A SCHOOL’S ACTIVITY SYSTEM OF SUPPORTING UPPER-ELEMENTARY NEWCOMERS’ ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY GROWTH

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my inspirational teachers, including my first educators: my parents and grandparents. I will forever be grateful for your endless encouragement, dedication to excellence, and belief in the power of education.
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To God: I would not reach this academic and personal milestone without Your endless and steadfast love, strength, and goodness. I am Your instrument.

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ABSTRACT

KARA ELIZABETH COWDRICK
A SCHOOL’S ACTIVITY SYSTEM OF SUPPORTING UPPER-ELEMENTARY NEWCOMERS’ ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY GROWTH
Under the direction of LUCY BUSH, Ed.D.

Using the sociocultural theoretical framework of activity theory, this intrinsic case study sought to investigate how administrators, mainstream teachers, and English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) teachers in one school support newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. Newcomers are English learners (ELs) who moved to the United States within the past year and have no or extremely limited English language proficiency. It is critical to understand how schools support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth because more newcomers are entering United States classrooms now than in the past (Trickett et al., 2012) and recent legislation emphasizes upper-elementary ELs’ language proficiency growth for accountability measures. This study seeks to illustrate how newcomers are supported and add to the current void in research related to upper-elementary newcomers’ education.

This single-bound intrinsic case study used Stake's (2005) case study methodology recommendations. After a three-phase research site selection process, the researcher collected and holistically analyzed three sources of data: observations, interviews, and documents. Participants included three administrators, four mainstream
classroom teachers, and two ESOL teachers. The case study's data analysis thoroughly portrayed how each component of the school's activity system connected to supporting upper-elementary newcomers' English language proficiency growth.

Findings illustrated the intricacies of each component of the school's activity system: rules, division of labor, community, and tools. They also revealed that multiple primary and secondary contradictions exist within the activity system. Conclusions included the school's activity system is multifaceted and interconnected, explicit assessment rules strongly impact the activity system, and educators are using research-based pedagogy despite challenges. Furthermore, there is a need for transformation due to the contradictions that exist within the activity system. Recommendations for future study include: (a) to include more or different participants at the same school, (b) replicate the study in a middle school or high school environment, (c) conduct other studies using other qualitative methodologies to gain a better understanding of a specific component of the school's activity system, and (d) engage in a multi-case analysis to shed light on third and fourth generation contradictions of the activity system.
PREFACE

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Hebrews 12:1
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“When I came here in Grade 4 the teachers didn’t know what I was capable of. I was given a pack of crayons and a colouring book and told to get on colouring with it. And after I felt so bad about that - I’m capable of doing much more than just that. I have my own inner skills to show the world than just colouring and I felt that those skills of mine are important also...I’m not just a colouring person - I can show you that I am something.” (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 50)

Today a greater number of ELs (English learners) are entering United States classrooms than in the past (Kena et al., 2016; Trickett et al., 2012). Over four million American students are ELs and over 20% of ELs in elementary schools are foreign-born (Capps et al., 2005). Nationwide 15% of third-grade students, 11.9% of fourth-grade students, and 9.8% of fifth-grade students are identified as ELs (Kena et al., 2016). Although education systems do not always use the same criteria to classify ELs in the United States (Han & Bridglall, 2009), there is one commonality that relates to ELs throughout the United States: more diverse newcomer ELs are entering United States classrooms now than in the past (Trickett et al., 2012). According to Short and Boyson (2012), newcomers can be students who have recently entered the United States with having complete educational backgrounds, partially-schooled educational backgrounds, or disrupted or weak educational backgrounds. The recent waves of newcomers are much more diverse racially, socioeconomically, and ethnically than previous United States immigration waves (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011). For example, in 1880, 97% of the
foreign-born population in the United States was from Europe, 1.6% was from Asia, and 1.3% from Latin America. In 2003, 13.7% of the foreign-born population was from Europe, 25% was from Asia, 53.3% was from Latin America, and 8% were from other regions (Malone et al., 2003). Specifically, between 2001 and 2010, 80% of K-12 children who were newcomers to the United States came from Latin American and Asian countries, including Mexico, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Colombia, China, South Korea, India, and Vietnam (Capps et al., 2005; Kandel & Wasem, 2016).

Georgia is one state that has experienced substantial growth in the number of foreign born individuals (Batalova & McHugh, 2010; Malone, Baluja, Costanzo, & Davis, 2003). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), there were approximately 570,000 foreign born individuals living in Georgia in 2000; there were over 960,000 foreign born individuals living in Georgia in 2013. Individuals arrived primarily from Latin American, African, and Asian countries. 12.65% of Georgia residents speak a language other than English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Over 60% of those residents speak Spanish. The other most frequently spoken languages are Korean, Vietnamese, French, Chinese, German, and Hindi. As more individuals move to the United States from other countries, the EL population is also increasing. In 2003-2004, only 3% of Georgia students were ELs; this percentage increased to 7% in 2012-2013 (Beaudette, 2014). In the 2015-2016 school year, 148,988 Georgia students, approximately one in every 13 Georgia students, was classified as an EL (Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2016). Although national legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 classified language minority students as Limited English Proficient
students (LEPs), Georgia follows the U.S. Department of Education's identification term by using English learners (ELs) (GADOE, 2016b).

According to Georgia’s Department of Education (2016b), Georgia classifies a student as an EL if a student’s parent indicated the student’s native language is a language other than English and/or if a language other than English is spoken at home. The languages spoken most frequently by ELs in Georgia are Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs [NCELA], 2015). In addition, an EL in Georgia must have an English proficiency level score that is below the level of proficient on the state-adopted English proficiency screening assessment. According to the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE, 2016b), Georgia schools use the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs®) assessment or the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT) test to determine students’ levels of English proficiency. Level 1 is the entering level, Level 2 is the emerging level, Level 3 is the developing level, Level 4 is the expanding level, Level 5 is the bridging level, and Level 6 is the reaching level (WIDA, 2016). Newcomers are typically identified as Level 1 and Level 2 ELs. As newcomers learn more social and academic English, they begin to demonstrate more knowledge and skills related to reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which results in increased English proficiency levels.
Background of the Problem

There is a current need for educators to pay more attention to newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. Figure 1 illustrates English language proficiency encompasses four systems of language: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. All four systems of language are critical components of developing ELs’ academic language proficiency levels. When students use academic language in school, they use four language systems: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Berninger & Abbott, 2010.) There are unique language skills associated with each language system. As newcomers acquire language, they do not develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in a specific sequence; instead these skills interact and develop overtime (Berninger, 2000). Cummins (1979) expressed students have cognitive academic language proficiency when they can fully understand and express concepts using both writing and speaking skills to complete academic tasks. It takes second language learners on average four to seven years of academic instruction to gain the necessary language skills to be competitive with native English-speaking peers (Cummins, 1991).
Recent national achievement data highlight the importance of focusing on newcomers’ language proficiency development. In the United States, 39% of fourth-grade native English speakers scored at or above proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessments, but only eight percent of fourth-grade ELs achieved at the same level (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2016). This fourth-grade NAEP achievement gap has not been measurably different since 1998 (Kena et al., 2016). ELs’ eighth-grade NAEP reading scores are regrettably like the fourth-grade scores. 36% of eighth-grade native English speakers scored at or above proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessments, yet four percent of eighth-grade ELs achieved at or above proficiency (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Although these data are limited to
ELs who took the NAEP assessments and ELs in only certain grade levels, the high
difference in the achievement scores of ELs and non-ELs remains alarming.

Since this study focuses on Georgia’s upper-elementary newcomers, it is plausible
individuals might wonder about Georgia’s newcomers’ academic achievement data.
Although there are distinct differences between the needs of the general EL population
and the newcomer population (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010), it is difficult to zoom in on
specific standardized academic achievement measures of Georgia’s newcomers. Unlike
California and New York, Georgia and other states do not require that districts
differentiate between recently arrived newcomers and long-term ELs in their data
recording (Hooker, Fix, & McHugh, 2014). Nonetheless, holistically amongst all ELs in
Georgia, EL achievement data is lower than average rates. In 2013-2014 the graduation
rate of all Georgia students was 72.9%, but the graduation rate of ELs was 43.9%
(NCELA, 2015). In 2014-2015, 32% of Georgia ELs did not meet the annual target of
making progress toward English proficiency (Office of Elementary and Secondary
Education, 2016). When looking at these achievement scores, a question that might arise
might be: What are schools doing to decrease the achievement gap between newcomers
and their native-English speaking peers and increase newcomers’ overall English
language proficiency?

Moving forward, new legislation also highlights the importance of focusing on
newcomers’ language proficiency development. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),
which is set to take effect during the 2017-2018 school year, requires state education
systems and schools to pay more attention to ELs’ academic achievement and language
proficiency than past legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016). According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (2016), ESSA defines an “English learner” as “an individual who, among other things, has difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language that may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet challenging state academic standards” (p. 13). ESSA requires states to monitor the achievement of students who exited the English as a Second Language (ESOL) program. NCLB required states to monitor existed students for two years after their exit date, but requires exited students’ achievement to be monitored for four years. ESSA also now mandates states to report on the percentage of students who are long-term ELs. Long-term ELs are students who have been classified as ELs for five or more years. Moreover, ESSA not only tracks EL improvement using strictly standardized test scores, which assess students’ knowledge of complex English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies academic standards. ESSA also tracks EL improvement using multiple measures: standardized test scores and language proficiency test scores (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016).

Unlike NCLB, ESSA (2016) explicitly states newcomers who have been enrolled in United States schools less than 12 months may be deferred from one administration of the language arts content assessment. In Georgia, newcomers who have been enrolled one year or less in a United States school may be deferred from the English language arts and social studies end-of-grade content area assessments. However, all newcomers must take the mathematics and science content area assessments. Since English is the official
language in Georgia, all students must take all state assessments in English (GADOE, 2016b). ELs can receive accommodations while taking standardized assessments such as testing in a small group setting with repetition of directions and oral reading of test questions in English only (GADOE, 2016b).

Newcomers do not only have to take state standardized tests, but also in many states, including Georgia, newcomers must pass standardized achievement tests for grade level promotion (Wright & Li, 2008). Georgia's Promotion, Placement, and Retention law declares all third-grade students must achieve at least a grade level reading designation to be promoted to fourth grade. All fifth-grade students must achieve a grade level reading level designation and attain at least a Developing Learner achievement level on the mathematics state-adopted assessment to be promoted to sixth grade (GADOE, 2014). Since newcomers who have been in the United States less than one year can be deferred from taking the reading test, fifth-grade newcomers are solely required to pass the mathematics state-adopted assessment. Since this test is standardized, a native English-speaking fifth grader takes the exact same standardized assessment as a newcomer who recently arrived in the United States. They encounter the same types of computation problems and the same word problems with the same language demands. First-year students' mathematics and science scores are removed from state accountability measures, but the students' participation is included in EL participation counts (GADOE, 2016a) and the fifth-grade Georgia newcomers are still required to pass the mathematics test for promotion. Therefore, both the newcomer and the teacher of the EL view the test
as high-stakes. If an EL does not pass the assessment, an appeals process can take place after scores are received (GADOE, 2016c).

This high-stakes testing culture has influenced what teachers of newcomers can teach and how they teach it (Menken, 2006). Per GADOE (2016b), "The responsibility for the ELs' whole education, both in language and academic content, is shared by regular classroom teachers and English language assistance teachers alike" (p. 4). Therefore, mainstream teachers and ESOL teachers both regularly must support newcomers with their academic and language instruction. In Georgia, English as a second language (ESOL) teachers, who have a valid English to Speakers of Other Languages (P-12) certification or endorsement, support ELs’ education each school day. They must provide 45 minutes daily of support to ELs in Kindergarten through third grade and can provide up to one segment a day (GADOE, 2016b). GADOE (2016b) also mandates fourth and fifth grade EL students must receive support from an ESOL teacher for a minimum of 50 minutes daily; they can receive up to two segments a day.

Teachers who teach newcomers already face many professional challenges despite high-stakes testing pressure (Batt, 2008; Garcia-Nevarez, Stafford, & Arias, 2005; Menken, 2006). ESOL teachers’ extra duties beyond providing instruction, which can include translating conferences and filling out documentation paperwork, cause pressure and personal stress (Batt, 2008). Teachers do not feel confident in their abilities to teach ELs effectively; many doubt if it is effective to use ELs’ native languages in daily classroom instruction (Garcia-Nevarez et al., 2005). Many feel they do not have enough support and do not receive enough training (Valdés, 1998). Thus, sometimes teachers
choose to label ELs as having learning challenges and recommend they should receive special education services (Valdés, 1998). Some teachers even resist having ELs in their classroom because they view teaching ELs as too challenging (McDonnell & Hill, 1993).

Regrettably it is not just ELs teachers of newcomers who face challenges in current classroom environments; newcomers themselves face challenges in addition to being held to meeting many of the same accountability standards as their native English-speaking peers (Short & Boyson, 2012). Other obstacles newcomers encounter include English language acquisition, cultural adjustment, and psychosocial changes (McDonnell & Hill, 1993). Some newcomers face additional challenges caused by their experiences violence, trauma, and economic deprivation in their home countries (McDonnell & Hill, 1993). Newcomers must increase their English proficiency while simultaneously learning complex core content area concepts (Short & Boyson, 2012). Despite the language challenges, they also frequently are disengaged and unmotivated in the classroom because teachers, who are not taught effective EL pedagogy in either their teacher preparation program or their school’s professional learning sessions, assign newcomers tasks that are not challenging or interesting (Farris, 2011). For example, in one elementary school in Washington, a newcomer student received one short picture dictionary book in his silent sustained reading bag, but other students had multiple authentic picture and chapter books in their bags (Farris, 2011). Thus, many teachers allow newcomers to be disengaged in the classroom (Farris, 2011). The challenges newcomers face in the classroom impact both their academic achievement and English language proficiency growth (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).
In summary, English language proficiency encompasses reading, writing, speaking, and listening language skills. Recent United States and Georgia data and legislation highlight a need for educators to focus more on ELs' language proficiency development. Specifically, ESSA requires schools to pay more attention to language proficiency growth than ever before. Moreover, upper-elementary newcomers in Georgia face promotion requirements based on current high-stakes standardized test scores. ESOL teachers and newcomers alike encounter many challenges in this high-stakes standardized test focused environment.

Statement of the Problem

Past EL achievement data that clearly exposes the achievement gap provide quantitative evidence that educators, both mainstream and ESOL teachers, need to do more to support EL language and achievement growth (Fry, 2008; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015; NCELA, 2015). Now more than ever before it is critical to pay attention to all ELs’, including upper-elementary newcomers, language proficiency growth. WIDA (2017) recently warned that many ACCESS for ELLs® scores will drop or stay the same in 2017 due to recent standard setting. Therefore, fewer students will be able to exit EL programs due to receiving lower scores and not showing adequate levels of English language proficiency. New ESSA legislation requires schools and states to report EL progress using multiple data sources, including English language proficiency tests. Schools also now must report how many students exit the ESOL program and how many ELs are long-term ELs (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016). Thus, there
is more pressure for schools to show their EL population is making more progress with their English language proficiency levels.

Since there are greater returns to investing in early education than later years of schooling (Gunn, Biglan, Smolkowski, & Ary, 2000; Lipka & Siegel, 2010; Singh, 2013; Vaughn et al., 2006b), it is imperative that elementary schools take their role in educating ELs, particularly newcomers, seriously. Jeong and Acock (2014), who studied the academic achievement growth trajectories of adolescents from East Asia and Mexico, argued that newcomers need to receive early intervention to narrow the gaps of academic achievement performance in ethnic groups. I argue there needs to be extra focus and a sense of urgency in supporting upper-elementary newcomers’ English proficiency growth versus early-elementary newcomers. According to Chall (1983), kindergarten, first-, and second-grade teachers focus principally on students learning to read, but in third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers shift the focus more to reading to learn. Therefore, newcomers who arrive in kindergarten, first, or second grades enter classrooms that still focus on learning how to read. They can receive holistic literacy instruction in a supportive early literacy environment. Teachers in these classrooms focus on teaching phonics concepts and word decoding skills (Chall, 1983). However, newcomers who arrive in upper-elementary classrooms are placed in classroom settings that do not focus primarily on building students’ foundational literacy skills. Instead, in upper-elementary classrooms, students use reading to gain new knowledge and teachers incorporate reading more complex texts into daily instruction.
Moreover, newcomers who arrive in the middle of their educational journey, such as elementary students in third, fourth, and fifth grades, must face a “formidable barrier” (Hood, 2003, p. 9). They must fit into a school environment that emphasizes high-stakes testing instead of their individual needs (Hood, 2003; Menken, 2008). Multiple federal legislation mandates state denying ELs equal access to education due to their limited English proficiency is discriminatory and illegal (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). All students, including newcomers, deserve to receive adequate instruction in a nondiscriminatory environment. However, since newcomers’ state accountability content area test scores are exempt during the first year (Georgia Department of Education, 2016), do upper-elementary newcomers really receive the equal instructional attention from their mainstream and ESOL teachers as a student whose scores do count, or are newcomers’ unique linguistic and academic needs somewhat ignored in the classroom due to the high-stakes testing culture?

If elementary schools support the academic achievement and English proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers, these students can have a better chance of catching up to their English-speaking peers and having a more successful academic future. High language proficiency levels affect academic achievement significantly (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Per WIDA (2016), students reach the end of the continuum of English language proficiency development when they reach level six, Reaching. Since it takes four to seven years to gain English language proficiency (Cummins, 1991; Hakuta, Goto Butler, & Witt, 2000), if a newcomer arrives in third grade and receives appropriate and effective language and academic supports, a newcomer could reach
English language proficiency level six, Reaching, when he or she starts high school. Starting high school with a high English proficiency level can positively influence students’ grades, achievement, and graduation rates (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009).

Valdés (1998) wrote that the future English proficiency level growth of newcomers depends on the teaching of English...how well this teaching is done and how successful schools are in creating a context in which students have access to English during the school day will determine to a very large extent whether these youngsters acquire English at all. (p. 14)

Therefore, educators must target extra support to newcomer students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Many research studies already review how a variety of school and teacher factors impact the English language proficiency and academic growth of secondary-level newcomers (Bang, 2011; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2001; Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Valdés, 1998). However, there is a void in research of how schools support younger newcomers in schools. Therefore, due to this void in research and the unique needs of upper-elementary newcomers, it is of critical importance to investigate more about how a school effectively supports the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers. To investigate how a school supports upper-elementary newcomers’ academic achievement growth, it is important to look at a school holistically. Bandura (1993) expressed, “The task of creating environments conducive to learning rests heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of teachers” (p. 140). Moreover, other factors, related to
environments and tools, in addition to educators’ division of labor educator roles, can significantly impact a school’s activity system toward a goal (Engeström, 1987). With that being the case, I chose to use activity theory, a sociocultural theoretical perspective, as my study’s theoretical framework. In the next section, I will describe more about this framework.

Theoretical Framework

Valdés (1998), a distinguished educational researcher who focuses a lot of her research efforts centered on EL Latino students, once wrote, “Teaching of English is not neutral” (p. 13). According to the sociocultural theoretical perspective, cognitive development is not an isolated process; it takes place within a context, culture, and community that cannot be ignored (Vygotsky, 1978). Schools are part of a social system that is influenced by a myriad of factors (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). It is for this reason I grounded my study in a sociocultural theoretical perspective.

Specifically, in my study I used activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Leont’ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978) as an analytical tool and conceptual framework to guide me in understanding what administrators and teachers do within a given school context to support upper-elementary newcomers. Activity theory, which is grounded in Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural work, views an activity system as consisting of many contextual elements that influence goal-oriented human activity. The elements of an activity system, which are depicted in Figure 2, are the subject, object, mediating tools, community, rules, and division of labor (Leont’ev, 1978). The subject is who does the action, which is driven by a conscious and intentional goal. The object of the activity system is the
objective of the activity system. The subject uses tools, which can be physical, psychological, or cognitive, to carry out actions. The community of an activity system includes anyone who engages in the environment of the system and is interested in the object. The division of labor within an activity system recognizes that different members of the community engage in different tasks. They also have different power levels that affect how they contribute to the goal. Lastly, the rules are the explicit and implicit norms and expectations in an activity system. All elements of an activity system are interconnected; they can presuppose and influence each other (Leont’ev, 1978).

![Figure 2. Engeström’s (2014) activity system triangle model. This figure illustrates the various components of Engeström’s activity system triangle model. Figure is reprinted with permission from Learning by Expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research, by Y. Engeström, 2014, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (See Appendix B).](image-url)
As a teacher in an elementary school, I recognize there are many different interconnecting factors that influence daily activities within my classroom and school. I embrace the sociocultural perspective and recognize there is never one factor that impacts an outcome. Thus, I agree with Engeström (2001) that it is best to understand each factor when looking at an entire activity system (Engeström, 2001) and used activity theory as my grounding framework. After an extensive literature review, I developed an activity system model, shown in Figure 3, based on Engeström’s (1987) activity system triangle model of activity, to depict each element that was analyzed in my study. In this model, the subject is the school’s educators and the object is upper-elementary newcomers. To summarize, I used activity theory as the lens to analyze the various elements that work together when educators support the language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers.
Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the activity system of how educators at an elementary school support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner (EL) newcomers. English language proficiency growth encompasses strengthening listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. For this study, English language proficiency growth refers to an increase in newcomers’ ACCESS
for ELLs® language proficiency standardized test scores. This study investigated how administrators, mainstream classroom teachers, and ESOL (English as a second language) teachers support newcomers’ language growth within the school building. I explored how tools administrators and teachers use, how a school’s community, and how a school’s division of labor support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers. I also analyzed how various components in the activity system contradict each other. It is my hope that this study can become a guide for practitioners in the field of education who desire to learn specific and practical ways of how an elementary school can better support the needs of upper-elementary newcomers.

Although “numerous countries around the world have grappled with” teaching “linguistic-minority children” (Valdés, 1998, p. 12), I desired to focus solely on upper-elementary newcomers in Georgia for this study. I did not just want to study this population because there is a current void in literature related to upper-elementary newcomers; I want to study this specific population for more substantial reasons. I desired to study only upper-elementary newcomers because when upper-elementary newcomers enter a United States classroom for the first time, they are in a unique position. Upper-elementary newcomers enter classrooms with significant reading and writing needs, but they enter upper-elementary classrooms that focus more on reading to learn compared to lower-elementary classrooms that focus instruction on learning how to read (Chall, 1983). Even though their English-only speaking peers might already have solid understanding of the English phonics system and read fluently, upper-elementary newcomers need explicit English phonics rules, decoding skills, and fluency instruction.
Moreover, upper-elementary newcomers face standardized testing promotion requirements that can impact their future grade trajectories (GADOEc, 2016). If upper-elementary newcomers receive effective and early intervention to narrow their language and academic achievement performance gaps (Jeong & Acock, 2014), their academic trajectory can be full of promise and success (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009).

Research Questions

My research questions relate to my study’s activity theory theoretical framework. I follow Stake’s (2005) recommendation of having two or three research questions related to an issue to help guide the research process. The following are my research questions:

1. How do educators support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner newcomers?
   a. What rules impact how administrators and teachers support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   b. How does the school’s division of labor support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   c. How does the school’s community support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   d. What tools do administrators and teachers use to support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?

2. What contradictions exist when a school’s educators support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth?
Assumptions and Limitations

I recognize that there are underlying assumptions in this study and limitations. This study assumes that each person constructs his or her own reality in his or her own way (Merriam, 1998). Another assumption is that understanding how schools support newcomers’ English language proficiency can be beneficial to mainstream teachers, ESOL teachers, administrators, and district leaders.

Given my role in this research and my personal passion related to this study, I do realize that there is a possibility of bias, making inaccurate assumptions, and creating beliefs about the research site and participants. I recognize this is a limitation of my study. Therefore, to guard against my biases, assumptions, and beliefs, I only used the data I gathered during my data collection to frame my case study analysis. Another limitation of this case study is that it was not generalizable and does not have much external validity to other studies since I am only investigated one research site. Moreover, due to my methodology and research design, I left out two important voices of a school community from this study: students and parents. I recognize that EL newcomers and their parents are some of the most voiceless in our current schools today due to language barriers (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008); nonetheless, focusing on student and parent voices is not within the scope of this case study.

To address the limitations, enhance validity, and decrease bias in my study, I used the following methods;

1. I used bracketing to put aside my personal views during the research process (Ahern, 1999; Fischer, 2009).
2. I used an interview protocol in each interview to ensure I am focusing on the same types of questions with each participant.

3. I triangulated my data. Even though some researchers believe triangulation is more appropriate for studies that only connect with positive paradigms (Lichtman, 2013), I followed Denzin’s (2001) suggestion of triangulating by using multiple data sources and multiple data collection methods, which were interviews, document analysis, and observations.

4. I increased the rigor of my data analysis by using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

5. I had individuals outside my study review my recorded interview transcriptions to verify my transcriptions are accurate.

6. I also invited participants to engage in member checking techniques throughout my data analysis procedures to corroborate my data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

7. I requested peers who are not involved with my study or with the research site to peer review my work to ensure bias is limited. The peers reviewed and challenged my findings by specifically looking for over and under emphasized points, vague descriptions, and biases or assumptions that I made.
Definitions of Key Terms

The definition of ELs includes a wide range of learners: students who recently immigrated to the United States from a country that does not speak English; students born in the United States but who do not speak English until prekindergarten, kindergarten, or first grade; and students who are enrolled in a school’s ESOL program for six years or more (Short & Boyson, 2012). Han and Bridglall (2009) recommend that the nation needs to use a consistent definition of an EL at all levels. For the purposes of this study, I define ELs the same way the United States’ Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics defines ELs. Per Kena et al. (2016), an EL is:

An individual who, due to any of the reasons listed below, has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language to be denied the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in the larger U.S. society. Such an individual (1) was not born in the United States or has a native language other than English; (2) comes from environments where a language other than English is dominant; or (3) is an American Indian or Alaska Native and comes from environments where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency. (p. 297)

Other terms I use in this study include:

- Activity is translated from the Russian word dejatel’nost (Ryle, 1999). Therefore, activity encompasses the connotation of this Russian term, which is “doing in order to transform something” (Kuutti, 1996, p. 41).

- An achievement gap is when “one group of students outperforms another group, and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (that is, larger than the margin of error)” (Kena et al., 2016, p. 294).
- **Community** is defined as the social group that the subject is a part of during the activity (Engeström, 1999). For this study, community refers to both instructional settings and collaborative relationships within a school community.

- **Division of labor** refers to the idea that different individuals within a community are responsible for and engage in different tasks (Engeström, 1987).

- **English language proficiency** is “the level of language competence necessary to participate fully and learn successfully in classrooms where the primary language of instruction is English” (GADOE, 2013, p. 14).

- **English language proficiency growth** incorporates strengthening listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. For this study, English language proficiency growth refers to an increase in newcomers’ Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs®) language proficiency standardized test scores.

- **English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)** is “an educational support program provided to help ELs overcome language barriers and participate meaningfully in schools’ educational programs” (GADOE, 2013, p. 14).

- A **newcomer** is an English learner (EL) who moved to the United States within the past year and has no or extremely limited proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing English (Short & Boyson, 2012).

- **Long-term ELs** are students who have been classified as ELs for five or more years (ESSA, 2015).
- **Rules** are rules are the norms and expectations in an activity system. Rules in an activity system can be both explicit and implicit regulations or norms (Engeström, 1987).

- **Tools** are classified as anything used by the subject in an activity process. Tools can be both tangible and intangible (Engeström, 1987).

**Summary**

In summary, I began this first chapter by illustrating that the EL population, specifically the newcomer population, is increasing nationwide. I exemplified that Georgia is one state that has experienced this growth. Georgia uses language proficiency assessments to identify which Georgia students need to be classified as ELs. These language proficiency assessments assess reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills since these are the four components that make up cognitive academic language proficiency. After describing language proficiency and alarming achievement data, I sought to explain national and state legislation that is associated with newcomers’ academic and language education. Upper-elementary newcomers in Georgia are required to pass state-adopted standardized assessments in math, but their scores do not count toward accountability measures. These legislative mandates create challenges for both ESOL teachers and newcomers.

The discussion of challenges led to the Statement of the Problem section. In this section, I endeavored to illustrate that elementary schools need to take their role of educating newcomers seriously. If upper-elementary newcomers receive support in enhancing their English language proficiency starting right away in elementary school,
they can learn acquire enough English before they start their high school academic careers. I argued research illustrates that schools must provide extra support to upper-elementary newcomer students.

In the Theoretical Framework section, I expressed why I grounded my study in a sociocultural theoretical perspective and why I chose to use activity theory. I gave a brief explanation of what activity theory was, but this explanation will go into greater detail in the upcoming chapter: Chapter 2.

Towards the end of this chapter, I explicitly stated the purpose of my study and listed my two research questions. I then explained assumptions and limitations to add credibility to my study. Finally, in the previous section I defined key terms that were used throughout this study.

In conclusion, “Working to bridge the gap between newcomers’ developmental challenges and the resources available in their educational environments is an essential step in helping our nation’s newest students to achieve their potential” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010, p. 616). All newcomers in the United States deserve a quality and effective education even though their test scores do not always count for accountability measures. Since “time is critical” (Short & Boyson, 2012, p. 2), the education of newcomers cannot be ignored. In the next chapter, I will present an extensive overview of my research strategies, my study’s theoretical framework, and relevant research related to my study’s topic.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide a review of literature related to my research study. This study investigated how administrators, mainstream classroom teachers, and English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) teachers in one school support newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. Short and Boyson (2012) classified newcomers into three categories:

a. Literate, on-level newcomers are “students with educational backgrounds who have literacy skills and academic schooling in their own language that align with their grade level” (p. 3).

b. Literate, partially schooled newcomers are “students with native language literacy skills and some academic schooling” (p. 3).

c. Newcomer students with interrupted education are “students with disrupted or weak educational backgrounds and below-grade-level or no literacy in their own native language” (p. 4).

For the purpose of this study, a newcomer is generally defined as an English learner (EL) who moved to the United States within the past year and has no or extremely limited proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing English. Therefore, the term newcomers encompasses students who fall into any of Short and Boyson’s (2012) three categories.

One half of newcomer students arrive to the United States during middle and high school (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2001). Even though newcomers are more optimistic about their future (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) and have increased positive
attitudes about school (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995) compared to their native-born English-speaking peers, many newcomer students have greater educational and socioemotional needs than their native-born English-Speaking peers (Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2001). When newcomers arrive to the United States, they initially are optimistic and engaged in learning at school (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), but overtime engagement decreases (Fuligini, 1997). They typically have lower self-esteem than their peers (Bankston & Zhou, 2002). However, it is essential to understand how not only newcomers’ social-emotional needs are different than native-born English-speaking peers; newcomers’ academic achievement also contrasts greatly.

An achievement gap between ELs and their English-speaking peers exists (Kena et al., 2016; NCELA, 2015). When researchers zoom in on looking specifically at newcomer academic achievement, newcomers’ academic performance begins to decrease during the second and third year they are in the United States and it drops more in the fourth and fifth years (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). Students with lower academic English proficiency are more likely to have low academic achievement (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). In other words, students’ English proficiency levels predict students’ academic achievement: the lower a student’s English proficiency level is, the lower the student’s grades are (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009).

After being in the United States for five years, newcomers still struggle with academic English (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). One reason for this is because it takes second language learners on average four to seven years of academic instruction to gain the necessary language skills to be competitive with native-born
English-speaking peers (Cummins, 1991). Since it takes more than four years for students to acquire academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1991; Hakuta et al., 2000) and language proficiency levels affect academic achievement significantly (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008), schools must target extra support to newcomer students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). However, teaching English to newcomers is not “straightforward and unproblematic;” the challenge of developing “the full intellectual potential of all our citizens and future citizens” is “enormous” (Valdés, 1998, p. 16). Therefore, educators need to better understand how elementary schools are supporting the English language proficiency of upper-elementary ELs in a high-stakes testing setting.

