teachers in an attempt to diffuse ESL teacher expertise to meet the needs of the state's growing ELL population. The regrettable result of this professional development, in many instances, has been an oversimplification of the job ESL teachers do (Harper & de Jong, 2009). An oversimplification of an ESL teacher's job is concerning because if ESL teachers' specialized knowledge and expertise is not recognized or valued it is unlikely that ESL teachers will be in a position to effectively advocate for ELLs. Furthermore, ESL teachers are less likely to be consulted for decision making if they are not seen as having any specialized knowledge or unique perspectives to offer. This compromises the educational experience for ELLs, as it likely means they will be spending more of their school day with mainstream teachers who lack the appropriate amount of knowledge to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of their students (Harper & de Jong, 2009; Penfield, 1987).

The particular knowledge base that ESL teachers have is often not understood by those outside the field. People who have not studied second language acquisition often fail to realize that a deep understanding of language is more than simply being able to

communicate orally. On the contrary, students need to learn how language functions in various communicative situations and across different content areas (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000). One idea that has persisted is the assumption that anyone who is a native English speaker is qualified to teach ESL (Pennington, 1992; *Position Statement …* TESOL, 2003). This point is illustrated in a hypothetical, yet all too realistic, conversation in which an architect asks an ESL teacher, "Do you think I could teach English in Malaysia?" to which the ESL teacher replies, "Do you think I could build houses in Sarawak?" (Wright, 1998, p. 23).

ESL teachers do themselves, their field and their students a great disservice when they fail to articulate their unique perspectives and areas of expertise. If ESL teachers make their work seem effortless to those outside the field their value will be undermined (Harper & de Jong, 2009; Pennington, 1992). While there certainly are benefits in training mainstream teachers in ways to better meet the needs of the ELLs in their classes, their broad awareness should not replace the deep understanding of a trained ESL teacher (Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003).

<div align="center">The Gap in Research</div>

While clear guidelines have been established for teacher professionalism (Danielson, 2007), the variety in program models and ESL teacher preparation programs along with loose legal direction contribute to an ambiguous role for ESL teachers to fill. As a result, there remains a multitude of ways ESL teachers define their role or have their role defined for them. My research for this project was based in my current district at the elementary level. I want to find out what ESL teachers there have experienced and how

they define their professional role. This project will also investigate how ESL teachers'

roles are perceived by mainstream teachers and administrators in the district.

Research Questions

In an effort to address some of gaps in current research, this project seeks to

answer the following questions:

1) What do mainstream teachers and administrators perceive the roles of ESL

teachers to be?

2) How do ESL teachers see themselves as defined by their colleagues?

3) How do ESL teachers define themselves as professionals?

4) What discrepancies exist between mainstream teachers, administrators and ESL

teachers in the way the role of the ESL teacher is perceived?

Summary

ESL teachers frequently experience a marginalized professional status, due in part

to a lack of understanding of the specialized knowledge ESL teachers have by those

outside the field (Breshears, 2004; Elson, 1997; George, 2009; Ligget, 2010; Lin, 2010).

Just as mainstream teachers have unique strengths and areas of expertise, ESL teachers

do too. Additionally, the lack of national standards for entrance into the field, ambiguous

legal guidelines and a variety of program models that lack substantial research contribute

to an undefined role. These realities underscore the need for ESL teachers to have a clear

understanding of how they define professionalism for themselves, and work in such a

way that promotes their professional role and builds credibility for the field.

Chapter Three explains the qualitative research method I used for my study, which investigates perceptions of the elementary ESL teacher's role. Chapter Three also describes the surveys, interviews and focus group I used to collect data from ESL teachers, mainstream teachers and administrators. My procedure, data analysis and ethical considerations will also be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGIES

This chapter describes the mixed methodologies I used for this study to explore

these questions:

1) What do mainstream teachers and administrators perceive the roles of ESL

teachers to be?

2) How do ESL teachers see themselves as defined by their colleagues?

3) How do ESL teachers define themselves as professionals?

4) What discrepancies exist between mainstream teachers, administrators and ESL

teachers in the way the role of the ESL teacher is perceived?

The rationale for this research is presented in this chapter. This chapter also

explains and justifies the qualitative research paradigm I used. Additionally, I outline

how I collected my data and the procedure I used. I also describe the process I used to

analyze my data.

Qualitative Research Paradigm

This study is interested in finding out how people interpret and assign meaning to

their experiences as they relate to their perceptions ESL teachers' professional roles.

Therefore, a basic qualitative research method was used. The goal of qualitative research

is to understand the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved (Merriam, 2009). This

type of research is commonly used in education.

Qualitative research focuses on how meaning is constructed and how people make sense of their world. This approach was best suited for this study because it allowed me, as the primary research instrument, to focus specifically on uncovering and interpreting the meanings people create for themselves. Further, this type of research paradigm allowed me to gather rich, descriptive data to be presented through words rather than numbers. With qualitative studies in particular, which are typically inductive in nature, it can be difficult to know exactly how the data analysis will unfold until there is real data to look at (Merriam, 2009).

<div align="center">Data Collection Methods</div>

Data for this study was collected over the course of six weeks. Three forms of data collection were used: surveys, interviews and a focus group. Surveys were used with ESL and mainstream teachers, interviews were used with administrators and the focus group was held with a group of ESL teachers.

<u>Participants</u>

The participants in my study included 14 ESL teachers, 41 mainstream teachers and 4 administrators from 8 elementary schools in my current district.

<u>Location</u>

The setting for this study is a mid-sized suburban district in the upper Midwest.

<u>Data Collection Technique One: Surveys</u>

Electronic open-ended surveys were the first technique I used to collect data for my study. I used the website SurveyMonkey® to design two surveys. Mainstream teachers received a six-question survey and ESL teachers received a ten-question survey. Dornyei

(2003) points out that surveys can be an efficient means to gather attitudinal information. Further, he notes that surveys can collect a large amount of information in little time with minimal cost. One potential problem with the survey method of data collection is that it can be difficult to obtain an optimal number of respondents. Additionally, it can be challenging to obtain rich responses, as participants might provide simplified or vague responses (McKay, 2006). Another problem with surveys can be ensuring the responses' validity. Despite the assurance of anonymity, surveys do not ensure complete honesty from participants (Dornyei, 2003). Copies of both the mainstream and ESL teachers' surveys are included in Appendices A and B.

Data Collection Technique Two: Interviews

"Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings or how people interpret the world around them" (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). Perceptions are unobservable phenomena, and, therefore, interviews were an appropriate data collection technique for this study. One-on-one interviews were conducted with four administrators. Three of these administrators were principals and one was the district's ESL supervisor. Interviews, in addition to surveys, provided triangulation of my data. I used standardized open-ended interviews with the principals. All three principals were asked the same questions in the same order. Standardized interviews offer less flexibility than informal interviews; however, they allow each respondents' data to be comparable. This, in turn, facilitates the data analysis process (McKay, 2006). The district's ESL supervisor was asked some of the same questions as the principals; however additional questions were included to target this individual's specific knowledge and experience related to the field

of ESL. Interview questions used with principals and the ESL supervisor can be found in

Appendices D and E.

Data Collection Technique Three: Focus Group

In addition to surveys and one-on-one interviews, I also conducted a focus group

interview with a group of seven ESL teachers. Focus groups usually consist of six to

eight people who share a common background (McKay, 2006.) The advantage of a focus

group is that participants can provide a lot of information in a small amount of time

(McKay, 2006). Additionally, participants have the opportunity to hear others'

viewpoints on a specific topic and also share their own (Merriam, 2009). The

disadvantage of a focus group is participants' opportunities to share their views in depth

are more limited than they would be in a one-on-one interview. Also, participants'

responses might be less authentic in a focus group compared to a one-on-one interview,

especially if they are answering questions in a way that fits more with what the group is

saying rather than their true feelings or experiences. Focus groups may also lose their

effectiveness if one participant dominates the conversation (McKay, 2006). The set of

questions used at the focus group can be found in Appendix C.

Procedure

Surveys were my first data collection technique for this study. Prior to sending

surveys out to teachers in my district, I piloted the surveys with teaching acquaintances

from other districts to ensure clear wording. Once I had received feedback and felt

confident of the clarity of my surveys, an e-mail containing a brief explanation of my

project along with an invitation to participate in an electronic survey was sent to 22 ESL

and 114 elementary mainstream teachers from a total of 8 schools within my district.

Mainstream teachers received a six-question survey and ESL teachers received a

different, ten-question survey. Among ESL teachers, 14 out of 22 (64 percent) responded.

The response rate among mainstream teachers was 41 out of 114 (36 percent).

Interviews were used for additional data collection. Interview questions were also piloted.

Three principals and one ESL supervisor agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were

conducted one-on-one and lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. Interviews were recorded

and transcribed.

The focus group was the final part of my data collection process. An e-mail

invitation was sent out to all elementary ESL teachers inviting them to participate. Seven

ESL teachers from five different school sites attended the focus group. This focus group

was held at the request of a handful of ESL teachers, who after taking the survey had

expressed an interest in coming together as a group to talk more in depth about the

questions from the survey. The focus group interview lasted approximately an hour. An

ESL colleague from another district joined me to help mediate the focus group as well as

take notes. The focus group interview was also recorded and transcribed.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The first step in analyzing my data was to transcribe all of the interviews. After all

of the interviews, including the focus group, had been transcribed, I printed them out. I

also printed out each ESL and mainstream teacher's survey responses. I read through the

data multiple times in an attempt to see any particular patterns or themes emerge. After

taking some time to reflect on what I had read, I created three large, separate posters. I

created an ESL teacher poster divided into ten different sections for ten different survey questions. I created a mainstream teacher poster divided into six different sections for six different survey questions. I created an administrator poster divided into five sections for five interview questions. Within each section on each poster I began establishing categories by theme related to each question. I used a coding system to manage my data. I physically cut and glued participants' responses into categories for each question, categorizing them by similar words, phrases and ideas. For example, participants responded to what qualities they believe are most important for ESL teachers to have; I was able to group similar responses together, such as knowledgeable, flexible, bilingual and so on. McKay (2006) notes that a researcher's overall goal remains the same, regardless of the particular method of data analysis: "arrive at a list of categories that develop from the data and capture the ideas in the data" (McKay, 2006, p. 57).

Verification of Data

Even though qualitative research is unable to capture objective realities, there are still steps that researchers can take to improve a study's internal validity, or credibility (Merriam, 2009). To ensure internal validity for this study, I used a combination of data collection methods, namely surveys, interviews and a focus group, so that I could triangulate my data.

Ethics

Validity and reliability largely depend on the ethics of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). This study employed the following safeguards to protect informants' rights and contribute to the study's overall ethical code:

1) The purpose and objectives of the research study were shared with informants.

2) Consent was obtained from all participants.

3) Prior to collecting any data, this study was approved through a human subjects review by Hamline University as well as my participating district.

4) All interviews were transcribed.

5) Participants were ensured anonymity.

6) All data obtained for this study is to be destroyed within one year either by shredding or digital deletion.

Summary

In this chapter I described the methods I used for my study. I collected data primarily through surveys with ESL and mainstream teachers. I conducted interviews with principals and the district's ESL supervisor. At the request of ESL teachers who had taken the survey, I held a focus group to further discuss our role as ESL teachers. I analyzed my data by categories derived from recurring words or phrases. The next chapter will present the results of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter will report on the data that was collected for this study, which seeks to answer the following questions:

1) What do mainstream teachers and administrators perceive the roles of ESL teachers to be?