Organization of the Review

In this chapter, I will present a review of existing literature related to newcomers and how teachers support newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. Specifically, it will include an explanation of my search strategy, theoretical framework, and the research that relates to each component of my study. The closing section of this chapter will clarify how there is a current void in research that my study can fill.

In the Search Strategy section, I plan to identify the search strategies I used in locating research. I first express which databases I used during my search and then provide a detailed explanation of the guidelines I used during my research process. I then list the terms I used as search keywords and explain why I chose to combine certain keywords together. Then, I seek to describe the relevant results I found from my research search that are related to my study’s topic. After, I explain the search strategy I used for researching both my theoretical framework and my research methodology.
In the Theoretical Framework section of this chapter, I desire to provide a detailed description of the sociocultural perspective that I ground my study in. I then endeavor to provide a thorough explanation of activity theory, the actual sociocultural theory that I used to frame and situate my study. This is important because the theoretical framework provides structure for my study’s purpose, significance, methods, and analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). I will explain the historical evolution of activity theory. In addition, the basic components of activity theory will be discussed as well as its principles.

In the Activity Theory and EL Newcomers section, I will present literature and research related to each component of the activity of educators supporting newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. In this review of literature, I will highlight the following topics: national and state legislation related to EL newcomers, the roles of educators who work with newcomers, EL instructional settings, teacher collaboration that supports newcomers, ESOL teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about ELs, EL professional learning, and effective EL pedagogy. All this literature will be explained through the lens of activity theory, my theoretical framework.

Finally, I will conclude my chapter by illustrating there is a void in the current body of research that leads to the need for my research study.

Search Strategies

To find research relevant to my study, I utilized Mercer University’s electronic databases, which included Georgia Library Learning Online ProQuest, and EBSCO’s ERIC. One of Mercer’s qualified education research librarians assisted me during the
beginning stage and intermediate stage of research to develop my research course of action to help ensure I used a thorough research review.

Overall, I researched all topics related to my study using the Mercer University electronic databases and library catalog. I also used Google Scholar, which helped me determine which articles were cited most often in other research. To gather breadth and depth of research, I decided to intentionally follow five strict guidelines during my initial months of research. First, I only used peer-reviewed and scholarly journals as my initial search parameters. Second, I chose to not limit dates of relevant articles at the beginning of the research process to include both seminal studies and recent work in my results. Third, even though I chose to utilize a qualitative methodology, I did not limit research studies to solely qualitative studies because I wanted to analyze what quantitative and qualitative studies existed about my topics. Fourth, I also avoided limiting my search results by not specifying a specific grade level during my initial research. I only used terms such as elementary, secondary, middle school, and high school to narrow down my results. Finally, I purposely examined each relevant study’s reference section to learn about additional scholars’ work that connected with my study.

During all my database searches, I used the following terms as synonyms for English learner: English language learner (ELL), limited English proficient (LEP), non-English proficient (NEP), English as a second language (ESL), and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students. Since there were over 5,200 search results when I conducted an ERIC search of “English language learners,” I chose to combine search keywords throughout my literature review. I first wanted to search what research about
newcomers already existed. I used the following terms in this search: *newcomer* and *English learner*. This search led to 29 research studies. However, most of the studies were related to secondary schools. When I added *elementary* to the previous search, it narrowed down my search from 29 to 8 peer-reviewed articles. When I used the terms *newcomer, academic, elementary, and/or achievement*, all searches in less than 10 articles each. Some of these results related to specific newcomer achievement at schools that only newcomers attended (Hertzberg, 1998; Feinberg, 2000). Only one (Valentin, 1993) was relevant to my study’s purpose but the article was not published within the last twenty years. To expand my search, I next searched *immigrant* and *English learner* because I knew that immigrant is a term that frequently is used in literature instead of newcomer. Since this search resulted in 290 relevant studies, I narrowed my focus by adding the type of school to my search terms. When I used the terms *immigrant, secondary*, and *English language learner*, my EBSCO ERIC search resulted in 106 relevant peer-reviewed articles, but my search using the terms *immigrant, elementary,* and *English language learner* resulted in 88 results. I chose to initially look at results related to both secondary and elementary education to make sure I did not overlook anything. This search proved most challenging because it involved looking at each result individually to see if it was relevant. 61 of these 88 results related to elementary and secondary schools in general and focused on topics that did not pertain to my inquiry such as acculturation, EL advocacy, policy, preservice teacher education, EL parent involvement, and students’ socioemotional needs. Moreover, as seen in Table 1, I noticed
there was a large disparity in the number of studies related to secondary newcomers versus elementary newcomers.

Table 1

*Research Studies Related to K-12 Newcomers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Studies on elementary (K-5) newcomers</th>
<th>Studies on secondary (6-12) newcomers</th>
<th>Studies on K-12 newcomer education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Przymus (2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ramirez &amp; Jaffee (2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruiz-de-Velasco &amp; Fix (2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salerno (2015)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suárez-Orozco, Gaytán, Bang, Pakes, O’Connor, &amp; Rhodes (2010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, &amp; Martin (2009)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, &amp; Milburn (2009)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The two results that focused on K-12 newcomer education both focused on identifying effective newcomer programs and schools around the United States. As seen in Table 1, there were results connected with specifically elementary schools, newcomers, and an aspect of my study’s purpose, but Table 2 illustrates none had a holistic focus on English language proficiency growth of specifically upper-elementary newcomers. Therefore, my research confirmed there is a need for more current research on newcomers’ language proficiency growth in an elementary school environment.

Table 2

A Selection of Literature on Elementary Newcomers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title of article</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cairo, Sumney, Blackman, &amp; Joyner</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>F.A.C.E. Time (Families and Communities Educating): Accommodating Newcomers in Elementary School</td>
<td>Multifaceted afterschool &amp; summer program Family reading evenings University &amp; school partnership</td>
<td>Elementary newcomer ELs and their families</td>
<td>Described the F.A.C.E. Time collaborative program that is implemented in Lexington, Kentucky elementary schools to support refugee and Latino ELs and their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCafferty &amp; Rosborough</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Gesture as a Private Form of Communication during Lessons in an ESL-Designated Elementary Classroom: A Sociocultural Perspective</td>
<td>Nonverbal communication Teaching method Listening comprehension</td>
<td>2nd grade ELs in a sheltered instruction class and their experienced ESOL teacher</td>
<td>Investigated how an ESOL teacher and newcomer ELs used forms of gesture without speech for private communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Study Title</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Wright & Li      | 2008 | High-Stakes Math Tests: How "No Child Left Behind" Leaves Newcomer English Language Learners Behind | Mathematics assessment  
High-stakes testing  
No Child Left Behind Act of 2011 | 5th grade newcomer Cambodian students in Texas  
Discussed the implications of the No Child Left Behind act on newcomers by analyzing the language demands of a 5th grade math assessment and the content of the textbooks used in Cambodia and Texas |                                                                                                                                 |
| Marshall & DeCapua | 2010 | The Newcomer Booklet: A Project for Limited Formally Schooled Students       | Classroom instructional practice  
Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) framework | Elementary & secondary ELs  
Explored why the Newcomer Booklet, a popular project in EL classrooms, is effective |                                                                                                                                 |
| Courtney         | 2015 | Looking at Racial Segregation: An Exploratory Case Study of a Predominantly Somali Charter School | Refugee and EL students  
Charter schools | K-8 ELs from Somalia and their teachers  
Examined data from the California Department of Education to analyze the effectiveness of Iftin Charter School (ICS), a K-8 school established to support the language, social, and academic needs of newcomers from Somalia |                                                                                                                                 |
Once I realized that there was a research gap in elementary schools’ methods of supporting the academic achievement of newcomers, the next goal of my search was to identify research related to my theoretical framework. Therefore, in this half of my research, I reviewed literature about Vygotsky’s sociocultural theoretical perspective and activity theory. I then chose to review literature that applied the various elements of activity theory and educational settings. I also used the search term *English learner* instead of newcomer and search for other EL-related studies that used activity theory as a theoretical framework, but I did not find any relevant studies.

Lastly, my third literature search focused on research methodology. From the very beginning, I leaned toward qualitative versus quantitative studies because qualitative studies provide a greater descriptive picture and do not “depersonalize and decontextualize” the study’s data (Maple & Edwards, 2010, p. 35). Although I always knew I wanted to engage in qualitative research, I initially did not know which type of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Cohorts</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conger</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Testing, time limits, and English learners: Does age of school entry affect how quickly students can learn English?</td>
<td>Cohorts of ELs aged 5-10 years old who were newcomers in New York City in 1997</td>
<td>Examined how long it takes for students to gain minimal English language proficiency and how the age of entry into the United States impacts the length of gaining proficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| English proficiency | Rate of English language acquisition | Age differences |

| English proficiency | Rate of English language acquisition | Age differences |
methodology I wanted to engage in so I first read many examples of various kinds of qualitative studies. When I determined I wanted to illustrate one specific case of an elementary school’s activity system, I determined either a single-bound case study methodology approach or a narrative inquiry approach would be best for my study. I read Creswell’s (2006) basic summaries of both methodologies and then began to study works by authors that Creswell cited in his summaries. After I read works by Stake (2005), Yin (2009), and Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I opted to engage in a case study since my primary goal was to gain an awareness of the intricacies of school’s activity system’s components (Lichtman, 2013). I felt a narrative inquiry approach would be better if I was zooming in on a few participants’ experiences within the activity system because narrative inquiry allows researchers to focus on the “continuity and wholeness of an individual’s life experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). Once I determined case study methodology was best for my research, I then conducted an ERIC search of case studies that had teachers of ELs as participants and case studies that also used activity theory as a theoretical framework to use as guides for my own methodology.

To summarize, I used multiple databases and search terms to review literature related to my study. I chose to engage in researching my study’s topic, my study’s theoretical framework, and my study’s methodology. After more than fifteen months of research on this topic, this extensive search review revealed that my current study adds to a current void in educational research. I now will seek to thoroughly describe the theoretical underpinnings and theoretical framework that my study is rooted in.
Theoretical Framework

In this section, I describe the theoretical framework I used to ground my study. Since I used activity theory, a sociocultural theory, to frame and situate my study, I will begin by describing the sociocultural theoretical perspective. I then will provide a detailed explanation of activity theory. I will share about activity theory’s historicity, components, and principles.

Sociocultural Theoretical Perspective

This study is grounded in the sociocultural theoretical perspective of human learning. Prior to the early 1900s, most research was grounded in a positivist approach, which used methods associated with hypothesis testing, mathematical analysis, and quasi-experimental and experimental designs (Lee, 1991). However, sociocultural theories began to appear in Russia in the 1920s and 1930s. These theories were new and different than widely-accepted positivist approach behaviorism theories because sociocultural psychologists created complex, multifaceted theories (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Per Vygotsky (1962), a seminal sociocultural psychologist, humans cannot artificially separate mind and society. Vygotsky’s goal was to theorize and investigate how mind and action and individual and society are integrated (Ryle, 1999). Since Vygotsky (1978) asserted individuals’ actions cannot be analyzed in isolation from their social, environmental, cultural, and historical contexts, educational research needs to examine how educators’ perspectives, goals, and actions are impacted by a variety of social, cultural, and historical factors. Furthermore, Vygotsky posited individuals use mediating devices, such as language, symbols, and tools, to learn. An individual, the subject, can
engage in using mediators, tools, to learn and change the world, the object. Wertsch (1995) explained that sociocultural research focuses on individuals carrying out activities and that mediated action is the primary unit of analysis.

It is fitting to use a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective for this study because it has an epistemological stance that cognitive development is not an isolated process. Development takes place within a context, culture, and community that cannot be ignored (Vygotsky, 1978). To fully illustrate the context, culture, and community of my research site, I chose to frame my study specifically in activity theory, a theory rooted in the sociocultural theoretical perspective. In the next section, I will explain the historical evolution of activity theory. In addition, the basic components of activity theory will be discussed as well as its principles.

Activity Theory

Activity theory is grounded in Vygotsky’s (1978) work. Vygotsky’s work is influenced by Marx’s ideas (Cole & Scribner, 1978). Marx thought theory should not just be used to analyze and explain the world; it also should be used to change the world. According to Vygotsky (1978), human beings achieve goals through interacting with their environments and through the mediation of tools. He constructed a triangle model to illustrate mediation. Vygotsky’s (1981) mediational model used a triangle to show how a stimuli (S) and a response (R) interact with the mediation of a tool (X). He used bidirectional arrows to show mediation can impact the agent and the goal.

Vygotsky used the Russian word dejatel’nost to identify activity (Ryle, 1999). The connotation of this Russian term is “doing in order to transform something” (Kuutti,
1996, p. 41). It is essential to understand that Vygotsky’s term “activity” encompasses more than the English “activity,” which is defined as something individuals do (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015). The English word *activity* does not mean the same and the English language does not have a word that fits this exact meaning of the Russian word. Is it not fitting that the theoretical focus of a study about newcomers’ English learning has ambiguity and challenges with word translation? Newcomers’ daily reality involves not having the exact language to encapsulate an idea; they constantly try to make meaning and translate terms into language that can be expressed. With this in mind, it needs to be understood that the term “activity” in this study always means “doing in order to transform something.”

To continue, Vygotsky unfortunately only introduced the idea of activity; he died before creating a complete theory. Later in the 1900s, Leont’ev (1978), Vygotsky’s student, built upon Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory principles. Sannino, Daniels, and Gutierrez (2009) posited that the Soviet revolution brought Vygotsky and Leont’ev together with a common motivation: “a need to make sense of historical turmoil” (p. 9). This led to the creation of activity theory. Leont’ev (1978) believed activity should not be excluded from Vygotsky’s mediation model. He defined activity as a meaningful social and cultural activity that fulfills a need. The need can be biological, psychological, or social. Leont’ev (1981) created a formal framework that illustrates an activity system consists of many contextual factors that influence goal-oriented human activity. He noted his model did not represent reality; instead the model is a heuristic aid that can be used to identify and analyze multiple factors that mediate goal-oriented human activity.
Leont’ev (1978) identified that cultural, historical, and societal elements in activity system influence and are influenced by people and their mediating tools. All elements of an activity system (the subject, object, mediating tools, community, rules, and division of labor) are interconnected; they can presuppose and influence each other (Leont’ev, 1978). Leont’ev (1981) proposed activity is organized into three hierarchical levels: operations, actions, and activity. The top layer, activity, relates to a motive, which is a certain need. The second layer, actions, is directed at goals. Actions and goals are specific to individuals, time, and place. The third layer is operations. Operations are processes that emerge by automatic conscious actions.

In Europe, Engeström (1987), a Finnish psychologist, expanded on Leont’ev’s work by proposing a triangular model of activity theory. He referred to Vygotsky’s interconnected relationship between a subject, mediator (tool), and object as a first-generation activity theory model. In 1987, Engeström introduced the second-generation activity theory model. Unlike Vygotsky’s model which focused most activity analysis at the micro level, individuals’ actions, this new model led to activity being analyzed at the macro level, collective community actions.

Engeström’s triangular model consists of the following essential components: the subject, object, mediating tools, rules, community, and division of labor (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Engeström, 1987). The subject is who does the action. Action is driven by a conscious and intentional goal. For example, in Kim’s (2011) study which investigated what teachers did in the classroom, the teacher was the subject. Sometimes the subject can be defined as a collective group. When individual subjects participate in a
collective activity, they identify themselves as belonging to a collective entity and can display collective responsibility and “‘we’ feelings” (Lektorsky, 2009, p. 81). However, Lektorsky (2009) warned that it is impossible to understand collective activity without considering individuals because individuals influence collective due to being connected to it and participating in it.

The object of the activity system is the “‘raw’ material’ at which the activity is directed and which is molded and transformed into outcomes” (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2003). An object can be a physical, social, or cultural phenomenon. A psychological or social object can be just as important as a physical object (Engeström, 1987). The object leads to the desired outcome. Engeström (1987) explained the outcome is the change that takes place in the object. Thus, the goal of activity is to transform the object. Multiple actions are performed to reach the outcome. Each action is performed because there is a conscious goal (Kuutti, 1996).

The subject uses tools, which can be physical, psychological, or cognitive, to carry out actions (Engeström, 1987). There is a reciprocal relationship between tools and activity. For example, an activity can shape how a tool is used; the use of a tool can affect the dimensions of an activity (Gay & Hembrooke, 2004). In other words, tools can transform an activity and tools can be transformed as they are used. Furthermore, tools in one activity system framework can be objects in another system. For example, if a study focuses on the actions of an individual using a word-processing program to write a paper, the object is the completed paper and the tool is the software program. However, if the
software breaks down, the software becomes the new object during the troubleshooting activity.

The rules are the norms and expectations in the activity system. Norms can be implicit and explicit (Engeström, 1987). The community in an activity system includes anyone who engages in the environment of the activity system and is interested in the outcome. Lastly, the division of labor within an activity system recognizes different members of the community, who engage in different tasks and have different power levels, all contribute to the goal in different ways (Engeström, 1987). In summary, the way an individual relates to an objective is mediated by tools, community participation, and divisions of labor structures that exist in the community.

Naysayers might argue that Engeström’s triangle model is rigid. Kuutti (1996) argued those who view the triangle model as rigid need to remember the triangle is used only for representation. Activity theorists recognize activities are neither static nor linear; they are constantly developing and are uneven. The model includes bidirectional arrows to indicate the model is complex and integrated with multiple mediating relationships.

Later in 1999, Engeström theorized a third-generation model of activity theory. This model illustrated what two interacting activity systems looks like. Engeström (1999) created this model to help better understand multiple perspectives and networks of activity systems. In 1999, Engeström also described five principles of activity theory, which are summarized below:
1. Activity theoretical analysis can take place when a specific activity object is the unit of analysis. An activity system consists of six elements.

2. All activity is collective and multivoiced. An activity system includes the voices, traditions, beliefs, expectations, and histories of the individuals and groups involved in the activity system.

3. An activity system can only be fully understood when looking at its historicity.

4. An activity system has contradictions.

5. Activity theory research should not be just transactional; it should be transformational for the community.

The fourth and fifth principles are interconnected. Per Engeström (1999), an activity system supports development and reaching an objective. However, it can also display disturbances, which are identified as contradictions by Engeström (1987). According to Engeström (1997), an activity system can have four levels of contradictions. A level one or primary contradiction takes place within a single part of the activity system. For example, Kim (2011) used activity theory to study a teacher’s language teaching practices in South Korea. The teacher’s object was to teach the content, sustain or enhance her students’ motivation, and ensure her students can pass the school language exam. Kim identified a level one contradiction in that system existed because the teacher had strong beliefs about using authentic communicative activities in the classroom, yet she also supported using teacher-directed grammar rule instruction that focused on rote memorization. Thus, the subject of the study had inner belief contradictions. A level two, secondary contradiction, occurs within the relationship between two components of
an activity system, such as the subject and tool, subject and community, division of labor and tools, or community and rules. In Kim’s (2011) study, a secondary contradiction existed between the community and tool: students (community) who were focused primarily on passing a school exam did not view the communicative activities (tool) as an effective learning strategy. Engeström (2005) explained researchers could help subjects resolve these secondary level tensions. To do this, subjects need to look beyond their own activity system to borrow innovative ideas from others. However, implementing new elements into an activity system can lead to level three, tertiary, contradictions. Tertiary contradictions are between new and old elements of the activity system. A level four, quaternary, contradiction, occurs between two interacting activity systems that have a shared outcome or object. This level of contradiction aligns with Engeström’s (2009) third-generation of activity theory, which focuses on multiple interactivity activity systems that partially share an object. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore quaternary contradictions. In short, contradictions can occur between activity systems, within an activity system, or between elements of an activity system.

Kuutti (1996) pointed out contradictions are typically always a part of activities. When people not only experience these tensions, conflicts, and disturbances but also address them, the contradictions can be powerful forces for change (Blacker, Crump, & McDonald, 1999). Activity systems are not meant to be looked at as static; instead activity systems are responsive to changes when contradictions occur. For example, changes can involve changing conceptual or tangible tools and shifting division of labor (Edwards, 2009). Contradictions encourage individuals to alter the activity to reduce
structural tensions (Engeström, 1999). Therefore, contradictions can lead to transformation and expansive learning (Engeström, 2009). He described, “an expansive transformation is accomplished when the object and [outcome] of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). Therefore, researchers who use activity theory need to address contradictions, challenge norms, and engage in thinking that focuses on expansive learning.

In current research today, most researchers who use activity theory always reference Engeström’s five principles (Ahn, 2011; Campbell, MacPherson, & Sawkins, 2015; Fleer, 2016; Gedera and Williams, 2016; Kim, 2011). Regarding educational research, in the late 1970s, Engeström focused on using activity theory to study instruction to promote changes in school practices (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009). In more recent years, Engeström recognized the use of activity theory is rapidly increasing in education research; today activity theory is commonly used as a conceptual lens in educational research (Gedera & Williams, 2016). The use of an activity system for analysis can make the context of an educational process visual. Activity theory assists researchers in understanding immediate interactions in a research setting and the larger contexts of the interactions (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015). Researchers use activity theory to understand teachers’ classroom practices (Ahn, 2011; Kim, 2011). Activity theory can also provide a methodological foundation for examining societal, personal, and institutional dimensions of an activity (Fleer, 2016).
Engeström (2001) stated an activity system’s factors are “eventually understandable only when interpreted against the background of entire activity systems” (p. 136). Since I desired to analyze educators’ individual and group actions, as well as the educators’ community, division of labor, and rules, I used activity theory to help me better understand the activity system of how educators support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers. For my purposes, I developed an activity system model, shown in Figure 3, for how educators support upper-elementary newcomer academic achievement based upon previous research. In this model, the subject is the school’s educators, the object is upper-elementary newcomers, and the outcome is newcomer English language proficiency growth. The tools include teachers’ pedagogy, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and professional learning. The rules include implicit school norms and explicit national and state legislation relating to educating ELs. The community is defined as the different school instructional environments where newcomers’ English language proficiency growth takes place and educators’ collaborative social groups. Lastly, the division of labor refers to how administrators, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers split up the work related to the objective.
Figure 3. An elementary school’s activity system of how educators support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. This figure illustrates the various components of a school’s activity system for upper-elementary newcomer education. Figure is adapted with permission from Engeström’s (2014) triangle model from *Learning by Expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*, by Y. Engeström, 2014, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (See Appendix B).

To review, in this Theoretical Framework section, I explained why I chose to use activity theory, which is rooted in sociocultural theory, as my theoretical framework. Throughout the past century, activity theory has gained depth and popularity. The following sections of this literature review will describe in detail relevant educational research related to each of the factors of activity theory. Specifically, it will expose prior research that relates to various rules, divisions of labor, community, and tools educators are connected with when working toward the goal of enhancing upper-elementary newcomers’ language proficiency growth.
Activity Theory and Newcomers’ Language Proficiency Growth

In this section, I will present relevant research related to each component of the activity of educators supporting newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. All this literature will be explained through the lens of activity theory, my theoretical framework. Each part of this section will begin with a review of what activity theory researchers define each component. Then, I will highlight EL research relevant to that component. Therefore, I explain each component in the following sequence: rules, division of labor, community, and tools.

Rules
Per Engeström (1987), rules are the norms and expectations in an activity system. Rules in an activity system can be both explicit and implicit regulations or norms (Engeström, 1987). They can limit or liberate activity. They can also provide guidance to the subject on acceptable procedures that can be used within a community (Engeström, 1993). They also can include conventions and social relations within a community.

Although I understand that there are both implicit and explicit rules within a school community, this section will review explicit legislation of the past and present related to newcomers in the United States and particularly in Georgia.

Rules: The past. To successfully understand how the norms and legislation related to newcomer education in today’s American classrooms, it is necessary to first understand what happened in the past. After all, “it is difficult to know where we are going if we do not know where we have been” (Edgar, 2009, p. 57). Throughout the history of the United States, there is documentation of newcomers arriving to the United
States and learning English. As newcomers arrived, individuals positioned themselves along the English-only and multilingualism continuum. Individuals’ differing opinions led to decisions that impacted newcomers’ education. When looking back at the history of the United States, it is apparent decisions about newcomers’ education in the United States have always been deeply connected to political contexts. These decisions had sociopolitical connections because “demeaning or restricting people’s use of a particular language is usually a veiled way of demeaning the people themselves” (Lessow-Hurley, 2012, p. 11).

In the 1700s, as many Germans immigrated to Pennsylvania, German children began to learn English quickly. Therefore, the German community began to organize ways for children to preserve their German language because they did not want social isolationism to exist in their community due to language differences (Barron, 1990). Many citizens supported bilingualism (Horton, 2005). On the other hand, individuals during the 18th and 19th century focused on using schools, rather than political offices, as a primary setting to acquire the English language. In 1837 and 1838 at the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention, delegates debated if the best way to spread English across the United States was school immersion or bilingual education (Barron, 1990).

Between 1890 and 1930, over 22 million individuals moved to the United States (Edgar, 2009). As the population of newcomers dramatically increased in the late 1800s, the Americanization movement and language debate strengthened, and the government began to use more power to influence these individuals’ language development. In the 1900s, the United States viewed schools as ideal places to assimilate immigrants
(Crosnoe & Turley, 2011). Teachers believed English immersion was the best language development practice to use during that time (Horton, 2005). Twenty states had Americanization statutes and 34 states required elementary education in English by 1923 (Barron, 1990).

After the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the national origin quota system that had been used since the 1920s, a large influx of newcomers entered the United States (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011). During this period, attention turned to ELs’ education. Officials enacted Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to protect ELs and prohibit denying ELs equal access to education due to their limited English proficiency. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare clarified this protection in 1970 when they issued a memorandum to clarify this protection. The *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) Supreme Court case upheld the requirements explained in the memorandum (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Therefore, all students, including newcomers, deserve to receive adequate instruction in a nondiscriminatory environment. Despite having additional safeguards in place, debates about newcomers’ education continued to exist. The *Castaneda v. Pickard* (1981) case concluded that ELs could be segregated when the benefits of the academic setting outweigh the negative effects of segregation (Crawford, 1999). In *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), the United States Supreme Court ruled that states could not deny free public education to newcomer children regardless of their immigration status (Crawford, 1999).

It was not until legislators passed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 when education and government leaders began to focus more attention on the academic achievement of ELs (Short & Boyson, 2012; Trickett et al., 2012). The No Child Left
Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) called for student achievement of all students, including diverse student groups such as ELs, to be measured. The institution of this legislation led to many conversations about how to include ELs into standardized-accountability systems (Kopriva, Emick, Hipolito-Delgado, & Cameron, 2007). An entire school could be labeled as a failing school if its EL student population did not make adequate yearly progress in students passing standardized state tests (Wright & Li, 2008). Educators had to carefully select appropriate accommodations so that test results best represented student knowledge and ability (Kopriva et al., 2007). NCLB (2002) greatly impacted the structure of newcomer programs. Separate-site programs that served newcomers in the first year of school could not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) and many shut down (Short & Boyson, 2012).

Standardized-testing data from 2001 to 2007 clearly indicated that an achievement gap between ELs and native English-speaking students existed in the United States’ education system (Fry, 2008). About 51% percent of eighth-grade ELs had lower national standardized test scores than their Caucasian English-speaking peers (Fry, 2007). So, more scholars started to study ELs’ academic achievement (Jeong & Acock, 2014; Han & Bridglall, 2009). Although some researchers celebrated that mandates from NCLB required schools to pay attention to the EL achievement gap (Haycock, 2006), since 2001 many researchers demonstrated how NCLB’s requirements and expectations for ELs are harmful and unjustified (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Menken, 2006; Wright, 2006). Menken (2006) researched how NCLB’s emphasis on high-stakes testing influenced what ESOL teachers teach and how they teach it. Menken concluded schools increased how
much English instruction ELs received in one day, implemented more English-only policies in the schools, and changed the ESOL curriculum so it aligned more to the state tests. In other words, the high-stakes testing influenced what ESOL teachers can teach and how they teach it (Menken, 2006).

Rules: The ESSA present. To combat some of the challenges NCLB created, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) into law on December 10, 2015. This act reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and replaced the NCLB. ESSA (2015) began its full implementation in 2017-2018 (GADOE, 2016a). ESSA requires that states have academic content standards and that states administer content-based assessments. Regarding ELs, ESSA mandates states annually assess ELs for English language proficiency. Moreover, instead of just requiring that states have English proficiency standards, ESSA requires states to have English proficiency standards that align to ELs’ academic standards and address the different English proficiency levels of English learners in their Title I plans. ESSA tracks improvement using multiple measures, which include language proficiency tests, instead of strictly standardized test scores (ESSA, 2015).

Unlike NCLB, ESSA requires that students who exited the ESOL program be monitored and tracked for four years instead of two years. ESSA now requires states to report on the percentage of students who are long-term ELs. Long-term ELs are students who have been classified as ELs for five or more years (ESSA, 2015). Also, ESSA allows states to exclude newcomers who have been enrolled in United States schools less than 12 months from one administration of the language arts content assessment. There
are two options for delaying newcomers’ scores in accountability determinations (ESSA, 2015).

In Georgia, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of ELs entering their schools because it experienced 233% growth in the number of immigrants between 1990 and 2000 (Malone, Baluja, Costanzo, & Davis, 2003). In 2013-2014, over 98,000 ELs in Georgia received services from Title III, a federal program that funds language instruction programs for ELs (NCELA, 2015). Georgia’s Department of Education (GADOE) allows newcomers who have been enrolled one year or less in a United States school to be deferred from the English language arts and social studies Georgia Milestones End-of-Grade content area assessments. However, all newcomers must take the mathematics and science content area assessments. The first-year students' mathematics scores are removed from local school and state accountability measures, but the students' participation is included in EL participation counts (GADOE, 2016a).

To review, rules in an activity system can be explicit or implicit. In the United States and Georgia, many explicit pieces of legislation impact how educators support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that “people cannot be legislated into English proficiency” (Lessow-Hurley, 2012, p. 13). Therefore, there are other factors of the activity system that impact how educators in one elementary school support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. In the following section, I will discuss a different component of activity theory: division of labor. Specifically, I will explain
how administrator, ESOL teacher, and mainstream teachers’ roles relate to upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth.

Division of Labor

Division of labor is defined as explicit and implicit organization of the community. It refers to how tasks related to the activity are divided and shared amongst community members (Engeström, 1999). In other words, it refers to who does what. These divisions are usually mediated by sociohistorical power within a community and between a community and the greater society. Activity can be affected by horizontal and vertical division of labor. Vertical division of labor can be a result of power, positions, or access to resources. (Engeström, 1987; 1990). In an elementary school, tasks related to newcomers’ English language proficiency growth can be shared amongst the administrative team, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers.

Administrative team. An administrative team’s inclusive leadership philosophy is one aspect that greatly impacts a school’s culture. The way a school’s principal positively promotes EL inclusion in mainstream classrooms and collaboration affects how ELs are viewed by teachers in the school (Russell, 2012). Levine and Lezotte (2001) name a principal’s collective vision as the most decisive factor that impacts school effectiveness for ELs. If a school has a supportive and inclusive school culture and the school’s administrative team values this type of school culture, collaboration between ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers can positively benefit the inclusion of ELs in mainstream environments (Russell, 2012). For example, a collaborative community partnership program, F.A.C.E. (Families and Communities Educating) Time in
Kentucky, successfully created positive change for newcomers. This would have not been successful without strong collaboration between the coordinators and the support of the school’s administrators and district’s superintendent (Cairo, Sumney, Blackman, & Joyner, 2012).