2) How do ESL teachers see themselves as defined by their colleagues?

3) How do ESL teachers define themselves as professionals?

4) What discrepancies exist between mainstream teachers, administrators and ESL teachers in the way the role of the ESL teacher is perceived?

Data was collected from ESL teachers, mainstream teachers and administrators over the course of six weeks. Fourteen ESL teachers, 41 mainstream teachers and four administrators participated in the data collection process. The administrators consisted of three principals and the district's ESL supervisor. The three data sources that were used in this study were surveys, a focus group and individual interviews.

Surveys

An invitation to participate in an electronic survey was sent out to ESL and mainstream teachers from seven elementary schools in the district. After six weeks, 41 mainstream and 14 ESL teachers had completed the survey. Mainstream and ESL

teachers received different surveys. Questions from the mainstream and ESL surveys can

be found in Appendices A and B.

<u>Mainstream Teachers' Surveys</u>

The survey that mainstream teachers received consisted of six questions. The first

question gathered information about how long participants had been working as a

classroom teacher. Among the 41 mainstream teachers who participated in the survey, the

majority had been teaching from 10 to 14 years. The five remaining questions on the

survey were open ended and related to the way in which they perceive the role of ESL

teachers. The themes that emerged from these questions are outlined in the table below.

Table 1

Themes from Mainstream Teachers' Surveys Based on Open-Ended Questions 2 - 6

Question	Themes
Based on your teacher preparation program, continuing education and experience working with ESL teachers, what have you learned the role of the ESL teacher to be?	1. Interact with ELLs 2. Collaborate with mainstream teachers
How would you characterize the role of the ESLs teacher at your school? What are their job duties?	1. Interact with ELLs 2. Collaborate with mainstream teachers 3. Act as a liaison between families and school
How do you believe an ESL teacher can best serve students?	1. Supporting ELLs by supporting classroom teacher and classroom instruction
What qualities do you believe are most important for ESL teachers to have?	1. Strong affect 2. Knowledgeable 3. Ability to work with anyone on anything
Please describe how you envision an ideal working relationship between an ESL teachers and classroom teacher to best meet the needs of ELLs.	1. Communication and planning time 2. Program model flexibility

Mainstream teachers were most clear in their responses that described the qualities they felt ESL teachers should possess. Qualities that related to a strong affect were most prevalent. Flexibility and patience were most frequently mentioned. Along with flexibility and patience, mainstream teachers valued ESL teachers with a "genuine and caring spirit," who were "thoughtful, loving and friendly," possessing a seemingly Mary Poppins-type persona. Mainstream teachers had a clear idea of the qualities they appreciated in ESL teachers, but they were less clear on the role of an ESL teacher, or how it should manifest in a school.

Mainstream teachers' responses to other questions on the survey were often vague, particularly on questions 2 and 3 from the survey which asked them what they had learned the role of ESL teachers to be based on their teacher preparation program, continuing education and experience working with ESL teachers, and how they characterize the role and duties of ESL teachers at their school. It should be noted that when teachers were asked to characterize ESL teachers' roles and duties, several mainstream teachers copied and pasted their response from the previous question that asked them to describe what they have learned the role of the ESL teacher to be based on their teacher preparation program, continuing education and experience working with ESL teachers. For example, many mainstream teachers defined the ESL teacher's role as working on language, supporting ELLs, pulling out small groups of students or teaching ELLs things that will help them recognize their potential. It is difficult to know whether the vague nature of responses is due to time restraints while taking the survey or lack of a clear idea of what it means for an ESL teacher to interact with ELLs.

ESL Teachers' Surveys

      ESL teachers from eight elementary schools in the district were invited to take a survey, of whom fourteen teachers participated. The ESL teachers' survey consisted of ten questions. Some questions were multiple choice, while others were open-ended. Survey results revealed that all ESL teachers who took the survey were licensed in ESL, and most of them were only licensed in that area. Most had been teaching ESL for five to nine years, and most ESL teachers indicated that they felt others in the school community would mostly agree with their understanding of an ESL teacher's role. Survey items that elicited open-ended responses that had themes emerge are outlined on the following page in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes from ESL Teachers' Surveys

Question	Themes
Whether ESL was your initial licensure or a second area of licensure, what led you to teach in this specific area of education?	1. Interest in other languages and cultures
How are your duties and role as an ESL Teacher defined in your school?	1. Duties and role are not defined
What qualities do you believe are most important for ESL teachers to have?	1. Knowledgeable about language 2. Can work well with others
Research suggests that ESL teachers and their role within schools is often misunderstood. What experiences have you had that either support or do not support that claim?	1. ESL teachers have felt their role was often misunderstood
Please describe your program model or primary method of service for ELLs. How well do you feel this model or method enables you to use your specialized knowledge and skills to best serve ELLs?	1. Model success is dependent on school environment
How do you envision an ideal working relationship between an ESL teacher and classroom teacher to best meet the needs of ELLs?	1. Communication and planning time 2. Focus on language instruction

In the absence of a strong program model, ESL teachers are creating their own.

For example, ESL teachers described how their role is oftentimes not clearly defined, so

as a result they do what they believe is best to meet the needs of students, and also the

teachers they work with. Most ESL teachers do not work within one specific program

model, but rather they do a combination of pull-out and push-in services. ESL teachers

indicated feeling most successful when they are able to determine the program model. One ESL teacher wrote, "I believe that we have an ideal situation in our EL program, as we are empowered by our administrator to do what we feel is best for our students, and we also have a number of teachers who both respect and understand the work that EL teachers do."