Leaders can improve how their school approaches newcomer instruction. Elfers and Stritikus (2014) investigated how leaders can support better support classroom teachers who work with ELs. They argued fragmentation can be fixed by focusing on high-quality instruction, integrating school-level and district-level leadership initiatives, communicating why every student is important, differentiating support systems between elementary and secondary levels, and using data to improve instruction. Another more way, to improve newcomer instruction is by stepping “outside the confines of the data conversation” and shadowing newcomers in their mainstream classrooms to better understand a student’s learning experience (Farris, 2011, p. 23). Shadowing a newcomer student can give principals valuable insights into newcomers’ daily school experience and their encounters with academic success (Farris, 2011). When administrators do not personally know the ELs in their school building, they can misinterpret ELs’ academic needs and make decisions that are not in the ELs’ best interest (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010).

ESOL teacher. ESOL teachers are looked at as the experts for ELs’ academic, linguistic, cultural, and social-emotional needs. Administrators often rely on ESOL teachers to communicate with ELs’ parents because they know how to find resources or individuals to communicate with parents who speak a different language (Brooks et al.,
Sometimes the ESOL teacher’s role is to be “a social worker and de facto administrator in addition to being a language and culture broker between students and adults” (Brooks et al., 2010, p. 146). Moreover, sometimes ESOL teachers are responsible for facilitating professional learning workshops to mainstream teachers (Harper & de Jong, 2009).

In Georgia, all ESOL teachers must have a valid English to Speakers of Other Languages (P-12) certification or endorsement. To receive this distinction, ESOL teachers can either obtain certification by taking coursework or pass a state licensure test (GADOE, 2016b). Over 500 additional ESOL teachers who work in Title III language programs will be needed in Georgia in the next five years (NCELA, 2015). The demand for qualified and certified ESOL teachers is higher than the supply; the rate of ESOL teachers becoming certified is substantially lower than the rate of ELs entering United States classrooms (Reeves, 2006). Moreover, even though ESOL teachers in Georgia have their ESOL certification or endorsement, they do not always effectively meet the needs of the ELs in their classrooms (Sehlaoui & Shinge, 2013). Certified ESOL teachers themselves expressed they do not feel prepared to effectively teach ELs (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011). Many mainstream teachers face similar challenges.

Mainstream teachers. According to the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE, 2016b), all teachers are language teachers when they have ELs in their classrooms. Therefore, mainstream classroom teachers and ESOL teachers share the responsibility of teaching ELs. Since mainstream and ESOL teachers need to teach both content knowledge and communication skills, which consist of writing, reading,
speaking, and listening (Somé-Guíébré, 2016), classroom teachers need to integrate language development knowledge and strategies with their instruction to support ELs (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Walqui, 2000).

The results of Conteh and Riasat’s (2014) study indicate that mainstream teachers do not always provide the best learning to multilingual students. Farris (2011) learned teachers worry about newcomers’ progress but they usually do not have a framework related to newcomers’ language and academic needs that can guide their instruction. Valdés (1998) learned mainstream teachers become discouraged when they realize it is challenging to engage ELs in questioning, critical thinking, and collaboration. Also, many teachers do not feel confident in their ability to teach ELs effectively and doubt if it is effective to use ELs’ native languages in daily classroom instruction (García-Nevarez et al., 2005). Unfortunately, many times teachers frequently continue to teach their ELs exactly how they are teaching their mainstream students (Valdés, 1998).

To summarize, the division of labor within a community impacts how educators can engage in an activity within a school. The administrative team, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers each have distinct roles that have been defined over time. Nonetheless, it is also important to observe how activity is mediated through a whole community. Therefore, in this next section I endeavor to illustrate what researchers posit about community aspects of an elementary school. I specifically will look to sharing about how EL instructional settings and collaborative relationships impact ELs.
Community

The community is the social group that the subject is a part of during the activity (Engeström, 1999). For this study, the community is situated within an elementary school setting. Although I recognize a school is part of a larger social system that is influenced by economic, social, cultural, historical, and political factors (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), this section will describe research related to collaborative community structures within one school environment. It will focus on teacher collaboration, EL and teacher relationships, and EL instructional settings.

ESOL and mainstream teacher collaboration. Collaborative school cultures that support ELs have a collective vision share philosophical beliefs (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). Researchers emphasize that ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers must collaborate “intentionally, purposefully, and knowledgeably” (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014, p. 338). Many times, teacher leaders, not administrators, are the ones who act as EL advocates and encourage the school community to intentionally support the needs of ELs (Russell, 2012). Administrators view ESOL teachers as the experts (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010). Therefore, it is essential ESOL teachers are invited to be a part of conversations related to grade retention, placement, and eligibility to ensure decisions about ELs are fair and evidence-based (Sox, 2009). It is imperative ESOL teachers also are involved in decisions about class placement because sometimes newcomers are placed in inappropriate classes because time constraints inhibit the students’ English language proficiency level to be assessed first (Valdés, 1998).
Moreover, ESOL teachers need time to collaborate with other colleagues to ensure they are best supporting the needs of newcomers in the classroom (Russell, 2012; Sox, 2009). Strong collaborative practices and unity between ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers positively impacts how teachers support the needs of ELs in mainstream settings (Russell, 2012). Mainstream teachers who teach newcomers need to have collaborative relationships with the students’ ESOL teachers. A collaborative relationship can help promote a more positive learning environment (Somé-Guiébré, 2016).

EL and teacher collaboration. It is also important for ELs to have positive collaborative relationships with their teachers. EL students who have formal or informal relationships with an advocate or mentor in their lives can have a more positive sense of well-being and academic performance (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Students who have supportive relationships in school make a greater effort in learning. These relationships help connect home and school cultures, help students feel safe, and provide additional opportunities for success (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). Students’ school-based supportive relationships predict students’ academic engagement and positively predicted students’ GPAs (Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009).

Instructional settings. Another factor related to the community aspect of an activity system is the type of instructional setting an EL is taught in. In Georgia, ELs are taught in a variety of instructional settings (NCELA, 2015). According to the Georgia Department of Education (2013), elementary students can receive ESOL instruction through the cluster center, pull-out model, push-in model, resource center/laboratory, or
through a different innovative delivery model approved by the Georgia Department of Education. Students in a cluster center model are grouped together in a specialized center to receive intensive language support. A pull-out model involves taking students out the general education mainstream classroom to receive small group instruction from an ESOL teacher. Students who receive services through the push-in model stay inside their general education classroom and receive instruction from their mainstream content area teacher and language instruction from an ESOL teacher. In a resource center/laboratory, students receive language support in a collaborative setting that is supplemented with multimedia materials. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss research-based evidence associated with the most common ESOL instructional models: cluster centers, pull-out, and push-in.

Short and Boyson (2012) extensively analyzed adolescent newcomer programs across the country. Newcomer programs typically enroll students for one or two years and then have those students transition to mainstream schools that have ESOL programs. A lot of variability exists between various newcomer centers; for example, some enroll all Level 1 newcomer students, but other programs enroll only newcomers with limited formal schooling. Programs follow a whole school model, separate-site model, or program within a school model. Newcomer programs face criticism because some educators do not like that they are isolated from English-speaking peer role models. For example, Valdés (1998) learned that students’ sheltered and pull-out class schedules lead to newcomers frequently only interacting with students who are also ELs instead of interacting also with English speaking students. Challenges of newcomer programs also
include providing transportation to newcomer programs and hiring competent teachers (Short & Boyson, 2012). It is also important to note that the economic depression of 2008 significantly decreased the amount of EL instructional newcomer programs throughout the country (Short & Boyson, 2012).

Many research studies conclude that solely mainstreaming ELs can be ineffective (Harklau, 1994; Langman, 2003; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Harklau’s (1994) ethnographic study identified how ELs transitioned from sheltered instructional settings to a mainstream classroom. When Harklau observed four ELs in a San Francisco high school, she observed the students were less engaged, had fewer opportunities to receive comprehensible input, and talked less with their peers and teachers. Years later, Thomas and Collier (2002) conducted a five-year research study that focused on the correlation between language minority students’ long-term academic achievement and their type of instructional program. They concluded effective EL programs have administrative support, effective teacher skills and training, provide students with an optimum time to receive comprehensible instruction in an unisolated classroom setting, and focus simultaneously on linguistic, cognitive, and academic development in a supportive environment. ELs who were only mainstreamed and did not receive any EL instructional services had the lowest achievement and had higher dropout rates. On the other hand, students in bilingual programs outperformed all other students, including students who only spoke English. Lastly, Langman (2003) investigated how moving middle school ELs to a full mainstream model impacted ELs’ academic language. Even though all teachers in the school received EL professional learning and used EL strategies in their
classrooms, the students who received the mainstream instruction did not show improvement in their English academic language at the end of the year.

On the other hand, research studies illustrate ELs can be successful when placed in inclusive classroom settings where ELs still receive language instruction and support from the mainstream teacher and/or the ESOL teacher. When ELs remain in their mainstream classrooms with non-EL peers, they do not miss valuable instruction (Dove & Honisgfeld, 2010) and they do not appear as marginalized in their school due to being pulled-out of the classroom (Theoharis, 2007). ELs can also develop their social language because they have more opportunities to engage in conversation with non-EL peers (Abdallah, 2009; Duke & Mabbot, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

To summarize, there is proven research that illustrates teacher collaboration, teacher-student collaborative relationships, and EL instructional structures all can greatly impact EL achievement. Nonetheless, no matter how collaborative teachers are and no matter which type of setting ELs are instructed in, the teachers in the classrooms must use effective instructional methods. Effective classrooms are safe settings that foster both increases in confidence and success with academic tasks (Hertzberg, 1998). To promote success, ELs must experience effective instruction. Therefore, in the following section, I seek to describe what researchers define as effective pedagogy for newcomers.

Tools

In an activity system, a tool is anything used by the subject in an activity process. Tools can be both tangible and intangible. Per Roth and Lee (2007), sometimes tools can continuously be transformed during activity. Sometimes tools are transparent because
they are embedded in the human body or mind. Leont’ev (1978) referred to tools as “crystallized operations” because they reflect patterns of culture and can only come into consciousness when they fail to reach the object during an activity. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that teachers use a variety of tools, explicit and implicit, to support the academic and sociocultural needs (Engeström, 1999). Adler (1982) stated, “The quality of learning, in turn, depends very largely on the quality of the teaching” (p. 49).

According to Hattie (2009), who partook in a mega-meta-analysis of more than 800 meta-analyses on teaching and learning, the teacher has the strongest influence on successful school learning. Currently, ESOL teachers face many professional challenges (Batt, 2008; Garcia-Nevarez, Stafford, & Arias, 2005; Menken, 2006; Trickett et al., 2012). For example, a shortage of EL teachers and extra duties of EL teachers cause pressure and personal stress (Batt, 2008). However, it is important to also understand how teachers’ use of a variety of tools can impact how they teach newcomers and other ELs in their classrooms.

In this section, I first will illustrate how teachers’ beliefs can impact ELs’ growth. Second, I seek to describe how the tool of professional learning can be a mediator in students’ progress at school. Third, I plan to extensively describe effective research-based EL pedagogy.

Teachers’ beliefs. Although some individuals may argue that internal beliefs are not tools, this study, which is rooted in Vygotsky’s (1987) sociocultural theory, labels beliefs as a tool of an activity system. Although beliefs are not physical objects, Barahona (2014) explained they are “psychological tools that mediate the formation and
development of concepts about teaching and language learning” and are “situated social ideas that emerge in concrete activities” (p. 117). Therefore, it is important to address teachers’ beliefs as a tool in an activity system. Palmer (1997) wrote, “We teach who we are. Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse” (p. 57). All teachers need to be aware of their beliefs about students, especially aware of their own biases (Sox, 2009). Teachers’ beliefs about students influence their teaching practices (Delpit, 1995; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

“Teacher impressions underlie expectations, and expectations can influence student achievement” (Hertzberg, 1998, p. 398). The expectations and beliefs of teachers who instruct ELs daily are situated on a wide belief continuum.

On one side of the continuum, some teachers of newcomers view ELs as successful and capable (Hertzberg, 1998). They do not view EL and newcomer success using academic achievement scores. In Hertzberg’s (1998) study of a specialized newcomer school that served fourth through eighth grade newcomers, which focused on examples of success instead of failure, teachers defined success beyond grades and test scores; they evaluated students as successful not solely using quantitative measures. Instead they defined successful students as students with high self-esteem and students who enjoy learning. One of the central goals for many educators at the newcomer school was to create an environment that promoted positive self-esteem. One teacher in Hertzberg’s (1998) study tries to teach students, “‘We’re all the same, and we’re all different. Kids need to understand that being different is okay’” (p. 401). It is evident this teacher values multiculturalism and reiterates its importance in this classroom. When
teachers view their students as competent learners, it is more probable that students will be competent students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). For example, in Kim’s (2010) study, teachers purposely used strength-based instruction in addition to questioning with ELs. In other words, they focused on ELs’ strengths and built instruction based upon those instead of building it upon what the ELs could not do. These instructional choices led to gains in ELs’ reading achievement scores and participation rates.

On the opposite side of the continuum, some teachers of newcomers and ELs view ELs with a deficit perspective. Educators who view students with a deficit mindset believe students fail in school because of perceived deficiencies related to students’ culture, class, family structure, or socioeconomic status (Valencia, 1997). For example, educators observe a lack of parent involvement in their classrooms and then attribute negative feelings toward ELs and their families (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Quirocho & Daoud, 2006). Therefore, it is educators and schools with deficit mindsets, not the students and their families, who contribute to the problem of low student achievement (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson & Powers-Costello, 2011; Delpit, 1995). It is critical to address teachers’ beliefs and mindsets (Delpit, 1995; Escamilla, Chavez, & Vigil, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Teacher self-efficacy. According to Bandura’s (1993) self-efficacy theory, a theory grounded in social cognitive theory, individuals need a sense of efficacy and knowledge and skills to complete a goal or task. Teacher self-efficacy is a teacher’s belief that their skills and abilities positively influence their students’ learning and achievement (Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1982). It is influenced by behaviors,
environments, and interpersonal factors (Bandura, 1993). Individuals’ efficacy levels relate to whether they approach difficult tasks as “challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided” (Bandura, 1993, p. 144).

Teachers with high self-efficacy set high goals and put forth consistent effort in achieving their goals (Pajares, 1992). Tran (2015) learned teachers with high-self efficacy could better support ELs’ language development in a classroom by connecting “culture, content, and language while engendering academic success” (p. 39). Other benefits associated with teachers who have high self-efficacy include being more likely to support students’ needs (Ashton & Webb, 1986) and being more capable of having high expectations for students (Payne, 1994). When teachers with high self-efficacy think they can influence students’ learning, their actions reflect those beliefs (Pajares, 1992). For example, teachers with higher self-efficacy use and apply what they learn in professional learning programs more than teachers with lower self-efficacy ratings (Eun & Heining-Boynton, 2007). Unfortunately, many mainstream elementary teachers rated their efficacy as low when they considered their knowledge of ELs, their ability to teach ELs, and how to use students’ home languages as a resource in the classroom (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011).

*Teachers’ collective efficacy.* It is possible to enhance teacher self-efficacy levels within their school environments (Tatar & Buldar, 2013). Klassen, Tze, Betts, and Gordon (2011) explained why school collaboration is important when they wrote, “When teachers experience challenges and failures that may lower their individual motivation, these setbacks may be ameliorated by beliefs in their colleagues’ collective capacity to
affect change. Teachers’ collective efficacy beliefs, then, are related to teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs” (p. 23). In other words, teachers who jointly approach teaching with agency can impact individual teachers’ self-efficacy levels. This is beneficial because a school’s academic performance is higher when a school shares a positive belief in their instructional efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Moreover, “people’s beliefs in their collective efficacy influence the type of futures they seek to achieve” (Bandura, 1998, p. 65).

Professional learning related to ELs. Another tool that can impact how teachers support the language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers is professional learning. Multiple research studies indicate many teachers who teach ELs and newcomers in their classrooms are neither prepared nor effective (Coady & de Jong, 2011, Orosco & Klingner, 2010, Roy-Campbell, 2013). Coady and de Jong (2011) investigated teachers’ preparedness and effectiveness. They concluded teachers of ELs were least prepared and least effective with using strategies related to the sociocultural dimension of teaching. Moreover, after Orosco and Klingner (2010) investigated perceptions, beliefs, experiences, curricular documents, and instructional process of educators who work with Latino ELs in an urban, Midwestern school, they suggested a negative school culture and inadequate teacher professional learning affected how students received appropriate instruction. Therefore, they recommended educators receive appropriate professional learning related to teaching ELs to combat inadequate teacher preparation. Three years later, Roy-Campbell (2013) concluded that teachers need more formal training related to the needs of ELs and that there is currently a scarcity of general-education journal articles that relate to EL instruction.
Since culture is not static, teachers cannot have static knowledge either (Purcell-Gates, Lenters, McTavish, & Anderson, 2014). Therefore, teachers need to regularly receive professional learning on how to best instruct ELs. Teachers can receive EL professional learning by enrolling in a year-long ESOL certification program or attending shorter training program and sessions that focuses on teaching strategies that support ELs’ language development (Hooker, Fix, & McHugh, 2014). Batt (2008) investigated what areas of professional learning educators would like to overcome the challenges related to EL education. Teachers desire professional learning in the following six areas: parent involvement, ESOL curriculum development, Spanish language classes, second language literacy methods, sheltered English instruction, and ESOL methods. Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix (2001) argued all teachers need to know about cultural and linguistic diversity, how second languages are acquired, how to choose appropriate materials and assessments, and how to utilize appropriate content and language instructional strategies.

The most meaningful professional learning experiences that impacted teachers’ effectiveness the most were hands-on opportunities of working directly with ELs (Coady & de Jong, 2011). Nonetheless, it is important to consider that just providing professional learning does not guarantee teachers will teach ELs effectively. In a case study of four high school teachers, Reeves (2004) learned teachers resisted professional learning related to EL instruction because they believed teaching ELs was like teaching native English-speaking students. One of the participants considered learning about modifying for ELs a waste of time because the real world does not modify life for these students.
Research-based effective EL pedagogy. The following section will describe research-based EL pedagogy. This section is the most extensive because it is critical to use effective pedagogy in classrooms. Tharp et al. (2000) reiterated the importance of teachers’ instructional methods when stating,

All school reform has one final common pathway: instructional activity……nothing will have any effect on student learning except as it operates through the teaching-and-learning activities at the classroom level….The activities engaged in by teachers and students make up the common pathway that leads to educational success or failure. (pp. 1-2)

I chose to engage in an exhaustive review of literature related to EL instruction research due to extremely limited research related specifically to effective pedagogy for newcomer ELs. I determined there are three key components of effective EL instruction: using direct instruction and scaffolding, implementing collaborative learning structures, and affirming EL identities. Figure 4 graphically organizes these components and shows each of these components each are multifaceted. Each of these themes will be discussed in detail below.
Gertsen and Baker (2000) used a qualitative multivocal method to investigate which instructional practices are effective for ELs. For their multivocal synthesis, they facilitated five professional work groups in five different areas of the United States. Gersten and Baker (2000) identified directly teaching content, such as vocabulary words, and scaffolding meaning are critical and effective EL instructional methods. Multiple research studies displayed quantitative evidence that support Gersten and Baker’s interpretation (Crevecoeur, Coyne, & McCoach, 2014; Cruz de Quiros et al., 2012; File & Adams, 2010; Solari & Gerber, 2008; Vaughn et al., 2006a; Walqui, 2006). For these reason, the discussion of the first theme of effective EL pedagogy includes a synthesis of related to two instructional methods: direct instruction and scaffolding.

Direct instruction. There is substantive evidence that direct instruction is beneficial to ELs (Crevecoeur et al., 2014; Cruz de Quiros et al., 2012; File & Adams,
Direct, explicit, systematic instruction that uses sufficient amounts of modeling helps ensure student learning and retention. For example, both Cruz de Quiros et al. (2012) and File and Adams (2010) studied how explicit vocabulary instruction impacted ELs’ reading abilities. Cruz de Quiros et al. (2012) studied how an intervention that focused on both expressive and receptive oral language development of ELs impacted students’ retelling abilities in their first and second languages. The intervention was called STELLA: Story retelling and higher order thinking for English language and literacy acquisition. Teachers reread the same storybook multiple times each week during the intervention period using a structured story read-aloud format. They also incorporated explicit vocabulary instruction and teacher modeling of retelling. The control group classroom teachers read aloud the same storybook but did not utilize systematic, explicit instruction that focused on vocabulary and retelling. As predicted, students who received the STELLA intervention had stronger retelling and fluency results in their native languages and in English than the control group students.

Similarly, Files and Adams (2010) studied how integrating or isolating vocabulary instruction impacted students’ vocabulary learning and retention with older EL students. ELs received integrated or isolated form-focused vocabulary instruction. They used Paribakht and Wesche’s (1997) Vocabulary Knowledge Scale as a pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest to measure students’ vocabulary knowledge of both taught words and incidental words. The results of File and Adams’ (2010) data analysis indicated students who received integrated or isolated explicit vocabulary instruction had
higher vocabulary learning and retention rates than students who had incidental exposure. Yet, there was not a statistically significant difference between isolated and integrated instruction.

The research related to direct instruction brings up the question: Is direct instruction always a best EL reading instruction practice? Some researchers argue that direct instruction cannot be the only focus in EL classrooms. For instance, Mason and Krashen (2010) disagreed with File and Adams’ (2010) conclusion and argued that File and Adams’ (2010) study results provided evidence that incidental acquisition of vocabulary is more effective than a form-focused vocabulary instruction. They argued the incidental vocabulary data in File and Adams’ (2010) study are worth recognizing. Furthermore, Mason and Krashen (2010) explained there were significant results with explicitly taught vocabulary words because students spent more time being exposed to those words. Krashen (2011) had a counterargument for the idea that that academic linguistic proficiency and academic content should be taught directly. Krashen (2011) claimed that academic language proficiency and content knowledge is developed best when students engage in self-selected reading and problem solving. He argued teachers will not always see student academic language growth if teachers simply implement a specific strategy that they observed a proficient teacher using. Per Krashen (2004), students who read more read better. Students who read more also write better, spell better, and have more extensive vocabularies. Krashen (1988) insisted there is also a correlation between the development of reading comprehension and how much students
read. More recently, Guthrie’s (2004) research about literacy engagement also supported this claim.

Although it is important to consider the alternative viewpoint of researchers such as Krashen (2011), numerous quantitative research studies supported that direct instruction is a research-based practice that is proven to be effective in many situations with EL reading instruction (Crevecoeur et al., 2014; Cruz de Quiros et al., 2012; File & Adams, 2010; Solari & Gerber, 2008; Vaughn et al., 2006a). Cummins (2000) argued,

Development of academic knowledge and skills in the majority language will not ‘just take care of itself;’ it requires explicit teaching with a focus on the genres, functions, and conventions of the language itself in the context of extensive reading and writing of the language. (p. 23)

In other words, newcomers must receive direct instruction in their school environments to enhance their academic language proficiency.

Scaffolding. A second instructional method that is an essential part of EL instruction is scaffolding meaning. Bruner (1983), a cognitivist psychologist, first used the term scaffolding when he described young children’s oral language acquisition. Years later, Cummins (2009) used Bruner’s theoretical ideas to clearly define scaffolding as “the provision of temporary supports that enable learners to carry out tasks and perform academically at a higher level than they would be capable without these supports” (p. 48). Scaffolding can be defined as a generic term for a supportive environment structure or as a specific instructional process (Walqui, 2006). Walqui (2006) argued educators cannot focus on scaffolding as a structure and ignore the actual scaffolding process and vice versa; there is a connection between the two ideas. For example, the support structure
allows the process to occur. For this synthesis, scaffolding will primarily be described as an instructional behavior.

Scaffolding allows content to become more comprehensible (Cummins, 2009). Krashen (1982) argued in his fourth hypothesis of language acquisition that learners can acquire language if they encounter comprehensible input. Per Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, individuals acquire language only when they receive comprehensible input. In other words, if individuals can understand what they hear and see, then they can acquire the language used in that situation. If teachers do not provide opportunities for ELs to gain comprehensible input, then their ELs do not adequately acquire English. Therefore, scaffolding is a common effective instructional procedure used in many EL experimental studies that involved EL instruction related to language proficiency (Denton, Anthony, Parker, & Hasrouck, 2004; Silverman & Hines, 2009; Van Staden, 2011; Vaughn et al., 2006b; Vaughn et al., 2009).

Walqui (2006) identified there are six types of scaffolding strategies that can help ELs understand academic content: modeling, bridging, contextualization, building schema, re-presenting text, and developing metacognition. Teachers who use modeling show what tasks should look like, share examples of what finished student word should look like, and demonstrate appropriate academic language to use. Bridging is connecting new concepts and language with students’ previous knowledge. To do this, teachers can activate students’ prior knowledge by using tools such as written anticipatory guides. Bridging also involves connecting students’ lives to the academic content to make the learning relevant to the students’ lives. Contextualizing involves connecting academic
language with sensory modalities such as manipulatives, pictures, video clips, or authentic objects. Schema building involves teachers using advanced or graphic organizers to help students organize their knowledge and understand how it is interconnected. Re-presenting text is another scaffolding behavior teachers can use in the classroom. When teachers do this, they can encourage students to use new language by modeling the language using different genres. For example, students can reconstruct an article they read into a play or transform a poem into a narrative story. Lastly, teachers can support ELs’ learning by helping them develop their metacognition. Metacognition is the ability to self-monitor one’s understanding. Teachers can encourage students to use metacognitive strategies by explicitly teaching strategies of how to self-correct and self-assess.

One study that took place in 2011 effectively illustrated how it is beneficial to incorporate scaffolding methods that Walqui (2006) described into EL instruction. The purpose of Van Staden’s (2011) study was to determine how using scaffolding practices could improve ELs’ reading skills. For this study, 288 intermediate phase EL students between the ages of 10 and 13 years were randomly assigned to an experimental group or a control group. Over a six-month period, trained educators used scaffolding reading methods, such as modeling, building schema, and developing metacognition, with the experimental group in small group settings twice a week. The control group engaged in their schools’ balanced literacy programs, which did not incorporate scaffolding methods. Pretest and posttest data demonstrated that the experimental group had significantly greater improvements in reading skill assessment results than the control group’s results.
(p < .000). Thus, using scaffolding methods in reading instruction can help improve ELs’ reading skills.

A specific type of scaffold that can be used in EL reading instruction is using visuals (Cummins, 2009; Gersten & Baker, 2000). Visuals help ELs visualize abstract academic language. Educators can use tools such as short video clips, pictures, experiments, and three-dimensional models to scaffold content instruction so that students can make sense of the content (August, Branum-Martin, Cardenas-Hagan, & Francis, 2009; Silverman & Hines, 2009; Vaughn et al., 2009). Furthermore, graphic organizers and concept maps can help students concretely process information, integrate information, and reflect on new content (Gersten & Baker, 2000). Gersten and Baker (2000) argued that visuals are not used enough during EL instruction.

To review, a plethora of EL research related to effective pedagogy expresses effective instruction must incorporate the use of direct instruction and scaffolding. When teachers use direct instruction and scaffolding strategies in class, such as schema building and modeling, ELs can better understand academic content (Walqui, 2006). If newcomer students receive appropriate academic scaffolding, they will be less likely to have low academic self-efficacy and less likely to become frustrated (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Although there are some scholars who have dissenting opinions about how direct instruction connects with academic language proficiency development (Krashen, 2011; Mason & Krashen, 2010), a review of literature strongly supports direct instruction is an effective method when teaching ELs. It is crucial students have access to direct, explicit
instruction that uses a variety of scaffolding strategies to support the unique language needs of ELs. Nonetheless, there are other factors that are also important to consider.

*Collaborative learning structures.* Teachers cannot solely consider the types of teaching methods to use during EL instruction; effective pedagogy also consists of choosing effective collaborative learning structures. Two evidence-based instructional formats include peer-tutoring and small group instruction. The following sections will describe how these two types of grouping structures appear in EL instruction research.

Teachers need to consider using a collaborative work structure during EL instruction because ELs must have frequent opportunities to engage in discourse with peers and teachers (Gersten & Baker, 2000; Krashen, 1982). When students have opportunities to engage in collaborative settings and listen and speak in conversations about academic content, students exhibit both stronger literacy skills and academic language development (Reznitskaya et al., 2001). Peer-tutoring is one collaborative structure that positively impacts ELs’ achievement.

Multiple researchers studied the effects of peer-tutoring with ELs. When teachers pair higher-achieving students with lower-achieving students multiple times a week for reading instruction, it can significantly impact the ELs’ phonological knowledge and oral reading fluency (Calhoon, Al Otaiba, Cihak, King, & Avolos, 2007; McMaster, Kung, Han, & Cao, 2008). One group of researchers that used a peer-tutoring strategy was Saenz, Fuchs, and Fuchs (2005). Saenz et al. (2005) developed a study utilizing an intervention called PALS (Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies) to analyze how peer-tutoring can impact ELs’ reading behaviors, comprehension, and fluency. PALS was a
peer-tutoring strategy that involved reading, sequencing, summarizing, and predicting. The summarizing component required that ELs use higher order language skills. The goal of PALS was to increase students’ strategic reading behavior in addition to their reading comprehension and fluency. For this study, teachers used PALS in their classroom reading instruction three times a week for 15 weeks. Each session lasted 35 minutes. Teachers paired up students for PALs by matching a higher-achieving reader with a lower-achieving reader. Students switched partners each three- to four-week period. Saenz et al. (2005) argued PALS had what Krashen (1982) described that second language acquisition must have: opportunities to receive comprehensible input and experiences that allowed comprehensible output. Although integrating the PALS strategy did not improve ELs’ oral reading fluency, EL students, those with and without learning disabilities, who engaged in PALS, improved their reading comprehension skills. Thus, Saenz’s et al. (2005) study supported the argument that peer-tutoring collaborative structures can help EL students’ reading development. It would be worthwhile to investigate why some pairs of students had greater improvement than others in future research.

Another evidence-based format that can improve ELs’ language proficiency is small group instruction. EL interventions are effective when they frequently engage students in small homogeneous instructional groups (Calderon, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998; Denton et al., 2004; Geva & Farnia, 2012; Kamps et al., 2007; Vaughn et al., 2006a; Wanzek & Roberts, 2012). To illustrate, Kamps et al. (2007) divided second-grade ELs into an experimental group that received small group instruction and a control
group that received whole-group reading instruction. The experimental group that received small group instruction had higher posttest scores at the end of the study. A study by Calderon et al. (1998) also had comparable results with EL second- and third-grade students. In Wanzek and Roberts’ (2012) study, fourth-grade ELs who were identified as having reading difficulties received a small group intervention. They were randomly assigned to treatment small groups that emphasized comprehension, word study, comprehension or word study based on students’ pretest skills, or a control group. All ELs who received the small group reading interventions increased their word-reading achievement more than students who were not ELs. A question remains though: Did the ELs show more growth because they had initially lower achievement results and had more room to grow? This remains unclear in Wanzek and Roberts’ (2012) research and thus might make some experts question the implications of the study.

Nonetheless, other research also displays the effectiveness of small group instruction. Results of Denton’s et al. (2004) study indicated systematic English phonics small group instruction that used students’ strengths and focused attention on their needs significantly impacted the ELs’ word identification decoding abilities. Moreover, Ehri et al. (2001) suggested that phonemic awareness instruction is more effective when taught in small groups instead of individually or in whole classroom settings. However, it is important to note that when Richards-Tutor et al. (2016) statistically analyzed group size as a moderating factor in each of the experimental EL reading studies they analyzed, they determined that there is no significant difference between individual intervention results and small-group intervention results. So, although some meta-analytical research
supports the idea that small-group instruction is more effective than individual instruction (Ehri et al., 2001), other research does not show a difference between individual and small-group instruction (Richards-Tutor et al., 2016).

Although many studies support small group instruction, there are alternative conclusions. Liu and Wang (2015) studied whether small group cooperative reading activities and independent reading activities are effective for fourth-grade ELs’ reading proficiency growth. They used data from two large data sets: the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Their statistical analysis revealed that small group instruction and EL student reading performance had a negative relationship. Fourth-grade ELs who received instruction in small groups more frequently had lower reading achievement scores in PIRLS data. Fourth-grade ELs who received whole group instruction had higher achievement scores. In addition, students whose teachers used pair work reading once or twice a week had lower reading scores than students whose teachers used it once or twice a month. On the other hand, students who consistently read books that they chose independently had higher reading scores. Therefore, Liu and Wang (2015) argued that teachers cannot rely solely on using small group and pair work reading structures in their classrooms. The conclusion of this article needs to be explored more.

The study did not measure growth; it measured only the statistical relations of various variables. If progress were measured, would the conclusions be the same? Perhaps the ELs in small groups did not have higher achievement scores because they were receiving extra reading interventions due to exhibiting lower reading achievement. Are there any
current researchers that are verifying the study’s conclusion? It would also be worth investigating if the results of the study would differ if the researchers analyzed the factors and data of multiple individual classrooms versus using national data sets. Since individuals may have some concerns about this research, future research must take place to strengthen the study’s conclusions before Liu and Wang’s (2015) conclusions impact EL pedagogy.

To summarize, it is essential that teachers consider which instructional methods and which type of structure should be used in ELs’ classrooms. Peer-tutoring and small group settings are both effective research-based structures for EL instruction. Both factors can impact not only students’ language proficiency growth but also their literacy engagement (Guthrie, 2004). Literacy engagement must be emphasized in language instruction (Cummins, 2012). Literacy engagement encompasses how much students read extensively, students’ affect while reading, students’ use of strategies to increase comprehension, and how often students pursue literacy activities in and out of school (Guthrie, 2004). Teachers of ELs need to maximize literacy engagement opportunities in the classroom to teach ELs effectively (Cummins, 2009). Per Cummins’ (2009) literacy engagement framework, teachers cannot improve literacy engagement by only using effective instructional methods and collaborative structures, they need to consider a third component of effective EL instruction.

Identity affirmation. Effective EL pedagogy must go beyond focusing solely on direct instructional methods and structures. It also includes understanding and addressing identity affirmation (Cummins, Hu, Markus, & Montero, 2015). Unfortunately, this
dimension of instruction is regularly ignored in policy conversations related to decreasing the EL achievement gap and increasing ELs’ language proficiency (Cummins et al., 2015). Educators need to create environments that promote identity empowerment (Cummins, 2009). Many educators and researchers cite Cummins’ (2009) Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy as a framework that incorporates this concept of identity affirmation (Cumico, 2005; Moje, 2002; Prasad, 2013; Simon, 2012).

Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy is organized by multiple principles. This pedagogy highlights that educators view students as capable and talented, build on students’ cultural and linguistic prior knowledge by promoting students’ identities and cognitive development, and use multimodal and multilingual tools to support students’ learning and presentation through the creation of identity texts. Research related to these principles will be discussed to better illustrate how they are critical components of ELs’ instruction.

Educators must use instructional strategies that promote development of students’ competence to challenge society’s deficit-minded viewed of ELs’ languages and cultures (Cummins et al., 2015). Cummins (2009) supported this critical need when he wrote, “When we choose to frame the universe of discourse about underachievement primarily in terms of children’s deficits in some area of psychological or linguistic functioning, we expel culture, language, identity, intellect, and imagination from our image of the child” (p. 52). In that statement, Cummins corroborated the argument that viewing an EL with a deficit mindset leads to greater challenges because it strips away something that is the essence of the students: a unique cultural and linguistic identity.
Educators must establish a collaborative classroom environment (Harper & de Jong, 2004) and a welcoming classroom environment where students’ cultures and languages are valued (Sox, 2009). One way to do this is by teachers understand ELs’ funds of knowledge to better instruct their EL students (Gonzalez et al., 1993; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Rios-Aguilar, 2010). Moll et al. (1992) stated funds of knowledge are “specific funds of knowledge pertaining to the social, economic, and productive activities of people in a local region, not ‘culture’ in its broader, anthropological sense” (p. 139). In other words, they are students’ individual household experiences and specific family cultural practices. Students engage in meaningful activities at home that help with students’ academic and nonacademic success (Rios-Aguilar, 2010). It is the role of the teacher to understand students’ funds of knowledge so they can truly understand where their ELs are coming from. Then, teachers can integrate students’ funds of knowledge into the curriculum and develop appropriate lessons that cater to the students’ experiences (Gonzalez et al., 1993; Moll et al., 1992). EL teachers need to understand ELs’ funds of knowledge because the ELs’ family capital and human capital positively affect the academic achievement of ELs (Jeong & Acock, 2014).

Moreover, recent research by Hepple, Sockhill, Tan, and Alford (2014) and Ntelioglou, Fannin, Montanera, and Cummins (2014) exemplified how to effectively incorporate identity affirmation into EL instruction. Hepple, Sockhill, Tan, and Alford (2014) provided EL Australian newcomers with a multiliteracy project that blended digital media with literacy teaching. The project involved students using Claymation. The process of Claymation first involved students reading and analyzing a text. Then,
students worked collaboratively to create a storyboard that illustrates clay character models portraying a scenario from the text. Finally, students had to write dialogue, film the clay models representing the scene, and narrate the film. As students used linguistic, spatial, visual, auditory, tactile, and gestural modes for their Claymation projects, the educational researchers noticed the multiliteracy projects promoted students’ agency and collaboration. This pedagogy promoted learner agency because all members of the classes were viewed as capable group members; their identities were valued from the very beginning of the project. The researchers reported this multimodal literacy approach had more transformative effects on ELs than traditional remediation or scripted basic skills literacy instruction.

Likewise, Ntelioglou et al. (2014) viewed elementary ELs’ identities as an asset during their study, which utilized collective pedagogical inquiry as its primary methodology. The authors investigated how creating multimodal identity texts in a Toronto mainstream classroom impacted ELs’ literacy development, attitudes about reading, and reading engagement. Identity texts connect affirming student identities with engaging students in literacy (Cummins & Early, 2011). Since the teachers wanted students to bring students’ own cultural pride and knowledge into their mainstream classrooms, third-grade ELs created multilingual texts that shared their cultural experiences and used their first languages. Students not only wrote the texts, but they also used a variety of digital media tools to incorporate visuals and their own voices into their projects. When teachers affirmed students’ identities by giving the ELs the chance
to be involved in multimodal and multilingual identity text projects, the students exhibited language learning, academic content learning, self-worth, and cultural pride.

Some teachers may have concerns that Ntelioglou et al. (2014) encouraged ELs to use their first native languages (L1) in their reading classroom environments. Why should teachers allow students to use L1 if the goal is for the students to increase their proficiency in a second language (L2)? Teachers can affirm ELs’ identities by acknowledging the advantage of students using their L1 during teaching and learning. ELs benefit from instruction that connects their L1 with their L2 (Cummins, 2012).

When ELs use their L1 to discuss texts they read first, they can practice clarifying and expressing their ideas in a nonthreatening manner prior to trying to express it in L2 (Hampton & Rodriguez, 2001; Kearsey & Turner, 1999). There is a reciprocal language learning process between students’ L1 and L2. A student’s knowledge of L1 positively impacts the student’s L2 acquisition, and L2 acquisition can impact L1 development (August, 2003; Vaughn et al., 2006b). Moreover, teachers acknowledge ELs’ identities and encourage them to promote their identities in their schoolwork when they themselves implement bilingual instructional strategies (Cummins, 2007b). In Cummins’ (2007b) view,

Students’ L1 is not the enemy in promoting high levels of L2 proficiency; rather, when students’ L1 is invoked as a cognitive and linguistic resource through bilingual instructional strategies, it can function as a stepping stone to scaffold more accomplished performance in the L2. (p. 238)
In other words, Cummins argued students need opportunities to activate and extend their background knowledge using their L1 to help them get to their goal of comprehending a text written in the students’ L2.

Nonetheless, although there is a copious amount of research that proves using a student’s first language (L1) in classrooms is a beneficial instructional practice (Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Myers-Scotton & Ury, 1977; Somé-Guiébré, 2016), many teachers are still uneasy about using students’ L1 for instructional purposes (Copland & Neokleous, 2011). In a nutshell, in the United States today there are teachers who “struggle to reconcile pedagogic ideals with contextual realities, leaving them feeling damned if they use L1 and damned if they do not” (Copland & Neokleous, 2011, p. 271). Moreover, some teachers believe that only teachers who speak the students’ L1 can support students maintaining their L1, but all teachers have the power to help students view their native language as a resource (Lee & Oxelson, 2006). Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that if a teacher does speak a student’s first language, this does not guarantee the teacher will create an environment that promotes student success; as discussed previously in the section about tools, a teacher’s personal beliefs can negatively affect teachers’ pedagogy (Hertzberg, 1998).

In summary, educators of ELs must affirm students’ identities frequently during effective EL instruction. This allows teachers to be linguistically responsive and culturally responsive during instruction (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). There are only benefits when teachers view students with an asset mindset and encourage students to use their L1 in the classroom. Cassandra Bice-
Zaugg, a high school EL involved in creating a multimodal identity text, best reiterated the importance of identity affirmation in the classroom when she expressed, “Take away identity and what do you have? If you have a student that doesn’t know who they are, do you think they care about what goes on in the classroom?” (Montero, Bice-Zaugg, Marsh, & Cummins, 2013, p. 90). To put it plainly, if educators want newcomers to care about becoming good students, educators must show care toward their students’ unique cultural and linguistic identities.

**Critiques of pedagogy research.** After reading these findings, it is evident that effective EL pedagogy involves using direct instruction and scaffolding teaching methods, choosing appropriate collaborative structures, and affirming students’ identities. When critics read about research related to these three themes, the information might give rise to certain questions. One question that might come up amongst literacy researchers is: Where is the discussion about the importance of having access to print for effective EL instruction? Another question that could arise is: Are these research-based pedagogy components effective for all ELs? Lastly, educators might wonder: Are these three components that relate to effective EL pedagogy just characteristics of effective teaching in general? The following sections will address each of these valid inquisitions.

The first question that is pertinent in the eyes of literacy teachers and scholars: Where is the discussion about the importance of having access to print for effective EL instruction? Cummins et al. (2015) argued literacy engagement could only take place when students have sufficient access to print. After Lindsay (2010) engaged in a meta-analytic review of literature, Lindsay concluded that students’ access to print affects
“behavioral, educational, and psychological outcomes in children—especially attitudes toward reading, reading behavior, emergent literacy skills, and reading performance” (p. 85). The essence of this conclusion is that access to print can impact not only ELs’ cognitive-related reading gains but also ELs’ behaviors and affect related to reading. Students actively engage in learning when they are in a print-rich classroom environment that is culturally responsive (Cummins, 2007a). Without access to print, reading instruction cannot occur. Therefore, access to print is not a component of effective EL language proficiency instruction; it is a critical prerequisite.

A second question is also an important concept to consider: Are these three research-based pedagogy components effective for all ELs? The short answer to this question is although these pedagogy components are proven to be effective for ELs, all ELs will not benefit the same way from the use of direct instruction, scaffolding, collaborative grouping formats, and identity affirmation. Studies on EL achievement illustrate that interventions that are beneficial for one group of ELs may not be equally beneficial with other groups (August & Shanahan, 2006; Richards-Tutor et al., 2016; Yesil-Dagli, 2011). For example, in Yesil-Dagli’s (2011) research on first-grade ELs’ reading fluency scores, not all ELs experienced the same growth rate. One reason for this discrepancy could be because the EL population varies in both language proficiency levels and academic achievement (August & Shanahan, 2006). Also, discrepancies in ELs’ reading achievement growth can also be linked with when students receive effective reading interventions. ELs who receive early reading interventions can decrease the achievement gap sometimes faster than students who receive reading interventions in
later grades (Gunn, Biglan, Smolkowski, & Ary, 2000; Lipka & Siegel, 2010; Singh, 2013; Vaughn et al., 2006b). Consequently, it is fallacious to say that all ELs will experience the same type of academic growth when effective EL pedagogy is used. More research is needed to determine the quality of instructional interventions for ELs. Richards-Tutor et al. (2016) recommended future research needs to focus on how individual ELs differ, how interventions that focus on both language and academic vocabulary impact student achievement, and how the impact of interventions differ for ELs with different language proficiency levels. Nevertheless, due to varied effectiveness, would it be best practice to avoid using all pedagogy that is proven to support the language needs of this unique group of learners? More than likely, educational researchers involved in EL instruction research would confidently reject that question.

Lastly, the final question is a valid question: Are these three components that relate to effective EL pedagogy just characteristics of effective teaching in general? It is a common assumption that effective EL teaching methods involve applying the same strategies that are recommended for other student populations (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Walqui, 2006). However, Gersten and Baker (2000) argued, Effective instruction for English language learners is more than just ‘good teaching.’ It is teaching that is tempered, tuned, and otherwise adjusted, as a musical score is adjusted, to the correct ‘pitch’ at which English language learners will best ‘hear’ the content (i.e., find it most meaningful). (p. 461)

Although the results from many research studies suggest native English speakers can also benefit from effective EL teaching practices (August et al., 2009; Carlo et al., 2004; Lesaux, Kieffer, Faller, & Kelley, 2010; Lesaux, Kieffer, Kelley, & Harris, 2014; Vaughn
et al., 2009), EL teaching methods are unique because teaching ELs involves consciously being aware of and adapting for students’ unique academic content needs and language development needs. Also, ELs need more scaffolds continuously to help them understand content (Walqui, 2006). For example, Walqui (2006) explained an EL may need “four or five different tasks” to master an academic content standard whereas for the English-only speaking student “two tasks may be sufficient to understand and practise a concept” (p. 178). Thus, it may take teachers longer to teach an academic standard.

Lastly, it is important to consider that good teaching is dynamic; it varies from one setting to another setting (Au, 2009; Gay, 2000). Gay (2000) expressed, “Many educators still believe that good teaching transcends place, people, time, and context...The standards of ‘goodness’ in teaching and learning are culturally determined and are not the same for all ethnic groups” (p. 22). Therefore, it is fallacious to say the effective components of EL reading instruction are just characteristics of good teaching in general. Individuals’ socially constructed definitions of good teaching will look differently in different environments and with different students.

Review of effective EL instruction. To summarize, the peer-reviewed research studies synthesized above display that there are three key components of effective EL instruction: choosing effective instructional methods, using collaborative structures, and affirming students’ identities. Effective instructional methods that are most prevalent in EL research are using direct instruction and scaffolding. Collaborative structures, such as peer tutoring experiences and small group instruction, provide ELs with a safe environment to engage in dialogic conversations about literary texts and academic
content so that ELs can increase their proficiency in both literacy and cognitive academic language. Furthermore, teachers must approach EL instruction with an asset-based mindset and affirm students’ unique cultural and linguistic identities. Although there are some dissenting scholarly opinions and research related to these essential elements of EL pedagogy, there is enough scholarly evidence to show clear support for each of the three effective components discussed.

Gap and Importance of Study

Plenty of research about newcomers at the secondary level exists and illustrates that secondary schools are not effective at addressing the needs of newcomers (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Clewell, & Fix, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). More researchers focus on newcomers at the secondary level because the end of secondary education is either a gateway to postsecondary education or the end of an educational journey (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011). Per Crosnoe and Turley (2011), national data collections on secondary education are more common than elementary education. Therefore, elementary research about newcomers is perhaps less plentiful because of data unavailability.

Since it takes four to seven years to gain English language proficiency (Cummins, 1991; Hakuta et al., 2000), elementary schools must support the academic achievement of upper-elementary newcomers so these students can have a better chance of catching up to their English-speaking peers. According to Capps et al. (2005), 76% of elementary school ELs are native-born, which means 24% of elementary ELs come from countries outside the United States. Previous research studies do not exactly describe how schools
support this 24%. Specifically, it is unclear how are schools supporting the achievement of upper-elementary newcomers whose standardized test scores do not count toward ESSA accountability measures. Ergo, a current gap in how elementary schools are supporting the academic achievement of upper-elementary newcomers.

Summary

In summary, I presented a review of existing literature related to newcomers and how teachers support newcomers’ English language proficiency growth in a standardized-testing environment. To begin, in the Search Strategy section, I identified the search strategies I used in locating research. I used a variety of databases during my research process as I followed specific guidelines. These guidelines included using studies from only peer-reviewed journals, not limiting publishing dates, not limiting research to just qualitative studies, and not limiting my research to one grade level. I then listed the multiple terms I used as search keywords and explained why I chose to combine certain keywords together. Afterward, I described which results were more relevant to the components of activity theory and newcomer instruction, Table 1 and Table 2 helped to visualize why I determined there is void in research related to educators supporting upper-elementary newcomers’ English proficiency growth. Towards the end of the second, I sought to review the research process I used to gain information about both my theoretical framework and my research methodology.

In the Theoretical Framework section of this chapter, I described the sociocultural perspective because activity theory, the actual theory I use to frame and situate my study, is a sociocultural theory. Per Vygotsky (1978), the most important tenets of sociocultural
theory are that mind and society are interconnected and all activity cannot be analyzed without considering the context, culture, and community factors that affect it. I attempted to provide a thorough explanation of how activity theory evolved through the writings of its seminal researchers: Vygotsky (1978), Leont’ev (1981), and Engeström (1987, 1999). Moreover, I described that activity theory’s six components, which are visualized in Engeström’s triangular model, consist of the subject, object, mediating tools, rules, community, and division of labor (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Engeström, 1987). It is also crucial to understand that activity is collective and multivoiced, is fully understood when understanding its historicity and contradictions, and can lead to research that is transformational.

Next, in the Activity Theory and EL Newcomers section, I presented literature and research about educators and ELs and language proficiency growth. Each aspect of research presented correlated with each component of activity system. In this review of literature, I highlighted past and present explicit national and state legislation tools that impact how educators support upper-elementary newcomers. I described the divisions of labor that exist in an elementary school and what research concludes about how EL growth is impacted by the roles of administrators, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers. I then focused on exposing how researchers illustrated how community structures within one school environment. Such as teacher collaboration and different types of EL instructional settings, affected EL English language proficiency growth. At the end of this section, I reported teachers use a variety of tools, explicit and implicit, to
support the academic and sociocultural needs. I specifically focused on research related to teachers’ personal beliefs, professional learning, and effective pedagogy.

Finally, I concluded my chapter by illustrating again how there is a void in the current body of EL research about how educators at an elementary school support newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. Although there is a plethora of research that exposes how secondary schools support the unique needs of newcomers, elementary newcomer research is scarce. Academic achievement data clearly expose that we need to address the achievement gap with elementary ELs, not just secondary ELs. Even though upper-elementary newcomers standardized test scores do not count toward ESSA accountability measures, they still deserve a quality education. A quality education in a supportive school environment can help elementary newcomers have a better chance of catching to their English-speaking peers before it is too late. Since it is unclear how elementary schools are supporting the achievement of upper-elementary newcomers whose standardized test scores do not count toward ESSA accountability measures, I engaged in a research study about this very topic. In the following chapter, I will describe my study’s methodology. I plan to explain my research design and rationale, my study’s participants and setting, a sample study I conducted, data collection and analysis procedures I used, and how I ensured my study is dependable, credible, and ethical.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The fastest growing student population in the United States is the English learner (EL) population (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). Between 1998 and 2008, the number of ELs in United States schools increased by 53.2 percent whereas the number of all pre-K through 12th grade students increased by 8.5 percent (NCELA, 2011). After the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the national origin quota system that had been used since the 1920s, a large influx of newcomers entered the United States (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011). Georgia is one state that has experienced substantial growth in the number of EL students in recent years (Batalova & McHugh, 2010; Malone, Baluja, Costanzo, & Davis, 2003). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), in 2000 approximately 570,000 foreign born individuals lived in Georgia; in 2014 over 960,00 foreign born individuals lived in Georgia. Individuals entering the United States in recent years are more diverse racially, socioeconomically, and ethnically than previous United States immigration waves (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011). As individuals are moving to the United States, more ELs, specifically newcomers, are enrolling in public schools. Per Capps et al. (2005), 76% of elementary school ELs are native-born, which means 24% of elementary ELs were once newcomers from countries outside the United States. For the purpose of this study, a newcomer is generally defined as an EL who moved to the
United States within the past year and has no or extremely limited proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing English.

The United States education system has also experienced another increase in the past two decades: increased accountability measures. On December 10, 2015, United States President Obama affected the future of education of English learners (ELs) by signing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (2016), ESSA defines an “English learner” as “an individual who, among other things, has difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language that may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet challenging state academic standards” (p. 13). This act, which took effect during the 2017-2018 school year, reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016). NCLB required that all schools pay more attention to ELs’ achievement (Short & Boyson, 2012). However, ESSA requires states to pay even more attention to ELs. ESSA mandates states to report on the percentage of students who are long-term ELs. Long-term ELs are students who have been classified as ELs for five or more years (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016). ESSA also requires using multiple measures, which include language proficiency tests, instead of strictly standardized test scores to measure EL growth (ESSA, 2016). According to ESSA, newcomers who have been enrolled one year or less in a United States school may be deferred from the English language arts content area assessments one time. In Georgia, third, fourth, and fifth grade newcomers’ content area assessment scores are removed
from state accountability measures, but the students' participation is included in EL participation counts (GADOE, 2016a).

Newcomers are negatively impacted by increased accountability measures (Hood, 2003; Menken, 2008; Short & Boyson, 2012). Newly arrived youth who arrive in the middle of their educational journey must face a “formidable barrier” (Hood, 2003, p. 9). They must learn English communication skills and rigorous academic vocabulary simultaneously (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Moreover, newcomers must fit into school culture that emphasizes high-stakes testing instead of their individual needs (Hood, 2003; Menken, 2008). In upper-elementary classrooms, many newcomers are disengaged, cannot understand assigned classroom tasks, are ignored and not called on to participate, and are not motivated (Farris, 2011). Their teachers worry about newcomers’ progress but usually do not have a framework related to newcomers’ language and academic needs that can guide their instruction (Farris, 2011).

Multiple federal legislation mandates, such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act, prohibit denying ELs equal access to education due to their limited English proficiency (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015). Therefore, all students, including newcomers, deserve to receive adequate instruction in their first year of enrollment in American schools even though their results are exempt from state accountability and achievement data. Newcomers cannot be ignored in the classroom; their English language proficiency growth needs to be valued as much as any other EL’s English language proficiency growth. Since it takes more than four years for students to
acquire academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1991; Hakuta et al., 2000) and language proficiency levels affect academic achievement significantly (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008), schools need to target extra support to newcomer students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). ELs need to receive early intervention to narrow the academic achievement performance gaps (Jeong & Acock, 2014). Regrettably, recent studies about how schools support newcomer ELs focused primarily on secondary education settings (Bang, 2011; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2001; Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Valdés, 1998). Crosnoe and Turley (2011) explained that elementary research about newcomers is less plentiful because of data unavailability. Most of national data collections are on secondary EL students, not elementary ELs. Since there are benefits of intervening earlier in a student’s educational journey rather than in later years of schooling (Gunn, Biglan, Smolkowski, & Ary, 2000; Lipka & Siegel, 2010; Singh, 2013; Vaughn et al., 2006b), it is imperative for educators to learn how elementary schools are supporting the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how administrators and teachers at an elementary school support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner (EL) newcomers. This study investigated how administrators, mainstream classroom teachers, and ESOL (English as a second language) teachers support newcomers’ English language proficiency growth within the school building. It is my hope that this study can become a guide for
practitioners in the field of education who desire to learn specific and practical ways of how an elementary school supports upper-elementary newcomers.

This chapter describes the intrinsic case study methodology I used to frame and situate my study and answer my research questions. Specifically, it will include an overview of my study’s purpose, research design, the context of the study, the site and participant selection procedures, my pilot study, and data collection and analysis processes. The final section of this chapter will explain dependability and credibility of the study, the role of the researcher, ethical safeguards, and limitations.

In the Research Design and Rationale section, I plan to identify why I chose to use case study methodology. I intertwine my reasons with cited work of scholarly case study methodologists. In this section, I also explain the theoretical framework that guided my research.

In the Sample Study, Participants, and Setting section, I seek to clarify how a pilot study impacted my decision to implement this current study. I also explain my three-phase participant and site selection procedure.

In the Data Collection and Instrumentation section, I expect to provide a description of my data collection procedures. This description includes an explanation of which types of data I collected. For each form of data, I explained how, where, when, and why I collected it.

In the Data Analysis section of this chapter, I hope to specify processes I used to analyze the data I collected. My explanations for how I coded the data will be supported with citations from qualitative scholars’ work.
In the Role of the Researcher section, I desire to describe how my own personal background connected with my research study. I explain why I chose this topic and how my personal teaching experience connects with the topic.

In the Dependability and Credibility section, I endeavor to provide evidence that my study is dependable and credible. To do this, I explain which techniques I used to ensure my study is valid.

In the Ethical Safeguards section, I look to describing how I protected participants’ identities and my study’s data. I also intend to describe how I followed all Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines.

Research Design and Rationale

For this qualitative study, I used an intrinsic single-bound case study methodology as my mode of inquiry. Case study methodology, a qualitative research approach, is widely known and regularly used in psychology, medicine, law, and political science (Creswell, 2006). Although many scholars initially viewed case studies as “less rigorous” and “not scientific” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 91), case studies are now quite prevalent in current research (Creswell, 2006). It is also one of the most prevalent methodologies used in educational research (Yazan, 2015). Lichtman (2013) shared it is a common methodology in the field of education because it provides “rich and detailed insight into the case” (p. 94).

It is important to point out that scholars do not always agree on exact case study methodology (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) approached case study with a more positivist approach. Per Lee (1991), a positivist approach involves using methods
associated with hypothesis testing, mathematical analysis, and quasi-experimental and experimental designs. Positivists seek to gain knowledge from observable and measurable facts (Crotty, 1998). Yin viewed a case study as having a specific methodology. On the other hand, Stake (2005) approached case study with a constructivist lens. Constructivists believe “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). In other words, meaning is constructed within its environment. Stake did not precisely define case study methodology because the entire research process should be flexible. I approached this case study more with Stake’s (2005) constructivist lens than Yin’s (2009) positivist approach because my personal beliefs about meaning align more with constructivists. I assert individuals construct their own realities based on how they see and experience the world.

There are three reasons for deciding to engage in a case study. First, case study methodology is more concrete and contextual than other qualitative research methodologies (Yin, 2009). Second, case studies are unique because they provide individuals with information that usually is private and inaccessible (Merriam, 2009). Third, the readers of a case study can develop a deep understanding of a case, which can impact the knowledge base of fields (Creswell, 2015; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). The rich detail, which Geertz (1973) referred to as thick description, included in a case study report is useful to other people so they can learn specifically from the details of the case (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). In this research, I intend to include thick
descriptions with illustrative detail to look “for the detail of interaction within its contexts” (Stake, 2000, p. xi).

Stake (1995) recommends it is best for researchers to intentionally determine what type of case study they plan to use and define the case. This research was not an instrumental case study because instrumental cases are chosen to reveal a specific issue or problem (Stake, 1995). I did not begin my research with the intent to reveal a one particular issue; instead I wanted to gain a complete picture to learn the intricacies of how administrators and teachers interacted within an activity system focused on upper-elementary newcomer’ English language proficiency growth. Also, this study was not a multiple case study because it was not my goal to compare one case with another case. I wanted to focus only one case for this to provide a clear, detailed understanding of one school’s activity system. Moreover, this case study does not combine other methodologies like narrative or phenomenology because it did not seek to focus on the stories of participants or “make sense of life as lived” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78) and it did not attempt to understand an abstract phenomenon. Therefore, for my study, I believe an intrinsic single-bound case study was the best fit for my research questions. Stake (1995) defined intrinsic studies as studies that focus on a case, such as a classroom or grade level, that is unusual and can be described intricately. The goal of this study was to clearly illustrate how educators at a school support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. The school I chose can be identified as unusual due to its newcomer population size and how it utilizes multiple instructional settings for newcomers.
The actual case I studied is one suburban Georgia Title I elementary school, which is identified as the pseudonym Esperanza Elementary. I looked specifically at how administrators, mainstream educators, and EOSL teachers approach supporting the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers within the school building during school hours. I only spoke with administrators and teachers who are employed at the school. I did not seek out interviews with students, parents, or community volunteers who related to my research site because that was beyond the scope of my specific case.

This research study strove to follow Yin’s (2010) recommendation of balancing my study between an etic and emic perspective. According to Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta (2007), research with an emic perspective “looks at things through the eyes of members of the culture being studied” (p. 100). The culture can be broad, like an entire school system, or very specific, such as two individuals in a classroom. An etic research approach involves the researcher using preexisting theories, “structures and criteria developed outside the culture as a framework for studying the culture” (Willis et al., 2007, p. 100). While designing my study, I initially experienced tensions like other researchers, such as Olive (2014), about whether to focus on emic understandings or etic understandings. Unlike etic research, which begins with external criteria, such as theories, that have already been derived, emic research involves the researcher using inductive reasoning and looking at meanings that emerge in the research setting (Morey & Luthans, 1984; Tracy, 2013). Since I find value interpreting an insider’s viewpoint but also analyzing data grounded in an outsider theoretical perspective (Lichtman, 2013), I
chose to follow Patton’s (2010) advice of doing “justice to both perspectives during and after fieldwork and to be clear with one’s self and one’s audience how this tension is managed” (p. 268). Therefore, I used an integrated interpretive approach (Schutz, 1954); I approached the research primarily with an etic perspective by using a sociocultural theory as my theoretical framework, but I kept in mind the importance of considering the emic perspective throughout my study.

Speaking of my study’s theoretical framework, my study is grounded in a sociocultural theoretical perspective, which aligns with Stake’s (2005) constructivist case study approach. Researchers with a sociocultural perspective believe humans cannot artificially separate mind and society. Cognitive development is not an isolated process (Vygotsky, 1962). All activity takes place within a context, culture, and community that cannot be ignored (Vygotsky, 1978). John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) argued it is important to use a sociocultural theoretical stance in educational research. Specifically, I used activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Leont’ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978), a sociocultural-based theory, as an analytical tool and framework to guide me in understanding what administrators and teachers do within a given school context to support upper-elementary newcomers. Activity theory is grounded in Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural work. According to Vygotsky (1978), human beings achieve goals through interacting with their environments and through the mediation of tools. Mediation of tools refers to the concept that humans use items between themselves and their environments to alter their environments and impact psychological development (Vygotsky, 1978). Tools can be
physical objects, psychological, or cognitive. For example, Vygotsky classifies language as a tool.

Leont’ev (1978) argued activity should not be excluded from Vygotsky’s mediation principle. Consequently, he built upon Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory mediation principle by designating activity as an essential piece of the mediation process. Leont’ev (1978) created a framework that illustrated an activity system consists of contextual elements that influence goal-oriented human activity. The elements of an activity system are the subject, object, mediating tools, community, rules, and division of labor. Engeström (1987), a Finnish psychologist, expanded activity theory by proposing a triangle model of activity theory, depicted in Figure 2, based on Leont’ev’s (1978) work. The triangle model visually models how an activity system consists of the six elements Leont’ev (1978) defined. The subject is who does the action, which is driven by a conscious and intentional goal. The object of the activity system is the objective of the activity system. The subject uses tools, which can be physical, psychological, or cognitive, to carry out actions. The community of an activity system includes anyone who engages in the environment of the system and is interested in the object. The division of labor within an activity system recognizes different members of the community engage in different tasks and have different power levels that affect how they contribute to the goal. Lastly, the rules are the explicit and implicit norms and expectations in an activity system.
I chose to analyze the activity of educators supporting upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. Specifically, I sought to see how the components of community, division of labor, rules, and tools impact the activity. Engeström (2001) stated these factors are “eventually understandable only when interpreted against the background of entire activity systems” (p. 136). I chose multiple individuals as my subject because all activity is collective and multi-voiced (Engeström 2001). Moreover, since activity theory also insists activity systems have contradictions, I also sought to understand what contradictions exist in a school’s upper-elementary
newcomer activity system. Therefore, using activity theory as my grounding framework helped me to better understand and illustrate the activity of how educators support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers.