Mainstream teachers, on the other hand, very much favored an ESL service model that allowed ELLs and the ESL teacher to stay in the mainstream classroom. Multiple mainstream teachers wrote that pull-out models are only appropriate for newcomer students. While some ESL teachers also favored push-in models that allowed them to co-teach, several ESL teachers wrote that this type of teaching situation is not always the best option, but rather they felt more effective as language teachers when they were able to pull ESL students into an ESL teaching space. One ESL teacher wrote, "With co-teaching I can incorporate language … but don't often get to teach to mastery because the curriculum moves on. When I pull-out I still focus on classroom standards and I am more able to focus on language acquisition in an organized and logical way."

As the survey results show, ESL and mainstream teachers understand the role of an ESL teacher very differently. While ESL and mainstream teachers alike see ESL teachers as interacting with ELLs, the type of interaction is defined in different ways. Mainstream teachers view ESL teachers as classroom support, while ESL teachers see themselves as language teachers. Mainstream teachers most commonly characterized the interaction between an ESL teacher and ELLs as helping or supporting, often with classroom work. The act of teaching was seldom described by mainstream teachers in

describing the role of an ESL teacher. As one mainstream teacher stated, the role of an

ESL teacher is characterized as "helping kiddos with classroom work." Another

mainstream teacher defined ESL teachers as "support personnel." These are indications

that ESL teachers are seen as support personal primarily for classroom activities. One

mainstream teacher felt that an ESL teacher's role is to support all students. She

described the role as, "Helping to meet the academic needs of all students, with a focus

on students who do not speak English at home." ESL teachers recognize that mainstream

teachers appreciate having ELLs, especially those at or beyond an intermediate

proficiency level, remain in the classroom. When ESL teachers push into a mainstream

classroom they are more likely to feel pressure to fill roles less related to teaching

language. For example, one ESL teacher wrote, "We are getting pulled into classrooms,

but not for our expertise; instead more for the extra supervision which dilutes our ability

to work with language learners."

Another theme that presented itself in both the mainstream and ESL teachers'

surveys was that an ESL teacher should be knowledgeable. While both groups agreed that

this is an important quality for ESL teachers to have, mainstream and ESL teachers'

differed when describing what ESL teachers should be knowledgeable about. ESL

teachers considered it important be knowledgeable mostly about concepts related to

teaching language and the language acquisition process. Mainstream teachers, on the

other hand, often expressed the importance of ESL teachers being knowledgeable of what

is happening in the mainstream classroom or to understand the demands placed on

classroom teachers throughout the day. One mainstream teacher stated, "The ESL teacher is an expert in supporting the classroom teacher and content."

<center>Focus Group</center>

In addition to being invited to participate in survey data collection, all elementary ESL teachers in the district were also invited to participate in a focus group. Seven ESL teachers from five different elementary schools attended the focus group. The focus group lasted about an hour and was held at my school site.

An ESL teacher from another district was also present to help me facilitate the conversation, keep track of time and take notes. The following table outlines the questions that were asked at the focus group, as well as the themes that emerged. Focus group questions can also be found in Appendix C.

Table 3

Themes from ESL Teachers' Focus Group

Question	Themes
You are all trained to be language development experts. In what ways do you get to use and share your expertise at work? How are your duties and role as an ESL Teacher defined in your school?	1. ESL teachers feel pressure to be content teachers, particularly when co-teaching
Research suggests that ESL teachers and their role are often misunderstood. What experiences have you had that either support or do not support that claim?	1. The role of language teaching is often misunderstood
If you were asked to speak to a group of undergraduate students considering going into education, how would you present the EL teaching profession?	1. Flexibility in both ability to work with others (adult) and flexibility to adjust to students' needs 2. Focus on language
On the survey, most EL teachers indicated that others either mostly agree or somewhat agree with their understanding of the EL teachers' role. What do you believe contributes to the gap in understanding? Why does no one feel that other completely agree with their understanding?	1. Lack of training to recognize language demands 2. Classroom teacher stress
If you could determine the best EL program model at the elementary level, what would it look like?	1. Balance co-teaching with time for focused language instruction

The focus group conversation yielded two main challenges for ESL teachers. First, ESL teachers are constantly trying to find the balance between teaching content and language. They often feel valued for their ability to support content instruction, but that comes at the cost of targeted language instruction. The second challenge, related to the

first, is that ESL teachers feel pressure to be all things to all people. This is exemplified in the following excerpt from the focus group:

> ESL teacher 1: You have to be flexible and be all things to all people. You have to do things for a variety of classroom teachers, some who might be very structured versus unstructured … some people who like small groups, this and that … you're kind of a specialist, but even more a generalist. You have to know fractions, the Revolutionary War … you have to know all that and still come down to what does this kid need to grow his or her language right now.
>
> ESL teacher 2: A lot of times that gets lost.
>
> ESL teacher 1: A lot of times that does get lost. I think we are really good at building capacity in classroom teachers now, we are becoming better at making content comprehensible … but what is getting lost sometimes is growing language at the same time … it's like you said, one area goes up and the other goes down. You are always juggling, being all things to all people.

<div align="center">Individual Interviews</div>

The final data collection method used for this study was individual interviews with district administrators. I interviewed three elementary school principals and the district's ESL supervisor. Interviews lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes and were conducted primarily at my school site, however one interview took place at that principal's school site. Principals were asked five questions. The district supervisor was asked similar questions, along with some additional ones. The following tables summarize the different administrators' responses to the interview questions.

Pseudonyms have been used to maintain anonymity. Questions used for the principals'

and supervisor's interviews can be found in Appendices D and E.

Table 4

Question: What components do you believe are necessary for a successful ESL program at the elementary level?

Administrator	Response
Emerson	Limited pull out from mainstream, combination of co-teaching, pull-out and newcomer services.
Kennedy	Appropriate student to ESL teacher ratio, leadership that understands language development, model that allows for both co-teaching and pull-out services, build capacity with mainstream colleagues. Create academic rigor from standards to accelerate language acquisition and also provide content attainment.
Morgan	Strong relationships, high level of cultural competence, strong instructional skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking, SIOP, assessment, feedback, communication with families and other teachers.
Robin	Additive bilingualism, thoughtfully designed instruction to target both receptive and productive language using the WIDA model, understanding the role of literacy.

As is evident from the table above, there was little consistency in the components

administrators identified as being necessary for a successful ESL program.

Table 5

Question: What do you believe is the most effective ESL program model? Why?

Administrator	Response
Emerson	One that gives ELLs a challenging, intense learning day, multi-tiered and flexible to adjust to needs in building. Collaborative model that allows for pre-teaching, co-teaching, pull-out when there is something specific to support students. One that allows for pre-teaching
Kennedy	Hybrid model that allows for traditional pull-out services, plus additional services through content or mainstream. There is data to support dual language immersion.
Morgan	Partial to push-in model, but a pull-out model can be more targeted. Each model has pros and cons. Pull out allows targeted instruction in a quieter setting, but students miss instruction in class, doesn't allow for same collaboration or benefit all students the way that push-in models do. Co-teaching is great because the EL teacher can scaffold the vocabulary, build the background knowledge and other parts of the lesson that will benefit all learners, not just ELs.
Robin	One that includes an aspect of strong bilingualism, not a fan of all English models. Most effective program models honor and support growth within both languages at the same time.

All administrators described a program that they thought would have the most positive impact on student achievement. Most agreed there should be a combination of pull-out and push-in services.

Table 6

Administrator	Response
Emerson	Like every teacher, passion for teaching, someone who will make good judgement calls, expertise in their area, good training and experiences, quality recommendations, cross-cultural experiences.
Kennedy	K-12 ESL licensure, affective qualities, competency in English language development, academic language analysis, ability to recognize language demands and develop strategies to meet students' needs, someone who is flexible.
Morgan	Strong relationships, high cultural competence, strong instructional strategies, understand that kids take different paths to common outcomes, SIOP, assessment, feedback, communication, someone who is staff of color or dual language.
Robin	Dependent on context of student body, someone who is fluent and literate in the language of majority of students, someone who understands literacy in an ESL context and can guide classroom teachers through that on a student by student basis.

Question: What qualities do you look for when hiring ESL teachers?

The qualities administrators looked for in ESL teacher candidates varied. Some administrators looked for the same qualities in mainstream teachers as ESL teachers. Others described qualities and abilities that were specific to ESL teachers.

Table 7

Administrator	Response
Question: How would you define the role of ESL teachers in your building/district?	
Emerson	Range of services, SIOP frame is important but can become a beast of components on a checklist and take away from actual instruction and love of teaching. It's great in a perfect world, but we don't live in a perfect world, would love to see more integrated areas of instruction, less interventions and more experiences for students.
Kennedy	Advocates for students and families, instructional leaders, exceptionally professional due to having to manage so many different pieces such as assessing, understanding language development, how to plan appropriately to meet students' needs.
Morgan	Essential to closing the achievement gap, advocates for EL students, collaborators with other teachers, ESL teachers are someone we can all learn from, SIOP framework and mindset is good for all learners, not just EL learners.
Robin	Language experts, should be able to support all school systems, collaborator, leader, advocate. If school improvement plan isn't connected to them, plan isn't written correctly, or the ESL teacher isn't demonstrating desired skill set.

By and large, administrators were very positive about the role of ESL teachers.
They showed an awareness of several components related to teaching language, such as
cultural competency, WIDA, SIOP framework and building capacity with mainstream

teachers. Despite having a very positive perception of ESL teachers' roles, there was tremendous variability in the administrators' responses, as demonstrated in Tables 4 – 7. All administrators agreed that student achievement is the ultimate goal, but their ideas on how to accomplish that differed. For example, one administrator referred to the SIOP model as a "beast" while another stated it is "great for all learners." Qualities were another area in which there was a wide range of opinions. One administrator appreciated skills and knowledge around language development and analysis, whereas other administrators did not even mention language. One administrator stated the importance of having a program that allows for push-in services as well as pull-out services to meet students' language needs, while another favored program models that allow ELLs to stay in the mainstream classroom in elementary school because "there are certain grades where kids are learning English anyway." The administrator went on to say, "Levels ones and twos are going to need some more support … but there are probably some more academic holes that could be addressed with our middle kids, the threes and fours." Data from administrators and mainstream teachers alike showed a wide range of understanding regarding the role of language in content instruction, as well as a lack of specificity in defining the role of ESL teachers.

The data show discrepancies in how school personnel interpret and define the work of an ESL teacher. Mainstream teachers largely view ESL teachers as support staff for their work in the classroom. ESL teachers define themselves through language instruction. Administrators, while aware of various program models, vary greatly in their definition of ESL teachers' roles. Key findings and implications of the results outlined in

this chapter, along with limitations of this study, will be discussed in the following

chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This capstone investigated perceptions of elementary ESL teachers' roles. The questions that guided this research were:

1) What do mainstream teachers and administrators perceive the roles of ESL teachers to be?

2) How do ESL teachers see themselves as defined by their colleagues?

3) How do ESL teachers define themselves as professionals?

4) What discrepancies exist between mainstream teachers, administrators and ESL teachers in the way the role of the ESL teacher is perceived?

This chapter will discuss the key findings and implications from this study based on evidence outlined in the previous chapter.

Key Findings

1) ESL and mainstream teachers view ESL teachers' interactions with ELLs differently.

2) The role of language is unclear to mainstream teachers.

3) The role of ESL teachers remains undefined.