For my study’s purposes, I developed an activity system model, illustrated in Figure 3, for how educators support upper-elementary newcomers’ language proficiency growth. In this model, the subject is the school’s educators and the objective is newcomer language proficiency growth. The object of the activity is upper-elementary newcomers. The tools include teachers’ pedagogy, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and professional learning. The rules include implicit school norms and explicit national and state legislation relating to educating ELs. The community is defined as the different school instructional environments where newcomers’ English language proficiency growth takes place and educators’ collaborative social groups. Lastly, the division of labor refers to how administrators, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers split up the work related to the objective.
My research questions relate to this study’s activity theory theoretical framework. I followed Stake’s (2005) recommendation of having two research questions related to an issue to help guide the research process. The wording of these research questions is somewhat different from my original questions. Using a constructivist approach and sociocultural perspective, I was open to the idea that my initial research questions were
dynamic. As I gained a better understanding of my theoretical framework, study, participants, and the activity system, I altered the wording of my research questions to be clearer and more direct. The following are this study’s research questions:

1. How do educators support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner newcomers?
   a. What rules impact how administrators and teachers support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   b. How does the school’s division of labor support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   c. How does the school’s community support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   d. What tools do administrators and teachers use to support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?

2. What contradictions exist when a school’s educators support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth?

However, since case study fieldwork can go in “unexpected directions” and rigid commitment to research questions is challenging (Stake, 1995, p. 28). Therefore, I intentionally tried to avoid being too focused and narrow minded with my research questions. To avoid becoming too focused and narrow-minded, I followed Stake’s (1995) recommendation of using a list of flexible questions and being willing to embrace opportunities to learn something new. I understand case study methodology is complex
(Yin, 2009) and “not spelled out” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 94), so I used both rigidity and flexibility when following my study’s methodology.

To review, in the Research Design and Rationale section, I identified why I chose to use an intrinsic single-bound case study as my method of inquiry. I also explained why I chose to use activity theory, which is rooted in sociocultural theory, as my theoretical framework to guide my research. I now will seek to clarify the influences of a pilot study on my research and how I chose my participants and setting.

Sample Study

In January through March 2016, I had the opportunity to conduct a pilot case study with two upper-elementary general education teachers (Cowdrick, 2016). The purpose of this case study was to describe the experiences of two general education teachers who teach non-English proficient (NEP) ELs at a diverse Title I suburban elementary school. At this stage in the research, NEP ELs was generally defined as students who moved to the United States within the past year with no proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing English. Both teachers were responsible for teaching their NEP ELs in their mainstream classrooms. They also each had an ESOL certified teacher push into their classrooms once a day for forty minutes to provide additional language and academic support. I examined the teachers’ experiences using the theoretical perspective of Krashen’s (1987) language acquisition hypotheses, particularly the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis and the Affective Filter hypothesis.

Both participants’ interviews expressed concern about the lack of training they received to support their NEP students. One participant received her ESL certification by
taking a state certification ESOL test. She mentioned she wished she had more specific training related to teaching NEP students because most of the training she received to pass the certification test was geared toward teaching ELs who had already been in the country for two or three years. The other participant received her ESL certification by taking three courses as a part of her undergraduate teacher education program. When I asked about what she learned, this participant responded, “The only ESL certification I remember was some talk about creating a culturally relevant classroom and making your kids feel welcome.” Thus, both participants’ responses revealed there was a huge disparity between having the certification and knowing how to support ELs.

Moreover, both participants the pilot study expressed many concerns about the amount of language learning instruction their NEP students receive daily. They both admitted that testing and accountability pressure affected how much time they supported their NEP students. For example, when I asked how many minutes the ESOL teacher works with the NEP student each day when the ESOL teacher worked in the mainstream classroom for reading instruction, the teacher responded “zero minutes” and then added,

To be completely honest, like the 40 minutes that the ESOL teacher comes in, she's serving my other nine ESOL students who are direct served and the other seven first- or second-year-exit kids when she comes into the room. I mean it sounds awful, but these are the kids that have to pass the Milestones this year, and if we neglect to give them an extra reading group to meet with [my NEP student] for 20 minutes, it's not serving the best purposes of the twenty-six other students in my class.

This participant’s statement referenced how NEPs are deferred from taking the Language Arts Georgia Milestones standardized state assessment when it is their first year in the country (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).
The results of this case study raised questions about how teachers, and the current standardized testing culture, affect the English language proficiency growth of NEP students. During my pilot study, I recognized the challenge of supporting NEP students in the classroom went beyond teacher preparation, professional learning, and limited resources. There were other factors such as ESOL and mainstream teacher divisions of labor, explicit legislation rules, and school community environments that impacted how teachers supported their students. My pilot study raised questions about how a different elementary school is making efforts to lessen the deficits in professional learning and balance the accountability pressures with supporting the English language proficiency growth of all students, including NEPs. Therefore, these lingering wonderings and my personal passion for seeing EL newcomers encounter success led me to my current research study.

Site and Participant Selection Process

To determine my research site, I did not rely on solely using convenience sampling. Instead, I used purposeful sampling by engaging in a three-phase purposeful sampling process to select my research site (Tracy, 2013). I constructed my three-phase process based on Hertzog’s (2007) two-phase selection process of identifying successful elementary teachers. Hertzog (2007) used this multiple phase process to ensure she chose effective teachers that met certain research-based evidence. I was thorough and methodological throughout each phase of the selection process.
Phase One of the Selection Process

The goal of the phase one of the site selection process was to compile a handful of schools that met certain criteria. To become a part of the first group of possible sites, schools had to meet the following criteria:

- The school needs to be located within the Georgia school district selected for the study. I chose this school district primarily because of its high enrollment of ELs in the district but also because of convenience sampling. In the 2013-2014 school year, this district served over 18,000 ELs, which is about one-fifth of the state’s population of ELs (NCELA, 2015).

- The research site had to have at least 50% of its students classified as ELs. I made this criterion because schools with a greater population of ELs have a greater population of newcomers (New York City’s Department of Education’s Division of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners, 2013). I accessed this data through the school system’s 2016-2017 accountability reports.

- The research site needed to have at least 70% of its ELs positively moving from one Performance Band to a higher Performance Band as measured by the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners. (ACCESS for ELLs®) assessment. I chose at least 70% because Georgia’s average percentage for this data point of all elementary schools was 76%. I accessed this data through Georgia’s 2016 College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) reports (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).
Phase Two of the Selection Process

The goal of phase two of the selection process is to select one school. To do this, I engaged in snowball sampling (Patton, 2010). Snowball sampling involves identifying participants that may be information-rich cases based on other individual’s nominations (Patton, 2010). I took my list from phase one of the selection process and sought input from curriculum and instruction leaders from the Title III/English Language Learner department about the final site possibilities. In other words, I followed Thomson’s (1997) recommendation of using social networks within the local school system to identify potential school locations. The selected school had to receive a double nomination from two curriculum and instruction leaders within the southeastern school district. This double-nomination process helped confirm the research site is an information-rich model for the study (Patton, 2010).

Once the school was determined, I followed Bogdan and Biklen’s (2007) advice of first reaching out to the principal of the school. The principal is the “key gatekeeper” and his or her support is greatly important for a study at a school to be well received (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 85). I requested a meeting with the school’s principal, Ray, to briefly discuss my study’s goals and the principal’s potential interest in participating in my study. I also requested permission to observe an upper-elementary mainstream classroom teacher and informally converse with the ESOL teacher. There are several purposes to this phase of the selection process. First, I wanted to determine if there are at least five EL newcomers enrolled in third, fourth, and/or fifth grades. Second, I wanted to hear about how the ESOL teachers and principal view their role of serving newcomers
and learn that teachers had access to professional learning related to EL education. Third, I wanted to verify potential teacher participants appeared to be a successful teacher of ELs. During this phase, I temporarily took on the role of an evaluator. I looked for evidence of the teacher using at least four of the eight effective researched-based EL pedagogical strategies that I discussed in Chapter 2 of this study during the classroom observation. These qualities were:

- wait time (Hertzberg, 1998)
- direct instruction (Van Staden, 2011)
- academic scaffolding (Van Staden, 2011; Walqui, 2006)
- collaborative and welcoming classroom environment (Harper & de Jong, 2004; Sox, 2009)
- integrating funds of knowledge into classroom curriculum (Gonzalez et al., 1993; Jeong & Acock, 2014; Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar, 2010)
- allowing students to use their first languages (Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Myers-Scotton & Ury, 1977; Somé-Guiébré, 2016)
- showing evidence of teacher-student supportive relationships (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009)

Teachers had to exhibit any of the four qualities from the list. I required only four of the eight qualities because I only observed the classroom for 45 minutes to one hour; it was
not a realistic expectation to expect to see all eight qualities in a short amount of time.

Following the observations, I determined the teachers did use effective pedagogy in their classrooms. So, I verified that the site from the phase two process met the newcomer population criteria and then proceeded with phase three of the selection process.

Phase Three of the Selection Process

The goal of phase three of the selection process was to choose actual participants for the study within the research site. Since my goal was to study a whole-school approach, I invited three administrators, six upper-elementary mainstream teachers who teach newcomers, and three ESOL teacher who teach newcomers to be my primary participants. I asked the research site’s principal, instructional coaches, and the curriculum and instruction district leaders of the Title III/EL department for recommendations of upper-elementary mainstream teachers and ESOL teachers who might be willing to participate in the study. I encouraged them to take teaching experience and whether the teacher is ESOL endorsed into consideration. From there, I sent an interest email to possible participants and had informal conversations about the study (See Appendix C). I had three administrators, four upper-elementary mainstream teachers who teach newcomers, and two ESOL teachers who teach newcomers willing to participate. I had each participant read and sign an informed consent form before beginning data collection (See Appendix D).

Once I identified my research site and participants, I conducted a demographic study of the school’s total student population, total EL population, percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, and if the school receives Title I funding. I also
consulted with the ESOL department chair at the school to inquire about the primary languages spoken at home of the EL students and how many students in each grade are classified as Level 1 newcomer ELs. Furthermore, when I consulted with the ESOL department chair, I learned about how many ESOL teachers teach at the school, how many students each ESOL teacher serves a day, and what kind of instructional settings newcomers learn in. This helped me to better understand the site’s community, an integral component of an activity system.

In summary, in this section I clarified how a pilot study on upper-elementary newcomers impacted my decision to implement this current research on how a school supports upper-elementary newcomers. I also illustrated my three-phrase participant and site selection procedure. In the following section, I will provide a description of my multiple data collection procedures.

Data Collection and Timeline

Qualitative researchers rarely solely use one type of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Merriam (1998) emphasized that researchers need “both breadth and depth of data collection” to understand “the case in its totality” (p. 134). The goal of qualitative research is to gain a holistic understanding (Merriam, 1998). I desired to seek a holistic understanding of a school’s activity system, so I consequently used three methods of data collection instead of one method of data collection. Rigor is added to a study when observation is combined with other data collection methods (Adler & Adler, 1994). The three methods I used were: in-depth interviews, document analysis, and school
observations. Table 3 summarizes how different data collection methods corresponded to the components of activity theory.

Table 3

A Summary of Data Collection Methods

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<th>Community</th>
<th>Division of Labor</th>
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<td>Document analysis</td>
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My primary source of data was from interviews with administrators, mainstream upper-elementary general education teachers, and ESOL teachers who teach at my research selected site. Through the interview process, I gained a better understanding of all four parts of the school’s activity system and learned how participants personally impact the activity. Participants chose whether they wanted the interview to take place at the research site or in a neutral location. I provided them with a choice based on Elwood and Martin’s (2000) recommendation: an interview’s location and protocol can emphasize power differences and create an unbalanced power relation that influence the data being collected (Elwood & Martin, 2000). Moreover, I interviewed participants individually at least one time and invited participants to participate in focus group interviews. Participants’ time limitations impacted the amount of focus groups I conducted, so I unfortunately only used two focus groups. I did not engage in as many as I intended. I did not want to rely solely on individual interviews for two reasons. First,
focus groups can create “insightful self-disclosure that may remain hidden in one-on-one interviews” (Tracy, 2013, p. 167), even though I understand that focus groups decrease how much control I have as an interviewer and limit how much time each participant can share (Morgan, 1997). Second, focus groups discussions can also provide evidence about how participants’ opinions are similar and different and can elicit depth of dialogue that is not possible with individual interviews (Smithson, 2000).

Nonetheless, despite not having as many focus groups as originally planned, all the individual interviews were very rich. Individuals did not demonstrate inhibition and conversation flowed easily (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). During the interview, I used a variety of what Tracy (2013) refers to as generative questions and directive questions to make sure my interview questions were both non-threatening and encouraged open-ended answers. I audio recorded all interviews using a digital recorder and a computer online-based recorder, even though I realize some participants may have had ethical concerns about participant privacy when data is collected using online methods (Nicholas et al., 2010).

Since teacher beliefs and teachers’ actual practices can differ (Ertmer, 2005), it is important to observe what the teachers do in their classrooms. Therefore, I also engaged in observations at the local school to better understand teachers’ behavior. These observations validated or refuted what my participants told me in my interviews. I observe each teacher I interviewed during the initial screening for a full class segment and most teachers one other time. I recorded detailed notes that included vivid descriptions and dialogue (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I then wrote formal field notes
following Tracy’s (2013) recommendations within 36 hours of the observation. It was important to not procrastinate when writing field notes so I could recall the details of my experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Since reflective note taking assisted me in developing new thoughts and perspectives (Glesne, 2011), I tried to be as reflective as possible when writing my formal field notes. I intentionally focused on writing reflections related to analysis, method, ethical dilemmas, and my own thoughts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Finally, to engage in document analysis, I worked closely with the research site’s principal to gain access to organization documents and materials that provided additional background about the school’s vision, student achievement, and professional learning plan. I better understood teachers’ environments by analyzing both internal documents and external communication materials (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These documents included faculty emails, weekly communication newsletters, professional learning handouts, teachers’ lesson plans, handouts and assessments teachers gave their students, and district resources and communication related to supporting the school’s newcomers. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) classify these types of documents as official documents because they illustrate a setting’s official perspective. Document analysis assisted me in getting a “behind-the-scenes” understanding of the school that may not come up in observations or interviews (Patton, 2010, p. 293). These documents also helped me gain awareness of the interplaying factors that impact the school’s activity’ system. Lastly, I used document analysis because it is a means of data triangulation (Bowen, 2009). I use documents to verify both interview data and observation data. For example, when
teachers said they incorporate direct instruction of phonics into their classroom instruction on a weekly basis, I looked back at those teachers’ lesson plans to see if that direct instruction was listed on their weekly lesson plans.

To summarize, in the Data Collection and Implementation section I described how I collected data using interviews, document analysis, and observations. I chose to use multiple data collection methods to add rigor to my study (Adler & Adler, 1994). In the following section, I will specify how I analyzed the data I collected.

Data Analysis

When researchers engage in data analysis, they organize data, code data, synthesize data, and search for patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Saldana (2009), coding is more than “just labeling, it is linking” (p. 8). Since coding should be a cyclical process (Saldana, 2009), I followed Stake’s (2005) and Bogdan and Biklen’s (2007) recommendations of simultaneously collecting data and analyzing data. This allows the researcher to verify the data that is collected is substantial and focused (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It also helped me to “cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 50). Therefore, within 48 hours, I transcribed each interview session, and wrote my anecdotal notes in my research journal that consisted of my impressions, possible themes, and further questions. I knew I was finished with my data collection when I noticed I have reached the point of data saturation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Per Bogdan and Biklen (2007), I reached data saturation when the data I collected became redundant.
As I collected the data, I coded all the data using NVivo software. I chose to do this because software can efficiently help researchers manage, organize, and categorize qualitative data to aid in the analysis process (Saldana, 2009). I input each interview and observation anecdotal notes into the software. I did not put the actual documents I analyzed into NVivo because I used documents mainly for data triangulation purposes (Bowen, 2009). I followed Jick’s (1979) and Yin’s (2009) recommendations of engaging in a holistic analysis of all the data. To do this, I chose to engage in three coding cycles, which is illustrated in Figure 5. Multiple data coding cycles helps researchers filter, focus, and better understand data (Saldana, 2009). My three coding cycles loosely follow Saldana’s (2009) two coding cycle descriptions.

For my first cycle, I transcribed data using open coding to allow possible terms to emerge. As I read, I broke down the data into “pieces” and marked each piece of data with a label, which I refer to as codes (Khandkar, n.d.). I added a code to a line, sentence, or section of data. I did not use any pre-existing codes when I began. This allowed me to approach the data openly and help me begin to formulate possible categories and themes (Janesick, 1994). As I open coded my data, I used memos to record my thoughts and questions. Once I finished my initial data coding cycle, I began the second round of coding.
During the second cycle, I looked at all my open codes in NVivo and began to organize my open codes into specific categories. When I made a category, I followed Maykut and Morehouse’s (1994) of writing a short descriptive statement that explained what the category included. Some coding categories I used were assessment, ESOL teacher and mainstream teacher collaboration, newcomer class, teachers’ beliefs about own teaching, and professional learning. Thus, I used a variety of types of codes including setting codes and participant perspective codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It was here where I also began to organize my data into categories that coincided to the components of activity theory. However, I did not limit myself to only organizing my initial codes into only activity theory related categories. During the second cycle, I realized the data began to fit into identified categories and subcategories that related to overall themes. This led to my third cycle of data analysis.
During my final cycle of data analysis, I took one final pass through the data. I did this to ensure I did not overlook or analyze something in error. During this cycle, I had to refine categories into themes and collapse some codes (See Appendix G). Refining codes and categories involved tweaking a code to a different one that fit more naturally. I had to collapse some codes because I noticed various codes I had were redundant. Finally, once I went through all my data, I began to synthesize my findings and saw how the data answered both of my research questions. As a whole, the description that best describes the beginning of my final cycle of data analysis is Abbott’s (2004): It was like “decorating a room; you try it, step back, move a few things, step back again, try a serious reorganization, and so on” (p. 215). In other words, the three-cycle holistic data analysis process took both time and patience. It was nonlinear and flexible, which was sometimes difficult for me, a beginning researcher. It was isolating and frustrating at times. Even with member-checking and consulting with a doctoral program peer, I still feared bringing my own personal bias into my codes. However, I am a stronger qualitative researcher for engaging in each of these data analysis cycles. Moreover, I gained a very holistic and illustrative picture of the activity system of my research site. This rich description is shared in Chapter 4: Data Analysis.

In summary, in this section of Chapter 3 I provided a description of how I analyzed the data I collected. I engaged in a holistic analysis of my data using open coding to create themes by using qualitative research software. My data analysis processes were based on qualitative scholars’ work and recommendations. In the next
two sections, I desire to outline my research timeline and describe how personal background impacts my role as a researcher in this study.

Research Timeline

I elected to rigorously follow my proposed research timeline due to time constraints and personal commitments beyond this dissertation research. My research timeline below illustrates that my data collection and analysis occurred during a four-month period.

April 11, 2017 - Proposal Defense
April 12, 2017 - Submitted IRB to Mercer University (See Appendix A)
April 13, 2017 – Received IRB approval from Mercer University
(See Appendix A)
April 15, 2017 – Submitted IRB to local school district
Late April 2017 – Received IRB approval from local school district
Late April - May 2017 - Phase 1, 2, and 3 of site selection process
May - August 2017 – Ongoing data collection & analysis

Role of the Researcher

As I shared in the above section, I had obligations beyond this dissertation during my research. Throughout this case study, I was the sole investigator of this research, and I was also a fulltime educator and doctoral student. I am aware my roles as a teacher, student, and researcher influenced my observations, interviews, and data collection and analysis procedures (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam 2009). It is in this section where I hope to be transparent in explaining where I fit into this research.
As an individual with roots from the progressive educational pedagogical movement, I value quality public education, civic education, and multicultural collaboration. I am from an intercultural, responsive pedagogy foundation and applied axiological view and anti-foundationalist ontological view. I value knowledge because it is purposeful. I know our world is affected by our social, cultural, ethnic, and gender values. I am from the realist constructivist epistemological tradition and believe knowledge is gained because of an individual's active engagement and is affected by an individual’s social, cultural, and language interactions. My personal teaching and learning experiences connect with aspects of four specific theoretical paradigms: behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and postmodernism. Today, as a veteran teacher and doctoral student, I stand confidently on top of the intersection of these four specific paradigms; the education-related decisions I make are rooted in the paradigms that serve as my foundation. Essentially, I am an interactionist who blends theories together based upon my past educational experiences as a lifelong learner and educator. I intertwine ideas from multiple theoretical paradigms into my classroom practices. Therefore, I approach teaching with balanced theoretical-rooted thoughts and actions.

I am a fifth-grade teacher who teaches in the same school district where my research site is located. Throughout my seven years of teaching, I always taught the EL-cluster class, which means at least one-third of my students are classified as ELs. Each year, I have had at least two EL newcomers in my classroom and have worked directly with numerous ESOL teachers at my school to support these students. I approach teaching the newcomers in my class with a hopeful spirit and an excited purpose. I
believe this passion stems from my personal interest in learning and speaking a foreign language, studying abroad in multiple Central American countries, and my personal family connections of my great-grandparents’ families learning English.

I recognize my personal identity and “heart-felt engagement” (He & Phillion, 2008, p. 16) that I have undoubtedly influence me to “connect the practical with the theoretical, and the personal with the political” during my study (He & Phillion, 2008, p. 3). Nieto (2004) warned about this the influence of the researcher’s personal identity on a case study when she wrote,

Before undertaking your own case studies, however, you need to think carefully about the ethics of doing this kind of research. All research is fraught with problems of intellectual integrity and case studies are no exception. Thus, for example, you need to think about your own identity and how it might influence the person you interview, particularly if she or he has an identity different from yours. What biases do you bring to the interview? How does your identity influence your attitudes toward him? How might your voice, inflection, facial gestures or postures affect her answers? (pp. 19-20)

In other words, I realize that it was not just my words I used that impacted my research; my personal identity and nonverbal cues also impacted my study’s methodology and analysis. I recognize my study is not completely impartial. It was not possible to fully bracket my own feelings and avoid my own preconceived opinions during data collection and data analysis due to my personal passion and experiences. However, I insist I did everything in my power to remain objective and not insert my individual opinions and bias into the data collection and analysis. In the next sections, I will further expand on this and other limitations of my study.
Limitations

Given my role in this research and my personal passions, I do realize that there was a possibility of bias, making assumptions, and creating beliefs about the research site and participants. I recognize this is a limitation of my study. To guard against my biases, assumptions, and beliefs, I only used the data I gathered during my data collection to frame my case study analysis.

Moreover, I realize there are other limitations in this study. First and foremost, I am fully aware that this case study, in its totality, is not generalizable to other studies since I investigated one research site. Merriam (2009) recommended using a collective case study when trying to improve generalizability and external validity because “the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be” (p. 50). I chose to just focus on one case for this study because I valued analyzing the depth of one case instead of the breadth of multiple cases. Nonetheless, I realize that this research study is not generalizable and does not have much external validity.

Second, I am aware there are limitations related to using interviews as a data collection method. Denscombe (2007) discussed that people’s perceptions of the interviewer affect how people respond to questions. I interviewed a varied group of participants who represented both genders, diverse cultures, and had a variety of years of teaching experience. I recognize the participants could have responded to me differently based on how they perceived me and my study’s topic. This is especially important to keep in mind since I am a teacher-researcher and I interviewed individuals in higher
leadership positions (Elwood & Martin, 2000). Moreover, since many of the interviews occurred within the research site, I understand some participants could have been hesitant to share any weaknesses or contradictions of the school’s activity system. It is also important to acknowledge that I cannot be certain that the participants told the truth (Alshenqeeti, 2014). When I observed the participants, I could visibly confirm multiple aspects from the interviews. However, I did not spend extensive time in each classroom so I could not fully verify each aspect of what was said during interviews. Furthermore, although I gave participants a choice in their interview location, my data may be limited because the research site can affect both participants and researchers because it can produce “‘micro-geographies’ of spatial relations and meaning (Elwood & Martin, 2000, p. 649).

Third, another limitation of my methodology and research design includes leaving out two important voices of a school community: students and parents. I recognize that EL newcomers and their parents are some of the most voiceless in our current schools today due to language barriers (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008); nonetheless, focusing on student and parent voices was not within the scope of this case study.

In brief, in the past two sections I described how my personal background impacts how I viewed and approached my research study. I also explicitly noted limitations of my study. In the remaining two sections of this chapter, I endeavor to show how my study is dependable and credible and explain how I ensured I used ethical safeguards throughout my research.
Dependability and Credibility

As qualitative research becomes more prevalent, Schofield (1990) and Cho and Trent (2006) recognized the concern for validity in qualitative research is increasing. I recognize there were threats to the internal validity of my study. According to Campbell and Stanley (1963), external events at the school could influence how my subjects respond during interviews. Also, the subjects I interact with can mature or experience psychological changes during my research period. However, I agree with Koro-Ljungberg (2010) that it is important to not engage in “external, objectified, oversimplified, and mechanical approaches to qualitative research” (p. 604). Therefore, I used a variety of measures to enhance validity and decrease bias during my data collection and data analysis procedures.

During my data collection, I first used bracketing to put aside my personal views during the research process (Ahern, 1999; Fischer, 2009). I realize it is extremely difficult to completely isolate my personal bias with my interpretations, but I intentionally tried to put aside my own experiences and feelings during this research (Ahern, 1999). Second, I used an interview protocol in each interview to ensure I am focusing on the same types of questions with each participant (See Appendix E). Third, I triangulated my data. Even though some researchers believe triangulation is more appropriate for studies that only connect with positive paradigms (Lichtman, 2013), I followed Denzin’s (2001) and Jick’s (1979) suggestion of triangulating by using multiple data sources and multiple data collection methods, which were interviews, document analysis, and observations. Triangulation helped to answer the question “What is really
happening here?” (Tracy, 2013, p. 40). Triangulation also strengthened the reliability and credibility of my data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994; Tracy, 2013).

Once I reached data saturation and finish collecting my data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), I continued to reduce bias and increase validity during data analysis procedures. I increased the rigor of my data analysis by using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. This software helped me organize and analyze my coded data (Bergin, 2011). It also allowed me to keep a trail of my data analysis cycles (Bergin, 2011). Researchers who maintain an audit trail of their data analysis cycles increase trustworthiness and qualitative rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, I recognize that multiple interpretations of my data may exist and I need to avoid inadvertently “imposing [my] own (etic) interpretation onto a participant’s (emic) interpretation” (Yin, 2010, p. 12). To do this, I had individuals outside my study review my recorded interview transcriptions to verify my transcriptions are accurate. I also invited participants to engage in member checking techniques throughout my data analysis procedures to corroborate my data (See Appendix F). Member-checking solicits feedback from participants to help check if their own data are accurately recorded (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994). Lastly, after I analyzed my data, I asked a member of a different doctoral program who was not connected with my research site to peer review my work to ensure bias is limited. I engaged in what Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to as peer debriefing. This involved inviting my doctoral colleague who was familiar with my research methodology and the topic of my study to first read my study’s interview transcripts and field notes and then review how I coded the material. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend a peer to be a
devil’s advocate and ask hard questions about the researcher’s interpretations and methods. I wanted my peer to review and challenge my findings by specifically looking for over and under emphasized points, vague descriptions, and biases or assumptions that I make.

In short, I remembered Koro-Ljungberg’s (2010) statement as I engaged in my data collection and analysis procedures: “Validity can become possible in doing the impossible, allowing possibilities to develop” (p. 609). I embraced flexibility and was open-minded while ensuring my research was dependable and credible. In the next section, I will describe how I used ethical safeguards throughout my study.

Ethical Safeguards

Per the American Educational Research Association’s Code of Ethics (2011), researchers need to ensure “the welfare and protection of the individuals and groups with whom education researchers work” (p. 146). Researchers must do no harm, protect the privacy and anonymity of participants, maintain confidentiality, avoid inappropriate behavior, and interpret data honestly (Lichtman, 2013; Tracy, 2013). Therefore, as a researcher, I had to be sensitive to all possible ethical issues when I researched in a public elementary school setting (Lichtman, 2013). First and foremost, for this written study, I guaranteed privacy and anonymity by changing all names of schools, school districts, administrators, teachers, and students to pseudonyms (Lichtman, 2013). I was extremely cautious when I included a participant’s description, stories or quotes to avoid inadvertently revealing a participant’s identity or the actual research site location. During observations, I sought permission to observe students’ and teachers’ actions and never
used any identifiable information in my field notes to protect all students’ identities. The only individuals other than me who ever had access to the raw data were my dissertation committee members.

Second, I followed all university and school district Institutional Research Board (IRB) procedures. I did not begin my study until receiving IRB approval from both my university and the research site’s school district. I secured informed consent from each participant and reiterated to each participant that he or she could always choose to withdraw from the study.

As has been noted in the past two sections, I desired to have a dependable and credible study. I used bracketing, interview protocols, data triangulation, qualitative data analysis software, member checking, and peer review to ensure my study is valid. I also legally followed all IRB guidelines and used additional ethical safeguards, such as using anonymity and making raw data inaccessible to the public.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the case study methodology I used during my research. In the beginning of the chapter, I identified why I chose to use a single-bound intrinsic case study methodology to describe the activity system of how administrators and teachers at an elementary school support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary ELs. I developed my study’s research questions based upon activity theory, which is rooted in the sociocultural theory perspective.

In the next section, Sample Study, Participants, and Setting, I began by describing the results from a pilot case study I conducted. During my pilot study, I recognized there
were many factors that affected the academic achievement growth of elementary newcomers. The results from this pilot study led to my study’s inquiry. This discussion led into explanation of my study's anticipated participants and setting. I used purposeful sampling by using a three-phase process to select my research site. First, the research site had to meet criteria related to location, EL population, and EL achievement growth. Second, I used snowball sampling and social networks to identify a potential site so I could meet with the school’s principal and observe the school had successful and effective teachers. Third, I chose actual participants for my study by using a combination of recommendations and convenience sampling.

In the next two sections, Data Collection and Instrumentation and Data Analysis, I first described that I used three different data collection methods: observations, interview, and document analysis. I desired to use three methods of data collection to seek a holistic understanding of a school’s activity system and increase the rigor of my study. These different sources of data allowed me to better understand the school’s activity system components. I then illustrated how I used a holistic data analysis process to code my data and create possible themes.

The following two sections were Limitations and Dependability and Credibility. I recognized that there is a possibility of bias and my study is not generalizable and does not have much external validity. It also does not include two key voices of a school community: parents and students. Despite these limitations, I explained how I guarded against threats to my study's validity during data collection and analysis. For example, I
put aside my own personal experiences, used interview protocols, triangulated my data, kept an audit trail of my data analysis procedures, and used member-checking.

In the final section of this chapter, Ethical Safeguards, I reviewed why it is imperative to be sensitive to all ethical issues that may arise in my study. I described how I protected participants' identities and how I followed all university and local school district research procedures.

Overall, I explained why I chose to use single-bound intrinsic case study methodology. Although there are some dissenting views on what type of case study approach is best, I desired to engage in a single-bound intrinsic case study methodology because it is a concrete, contextual, detailed, and has defined limits. Since I wanted to fully illustrate all aspects of how one school’s educators influence upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth, I studied one case using activity theory, which is grounded in a sociocultural theoretical perspective. Activity theory (Engeström, 1987; Leont'ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978) has six components: the subject, object, mediating tools, community, rules, and division of labor. This theory recognizes multiple components impact the object of the activity and that all activity is multivoiced, interconnecting, and has contradictions.