Finding One: Different Views of Interactions with ELLs

Mainstream teachers believe the role of ESL teachers is to interact with ELLs. Interaction was vaguely defined by mainstream teachers as working with ELLs, helping

or supporting them, often with classroom content. ESL teachers, on the other hand, defined their interaction with ELLs as teaching language. The differing views relating to the way ESL teachers interact with ELLs has an influence on the way in which ESL and mainstream teachers perceived different program models. For example, mainstream teachers were enthusiastic about co-teaching and push-in models, however ESL teachers favored a more balanced approach. ESL teachers appreciated being able to do a combination of pull-out and push-in services, noting that they often felt more able to focus on teaching targeted language skills in a pull-out setting.

Some ESL teachers felt successful co-teaching, but those who did attributed the success to their relationship with the mainstream teacher, noting the importance of being seen as an equal in the classroom. Other ESL teachers with less positive co-teaching experiences felt mainstream teachers appreciated the co-teaching model not because of the language expertise an ESL teacher brought to the classroom, but rather the extra pair of hands.

Given the difference in understanding of what interacting with ELLs means and how that influences program model preferences, one recommendation would be for increased opportunities for mainstream and ESL teachers to attend trainings or other professional development sessions together to learn more about how language functions within different content areas. With increased opportunities to examine the language within the content, both language and content as specific areas of expertise might become more apparent. Learning more about role of language and how it functions within content

could help mainstream teachers better understand the specialized knowledge ESL teachers can bring to the classroom.

An additional recommendation would be for ESL teachers to be more explicit in what they are doing when they are interacting with ELLs. ESL teachers' ability to make their work explicit and understood by others is a key component to being recognized as language specialist professionals (Edstam, 2001; Pennington, 1992; *Standards for the Recognition …*TESOL, 2010). While ESL teachers may see themselves as teaching specific language skills when working with ELLs, mainstream teachers might interpret those same interactions as broad support services. One way ESL teachers could make their work more explicit would be to share their language objectives with mainstream teachers. Language objectives offer clear targets for learning that outline specific language functions students need to understand in order to meaningfully participate in a lesson. Language objectives help students access the content while also furthering their proficiency in English (Echevarria, Short & Vogt, 2008). In addition to clarifying the interactions between ESL teachers and ELLs, sharing language objectives would also help mainstream teachers see how language operates in various content areas. The language required for academic discourse varies greatly from the language required for informal use. As a result, students with various levels of English proficiency need direct language instruction in order to meaningfully interact with this specialized register of English (Schleppegrell, 2001). This leads to the second finding of this study.

Finding Two: Role of Language Unclear to Mainstream Teachers

The role of language within content instruction appeared unclear to many mainstream teachers based on their survey responses, as most were unable to articulate or acknowledge the connection between language and content. Correspondingly, they rarely defined the role of the ESL teacher as anything close to a language specialist. For example, many mainstream teachers wrote than an ESL teacher's role is to support classroom instruction or assist students with what they are learning in class. Many mainstream teachers described the ESL teacher's role as pulling small groups of kids, or pushing into the classroom to help deliver content instruction. One mainstream teacher wrote that an ESL teacher's role is to "teach rules of society and dress." While some mainstream teachers noted that ESL teachers were linked to English language development, few could expand on what that meant.

Interestingly, several mainstream teachers described the role of the ESL teacher to help level 1 students or newcomers with basic language skills but facilitate classroom content for higher proficiency students. Mainstream teachers did not identify that language was something to be explicitly taught to ELLs beyond the stage of a newcomer. ESL teachers, on the other hand, noted the importance of language instruction for all students who qualify for ESL services. At the focus group, one ESL teacher expressed a desire for ELLs of all levels to have allocated time with an ESL teacher. ESL teachers acknowledged that mainstream teachers are often thankful to have lower proficiency students pulled. However, once ELLs' language skills are more developed, it becomes increasingly difficult for mainstream teachers to recognize language needs. ESL teachers

noted that higher proficiency students still need language support. This is demonstrated each year through the ACCESS test, which now assesses the language proficiency of ELLs through a level 6, which is the equivalent of native-like proficiency. Additionally, ESL teachers noted that once ELLs enter an intermediate proficiency level, the academic and content area learning is most crucial, and unfortunately that is often when language services are eliminated, as they are no longer seen as necessary. Research has shown, however, that language instruction is still necessary for ELLs at intermediate and even advanced levels of English proficiency. When language services are eliminated too soon, ELLs are more likely to become Long Term English Learners (LTELs). LTELs are often students who are born in the United States but still lack sufficient academic language to participate optimally with classroom content. As a result, LTELs are among the most likely of students to drop out of school (Olsen, 2010).

While the role language plays within the content was often unclear, there were some mainstream teachers who expressed a desire to know more, either about working with ELLs in general or what the ESL teacher does with the students in a pull-out setting. One mainstream teacher wrote, "I would love to hear from EL teachers more at trainings about what might help students who are EL." Another mainstream teacher wrote, "To be honest, I know generally what they're doing in EL class ... I'd be interested in knowing the specifics." Given the lack of mainstream teachers' understanding of language's role within content instruction, along with the fact that some teachers expressed they want to know more, it is evident again that ESL teachers need to make their work and how it connects to classroom content more explicit. Comments on ESL and mainstream

teachers' surveys indicated a desire from both groups for more time to meet to plan and discuss students' needs. If teachers had more time to collaborate, this would be an ideal opportunity for ESL teachers to share the specific language skills they are targeting. If time to collaborate is not an option, a weekly update from the ESL teacher highlighting the upcoming linguistic focus and how it relates to the classroom content could help mainstream teachers see the role of language in content, and additionally the role of the ESL teacher. For example, if students are working on procedural writing, their success will likely depend on their ability to use the imperative as well as temporal words. When ESL teachers help ELLs with procedural writing, they are not simply helping ELLs complete a task, but rather are targeting specific language needs.