In the subsequent chapter, Chapter 4, I will present emergent themes from my data analysis that is grounded in activity theory. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of my results, implications, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The Georgia Department of Education is witnessing increases in two areas: newcomer population and increased accountability measures. As the foreign-born population of Georgia is increasing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), more newcomers from a variety of countries are enrolling in public schools. For the purpose of this study, a newcomer is generally defined as an English learner (EL) who moved to the United States within the past year and has no or extremely limited proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing English. Increased accountability measures also exist because the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) legislation mandates schools pay more attention to ELs’ achievement (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2016).

Unfortunately, newcomers are negatively impacted by increased accountability measures (Hood, 2003; Menken, 2008; Short & Boyson, 2012). Newcomers not only have to quickly adapt to a new culture and school, but they also are faced with the challenges of simultaneously and quickly learning both the English language and rigorous academic content (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

Public schools are mandated by law to provide all students, newcomers included, free and appropriate instruction. Newcomers must have adequate instruction in their first year of enrollment in American schools despite their increasing population and increased accountability pressure. It is imperative for educators to learn how schools are supporting the English language proficiency growth of newcomers in today’s current educational climate. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how
administrators and teachers at an elementary school support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner (EL) newcomers. This study investigated the activity system of how administrators, mainstream classroom teachers, and ESOL (English as a second language) teachers support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth.

The two research questions for this study were:

1. How do educators support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner newcomers?
   a. What rules impact how administrators and teachers support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   b. How does the school’s division of labor support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   c. How does the school’s community support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   d. What tools do administrators and teachers use to support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?

2. What contradictions exist when a school’s educators support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth?

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to share the results of the data collection thoroughly to answer this study’s two research questions.
Organization of the Chapter

In this chapter, I will present the results of this study’s data collection. I will introduce the chapter by introducing the research site. I then seek to share data related to each of the six components of the activity system: subject, object and outcome, division of labor, community, rules, and tools. In the final section of the chapter, I will illustrate the various primary and secondary contradictions that exist within the activity system. I seek to share these tensions not with a negative state of mind; instead I want to expose them so that positive transformation can occur. It is my hope that both of the study’s two research questions will be thoroughly answered at the end of this chapter.

Illustrating the Activity System

In this section, I will begin by presenting the research site. I endeavor to share how the research site met all the requirements listed in Chapter 3. I also will illustrate information about site’s demographics and culture. Then, I will share about my findings related to each component of the activity system. I will illustrate each component in the following order: subject, object and outcome, division of labor, community, rules, and tools.

Research Site

The research site for this case study met all requirements I identified in the research site selection process of Chapter 3. The school is located within the Georgia school district selected for the study and has at least 50% of its students classified as ELs. It has at least five newcomers enrolled in third, fourth, and/or fifth grades. Also, according to Georgia’s 2016 College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI)
reports (Georgia Department of Education, 2016), it had at least 70% off its ELs positively moving from one Performance Band to a higher Performance Band as measured by the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners. (ACCESS for ELLs®) assessment. This selected research site also received a double nomination from two curriculum and instruction leaders within the Georgia school district. This double-nomination process helped confirm the research site is an information-rich model for the study (Patton, 2010).

Lastly, during classroom observations I witnessed that teachers used the majority of the eight-effective researched-based EL pedagogical strategies that I discussed in Chapter II of this study during the classroom observation.

This case study took place at Esperanza Elementary, a public elementary school in a suburban city of Georgia. The school is located just blocks away from a busy interstate and business district. This city’s residents have a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As citizens of all races walk along the sidewalks and drive along the local roads, they see business signs on commercial buildings not just written in English; many shops and restaurants in the city have Spanish or Korean signs above their storefronts. Esperanza is nestled on a large acreage behind a commercial lot and surrounded by residential neighborhoods on its other sides.

Esperanza Elementary opened in 2004 and welcomed 692 students its first year. These students originated from 47 countries and spoke 27 languages. Throughout the past 16 years, it experienced substantial student growth. Esperanza Elementary enrolled 1,228 students in 2017. 11% of students are identified as Asian, 28% are Black/African
American, 53% are Hispanic or Latino, 2% are Multiracial, and 5% are White.

Esperanza Elementary receives Title I funding and over 85% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. There are 101 certified teachers and 44 staff members employed to support teaching and learning at Esperanza Elementary. About 30% of Esperanza’s educators have Bachelor’s degrees, 55% have Master’s degrees, 10% have Specialist degrees, and 5% have doctorate degrees.

Esperanza Elementary’s administrative team encourages and models a strong collaborative team environment. A unified commitment from teachers, students, parents, and community members led to enhancing student achievement, embracing diversity, sustaining community collaboration, and building leadership skills of students and faculty. All faculty and staff members at Esperanza Elementary are encouraged to refer to their students as champions. This asset-mindset approach appears to positively impact the school’s climate. In 2016, Esperanza Elementary received a four out of five-star school climate rating. This rating encompassed student discipline data, safe learning environment data, student attendance rates, and survey data from students, staff, and parents (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). Academic achievement data also illustrates Esperanza Elementary’s commitment to effective teaching. In 2016, 3rd and 5th grade students at Esperanza Elementary scored above the state average on English language arts, mathematics and science Georgia Milestones end-of-grade assessments.

In addition, Esperanza Elementary has a large population of ELs. In the 2016-2017 school year, 53% of the student population was served by the English as a Second Language (ESOL) program. Primary languages Esperanza students speak at home
include Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, French, Creole, Arabic, and Amharic. Also, according to Georgia’s 2016 College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) report (Georgia Department of Education, 2016), it had 73% its ELs positively moving from one Performance Band to a higher Performance Band as measured by the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners. (ACCESS for ELLs®) assessment. Regarding newcomers, there were at least 48 students classified as newcomers at Esperanza Elementary in 2017. More specifically, there were 32 classified as upper-elementary newcomers: eight in third grade, 13 in fourth grade, and 11 in fifth grade. These students were enrolled in 10 different mainstream teachers’ classrooms. Sixty percent of the mainstream teachers who had newcomers in their classrooms were ESOL certified.

Esperanza Elementary employs five full-time ESOL teachers and one part-time ESOL teacher to support the unique linguistic needs of Esperanza Elementary’s EL population. Each teacher pushes into an average of eight classes each day for 40 minutes each. Two of the five ESOL teachers teach a newcomer class each morning for 30 minutes before their push-in segments. Half of Esperanza Elementary’s ELs are placed in general education classroom settings where the general education classroom teacher is ESL certified and half of the ELs are placed in classrooms where the general education classroom teacher is not ESL certified.

Subject

The subject in an activity system is the one who does the action and is driven by a conscious goal (Engeström, 1987). The subject in activity theory is not always singular.
Activity theory emphasizes interactions of multiple individual and collective factors instead of emphasizing one individual (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015) because activity theory’s goal is to analyze human lives that are a part of collective activity systems (Sannino, Daniels, and Gutierrez, 2009). Therefore, at Esperanza Elementary, I interviewed and observed multiple educators to gain an understanding of upper-elementary newcomers’ education. Specifically, the participants of this study are three administrative team members, four mainstream classroom teachers, and two ESOL teachers. Table 4 summarizes basic demographic information about each participant. In the following sections, I will endeavor to share more details about each educator.

Table 4

*Demographics of Research Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role?</th>
<th>Teaches what grade?</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Highest degree</th>
<th>ESOL Endorsement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Doctorate</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Administrators.

*Ray.* Ray is currently the principal of Esperanza Elementary. He has been the principal for four years. Ray grew up in south Georgia and has served in the U.S. Army Reserve since 1995. He speaks English as his primary language, yet has engaged in multiple unique cultural experiences through military experiences. He began his teaching career in 2000 after graduating from a public Georgia college to become a fifth-grade teacher. He was a classroom teacher for four years. During that time, he received a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction: Elementary Education. He then became an assistant principal in the same district and earned his doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. He was an assistant principal at two different elementary schools before being named principal of Esperanza Elementary in 2013.

At Esperanza Elementary, Ray leads and manages a school staff of 145 individuals. He is responsible for hiring each individual who works at the school. This past year, Ray explained he was “was intentional about hiring folks who were ESOL certified and who had gone through a program because I feel like they would know the strategies to be able to implement in the classroom.” He did this because he calls Esperanza Elementary “an ESOL school” because “more than half our kids are ESOL.” To provide appropriate levels of support to his staff to meet the needs of all students, Ray works collaboratively with his administrative team members, including Libby and Pamela, daily.

*Libby.* Libby is an assistant principal at Esperanza Elementary. Libby speaks English as her primary language and has a Master’s in Education degree and an add-on
certification in leadership. An educator for 23 years, she has nine years of experience as a middle school teacher and 14 years of experience as an elementary assistant principal. She helped open Esperanza Elementary in 2004. She was the administrator in charge of ESOL for 11 years and attended many local school and district professional learning sessions about ELs’ scheduling, curriculum, and instruction. Her current roles at Esperanza include working with and managing nine fourth and nine fifth grade teachers and their students. She also is responsible for coordinating the standardized tests students take, which include Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), ACCESS for ELLs®, and the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS).

Pamela. Pamela, who has been in education for 33 years, is also an assistant principal at Esperanza Elementary. Pamela holds a Doctorate of Education from a private online institution and speaks English as her primary language. She helped open Esperanza Elementary in 2004 as a third-grade teacher. In 2006, she transitioned to being an assistant principal at Esperanza Elementary. She used to be the Title I Administrator and now is currently responsible for managing nine first-grade and nine third-grade teachers and their students. She is also the current administrator who oversees the ESOL department at Esperanza Elementary. She does not have her ESOL endorsement, but she does frequently represent Esperanza Elementary at district leadership sessions related to educating ELs.

Mainstream teachers.

Karla. Karla is a third-grade teacher and has worked at Esperanza since 2014. She recently completed her sixteenth year as a classroom teacher. She worked first as a
classroom teacher and preschool director in Arkansas, where she grew up, and then later worked at two different Georgia schools after her children grew up. Karla has 20 students in her classroom. 80% of her students are classified as direct ELs. A direct EL is a student who is in the entering, beginning, or developing phase of English proficiency and who scored less than a Level 4 or less on their Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) test the previous year. Each day for 40 minutes, an ESOL teacher, Ana, pushes-into Karla’s classroom to support the direct ELs.

Two of Karla’s students are newcomers. Karla welcomed eight-year-old Jair in August from Congo. Jair has a background of interrupted formal education. Karla learned from Jair’s family that “he never went to school unless he wanted to go to school.” At the beginning of the year, Jair only spoke French. Karla explained, “We did not understand anything,” so Karla used a French and English-speaking student in the classroom down the hallway to help translate important directions. According to Karla, Jair “still doesn’t know the whole alphabet, he knows parts” and he learned to hold a pencil and write in recent months. In other words, he has important foundational literacy needs. Karla also welcomed eight-year-old Jose in December from Venezuela. He arrived at Karla’s classroom after spending one week at a different elementary school in the district. When he arrived, he spoke Spanish and did not know how to speak, read, write, or understand English. When I asked Karla to describe Jose, she explained he “could write and read in Spanish” and “he knows he can read words in English…he is always in my book area reading.”
Emma. Emma, who grew up in Georgia, entered the teaching profession after working ten years in the field of business administration. She has been a teacher for eight years and has taught 3rd grade at Esperanza Elementary for seven years. She has a Master’s degree and is certified to teach in Georgia kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. The language Emma speaks is English. Emma does not have her ESOL endorsement but indicated she desires to work on getting it in the future. She has attended multiple local school professional learning sessions about teaching ELs.

Emma vividly remembers the first newcomer she taught a few years ago. The student arrived to her classroom and “did not know one bit of English.” Emma explained,

He started out very shy, but not so much so that he wasn't able to make friends or whatever. My class that year really helped him...They would read with him and tell him what he was reading in Spanish. I mean, I utilized the kids a lot, but he picked up on it very, very, very quickly. He was just so sweet about it and honestly, even still every year when the teachers have him write the thank you letters, I get one from him about teaching English to him...He always just thanks me for the patience...This is why it gives me goosebumps. This is a kid who will probably remember me as his first teacher in America. That he thinks really taught him English. Honestly, I did. I always worked with him a little bit because he just wanted to learn it so much...One day I will be this old lady sitting in a chair probably not remembering anything and he will be talking to his kids about school and I’ll be one of the memories. Isn’t that sweet? That is why I teach; it is kids like that.

Emma continues to see the student sometimes and asks, “How’s your English?” The child’s response is always “It’s good!”

This year, her third-grade classroom, Emma has 20 students and are classified as direct ELs. Two of these students are newcomers. Each day for 40 minutes, an ESOL teacher pushes-into Emma’s classroom. Emma expressed she and the ESOL teacher have
“a lot of collaboration.” The ESOL teacher typically works with a “small group focusing on reading something that maybe has to do with a certain skill that we're teaching….She also utilizes some of that time for math and trying to incorporate the literacy through math.” In other words, both Emma and the ESOL teacher frequently utilize small-group instruction and embrace being flexible.

*Lucas.* Lucas is a fourth-grade teacher and recently completed his first year of teaching. Lucas, a Korean male in his mid-twenties, speaks Korean as his first language. He was born in America and attended school in the same district he now teaches in. He was classified as an EL when he started school because he “spoke more Korean at home.” Lucas’ educational journey is an example of a success story. Lucas acquired English, excelled in school, and graduated with a Bachelors of Arts in Early Childhood Education from a public state institution. He received his ESOL endorsement through college coursework. When describing his ESOL endorsement process, he said,

> When I was in college they said I was ESL endorsed, but there is only one class for ESL and I don't remember anything. They just threw textbooks at us and say "You're going to create a lesson for ESL." That was really confusing because I didn't learn anything in that class. Not to say anything bad about that teacher, but I don't think we're trained enough to be called ESL endorsed teachers. The reason why I say that was because there was nothing that we did that would help in the real life classroom.

Nonetheless, Lucas started teaching at Esperanza Elementary in 2016. Lucas teaches 25 students in his fourth-grade classroom. 70% of his students are classified as direct ELs and Lucas has seven students who are newcomers. He uses his personal experience to try to understand what it is like for newcomers to be in a school environment: “They will definitely face problems in America especially observing their parents and the language
barrier. In the future, they're going to have to translate for their parents and all these things.” One of his wishes for his newcomers is for “them to understand that there will definitely be people who are willing to help and that it will be hard for sure.”

The newcomers in Lucas’ class go to a pull-out intensive basic English class each morning for thirty minutes with another ESOL teacher and then are in Lucas’ general education classroom for the rest of the school day. An ESOL teacher, Harper, pushes-into Lucas’ classroom twice a day to support ELs’ English language proficiency growth. Lucas explained Harper is in his classroom for a total of 80 minutes each day. Typically, Harper instructs small groups of students at a side table in Lucas’ classroom. “Ever since we started doing centers, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, she would take my newcomers. Then on Tuesdays, Thursdays she would take my ESL not newcomers.” The alternating schedule provides Harper with the opportunity to work with all students who are classified as ELs.

Brooke. Brooke recently completed her eleventh year of teaching and has taught at Esperanza Elementary for all eleven years. Brooke speaks English as her first language, yet she is currently working on using Rosetta Stone to learn basic Spanish conversational phrases for the classroom. She received her Master’s in Early Childhood Education eleven years ago from a private Georgia institution. In 2012, Brooke’s principal encouraged her to receive her ESOL certification. She attended a local school professional learning test-prep course and then took and passed the Georgia Assessment for the Certification of Educators (GACE) for English to Speakers of Other Languages to receive her ESOL certification. When asked about her experience of teaching
newcomers, Brooke stated, “I’ve had several experiences with newcomers as far back as probably ten years. Typically, I don’t have a whole lot of newcomers every year. At most, it’s been like one or two a year, and probably only about five years. There's been several years where I didn’t have any.” Even though she has not taught many newcomers throughout her educational career, she remembers each of them.

Two former students especially stick out in Brooke’s mind when she thinks of the newcomers she taught. She remembered,

I had an absolutely sweet, sweet girl a couple years ago, and she was very shy, but her work ethic was insane. She wanted to learn...Her family worked with her at night. She wanted to do well...While she was really shy and she didn't have a whole lot of friends, she did make some friends by the end of the year and kind of came out a little bit more socially. But her work ethic as far as school goes was just crazy.

Brooke commented that the child’s determination “added the motivation to me to want to do even more for her and challenge her and make her successful in any way I could.”

Nonetheless, Brooke also has taught newcomers on what she referred to as “the opposite side of the spectrum.” According to Brooke,

[The student’s] situation was one that she did want to be here. She was more forced to leave, and so the two parts of that would be I don't think she had the home support to reinforce the importance of her learning in general, but also just learning English, and her work ethic at school was not there....I don't know if it was a defiance thing, like she was against it so she wasn't going to do it even though she knew that she was supposed to do it...I [had] a high percentage of students in my class that speak Spanish, so...it wasn't that she was isolated and had no one to talk to. People would try to reach out to her on the playground and friends and in class try to help her and tell her, and she didn’t want the help. She didn't want to put forth that effort...She would rather try to sneakily color as much as possible in class [because] she liked to color.
When thinking about that student, Brooke mentioned she came to visit Brooke a few months ago and it was disheartening because

She'd been in the country for maybe a year, year and a half at that point, and I said, "Hey, how are you?" And she hesitated. I don't know if she hesitated because of a lack of confidence, but I tried to have a conversation with her, and a year and a half in the country, and I don't know that she's learned anything more since she left my room six months beforehand.

Through these dichotomous experiences, Brooke learned the amount of progress a student can make “depends on the kid,” especially the kid’s motivation.

This year Brooke has 26 students in her fifth-grade classroom. In her classroom, 17 students are ELs: nine of them are classified as direct ELs and two of them are newcomers. Each day for 40 minutes, an ESOL teacher, Harper, pushes-into Brooke’s classroom to support the ELs. Typically, Harper works with two small groups of ELs in the Brooke’s classroom during the small group time of the reading instructional block. Brooke explained, “We don’t really have the newcomers as a focus in reading groups on an everyday rotation” because an ESOL teacher pulls the newcomers two or three days a week to work with them in a different small reading group.

ESOL teachers.

Harper. Harper, an educator for 22 years, grew up in Alabama and had experience learning to speak French during high school and college coursework. She became a first-grade classroom teacher after graduation. She has worked at three different schools in the district and currently holds a Master’s degree in Early Childhood Education. Harper was an elementary first- and second- grade classroom teacher for 14 years before becoming an ESOL teacher. Her first experience of working with a young Hispanic
newcomer influenced her desire to teach ELs. When asked to describe memories
associated with that student, Harper expressed,

> I spent a lot of time, probably spent more time with her than I should have...but I
would pull her and we would read and we would talk, and we got to where we
would look at pictures in those little books and laugh about what was happening. I
just really saw her blossom, and I love that...That's when I realized I wanted to be
an ESOL teacher. I loved working with her. She wasn't one of those that was
catching on quickly, but she was getting it, and she didn't come from a good
educational background.

To fulfill her dream of becoming an ESOL teacher, Harper received her ESOL
endorsement after taking the local school district’s endorsement courses. She worked at a
different school in the district as an ESOL teacher for 4 years before transferring to
Esperanza Elementary.

At Esperanza Elementary, Harper works with ELs in second grade, fourth grade,
and fifth grade. Each day, she works in six mainstream teachers’ classrooms and has 73
ELs on her caseload. Since she works in two teachers’ classrooms twice a day, she is
assigned 102 ESOL instructional segments. As the leader of her ESOL team at
Esperanza Elementary, Harper represents the ESOL department at local school leadership
team meeting and frequently attends district professional learning that focuses on ELs’
education.

> Ana. Ana grew up in Honduras speaking Spanish and has personal experience
learning English as a second language and being a newcomer in the United States. She
described that experience when she stated,

> I am originally from Honduras, so when I came to the United States, I was in
culture shock even though I knew the English…I missed my food and I knew
English from school. I was in a bilingual school but I never spoke English with
my classmates, with the teachers yeah, but that’s it. It was a different English; it was academic English but not to communicate. So, at the beginning, I was always like “What?” “What?” I learned not to ask because I thought they would think I’m dumb and not understand anything. I did not want to ask all the time, “What are you saying? What are you saying?” But at the beginning people spoke fast...So, I do feel compassion for [newcomers]. I just sometimes I want to cry with them because I know what they are feeling. I think I know what they are feeling, but maybe I do not.

After moving to the United States and working in the corporate world for a few years, Ana began teaching in 1996 in a neighboring suburban school district in Georgia. She has a Master’s of Education in Behavior and Learning Disabilities. She earned her ESOL endorsement in 2000 by taking professional learning courses through the neighboring school district. Throughout her career, she worked at four different elementary and middle schools in special education and ESOL classrooms before coming to Esperanza Elementary in 2007.

At Esperanza Elementary, Ana teaches ELs in kindergarten, first grade, and third-grade. She is responsible for teaching 97 segments of instruction each day to 93 ELs. At the beginning of the day, she teaches a beginning English pull-out class to newcomers in first, second, and third grades. According to Anna,

At the beginning of the year, my group was together, but we had to separate because I have too many kids, so I teach 3rd graders only on Thursdays and Fridays and the experience is giving them their basic vocabulary. So, it is basic, not so much as academic, but basic words that they can, you know, use to defend themselves in the real classroom.

Once teaching newcomers in the morning, Ana begins teaching small groups of ELs in other mainstream classrooms throughout the rest of the school day.
Object and Outcome

The object of an activity is the activity’s focus and the outcome is the change that takes place in the object. Thus, the object, or objective, of the activity system described in this chapter is upper-elementary newcomers at Esperanza Elementary. The outcome is the newcomers’ English language proficiency growth, which is quantitatively measured by the newcomers’ ACCESS test scores. Ray explained the ACCESS test is an appropriate assessment to measure newcomers’ growth because the test can help teachers really see newcomers’ language progress.

Nonetheless, teachers at Esperanza Elementary do more than focus solely on newcomers’ language acquisition; Ray shared they also “fit the content in the midst of language acquisition to really make it happen for [their] students.” Moreover, some individuals mentioned that their personal objectives for newcomer education go beyond addressing only on English language growth. For example, Ana shared she wants newcomers to “learn the language” and to “love school.” Lucas tries to help his students understand that knowing two languages is beneficial and hopes “they don’t lose their native tongue.” In other words, Esperanza Elementary’s educators who work with upper-elementary students have goals that go beyond academic and language learning. Nonetheless, since this study is looking particularly at newcomers’ English language proficiency growth, ways Esperanza Elementary’s educators approach newcomers’ social and emotional growth is beyond the scope of this case study and will not be addressed.
Division of Labor

The division of labor component of an activity system recognizes that different individuals within a community engage in different tasks. Sometimes power levels affect the type of roles individuals have and how they carry out their duties (Engeström, 1987). Interview data, observation data, and document analysis indicated that at Esperanza Elementary’s administrators, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers have multiple roles. Some of their roles overlap and are shared. Other roles are more unique to certain positions. In this section, I will first explain which roles are unique to each position. Then, I intend to describe which roles overlap.

Ray, Pamela, and Libby, administrators at Esperanza Elementary, are responsible for determining the school’s vision and mission, creating the school professional learning model, and coordinating all standardized test administrations. They also are the only individuals at Esperanza Elementary who observe and evaluate teachers’ effectiveness. ESOL teachers also have unique responsibilities. They lead professional learning about EL curriculum and instruction, fill out all ESOL placement and programming paperwork required by the local school district, and administer all ESOL testing. Mainstream teachers are responsible for writing and revising all newcomers’ English Language Proficiency Plans. These plans, which are required by the local school district, outline language learning goals for each content area and describe students’ current progress. They also collaborate with teachers and administrators informally and formally in student support team meeting settings to discuss a students’ progress. Mainstream teachers also
facilitate a supportive and welcoming classroom environment and evaluate newcomers’ classwork for grade reporting purposes.

It was also evident that individuals at Esperanza Elementary collaborate and share roles related to newcomers’ education. Administrators and mainstream teachers both are responsible for conferring together about newcomers’ academic, language, and social progress. For example, Pamela illustrated this when she commented:

When we see a ESOL student struggling, we'll go back in and look at the ESOL plan and say, ‘Okay. Maybe we need to adjust it. Here's another strategy you need to bring in.’ Or if they're doing well, let's remove those and bring in some more to support them in another area.

Therefore, mainstream teachers and administrators are responsible for conferring about newcomers’ progress to ensure students’ needs are being addressed. Moreover, Responsibilities that ESOL teachers and administrators share include coordinating ESOL class scheduling and determining newcomers’ class placement. Administrators and ESOL teachers collectively promote an asset-mindset about ELs and positive school culture. They also are required to attend various district-level meetings and professional learning opportunities about ELs. In addition, ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers share roles. They provide content and language instruction to ELs daily, create and use formative and summative assessments to track ELs’ progress, and communicate with students’ other teachers and families about their progress and current needs.

Despite having distinct roles, administrators, mainstream teachers, and ESOL teachers also share many roles. They all are responsible for supporting newcomers’ academic, language, and social needs. Therefore, they all attend professional learning
related to ESOL education and are encouraged to share resources with each other. Sometimes individuals from each of these positions attend Student Support Team meetings to discuss newcomers’ progress. It is in these meetings where they all are responsible for determining newcomers’ promotion if newcomers do not meet the necessary standardized test requirements.

To review, administrators, mainstream teachers, and ESOL teachers have both unique responsibilities and shared responsibilities at Esperanza Elementary in relation to upper-elementary newcomers’ education. *Figure 6* graphically displays each position roles and how the various positions overlap. Text in the thick-bordered rectangles lists responsibilities that are unique to that position. The rectangles between each circle show the responsibilities that overlap. The triangle in the center of the figure lists actions that all individuals engage in.
Figure 6. Division of Labor Roles at Esperanza Elementary. This figure illustrates how some roles of administrators, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers overlap and how other roles are unique to the position.
Community

The community of an activity system is the social group that the subject is a part of during the activity (Engeström, 1999). I learned that Esperanza Elementary educators spend their school days in diverse types of instructional settings and different collaborative social groups. Thus, in the following section, I endeavor to define and portray data related to the three instructional settings Esperanza Elementary’s educators teach in: mainstream, push-in, and pull-out. I will then share data about the dynamics of collaboration at Esperanza Elementary. Specifically, I hope to specify what collaboration looks like between administrators and teachers, ESOL teacher and mainstream teachers, and mainstream teachers and mainstream teachers.

Instructional settings for newcomers’ language development.

Mainstream. There are no separate homeroom classrooms for newcomers at Esperanza Elementary. Instead, the administrative team places newcomers in mainstream classes when they enroll at Esperanza Elementary. Therefore, newcomers in third, fourth, and fifth grade are in academic instructional blocks, lunch, recess, art, music, and physical education classes with their mainstream peers. According to the ESOL team’s scheduling documents, on average, newcomers spend 93% of their day with their mainstream class. Through observations, it was evident that newcomers interacted frequently with other ELs and native-speaking English students in the classroom. Some of the students in the mainstream classrooms who spoke other languages helped translate information or directions for newcomers at times.
Something unique regarding mainstream classes occurs in a few of Esperanza Elementary’s fourth and fifth-grade classes. For fourth and fifth grades, Libby intentionally only tries to place newcomer students in ESOL-certified teachers’ classrooms. Esperanza Elementary’s administrative and ESOL team chooses to designate one fourth-grade classroom and one fifth-grade classroom as classrooms that will have higher populations of ELs. Libby, who oversees fourth and fifth grades, explained they designate two classrooms to have “a lot of ESOL newcomers” to “serve them at least a minimum of two (ESOL) segments a day, if not more.” Lucas had one of these classrooms; he had 20 ELs, seven who are newcomers, two students who received special education services, and three students who received enrichment services. Harper, the ESOL teacher assigned to fourth and fifth grades, pushed-into Lucas’ classroom and the fifth-grade classroom twice a day to provide extra ESOL instruction to the ELs in those classes. She thinks establishing this type of classroom population is “wonderful” for newcomers because “they're not as intimidated. I think a lot of times they're intimidated in a class that's just filled with English speakers or children who are really, really catching on quickly.” Ray described what he witnessed when he observed in one of these classrooms:

I saw exactly what [newcomers] could do in the classroom. The conversations that they were able to have with each other really just shed some light on what a newcomer can do in just a small amount of time when we exposed them to the work but we also had them collaborate in a setting where there are like-students as well.
Therefore, when Ray observes classrooms with a mix of newcomers and other mainstream upper-elementary ELs, he can see both academic and social benefits for newcomers.

*Push-in.* Just because newcomers at Esperanza Elementary are placed in mainstream classrooms does not mean that they do not get additional support to support their English language proficiency growth. ESOL teachers provide push-in support in mainstream classrooms each day. In Libby’s eyes, the push-in model is “what’s best for kids” because there are classes of “26 kids in the upper grade level, fourth or fifth, and yes, your teacher is ESOL endorsed, but you have other students in that class as well. You may have a collab special education setting, you may have a Gifted setting...so, (if) we're trying to meet the needs of all of our students, and if we're able to support them with a second teacher, then we're gonna do that.” Pamela believes ESOL push-in is “much needed and very important” for ELs, particularly newcomers, because “there's a lot of content that they have to learn.” To illustrate, Ana explained,

The focus for my pull-out is more of the basic language or basic vocabulary. When I am in the classroom, we go deeper into a lesson. For example, if we were studying about Susan B. Anthony in 3rd grade, we have to focus more on, ‘Okay this is not just the vocabulary. What does it mean? Why was she important?’

Ana believed her push-in segments are “more challenging” because she has “to get that academic content and language to the child.” She also does not get to see all the ELs she is assigned to in a push-in classroom each day “because the time is so limited.” Nonetheless, Harper explained the ESOL teachers do make the most of the time that they have.
Harper pushes into Lucas’ classroom twice a day to support the newcomers and other ELs in his class. Since his classroom has a larger number of newcomers, Lucas and Harper arranged to work with both newcomers and ELs in his classroom. Lucas explained, “Ever since we started doing centers, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, she would take my newcomers. Then on Tuesdays, Thursdays she would take my ELs (who are) not newcomers. We'll have these different centers where she will teach one and I'll teach the other group and we'll switch.” However, in other classes Harper teaches in, there are just one or two newcomers. To still give these newcomers support, Harper explained she always adds the newcomers to the small groups of ELs she is assigned to work with:

I like to meet with them with the lower group. Even if it's still too hard for them, I feel like it still helps them, they're looking at pictures, they're hearing English, they're learning sight words, they're learning some new vocabulary. So even if we're reading a story and a lot of it is above their reading level, a lot of them will still understand the main idea of the story. They may not be able to express it in English, but I feel like they're still getting it and they're still learning.

Harper further elaborated she does try to also spend a few minutes to work just with the newcomers, especially if they are the only newcomer in the classroom. “I try to spend a little bit of time just with [him or her]. And you know, in ten minutes...if it's just one-on-one, I can do a lot with [a newcomer].” Thus, Harper makes the effort to always meet the needs of all the ELs on her caseload, including newcomers.