Many mainstream teachers did not acknowledge that intermediate or advanced level ELLs still have language needs. Given that this was one area of discrepancy between ESL and mainstream teachers, one implication is that mainstream teachers need more training that relates to who ELLs are and how different linguistic needs are likely to present themselves at various stages of the English language development process. ESL teachers would be ideal people to educate mainstream teachers. This relates to Wong Fillmore and Snow's (2000) recommendation that all teachers need to have at least a basic understanding of language acquisition. If more mainstream teachers knew more about second language acquisition they would be more likely to recognize the demands of academic English and its relation to classroom content. This, in turn, might put more mainstream teachers in a better position to understand and appreciate the language demands of the content, the need for explicit language instruction and the in-house

expertise of ESL colleagues. For example, the syntax and vocabulary needed to explain a strategy for a math problem differs significantly from the language needed to participate meaningfully in a poetry unit in language arts. Teacher licensure requirements are routinely adjusted to incorporate new skills and areas of awareness from teachers, such as mental health, bullying or literacy development. Adding more information about academic language and how language functions in different content areas could be another way to help mainstream teachers recognize language demands.

It would also be advantageous to have administrators learn more about how language needs are still evident for intermediate and even advanced level ELLs. While all the administrators interviewed for this study spoke highly of ESL teachers and programs, their responses were significantly varied, suggesting that some common understandings would be beneficial. Requiring administrators to complete coursework on special populations of students, such as ELLs, could help them recognize different challenges specific groups of students face, and in turn think more critically about how to address different students' needs (Darlington-Hammond, 2010).

It could also be useful for administrators to work with ESL teachers to develop various policies and procedures to be used consistently throughout the district that relate directly to ELLs and ESL services. For example, procedures related to student placement, program monitoring and processes to obtain resources in order to effectively implement language policies would improve to the overall clarity and effectiveness of ESL programs in schools throughout the district (Hamayan & Freeman Field, 2012).

English learners constitute the fastest growing segment of the school-aged population. Currently, 1 in 9 children are ELLs and that number is expected to be 1 in 4 by the year 2025 according to the U.S. Department of Education (2006). Additionally, the large-scale underachievement of ELLs in schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), and inequitable access (Natriello, McDill & Pallas, 1990) suggest it may be time for schools to rethink their approach towards language development. Greater awareness of language development from a culture that is largely monolingual could give teachers new perspectives on language demands ELLs encounter on a daily basis and offer new ideas on how to better meet their needs.

Finding Three: ESL Teachers' Role Remains Undefined

Data suggest the role language has within content instruction is unclear to those outside the field of ESL. This finding, along with the wide variance in administrators' perceptions of ESL programs, leads to the third finding of this study: ESL teachers' roles within this study's setting are not clearly nor consistently defined. When the role of language is not largely understood, that opens the door to a variety of interpretations for what the position of an ESL teacher should entail.

One idea that is supported by prior research and also emerged on ESL teachers' surveys and in the focus group was that many mainstream teachers are monolingual and have not had training or other experiences related to learning a second language. As a result, they often struggle to see the language that surrounds them and their students. This limited perspective can confound their understanding of the role language has in content, as well as the role of the ESL teacher (Elson, 1997; Wong, Fillmore & Snow, 2000). This

is problematic because when ESL teachers' expertise and role are not widely recognized within their school community, they are likely to be utilized for other purposes. ESL teachers are prime candidates for such broad support and misuse of their expertise mainly because their role of teaching language is not fully understood. Further, ESL teachers are valued for their kind demeanors and flexibility, making them ideal school personnel to accommodate others' requests. ESL teachers also typically make up a much smaller percentage of school personnel when compared to mainstream teachers, and spend most of their time with them rather than other ESL colleagues, which can make advocating for the role of language more challenging. It would be beneficial for ESL teachers within a district, or even a school, to meet regularly in order to build a stronger sense of community and have deeper conversations around what role ESL teachers have in their school communities, what they want it to be and how to best promote themselves as language specialists. Regular meetings could also help address feelings of isolation that were mentioned in ESL surveys and the focus group. Over time, this shared vision could contribute to ESL teachers having a more defined role.

An additional recommendation to help define the role of ESL teachers would be to address this issue with pre-service teachers. I find it encouraging that edTPA has begun requiring mainstream teachers to demonstrate an awareness of language. It would be beneficial for pre-service mainstream teachers to additionally receive instruction around what it means to collaborate with different specialists within the school.

Further, all pre-service ESL teachers would benefit from instruction that prepared them to effectively advocate for their role as language specialists. It is not false to say

ESL teachers support classroom content. However, the fact that language instruction is the vehicle of support is a concept that is too often overlooked. Given this reality, pre-service ESL teachers should receive training directly related to defining, clarifying and defending their role. A cornerstone of ESL professionalism rests on ESL teachers' ability and commitment to making their work public in a way that can be understood and valued by others (Edstam, 2001; Pennington, 1992; *Standards for the Recognition …*TESOL, 2010). As this study has shown, if ESL teachers do not define their role, others will, and it most likely won't relate directly to language instruction.

<div align="center">Limitations of Study</div>

This study was not conducted without limitations. First, the sample size of participants was relatively small. Participants in this study came from just one school district. Within this one school district, participants only came from elementary schools. Due to the limited number of participants, generalizations cannot be made from this study.

Despite the limited number of participants, the results from data collected from ESL teachers, mainstream teachers and administrators was consistent with many ideas from the research done by others, as outlined in the literature review in Chapter Two. For example, the literature review and results chapter from my study both discussed how ESL teachers' specialized knowledge often goes unrecognized.