**Pull-out.** At Esperanza Elementary, Ray explained that sometimes newcomers “are actually pulled out and given some instructions so they can get up to par, so they'll be able to join their peers in the classroom.” To illustrate further, most newcomers’ first instructional setting at Esperanza Elementary is a pull-out class just for newcomers.
After morning announcements, newcomers leave their mainstream classroom and go to an ESOL classroom for a thirty-minute instructional block. Ana teaches newcomers in first, second, and third grade; a different ESOL teacher teaches newcomers in fourth and fifth grades. Referred to as a “little boot camp class” by Ray, Pamela stated the newcomer class focuses on “working on language.” Specifically, Ana mentioned her goal is to give “them their basic vocabulary. So, it is basic, not so much as academic, but basic words that they can, you know, defend themselves with in the real classroom.” For example, some topics she focused on during the beginning of the year “had to do with school supplies, the classroom setting, the important words like bathroom, bus, maybe asking a question to a teacher for help.” They also learned about Esperanza Elementary by taking a tour and meeting individuals newcomers might interact daily. Later in the year, topics included seasons and “a little bit of math, too, depending on their grade level.” When I asked Ana to describe the strategies she uses during instruction, she explained, “We do a lot of other interactive activities with music, chants, videos, visuals that I obviously can't do when I push-in the classroom.” My observation of Ana corroborated her interview response because when I observed Ana, it was evident she used many research-based instructional strategies during her pull-out segment. For example, after a phonics warm-up using a multimodal video and using direct instruction methods to review the digraph phonics concept the students had been working on that week, Ana and the students sang a song to review English vocabulary related to seasons.

When participants spoke about the newcomer class during interviews, Ana, Harper, Emma, and Brooke expressed appreciation the newcomer class existed.
However, they also discussed the current challenges related to the newcomer class’ schedule and consistency. They shared about three specific challenges related to the newcomer pull-out class: a growing newcomer population, limited time, and lack of consistency.

The first challenge related to a small physical classroom and large newcomer population. Ana shared how the growing newcomer population impacted her newcomer class schedule: “The challenge is this year we enrolled many newcomers during the school year. I can’t have 20 kids in here; we don’t fit.” She wanted to still serve all of her newcomers in first, second, and third grades, so she went to her administrators and asked, “Is there anybody else, how can we do this? I don’t like to use the word graduate, but do I need to graduate some?” They did not want to remove some students from the class because they still needed beginning language support. Therefore, instead “we had to separate because I have too many kids, so I teach 3rd graders only on Thursdays and Fridays.” Thus, Ana prioritized the students’ needs and did not release some back to the mainstream class because they needed more newcomer instruction. Instead, the growing population of newcomers forced her to decrease the number of instructional minutes she provided to all of students each week.

Furthermore, the second challenge related to the length of the newcomer class. Both Karla and Brooke mentioned the newcomer class seems too short. They wished their newcomers could attend the class for a longer segment because they know it would benefit their students’ needs. Ana also expressed her concerns about the length of the newcomer pull-out segment. By the time students arrive to her classroom and get settled,
Ana has less than thirty minutes to teach. She shared this makes it difficult to teach deeply teach about concepts. She wonders, “What can I really do in half an hour? I feel bad.” In other words, the newcomer pull-out class’ short instructional block makes Ana feel regretful.

Last, Brooke and Emma both spoke about a third newcomer pull-out class challenge: lack of consistency. Due to the lack of consistency, Brooke currently believes the newcomer class looks “great on paper…it’s a good plan, but it’s not executed well.” She elaborated:

There's a newcomer class. My kids attend that, but ... Not to be negative, but it's canceled all the time for testing and pretty much anything. It could be, ‘There's a fire drill. Let's cancel it.’...’These people are in the building. Let's cancel it.’ ‘We're doing this. Let's cancel it.’ If I had to put quantity of days as a percentage, I would say ... If you count testing with Milestones and [district assessments] and the Kindergarten testing that they have to do, and then there's an entire month and a half where they do all the ESOL testing, the ACCESS testing, I would probably say maybe 50% of the days, which unfortunately, when you've kids that are new to the country, the consistency not being there is not helpful at all. But yeah, I would say maybe half of the days they end up meeting.

To put it short, Brooke believes the lack of consistency is not beneficial for the newcomers in her classroom. Therefore, although there is a newcomer pull-out class to support newcomers’ social English needs, the three challenges mentioned in this section do seem to impact its effectiveness.

Collaboration at Esperanza Elementary. At Esperanza Elementary, Ray regularly reiterates the importance of teamwork and collaboration within the school building. In his opening school address, he stated,

Our local school theme for the school year will be ‘T.E.A.M. Together Everyone Achieves More’...we believe in the power of every individual to deliver the best
outcomes for children. Unity is our greatest strength. For where there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved… When we work as a TEAM, we can achieve uncommon results!

I endeavor to illustrate the team collaborative dynamics between groups of Esperanza Elementary’s educators in the following section. Specifically, I will describe collaboration that exists between three groups: collaboration between administrators and teachers, collaboration between ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers, and collaboration between mainstream teachers.

*Administrators and teachers.* The entire ESOL team works closely with assistant principals throughout the school year. Each year, the ESOL team also collaborates with the administrative team to create the upcoming school year’s ESOL schedule. After the ESOL teachers collaborate as a team to build their schedules, they meet with Ray and Pamela to discuss the drafts they created and their reasoning behind the drafts. Pamela discussed the ESOL team also works with her to determine what ESOL professional learning should take place during the school year. Moreover, when a newcomer enrolls during the school year, the assistant principal assigned to the newcomer’s grade level sometimes consults an ESOL teacher about which class the newcomer should be placed in.

Mainstream teachers interviewed did not share many examples of how they collaborate with Esperanza Elementary’s administrators. Conversely, they did share some examples of how collaboration is lacking. For example, multiple teachers mentioned they get an email from their assistant principal that says “Coming from Guatemala” or “Coming from Mexico” when a newcomer enrolls and is placed in their
classroom. However, this is not always the case. Karla shared, “I didn’t even get an email he was coming. They just brought him down.” Lucas also expressed the lack of communication from administrators when newcomers arrived: “They don't mention anything. They were just, "Oh, here you go." I'm like, "Okay." They just come and we're just dealt the cards and we're just playing along.” As Brooke described her experience of working with newcomers, she realized,

The more I think about it, it's almost been a huge lack of support from assistant principals. They send you the email that says, "Getting [a newcomer] tomorrow," and they don't check in with you. They don't ask, "Hey, do you need anything for this kid?" And then at the end of the day, they forget you have two students that don't speak English in your class and you're working to get their stuff done. No. There's been absolutely none.

Put differently, when reflecting about her experiences of teaching newcomers at Esperanza Elementary, Brooke became conscious of the fact that she does not engage in collaboration with her assistant principal regarding her newcomer.

*ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers.*

Ray expressed the ESOL teachers “really work well with teachers and I think they are in high demand. There are folks who want them in the classroom and what that says to us that, what they're doing is really, really working.” Therefore, collaboration also takes place between ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers at Esperanza Elementary. However, participants did point out that mainstream-ESOL teacher desire collaboration could be strengthened. This section will illustrate how educators at Esperanza Elementary begin collaborating and build professional relationships. It will also illustrate their thoughts about improving collaboration.
Harper and Ana expressed that the beginning weeks of each school year are difficult for ESOL teachers. To build the relationships, Harper likes to meet with each teacher and discuss what a push-in instructional setting can look like. She does this especially with teachers she is working with for the first time because she sometimes feels “some teachers do not make good use” of her time in the classroom. “Some teachers do need more direction in how to use me. I think a lot of it is just … They're just not used to having somebody else in their room.” Harper expressed, “Sometimes it's a little tricky. You have to just learn the personalities because I don't ever want to ever tell a teacher how to teach.” She finds she sometimes has to be more of a mentor than a partner at times with novice teachers: “I have sat down with them and made suggestions and I'll be like ‘Now, it works best’ or ‘In this classroom, we do this and it works really well.’ In addition, Ana mentioned collaboration at the beginning of the year with mainstream teachers can be challenging because the relationships she has with the mainstream teachers she works with “is not as cohesive I guess at the beginning.” As the school year progresses, the relationships become stronger.

Multiple participants shared that building professional relationships overtime impacts their ESOL-mainstream teacher relationships. Ana told how she and Karla’s experience of working together last year helped this year: “This year I feel more comfortable with her. Both of us feel comfortable. I know the way she works...her strengths, her weaknesses, so I can work better with the kids too.” Emma, who expressed “there’s a lot of collaboration between me and the ESOL teacher, commented that her experience of working with the same ESOL teacher for “three or four years” makes
collaboration easier: “I guess once you're kind of familiar with the ESOL teacher and they're familiar with you and you kind of know what's going on just in the classroom in general, the mesh is well.” Nonetheless, despite having stronger relationships, Esperanza Elementary’s teachers do desire to collaborate more effectively.

Mainstream teachers and ESOL teachers desire to have time to plan more with each other. Brooke mentioned she receives “no communication about what’s going on in [the newcomer] classes.” She does not “see any work that they do” or “get emails that say, ‘Hey, we’re working on this...They should be able to do this now.” However, she did concede, “Part of that is on me for not reaching out to them to find out.” Brooke discussed why she desires to know what her newcomers are learning in their pull-out segment:

I struggle knowing what they're really capable of doing, because there is a huge lack of one-on-one time with them, so I find myself sometimes wondering, ‘Am I giving them a sheet on 'at' words when they are so far above this?’...If I had that information and [the ESOL teacher] said, ‘Hey, we're working on contractions right now,’ I would happily find a bingo game or tie it in with anything I'm doing with them.

Therefore, Brooke believes she could better meet her newcomers’ needs and support their language learning growth if more collaboration existed.

Lucas and Ana explained one reason collaboration between mainstream and ESOL teachers is not prevalent is because they do not have the same planning time. Lucas exclaimed, “I wish [Harper] was there during collaborative planning. Collaborative planning is great but I wish there’s also time for me to collaborate with my ESL push-in teacher that way we can really talk about what we can do together and what we could
focus on.” Likewise, Ana, who works with eight different mainstream teachers, asserted “it is a challenge because I do not share the same planning time with the [teachers].” According to the ESOL schedule, ESOL teachers are typically teaching in other grade-levels’ classroom during a specific grade-level’s collaborative planning. When she does get to collaborate with the teacher, she typically only has a chance to learn about the skill or topic of the week, but not the targeted objectives of the lessons: “I know that this week, we are studying, Cesar Chavez, so I know that I need to prepare something about that, but the specific parts of the lesson? I do not know. When I get there, it is like, ‘Okay does this work? Or does it not work?’ As a result, Ana knows she must be “very flexible, very patient” when she arrives at each of her push-in classrooms.

Despite not having scheduled time to collaborate, Ana and Harper both expressed that they just “find the time” to talk with the mainstream teachers they work with. Ana described collaboration exists “either before school, after school, in the hall, you know, that we talk, or when we can catch up, or e-mails.” Lucas mentioned Harper sometimes comes after school hours to talk. Harper explained she also regularly tries to briefly check-in with the mainstream teachers when she first enters or before she leaves the classroom or prior to the school day: “It's nice when they're close to me. Just about every morning, I'll run around…(and ask) ‘What's going on today?’…Just so I'll know.” She understands that she must make the effort during her free time to collaborate. To summarize, despite ESOL teachers not having structured times in their days to meet with mainstream, there is still collaboration that exists at Esperanza Elementary.
Mainstream teachers and mainstream teachers. There are also varied experiences of how mainstream teachers collaborate to support the newcomers in their classrooms. Brooke mentioned that another teacher on her grade-level fifth grade team shared “a welcome packet” with her a few years ago so that she could give that to her newcomers when they arrived. However, she said she is not aware “when [other teachers] get kids, what they try to do or what they don’t try to do” because “there is no talk about it with other teachers.” Also, Lucas stated, “During collaborative planning, they don’t really talk about ESOL, how we could help them. Although this is a Title I school and there’s a lot of EL students here.” He found it “interesting” that there is a lack of collaboration about how to support newcomers and other ELs amongst his fourth-grade team.

Nonetheless, in third-grade, Emma and Karla shared differing experiences about how their grade-level teammates collaborate. Although Emma mentioned “we share ideas on some of the things that we do in our classroom just to kind of help them,” Karla shared the opposite when asked about if her grade-level shares about how they support their newcomers:

Karla: We have never had anything except people saying, “We can’t do this.” They shouldn’t be in our classroom. I get that they are going to be in our classrooms, but some people do not. I understand it is frustration of not knowing what to do...But, no, as a grade level we’ve never discussed supporting [newcomer] ESOL students. Not even how to modify an assessment or anything like that.

Researcher: What do you think is the reason for why those conversations do not ever come up?

Participant: In our grade level, I think it is time of when are you going to do it? And then I also think it is a frustration level. And then it’s like, well they do not
really have to learn it because they are [newcomers], but they are supposed to learn something.

It is clear that Karla cited both the lack of time and teachers’ personal feelings as reasons why they do not collaborate about how to support newcomers academic and language needs in their classroom. In addition, her statement “they do not really have to learn it” leads to the sharing about the next part of Esperanza Elementary’s activity system of newcomer instruction: rules.

Rules

Every activity system has its own set of rules: both explicit and implicit rules. These rules provide guidance on what acceptable procedures are. They also can limit or liberate activity. The members of the community of Esperanza Elementary’s newcomer instruction activity system adhere to the explicit and implicit rules to varying degrees. I will first share what participants shared about explicit rules and then go into details about the implicit rules that exist.

Explicit rules. As discussed in Chapter 2’s review of literature, there are many explicit legislative mandates that impact EL education. Past and current legislation shape how teachers support ELs in their school environments. Based on interview, observation, and document analysis, I learned there are two categories of explicit rules that are interconnected in Esperanza Elementary’s activity system. Therefore, I intend to first explain how rules related to ESOL staffing and scheduling are present in the activity system. I then endeavor to describe how standardized assessment rules and promotion requirements are also a part of the activity system.
**ESOL teacher staffing and scheduling.** Ray must follow guidelines from the state and district regarding the amount of ESOL teachers he can hire. The Georgia Department of Education’s (GADOE) Quality Basic Education Act requires that schools report student enrollment using Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) students. Schools receive a base amount of money based on each FTE student and the educational segments students receive, such as ESOL (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Ray explained he receives Esperanza Elementary’s staffing allotment, which is based “upon the number of FTE or number of segments that you have,” from the district. According to Ray, “The more segments we’re able to have, more we maximize our FTE, the more teachers that we’re actually able to have.” Thus, the number of ESOL teachers at a school depends upon the number of ESOL segments that exist. Georgia’s Department of Education (2016) states a school receives an ESOL teacher allotment point for every 42 segments.

Moreover, Ray, Pamela, Libby, and Harper shared the state has explicit rules about ESOL teachers’ schedules. When the administrative team and ESOL team create the master ESOL schedule, they are guided by Georgia’s ESOL segment requirements. Georgia’s ESOL/Title III Resource Guide lists that students in third-grade should receive a 45-minute daily segment once a day (Georgia Department of Education, 2016). Students in fourth-grade and fifth-grade should receive 50-minute ESOL segment daily and may receive up to two segments a day. However, based upon document analysis, it is evident that currently ESOL teachers at Esperanza Elementary serve most upper-elementary students for only 40 minutes a day.
Newcomers’ assessments and promotion requirements. Another set of explicit rules that are a part of Esperanza Elementary’s upper-elementary newcomer activity system exists. There are specific explicit rules regarding the standardized tests newcomers take and promotion requirements connected with those assessments. At Esperanza Elementary, students take the following standardized assessments: local district assessments each nine-week period, Cognitive Abilities Test in September, Iowa Test of Basic Skills in October, ACCESS for ELLs® test in January, and the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS) in April. The district’s ESOL handbook mandates newcomers not required to take district assessments. However, Pamela shared that even though newcomers are not required to take the district assessments, sometimes “teachers toward the end of the school year will sometimes give them the hard copy just to assess how they're doing, and just have that information for them to see the growth of the student.” Libby described the other testing rules for newcomers:

Newcomers who are (in their) first year in the country obtain a one-year deferment on standardized testing, except for ACCESS, of course...The deferment is only for in the areas of English and Social Studies. All students in the building take Math, all students in the building take Science.

Therefore, newcomers are required to take the GMAS math and science sections and the ITBS math and science sections. Due to both tests being language-rich, newcomers are allowed to receive a read-aloud accommodation for these assessments. For fifth-grade newcomers, their promotion to the next grade level is dependent upon their success on the math section of the GMAS tests. Libby provided a rich explanation of the process that takes place to determine if a fifth-grade newcomer is promoted to sixth-grade:
[Math] still a promotional requirement for all students. It doesn’t matter if you're in our less one year in the country, or a Special Education student, or what, all students are required to pass….So...they take the Milestone in April, (if) it comes back (and) they didn't pass it, they have an opportunity to attend Summer School, we invite them, they come and take the re-test.

Therefore, there is a multistep process once the school receives initial assessment scores. Libby clarified if newcomers do not pass again, then the school holds “a Student Support Team meeting when the scores come back.” The individuals at the meeting, which include Libby, Harper, the student’s mainstream teacher, and the student's family, “make the decision on promotion and retention as a team.” The district requires the final decision for an EL’s promotion is based upon the student’s English Language Proficiency Plan. Libby explained the English Learner Proficiency Plan is a “fluid document” that teachers use to identify instructional targets and instructional strategies they will use with their ELs in their classrooms. In this document, Pamela said teachers “identify [WIDA standards] in all of the content areas” and Libby added teachers also “choose some accommodations to help the students not only in the classroom, but on tests as well.”

According to the district ESOL handbook, the English Language Proficiency Plan documents ELs’ academic progress and interventions.

Implicit rules. Unlike explicit rules that are followed in a multitude of variety of state, district, and school communities, implicit rules are more unique to a school’s culture. When I initially analyzed observation, interview, and document data, the implicit rules of Esperanza Elementary did not jump out. However, as I continued to follow my data analysis process I began to realize implicit rules do exist in the environment. I determined that Esperanza Elementary has two pervasive implicit norms in its upper-
elementary newcomer activity system. I will first describe how Esperanza Elementary has leniency with explicit rules. I then will discuss a norm related to a lack of accountability.

*Leniency with explicit rules.* One implicit rule at Esperanza Elementary is that there is some flexibility to some extent with following explicit rules related to ESOL staff, ESOL scheduling, and newcomers’ promotion. Ray described that they can request the district to provide an additional staffing allotment point during the school year if it is really needed:

For instance, if we did not have enough ESOL teachers to really provide services for the students, then we could say to the district, listen, we have this happening at our school, we need the actual point ... That actually happened to us with Special Education where we were just, we couldn't manage with the people that we had. And so they had to really give us a point. But then we had to justify how we were going to maximize that as well, so.

In other words, they must prove the need really exists using student enrollment and scheduling. Esperanza Elementary can have some flexibility with FTE segment ESOL teacher allotments and ESOL scheduling because its school system is one of Georgia’s Strategic Waver School Systems. This distinction allows school districts to have greater flexibility with following state requirements (Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, 2017). Libby expressed she appreciates having this flexibility because there is more local school control about making important decisions about what is best holistically for the school.

On the other hand, multiple educators at Esperanza Elementary expressed the flexibility related to following explicit rules, such as ESOL scheduling rules, concerning.
Harper, who is scheduled to serve 102 segments a day, spoke at great length about this reality:

I'll be honest. These children are not getting all the minutes they're supposed to get because we just can't physically do it...I think we go to every room for 40 minutes. So even though we're in a room for 40 minutes, am I serving all [the EL] children? No, I'm not because there’s just so many...

Therefore, she does not see all the students she is assigned to for the total number of minutes allotted in her schedule. When asked what impacts having so many ESOL segments and ESOL segments that are less than the recommended mandates, Harper stated, “People. I mean, just not having enough people. Having so many ESOL students and not enough ESOL teachers.” Libby also wishes Esperanza Elementary is “able to have more ESOL teachers to push-in” however she stated everyone at the school effectively “work with what we have.” She shared that their teachers do make the effort to do their best despite the challenges.

Elementary educators also flexibly interpret district rules for the student’s best interest. Educators at Esperanza Elementary use flexibility to determine a newcomer’s promotion. To do this, they focus first on what is best for the child and then consider the district’s explicit rules. Although the district requires schools use EL’s English Language Proficiency Plan, the administrators and educators looks beyond test scores and district paperwork to determine a newcomer’s promotion. Libby described,

The promotion, what I tell everybody, is based upon a preponderance of evidence. We're not going to just hold a student back because they didn't pass the Milestone two times...For any child, it doesn't matter who it is, we look at the child as a whole, and we look at everything that they’ve done, not even just this year. I like to look at what happened in other grade levels to see because retention of a child,
as you know, is very serious and we take it very seriously. Is that going to be what's best for the child just because they couldn’t score a 475 on the Milestone?

The understanding at Esperanza Elementary that some explicit rules can be flexible allows Libby and the Student Support Team to look at the newcomer’s progress more holistically.

Lack of accountability. Another implicit norm related to newcomers at Esperanza Elementary is about accountability. Multiple mainstream teachers, Brooke, Lucas, and Karla, shared they do not feel a lot of pressure to demonstrate their newcomers are making academic growth. Brooke expressed in a sense there is an implicit understanding that newcomers should not be held accountable to showing significant progress, “While I don't think that they should be required to take the tests or anything, there is no accountability.” The administrators have “very little check-in with them” regarding newcomers’ growth. Lucas thinks there is not “any pressure in showing growth with [the newcomers] because they are going to learn no matter what.” However, Brooke shared she thinks the lack of accountability is somewhat concerning:

It's kind of like when you're teaching a four or five-year-old a new language or a three-year-old a new language. So much of it is learned at the beginning. So much of it is learned immediately, and if they realize that they can get through a year of school and not have to really learn anything, I think we're kind of setting these kids up for not feeling like they have an expectation or not feeling like they need to do anything to be successful. Therefore, although there is an implicit norm that Esperanza Elementary’s upper-elementary newcomers do not have to be held accountable to making significant progress, some educators do find this concerning.
Tools

Tools in an activity system are anything used by the subject during the activity. At Esperanza Elementary, educators use a variety of tools with upper-elementary newcomers to support their English language proficiency growth. Observations, interviews, and lesson plan documents illustrated that some tools teachers use are tangible; other tools are intangible and embedded in the human mind. Therefore, in this section, I seek to share how Esperanza Elementary administrators, mainstream teachers, and ESOL teachers utilize the following tools in the upper-elementary newcomer activity system: teachers’ beliefs, professional learning at Esperanza Elementary, professional learning at the district level, experiential professional learning, and effective EL pedagogy. I will begin by describing the teachers’ beliefs about newcomers.

Teachers’ beliefs about newcomers. Prior to being asked specifically about teachers’ beliefs, Ray was very direct about sharing what he wants Esperanza Elementary’s teachers to believe about teaching newcomers. Ray wants teachers who teach newcomers to understand “because a child has yet to acquire the English language, does not mean that the child doesn't have intelligence.” He desires that teachers “honor the intelligence that the child currently has, honor the background, honor the experiences that the child has.” After reviewing all observation, documents, and interview data multiple times, I determined none of the teachers I observed and interviewed at Esperanza Elementary openly shared beliefs or demonstrated they had beliefs related to a deficit-mindset. However, Libby and Harper, who all have worked at Esperanza Elementary for more than ten years and support many teachers daily in their roles, were
forthcoming about their concerns that there are other educators at Esperanza Elementary who focus more on the deficits than assets. Harper mentioned, "I've had teachers say, "They can't do anything." I'm like, "Now, wait a minute...Yeah, they probably can't do what your other fifth graders are doing, but I'm sure they can do something...We’ve got to back up and see.” Furthermore, Libby shared, “I think, sometimes, teachers are afraid... Maybe not afraid, but nervous to have newcomers in their class because they don't think they can do anything. That's not true. They probably grow more than any of our students that we have.” She wishes all teachers would want to work with newcomers “because they really bring a joy to the class.” Put another way, Libby shared she wishes all educators had an asset-mindset and embrace having newcomers in their classrooms.

Professional learning at Esperanza Elementary. All Esperanza Elementary staff members engage in collaborative job-embedded professional learning. According to Ray, teachers engage in collaborative planning teams at least three times a week. His hope is that “we can grow while doing and learn from others while doing.” He mentioned teachers, including ESOL teachers, also engage in vertical learning teams to focus on “strategies that kids need in order to be able to apply whatever is actually learned in literacy experiences.” When thinking about ESOL teachers’ role on the vertical teams, Ray stated, “I do think by having them be a part of the vertical learning team they are able to add value and input into it as well.” This idea of all educators being key players in collaborative teams relates back to the strong collaborative culture Ray attempts to develop.
In terms of professional learning related to ELs, Pamela shared, “For the last couple years, [the administrative team] really encouraged our ESOL team to provide professional learning for our classroom teachers. At the beginning of the school year, we put them on the agenda to provide a staff development for our teachers to expose them to instructional strategies that they can use in their classroom or just to answer any questions that they have.” Ray mentioned, “I really like at the beginning of the year how we kind of launch it off. Really exposing our teachers to ESOL strategies, the WIDA Standards and things of that nature and how to go about planning and providing experiences for EL learners as well.” In addition to professional learning sessions at the beginning of the year, Pamela also mentioned the ESOL team is facilitating a new afterschool “book study to help our teachers even more.” She and her ESOL team determined there was a need and teacher interest for this study and plan to fully implement it at the beginning of the new school year.

Emma explained she had opportunities to participate in professional learning experiences related to ELs at Esperanza Elementary:

Yeah, we've had some professional learning opportunities here at school. I've done that twice…I think the two classes that I did were after school...Honestly, it's hard for some people to do it after school if that's something of interest because we have other things going on. Like, now I couldn't do that after school.

Hence, when Emma had professional learning related to ELs, the professional learning was after her work contract hours. She shared current personal time constraints and obligations would now interfere with being able that type of learning. Brooke also engaged in professional learning after her workday ended. One afterschool opportunity
Brooke engaged in was an ESOL course to help prepare her to take the ESOL GACE a few years ago. When she recalled that experience, she mentioned, “The ESOL class I took to get the certification, it’s more to prepare you for, you for that test than anything else, and so it wasn’t necessarily something that you walked away knowing how to do a reading group with ESOL students.” Frankly, Brooke credited “mostly just kind of my experiences and reading stuff on my own” as her primary means of professional learning related to ELs. With that being said, she did indicate:

I don't want to not give credit where credit is due, because there has been some professional learning on guided reading groups, strategies. There’s been some really good resources that have been handed to us, like, ‘Hey, this kid is on this level. These are the things they can do. These are the things they can't do.’ Kind of broken down level by level, and that's been really helpful.

Nonetheless, Brooke did mention that she would prefer to observe teachers modeling how they use the resources, instead of simply receiving the resources.

Professional learning through the district. Altogether, Ana, Harper, and Karla mentioned they had opportunities to attend professional learning sessions offered by the district EL department. When Karla first started teaching in the school system, she attended the EL workshops related to supporting ELs’ reading and writing needs because she had “never worked in a diverse classroom until I started teaching in this county. We did not have that back home. It was very different.” She also received a lot of staff development during half-day planning meetings at a previous school in the district. At those planning meetings, she explained, “The ESOL department and the LA department came every time. They showed the WIDA standards and how we would change a test. I do feel that that part was very important. Everyone understood what that was about.”
She also said the department leaders told them “you have to do this with them, you need to expect this from them.” According to Karla, “Everyone was told the same thing because the county person told every person in every grade level.” In her eyes, she found this extremely beneficial for her whole school.

Currently, Ana chooses to frequently attend district professional learning for ESOL teachers so “teachers like me can go and learn what other teachers are doing.” She also teaches a district professional learning class that focuses on instructing educators how to teach academic language and content to ELs. According to Ana, she benefits from this professional learning facilitation experience: “I think that through that class, because I am the facilitator, I have learned a lot of strategies, but also I learned from other teachers what they are doing at other schools. I think that has helped me a lot to know, you know, not every school is the same and everybody does different things.”

Speaking of experience, all teachers credited experience most frequently when sharing about how they learned to support newcomers’ unique needs.

Experiential professional learning. All mainstream and ESOL teacher participants attributed their personal experiences as a student and educator to helping them learn how to support newcomers in the classroom. Lucas recalled, “I learned more than anything from personal experience...I was an ESL student...My teachers, I remember, they would do a lot of motions and because I’m a visual person, I’m like ‘Hey, pretty sure that would help!’ Of course, they do.” As mentioned previously, Lucas does not credit his undergraduate experience with providing adequate training for ESOL certification.
because “there was nothing that we did that would help in the real-life classroom.”

Therefore, he had to learn a lot his first-year of teaching:

I learned to make different assessments for [newcomers] because I had to do that or my gradebook was going to be blank. No one told me how to do that, so it was a little struggling. I should have asked other teachers, that would have been helpful, but it was more like in the moment like ‘I need to do something!’ and ‘Oh, okay this is how I should do it.’

Simply put, some of Lucas’ experiential professional learning occurred due to urgency and necessity.

Both Harper and Karla believe their previous teaching experience of teaching students in first-grade positively impacts how they teach newcomers. Karla said, “Teaching 1st grade helped tremendously in teaching 3rd grade newcomers because I’m basically still teaching kids on that level. You are teaching them reading.” Similarly, Harper also made the connection between newcomers’ needs and first-grade students’ needs: “I taught first grade for a long time. So, I kinda feel like teaching ESOL students, especially newcomers, is kind of like teaching your first graders to read.” She further elaborated on her personal experience when she shared,

Yes. Before I became an ESOL teacher, I would say that I would have maybe one, and not every year, but the years that I had them, I had maybe like one newcomer in my class. Of course, I was panicked about that and didn’t really know what to do with them because I felt like they couldn't do things, and I was scared of that. I think a lot of teachers are scared of that. So I worked a lot with them, just one-on-one. Then the more that I worked with them, the more I realized I didn't need to be afraid of it, that they needed basics and they needed lots of pictures and they needed a friend that could help them out, and that they wanted to do what everybody else was doing...Anyway, so at first I was nervous about it, but then I got to where I thought, ‘This is fine. They just need a little extra over here on the side.’
Hence, Harper’s personal teaching experience also helped her to shift her mindset about newcomers and change how she approached teaching newcomers.

Additionally, when asked about how she learned to support newcomers’ needs, both Emma and Brooke asserted collaborating with peers helped them learn how to better support their newcomers. Emma mentioned, her professional learning mostly consisted of “maybe some knowledge from classes, but just utilizing what I think they could do…and probably just talking to the ESOL teachers.” According to Brooke, she benefited from learning through observation:

I had a collab class, and I was fortunate enough to be able to watch [my co-teacher] do reading groups. That was one of the first times I had seen someone else do a reading group, and to be able to see that, I was able to learn a lot more, but that was just because I was fortunate enough to have her in my class. If she hadn't been in here, I don't know that I ever would have seen someone else do a reading group, but I think that was probably the most beneficial thing.

Therefore, although Brooke explained her opportunity to observe her peer impacted her professional learning, it is apparent she also referred to a lack of professional learning present at Esperanza Elementary too.

Effective EL pedagogy. I witnessed Esperanza Elementary educators using a variety of effective EL pedagogy. In general, these tools were explicit and clear to identity. In this section, I will first discuss how educators create a collaborative and welcoming learning environment at Esperanza Elementary. Next, I seek to share how educators use differentiation and visuals to support newcomers’ learning in their classrooms. After, I endeavor to illustrate how educators integrate students’ first languages (L1) into the activity system and use direct instruction of literacy skills.
Finally, I will discuss how peer collaboration and identity affirmation are also tools present in the activity system.