Another limitation of this study was the limited depth in responses I received on the electronic surveys. The goal of qualitative research is to gather richly descriptive data from participants (Merriam, 2009). In many instances, the responses I received from

mainstream teachers on the open-ended survey items were less than I had hoped for. The interviews I conducted with administrators and the ESL teacher focus group yielded far more depth and breadth compared to the electronic surveys. If I were to do this study again, I would conduct individual interviews or a focus group with mainstream teachers as well.

<p style="text-align:center">Summary</p>

I began this capstone wanting to understand how the professional role of the ESL teacher was perceived by administrators, mainstream teachers and ESL teachers themselves. When I began this project I was under the assumption that ESL teachers were not perceived as professionals compared to mainstream teachers. As I conclude this project, I understand that as ESL teachers, we are seen as professionals, just not professional language teachers. We are seen more as professional support staff. While we are appreciated, at times characterized as being "essential to closing the achievement gap" or being "extremely valuable support," language teaching is rarely credited for the source of others' appreciation.

I realize that as educators we are all called to support students outside of our primary role. For example, mainstream teachers, though they are not food service workers or health care providers, may be serving snacks to students on a daily basis or bandaging a scraped knee. However, these additional tasks rarely override the mainstream teacher's fundamental function, which is to teach content. I do not believe the same can be said for ESL teachers. As we are expected to be highly collaborative and flexible staff members, our role of teaching language, which can be abstract at times to

those outside the field, often is interrupted when we are asked to be interpreters, reading interventionists or test proctors for an extended period of time. As a result, the way in which we are perceived by mainstream teachers, administrators and sometimes even ourselves, is compromised. I understand now that as I move forward in my career as an ESL teacher, there are specific actions I can take to clarify my role in my school. For example, I can share language objectives with mainstream teachers, or provide them with a weekly update of linguistic focal points that I will be teaching that relate to the classroom content. Additionally, there have been ESL teachers who, following the focus group discussion, have expressed a desire to have more conversations around our role and what that looks like in our different school communities. I am excited at the prospect of hosting and facilitating such discussions. While this particular project comes to a close, it is apparent that I still have much work to do within the field itself, defining and advocating for my role as a language specialist in an effort to better meet the needs of ELLs.

APPENDIX A

Survey Questions for Mainstream Teachers

1. How many years of experience do you have working as a classroom teacher?
   - 0 – 4 years
   - 5 – 9 years
   - 10 – 14 years
   - 15 – 19 years
   - 20 years or more

2. Based on your teacher preparation program, continuing education and experience working with ESL teachers, what have you learned the role of the ESL teacher to be?

3. How would you characterize the role of ESL teachers in your school? What are their job duties?

4. How do you believe an ESL teacher can best serve students?

5. What qualities do you believe are most important for ESL teachers to have?

6. Please describe how you envision an ideal working relationship between an ESL teacher and classroom teacher to best meet the needs of ELLs.

APPENDIX B

Survey Questions for ESL Teachers

1. Please indicate which area(s) you are currently licensed in. Check all that apply.
   o ESL
   o Elementary Education
   o Reading
   o Spanish
   o Communication Arts/Literature
   o Other _____

2. Whether ESL was your initial license or a second area of licensure, what led you to teach in this specific area of education?

3. How many years have you been teaching ESL?
   o 0 – 4
   o 5 – 9
   o 10 – 14
   o 15 – 19
   o 20 years or more

4. How are your duties and role as an ESL teacher defined in your school? Given your training and experience, does this match the role and duties you believe you **should** have as an ESL teacher?

5. To what extent do you feel others in in your school community (classroom teachers, other ESL teachers, administrators, etc.) agree with your understanding of the role and duties of an ESL teacher?

6. What qualities do you believe are most important for ESL teachers to have?

7. Research suggests that ESL teachers and their role within schools is often misunderstood. What experiences have you had that either support or do not support that claim?

8. Please describe your program model or primary method of service for ELLs (e.g. mostly pull-out, mostly push-in, co-teaching, etc.) How well do you feel this model or method enables you to use your specialized knowledge and skills to best serve ELLs?

9. How do you envision an ideal working relationship between an ESL teacher and classroom teacher to best meet the needs of ELLs?

10. How does your current position as an ESL teacher reflect (or not) your initial expectations of working in the field?

APPENDIX C

Questions for ESL Teachers' Focus Group Interview

1. Please describe a typical day of work for you (how many students do you work with, where are you teaching, what is your instructional focus, etc.).

2. You are all specially trained to be language development experts. In what ways do you get to use/share your expertise at work?

3. Research suggests that ESL teachers and their role within schools is often misunderstood. What experiences have you had that either support or do not support that claim? Please be as specific as possible.

4. If you were asked to speak to a group of undergraduate students considering going into education, how would you present the ESL teaching profession?

5. On the survey, most EL teachers indicated that others either "mostly agree" or "somewhat agree" with their understanding of the EL teacher's role. What do you believe contributes to the gap in understanding?

6. If you could determine the best EL program model at the elementary level, what would it look like?

7. How do you feel ESL as a distinct content area can best be promoted?

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions for Principals

1. How would you characterize the ESL program at your school?

2. What components do you believe are necessary for a successful ESL program at the elementary level?

3. What do you believe is the most effective ESL program model? Why?

4. What qualities do you look for when hiring ESL teachers?

5. As you see it, how would you define the role of ESL teachers in your building?

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions for ESL Supervisor

1. How did you initially become interested in ESL?

2. What components do you believe are necessary for a successful ESL program at the elementary level?

3. What do you believe is the most effective ESL program model? Why?

4. What qualities do you look for when hiring ESL teachers?

5. As you see it, how would you characterize the professional role of ESL teachers in the district?

6. Research suggests that ESL teachers and their role within schools is often misunderstood. What experiences have you had/seen that either support or do not support that claim?

7. How do you believe ESL as a distinct content area can best be promoted?

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