**Collaborative and welcoming learning environment.** The teachers I observed at Esperanza Elementary modeled the effective research-based practice of developing a collaborative and welcoming classroom environment. Pamela thinks all teachers of newcomers need to “let ‘em know you care and you’re glad they’re here.” When Ray observes teachers who have newcomers he wants to see teachers build relationships with the children because “relationship is very much important.” He also looks that they “create an environment where [newcomers] feel safe and where they can grow.” Through observations, it was clear that these environments exist within the walls of Esperanza Elementary. When I walked into Ana’s newcomer classroom, she had just given each student a new eraser. She explained that she wanted the students to use them if they made a mistake and said, “Mistakes are ok. That is how you learn. Don’t feel bad if you make a mistake here.” This supportive culture also permeated in Harper’s classroom. As she called students to share nouns and verbs they saw in an illustrated scene of kids playing on a gravel field, one newcomer raised his hand and then hesitatingly stated he saw grass in the picture. Harper explained that grass was actually not in the picture, but she praised and complimented the student: “You were really thinking! Thank you for being brave to share even if you weren’t sure!” Harper’s affirmation of students’ willingness to share led to the young student showing his giant front-toothless grin.
Differentiation. Both Esperanza Elementary’s administrators and teachers have a clear understanding about the importance of using differentiation to teach to newcomers’ unique needs. Ray passionately explained that effective teachers of newcomers have “an understanding of the difference between the whole idea of equity and equality.” When I asked him to describe what he meant, he expressed

When I think about the word equality I think about everybody in that classroom getting the exact same thing. But I think equity is, each child getting what he or she needs to be successful at that level...and ensuring that the children’s needs are met based upon where the child is at that moment in the actual classroom. And I’m not saying we shouldn’t hold children accountable, we should. We should have high expectations for children. Hold them at a level of high expectation where it’s kind of on their level.

To illustrate the idea of the importance of equity further, Ray elaborated,

So, for example you can have two ESOL children, one could be on level one, one could be on level two...equity comes when I maybe have to differentiate for the students just a little bit different. This child may have to point to something, or this child may have to draw something, you know?...Mastery may look different for each of those students.

Like Ray, Libby also showed understands this concept when she pointed out differentiating instruction is crucial: “They’re here for us to teach them, and they’re not gonna be on the same level as this kid over here who’s been in a school since Kindergarten.” She keeps this understanding in mind when she observes teachers in their classrooms.

All three administrators referred to the WIDA strategies when discussing how teachers should differentiate their instruction for ELs. Pamela mentioned teachers “use the WIDA strategies [to] identify those strategies that they feel they need to concentrate on and use with the students in the class to help them learn that language.” Specifically,
teachers, such as Lucas, pay attention to what action verbs are appropriate for level one newcomers. Appropriate actions for level one newcomers include *listen, point, draw, match, circle, repeat, sort, copy, trace,* and *identify.* Lucas explained, “For my newcomers when they first come in, they do a lot of matching, a lot of pointing, a lot of sorting and identifying especially if it's social studies or science.” For example, he shared what he did when he taught his newcomers about different emotions:

> I used visuals with my face like happy, like ‘How are you feeling?’ then they would also repeat and show happy and then I [wrote] it down for them and they would just copy along. I wanted them to copy for now then later like on my table was something that they would have to write it themselves. That was a good practice for them.

Observations of Lucas and Lucas’ lesson plans also validated that he does have his newcomers engage in appropriate tasks based on their English language proficiency levels.

Although Lucas was the only mainstream teacher to specifically describe specific actions that relate to the WIDA standards, all teachers showed evidence of differentiating instruction and assessment practices to meet the needs of their newcomers when I observed their classrooms. For example, in Emma’s classroom during a literacy instructional block, the students were working on identifying main ideas and details after reading a nonfiction passage. Emma engaged a small group of 5 students in reading a text written on a 3rd grade reading level. They then discussed the main idea and details and wrote them in a graphic organizer. The ESOL teacher worked with Emma’s newcomers on the same skill. However, instead of requiring the students to read a text written on a 3rd grade reading level and writing sentences in a graphic organizer, the
students were reading a nonfiction text on a 1st grade reading level and sorting pictures to represent the main idea and details. Moreover, Brooke explained she differentiates how she teaches content so newcomers are “actually able to attain what we're doing and understand.” When she taught her fifth-grade students about retelling fiction texts, she modeled and guided her class about understanding how to talk about a story’s characters, setting, conflict, characters’ feelings, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. However, she did not expect her newcomers to discuss all of these plot elements of a fiction text. Instead, she wanted them to focus primarily on characters, the text’s setting, and three events when retelling a story. She personally created retelling visuals, shown in Figure 7. She gave these differentiated visuals to her newcomers and other fifth-grade students as a visual tool. The retelling visual for the 5th grade newcomer did not list as many plot elements and included sentence frames to help guided students’ explanations.
Figure 7. Differentiated retelling visuals. This image shows two different retelling visuals. Brooke created these differentiated visuals to meet the needs of both her 5th grade on-level students and her 5th grade newcomers.
In terms of assessment practices, after Karla’s third-grade students learned about locating major rivers of the United States, she and Ana provided her ELs with modified assessments. Instead of requiring the newcomers to identify and label the rivers from memory, Karla’s newcomers had to first trace over the rivers on a paper map. Then, they had to look at the teacher’s map hanging in the classroom to help them identify the correct names of the river on their individual assessment.

**Visuals.** All administrators and teachers identified that one teaching strategy that is effective for newcomers is incorporating visuals. Brooke chooses to use visuals to help students match a picture to an abstract word. For example, *Figure 7* shows she used visuals such as a house and a clock to help students remember that setting refers to where and when a story takes place. In addition, Karla uses her artistic abilities frequently in her classroom to support her students. Karla exclaimed, “I draw everything. They draw everything. I let my kids draw.” Moreover, Lucas prefers to use technology and body language as visuals in his classroom. Lucas stated, “I'm a very visual person so I do a lot of PowerPoints and I think PowerPoints help a lot for the newcomers because there's a lot of visuals. It also helps my other students who don't need the visuals but it's just like reinforcement.” He also mentioned how he uses gestures. “Yeah, I think visuals and showing with my face, my body. Body language is a huge thing. I think it definitely speaks another language.” Lastly, like Lucas, Anna also uses “a lot of pointing” and “a lot of gestures.” However, Ana warned “if I show them a Venn diagram, that does not mean anything to them. It has to be a Venn diagram with pictures or with something that has to do with what, you know, what we are studying.” Thus, it is important to
understand that newcomers do not immediately understand all visual graphic organizers; they need to be taught how to interpret graphic organizers and need to encounter graphic organizers that use accessible text.

*Integrating L1 into classroom.* As I walked the halls of Esperanza Elementary, it was clear that students are free to speak languages other than English with their peers and even teachers. I even witnessed many newcomers using their L1 in both pull-out newcomer classes and in their mainstream classes. For example, when Harper’s newcomers were working in collaborative small groups working on a writing exercise, many of the newcomers in the small group were communicating in Spanish to explain what they see. Harper did not stop students from using Spanish. Instead, she stated, “Ok. Good. Now let’s figure out how to describe it in English. How do you say that in Spanish? In English, it is *jacket.*” Harper commented that she wants all her ELs, especially her newcomers, to use their first languages as a tool to better understand the content and skills they are trying to learn. She believes this especially helpful for science and social studies academic vocabulary. *Figure 8* shows a chart Harper shared with me. This chart, which was created by teachers at Esperanza Elementary, supports fifth-grade newcomers’ understanding of a science standard. To help her newcomers learn about the functions of various cell parts, she encourages them to refer to the chart that describes the function in both English and their native languages.
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**Figure 8.** Cell function first language chart. This is the chart that Harper created for her fifth-grade newcomers. The chart describes the function of various cell organelles in both English and newcomers’ native languages.

Moreover, multiple teachers mentioned how they utilize technology to integrate students’ L1 into the classroom setting. Ana said, “I do speak Spanish, which is a plus for me, but then I see the other side of the coin when I have...like this year, I have students that speak French and I do not know anything about French, so I have to have my Google Translate all the time.” She mentioned even using electronic translators to provide “one or two words” can greatly “help them understand.” Emma also regularly relies on students in her class to translate valuable information to her newcomers. She also uses technology translation apps so her students can increase their reading
comprehension of a text. Emma commented, “This year I did something new. I actually had them rewriting the sentences in English and then I would go back and, with my phone, translate it into Spanish and French so that they could understand it, and then they would read it back in English and we would just kind of progress that way.” Therefore, this strategy incorporates a student’s L1 in the classroom both newcomers’ reading comprehension and English vocabulary acquisition.

*Direct instruction of literacy skills.* Multiple teachers spoke specifically about direct instruction strategies they use to support newcomers’ literacy skills. To support newcomers’ reading and writing needs, Harper prioritizes providing direct instruction related to vocabulary. Harper explained,

> Before we read or before we do anything, we look at pictures. We talk. We learn new vocabulary... I like to really, really front-load these kids...so I do a lot of front-loading with vocabulary...then they'll tell me things in their native language, and they'll be excited about it, and I won't understand it, but I'll nod and say, "Yeah!" Actually, though, when you're sitting there looking at a little book together and it's pretty basic and simple, you kind of know what they're saying. So then I'll say it in English in a simple way.

Harper’s pre-teaching new vocabulary at the beginning of small group reading instruction provides the language support the newcomers need so that her students can understand what the text is about.

Moreover, Ana and Emma work in small groups with newcomers. In the groups, they prioritize explicit phonics instruction in addition to reading authentic texts in small groups. Ana incorporates a five-minute phonics lesson into her newcomer class each morning. She utilizes interactive YouTube videos in her classroom so students can practice producing the sounds that correspond to letters in the English alphabet. Phonics
lesson focuses include focusing on “beginning, middle, ending sounds, segmenting words, rhyming words, substituting sounds/parts of words, digraphs, compound words, language awareness sentence expressions, etc.” Like Ana, Emma also focuses on teaching her newcomers about letter-sound relationships. When they arrive, Emma likes to first get “them online doing different things like Starfall, some of those other websites that are kind of geared to just listening to the letter sounds and making sure they understand that.” Then, Emma’s “next step is to help them identify some of the similarities of letter sounds. That's just with me individually. I'll work in about 10-20 minutes every day trying to do that with them a little bit at the beginning. Then once I see that they can kind of correctly identify the sounds and match them up and put them into words, then what I'll start doing is utilizing some of the books in the book room that are kind of low level reading.” It was evident in interviews, observations, and document analysis of Emma’s lesson plans that she purposely provides this direct instruction to her newcomers.

*Peer collaboration.* Another effective EL pedagogical strategy teachers at Esperanza Elementary frequently use is peer collaboration. One of Esperanza Elementary’s instructional priorities is small group instruction that is differentiated and encourages both active student engagement and collegial collaboration. Ana and Brooke both engage their newcomers in small group instruction where they can work collaboratively. Ana believes this type of environment is best for newcomers because it is an unintimidating setting. To effectively teach her newcomers, Brooke uses “mostly as much small group as possible.” She also encourages homogenous peer collaboration by
making “some games for [newcomers] to work on together or activities that they could do together” because “they enjoy being able to do things at their level without it being with someone that is a first-language English student that doesn't have the struggles that they have.” Brooke thinks it is beneficial to have multiple newcomers in one class so they can “have each other” and “learn together.” Moreover, Emma expressed she uses heterogeneous grouping practices in her classroom. She sometimes groups newcomers with students who have higher levels of English language proficiency because the more proficient students “can translate” or “help them out if they’re trying to read independently.” No matter which type of peer collaboration strategy is used, Brooke, Emma, and Ana all agreed that a variety of peer collaboration environments allow newcomers to authentically practice with listening and speaking in English in a supportive setting.

Identity affirmation. It is interesting to note that Ray was the only one to mention the importance of affirming students’ identities and incorporating newcomers’ backgrounds into their classroom. When I asked about effective strategies teachers of newcomers use during instruction, he stated, “Activating that background knowledge because I think children have experiences; they just don't have the experiences we've had. We just have to further build or capitalize upon their background.” Even during follow-up interviews when I asked clarifying questions related to pedagogy, no other educators mentioned the how they affirm their students’ identities using strategies related to Cummins’ (2009) Transformative Multiliteracies Pedagogy. Nevertheless, although no teachers shared about this important pedagogical practice, during observations I observed
teachers affirming students’ identities and encouraging them to connect their personal funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) to what they were learning. I witnessed Karla asking students about the significance of their own names when she read aloud the book *My Name is Yoon* (Recorvitz & Swiatkowska, 2003), a book about a young Korean student who moves to America and struggles with writing her Korean name in English. I observed Harper asking her newcomers to compare how the playgrounds at their schools in the home countries differed from Esperanza Elementary’s playground.

In short, there was not a lot of illustrative evidence that depicted how educators explicitly affirm newcomers’ identities in interview data or document analysis. This leads me to wonder if I should have asked more focused questions about aspects of identity affirmation during my interviews. On the other hand, I also wonder if the lack of focus on this aspect of research-based EL pedagogy relates to a contradiction within the activity system. In the next section, I will illustrate the various contradictions that existed within Esperanza Elementary’s upper-elementary newcomer education activity system.

Contradictions within the Activity System

When individuals analyze an activity system’s components and the relationships of each of the component, tensions can arise. Tensions, contradictions, can strain or breakdown an activity stem (Engeström, 1997). “Contradictions occur when, for example, current rules restrict the use of new tools and limit our capacity to interpret and act on work tasks in fresh ways” (Edwards, 2009, p. 199). As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, Engeström (2001) argued identifying tensions should not lead to discouragement. Instead, it is not until researchers uncover contradictions that they can
begin the transformation process to activate important changes needed in the activity system (Engeström, 2009). Since all participants discussed various dilemmas they face as they work to support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth, it is important to disclose the tensions that exist within the activity system at Esperanza Elementary in this section. Figure 9 visualizes these contradictions. It is my hope that these tensions can be targeted so transformations within the activity system can take place. I only focused on exploring primary and secondary contradictions since this dissertation focused on illustrating one activity system only. Tertiary and quaternary contradictions are beyond the scope of this dissertation.
Figure 9. Contradictions within Esperanza Elementary’s upper-elementary newcomer activity system. This figure illustrates the primary and secondary contradictions of Esperanza Elementary’s activity system for upper-elementary newcomer education. Figure is adapted with permission from Engeström’s (2014) triangle model from Learning by Expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research, by Y. Engeström, 2014, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (See Appendix B).

Primary Contradictions

Primary contradictions take place within a single part of the activity system. They can even serve as foundations for other higher-level contradictions (Engeström, 1999). As educators at Esperanza Elementary shared about their experiences of teaching upper-elementary newcomers and I observed these educators in their classrooms, I identified
there are primary contradictions that exist between the tools, community, and division of labor components.

Tools: Lack of resources. Regarding the tools of Esperanza Elementary’s activity system, all four mainstream educators shared about dilemmas related to a lack of professional learning and resources. The fact that many of the teachers do not have appropriate resources to use with their students impacts the effectiveness of the pedagogy they are using in their classrooms.

Lucas described that at the beginning of the school year, he was always one of the last people to leave the building after school because he spent time “creating my own things” to support his students. Moreover, Emma and Brooke both expressed it would be beneficial to have additional resources. Brooke brought up the fact that supplying resources to help newcomers can even send a message about how educators value newcomers’ education, “If you're really embracing them as students within your county, they deserve their own set of resources, I guess, or it would be nice to supply teachers with a set of resources that would truly help them prepare for the rest of their education.”

When I asked Karla about resources she uses to help her newcomers’ English speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, Karla expressed she believed there probably are resources available but “no one has ever shown me or no one has ever told me that there was anything that could help.” This statement leads to also a discussion about the tension that exists related to professional learning.

Tools: Lack of professional learning. Karla, along with other mainstream teachers and administrators frequently discussed the need for improved
professional learning at the local school level. Harper reflected about the need for
teachers to be more prepared when she commented:

    I think a lot of these kids come in, they know no English, they may not have even
been to school, and they're scared to death. They don't know how to say bathroom
or just the basics, and here we are trying to teach them theme and main idea, and
my gosh, they are just trying to survive...A lot of our teachers are not prepared for
that.

This lack of preparation relates to lack of professional learning opportunities. As
previously discussed, Brooke showed evidence of not having opportunities to observe
other teachers who teach newcomers. Libby also demonstrated this desire when she
stated, “I just wish that every teacher would have the ability to be able to observe
someone teaching in a newcomer setting, or level one, or level two, to see what those
kids can really do.” Pamela wholeheartedly agreed with Libby’s statement during a focus
group.

    Moreover, Lucas recalled having a professional learning session related to ELs at
the beginning of the year and expressed, “I wish we had more of that not just at the
beginning of the year. That would have been amazing.” “When I think about it, there's
not a lot of training in modifying assessments.” Brooke, who has taught at Esperanza
Elementary for 11 years, agreed with Lucas that more professional learning catered to
newcomers is needed. When she reflected about it, she passionately stated, “We haven’t
ever received any staff development on how to support just newcomers...there hasn't
been a handout even that says, ‘Hey, try these with your newcomers.’” In addition,
Emma stated, “It would definitely be beneficial to have learning opportunities focused on
[newcomers]” because she believes the newcomer population has increased since she
arrived at Esperanza Elementary seven years ago. Like Emma, Ray also expressed there is a need for more EL-focused professional learning because of the school’s current ESOL population. Ray commented:

I do think there is a need for us to go deeper with ESOL professional learning because as I said earlier I believe we are an ESOL school and I think we have to be more intentional about providing opportunities for our teachers to build a capacity in that particular area...We want to do more with it, you know, do more with it because it's needed. It is needed because we were seeing a lot of our students were starting to really exit out of it, but with a new (ACCESS) criteria we're seeing far less children that are exiting out.

It appears Ray sees the need that currently exists for more professional learning at the local level.

The administrative team also recognizes there is a need for more professional learning opportunities outside the walls of Esperanza Elementary. Libby and Pamela both desire for more teachers at Esperanza to receive the district training to become ESOL certified:

Pamela: I wish all teachers would see the value in getting the certification to work with ELs.

Libby: I would say I agree, to have more staff certified.

Pamela: Yup. A lot of times they've communicated that it's the timeframe of getting the [certification] can be rather long. Maybe, kinda condensing it down, and just giving them nuts and bolts of what they need so that they can quickly move through that training and get that certification. I think that is what causes lots of teachers to hesitate. They want to do it, but it's the time.

In other words, Pamela and Libby shared sometimes the time demands of the certification process prevent educators from choosing to participate in district EL professional learning.
Community: Differing perspectives on instructional settings. Primary contradictions related to community initially arose when participants discussed newcomers’ instructional settings. As participants shared about newcomers’ different instructional settings at Esperanza Elementary, their opinions about the effectiveness of pull-out versus push-in settings for newcomers spanned the spectrum. It is clear that the educators at Esperanza Elementary do not have the same understanding of what is best for newcomers, which creates tensions within the activity system. Some are strong proponents of the push-in settings, others think pull-out settings are best for newcomers, and others are of a mixed mindset.

From the administrative perspective, Ray shared he is “in the middle” about what type of setting is best for newcomers:

I like the immersion part, I love that part. But I also do think too that once we get a child to be confident, then we can send them off. It's something like boot camp, you know, you go to the military, you learn all your skills and you get out there and you go out and do your role. And so I do think if we could find a balance, with that because at what point should I move the newcomer on to a new setting?

Ray’s statement shows sees benefits of pulling out newcomers and immersing newcomers in general education classrooms. He thought about how it is beneficial to equip newcomers with the basic vocabulary they need before gradually releasing newcomers into a general education classroom that receives push-in ESOL support.

Like Ray, mainstream and ESOL teachers also shared fluctuating opinions of what is the best approach at Esperanza Elementary. Ana and Karla both identically stated, “There are pros and cons to both.” Karla and Emma had similar suggestions about what instructional settings are most effective for newcomers. Although Karla did admit
her preference for EL education is “push-in. I’m not sure it is always best though, but it is more control for me. That’s the truth,” she also claimed it would be idea if newcomers were “in a class with [newcomer] students until they learn enough language and get to a certain score.” Karla shared she recently learned that some newcomers in New York engage in this type of educational progression. According to Karla, the students participate in a newcomer class for two years and then must exhibit a certain level of English proficiency on an assessment to be placed into a general education classroom. Additionally, Emma was of the same mind as Karla when she shared what she thinks what instructional setting is best for newcomers:

The push-in model is not the best model for truly newcomers...I feel like if they're just truly newcomers and they absolutely don't know English, I feel like it would be more productive and the outcome would probably be stronger in the academic setting if they were pulled out and maybe that first year specifically taught English. Then not necessarily focusing on content at first but mastering not only just social language but some of the basic school languages...it would be more effective and more practical for them.

The reason Emma thinks this has to do with her expectations to teach so much content in the mainstream classroom: “You can only give so much content to kids that don't understand what you're saying...That's why I think that if it was really intense when they first came it would seem like maybe in the long run they would be able to get into the content a lot quicker maybe.” Emma and Karla, in a nutshell, think newcomers could progress further and faster if they initially are not placed in a mainstream setting where they only receive a small percentage of ESOL support throughout the way.

Moreover, the ESOL teachers, Ana and Harper, have a unique perspective about the best type of instructional setting for newcomers because they have both had
experience with pull-out and push-in segments. Ana explained she notices a difference between newcomers’ behavior in a pull-out setting versus a push-in format:

When I pull them out, I think the kids feel more free to speak and I know that when we read a lot of literature and stuff, we know that for a Level 1 kid, the pull-out is much better because then they can truly show what they know. I do see a difference between the same kid that is participating in my pull-out class and when I go in push-in. It is a total different kid, which will not volunteer information or you have to ask and get it out. I think that is the difference of scenarios.

Nonetheless, despite noticing these participation differences, Ana still believes “there are pros and cons to both” segments. So does Harper. Prior to teaching at Esperanza Elementary, Harper taught at a school that only used the pull-out ESOL model. As a classroom teacher, her ELs were pulled out. She explained this was challenging because “I [didn’t] even know what they did, but they were gone. Then they did miss things. I’d have to try to catch them up if it was something I felt like they needed to know.”

Therefore, according to Harper, “I love the push-in.” Harper can support newcomers’ needs inside the mainstream classroom through forty-minute push-in segments, which she thinks “is fine for some children...children who already have some schooling and who come from a more educated type background.” However, Harper did admit she recognizes there is a need sometimes for more newcomer support. When she explained that her former school district had a newcomer center, she admitted, “I think that would be very helpful for a lot of children.” Harper expressed the best setting for newcomers “depends on the child and how quickly they're learning.” This statement is a reminder that newcomers themselves have many diverse needs and therefore cannot be stereotyped into one homogenous group.
Community: Classroom population within mainstream classes. Another primary contradiction that arose during data analysis within the community component of the activity system has to do with mainstream classrooms’ student populations. This past year, there were many classrooms at Esperanza Elementary that only had one or two newcomers yet had many ELs and other students who were classified as below grade level. Ana commented that this type of mainstream classroom’s population impacts how she can support students when she push-into the classrooms: “I might see a group of kids Monday/Tuesday and Wednesday/Thursday, you know another group. Friday’s we do a lot of assessments too, so truly it might be two or three times a week.” It is not just the ESOL teachers who face challenges related to classroom populations that have many ELs with language needs though.

Both Brooke and Emma shed some light about the dilemmas they face teaching in a classroom that has a large EL population. Emma had a mainstream class of 20 students; 80% of her class were classified as ELs and their end of the year reading levels spanned “such a wide range” from students on “Level A to...Level Ms.” The third-grade reading level expectation is to end the year on a Level P. She spoke strongly about how she could not provide enough support to each of her students because they all had “so many needs."

I asked my class about the word *underneath* and they didn’t know what it meant. We’re missing so much of that vocabulary...It’s any child in this room. So, if I need to focus on this with all the kids who everyone is thinking is on level; those poor little [newcomers], they aren’t getting anything from me. I don’t feel like I did them service in that way. I feel like it was set up for failure for them and for me from the first minute we walked into the room. It is very frustrating for them and for me.
In short, Karla shared that since she “didn’t have any students on grade level when this year started,” the structure of her classroom negatively impacted how much support she could give her students. However, Karla did comment when she had “two [newcomers] and maybe six students that were really below grade level” during the previous school year it was less frustrating and overwhelming.

Brooke also indicated how her mainstream classroom population impacts newcomers’ education. Brooke admitted she really did not include her two newcomers “in reading groups on an everyday rotation….just because of quantity of other direct students.” She added,

I have a total of 25 students. Three of them are currently reading on grade level. The majority of my students are reading on end of third grade, beginning of fourth grade level. When you have 20 other students with, what I would classify as high need, unfortunately, five days in a week, 40 minutes for reading groups or a little bit more, it just isn't feasible when you have so many other students that are in need of that attention to be successful.

Brooke explained that she wants “my newcomers to be prepared,” but she anticipated that her newcomers will get “more of [ESOL] support next year” in sixth grade and was concerned that some of her other students who face current challenges with reading would not. However, Brooke, who had one newcomer the previous school year and two newcomers this year, shared she did “put a little bit more pressure” on herself this year than the previous year to help her newcomers: “Because I know it's both of them, and I'm not just affecting the education of one kid. It's two kids...10% of my kids... so it's been a little bit added motivation for me to find resources and make sure I keep them in mind when I'm planning group work or activities that we're going to be doing.” In other words,
she explained having one newcomer compared to two newcomers in her impacted how she approached instructional planning for her newcomers.

By the same token, Lucas also thinks “it can be challenging” “having a mix group of students, especially with [newcomers].” He expressed “it’s definitely difficult,” especially when he tries to teach a mini-lesson during his reading instructional block to larger groups of students:

You're doing a whole group lesson and [the newcomers] are just sitting there, you're like "Oh man, I'm sorry, I'll be right there with you.” Then you so did that mini-lesson. You kind of leave your class be and then you have this mini-lesson with [the newcomers] but then the other students have questions...You're just like walking back and forth. You feel like, well I feel like I'm not really helping them as much as I should because I'm just everywhere like 3 different lessons going on.

The diversity of language and academic in the classrooms requires that Lucas put forth additional effort to make sure all his students are receiving instruction at their instructional level. Lucas welcomes a classroom that would have just primarily newcomers and other direct-served ELs:

I think it would be so much more comfortable if the class was just all ESL...Oh man, I really want that...I know we're not going to do that next year but if I had the opportunity I would definitely teach an all newcomer or all ESL class. I think that's my place.

In his “Utopia world,” he desires this because “that way I could have focus on that one group and we could , I feel like, I could definitely go further with them. But because everything's so divided, that's difficult.” Therefore, unlike Brooke and Karla, Lucas described that he desires to primarily have classroom population made up of ELs.

To summarize, a primary contradiction about mainstream classrooms' student population exists within the community component of Esperanza Elementary's upper-
elementary newcomer education activity system. Both ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers face tensions because of the quantity of students with language needs in one classroom. The total amount of newcomers' direct instruction time is impacted. However, as some mainstream teachers expressed the challenges related to having newcomers in their classrooms, others shared they would prefer classrooms full of newcomers to support their needs more effectively.

Division of labor. The last primary contradiction that arose in my analysis of Esperanza Elementary’s activity system of upper-elementary newcomers’ education connected to the division of labor component of the activity system. As I learned about administrators’, ESOL teachers’, and classroom teachers’ roles at Esperanza Elementary, there was one specific duty that was neither clearly defined nor assigned: enrollment. In fact, multiple educators shared tensions regarding the topic of newcomers’ enrollment. Ray described the enrollment procedures of newcomers in the following manner: “Typically, we like to, if they do not have any schoolwork we try to do a little, quick assessment on the student to see what it is that they demonstrate, or know. And then from there they are basically assigned to a particular class.” However, the other administrators’ and educators’ interviews did not mention any sort of screening; in fact, multiple teachers shared tensions related to the lack of screening.

Libby explained that Esperanza Elementary’s enrollment procedure for newcomers varies depending on what time of the year they enroll. If newcomers enroll during the open house day in August prior to the first day of school, administrators are “able to physically put eyes on them to know English is not their first language.”
However, if newcomers enroll after the school year begins, one of the registrars who registers them meets them and simply shares, “New to country. Newcomers.” Libby and Pamela then only share via email that basic information they know with the ESOL teachers to determine class placement. This is the same information classroom teachers, like Lucas and Brooke, receive. Lucas expressed, “I don't get much information at all. It's just an email of their name; that's it.” Brooke shared she receives the same information and tries to seek out additional feedback:

A lot of times I'll go to the office and be like, "Okay, what can you tell me?" And there's not really anything that they know. They don't do any kind of prescreening, to the best of my knowledge, as far as being able to give us other information.

Harper explained individuals cannot provide additional information because, “sometimes, the people who are registering them are not getting enough information.” For example, she wishes they could learn about how much schooling the newcomer had prior to Esperanza Elementary, which grades they completed in their home country, and if they move around a lot. Since the ESOL teachers “don’t get a whole lot of information when a newcomer enrolls,” once the student enrolls, Harper commented the ESOL teachers try to seek “go digging” by calling former schools and asking parents and students themselves about their backgrounds.

Harper is not the only individual at Esperanza Elementary who desires to learn more about newcomers’ prior educational experiences; Ana has similar wishes. Ana shared she wants to know:

What did they have prior to coming to us? Sometimes we do not even know because when they register they are not asked those questions. We do not know any of that. In middle school and high school, at the [International Newcomers
Center], they really interview the parent. Over there, they ask some other question including about sports, etc. The teachers receive a little database and receive more information about their kids than we do...They want to make sure they put them in the right place and transcripts are understood to make sure they really should be in 6th grade...They do a writing prompt. Like here, it would be great if the students can have a writing prompt, a math test. Can they read in their native language? Can they write? What math do they know? Not just throw them in the classroom and then the classroom teacher has to figure out all that essential information on his or her own time.

The International Newcomer Center (INC) that Ana referred to is located in the middle of the district. According to the district, the INC invites middle school and high school students whose first language is not English to visit the center to register for school. Employees at the INC assess students’ language and math skills, evaluate students’ transcripts from other countries, inform newcomers about graduation requirements, and share class placement recommendations. Esperanza Elementary newcomers do not register at the INC because elementary newcomers are told to report to their local school for assessment and registration. Ana, who has worked in the district for over ten years, regretfully stated, “I’ve never asked...Why is it done for only middle and high school?”

It is clear that current enrollment procedures for upper-elementary newcomers can be both somewhat unclear and inconsistent in the district.

Secondary Contradictions

A level two, secondary contradiction, occurs within the relationship between two components of an activity system, such as the subject and tool, subject and community, division of labor and tools, or community and rules. This section will focus on illustrating the secondary contradictions that impact the activity system in significant ways. Therefore, other slight secondary contradictions will not be included in this
analysis. I will address three contradictions that exist between the following components: (1) division of labor, community, and tools, (2) community, rules, and tools, and (3) rules and tools. All of these interacting components connect to the outcome of the activity system: upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. Since the tools component of an activity system incorporates so many different facets, I label which specific aspect of tools is the focus of each contradiction by using parentheses.

Subject → Division of Labor, Community, Tools → Object. Esperanza Elementary’s professional learning model defines that professional learning takes place in both collaborative grade-level teams and vertical learning teams. There are other opportunities outside of the workday that teachers can engage in, but during the workday all professional learning occurs within those two teams. This creates a tension within multiple activity system components: division of labor, tools (professional learning), and collaboration. The administrative team’s role is to define the professional learning model and professional learning goals for its staff members each year, which in turn impacts the type of professional learning teachers can receive. According to the model, the teams themselves choose the types of professional learning they want to focus on at their Tuesday and Thursday morning meetings. However, because third, fourth, and fifth grades only have one to three teachers on each grade level who teach newcomers, grade level teams do not choose to focus on professional learning topics related to teaching newcomers. The same reason is why newcomer professional learning does not occur within vertical learning teams. As Brooke pointed out previously: “I don't know other teachers, when they get kids, what they try to do or what they don't try to do...There is no
talk about it with other teachers.” Collaboration amongst her fifth-grade team members about supporting newcomers is nonexistent.

In a sense, it appears the administrator-created rigid structure of the school’s current professional learning model is preventing upper-elementary teachers from engaging in professional learning related to newcomers’ education. Lucas desired to engage in more collaboration with other individuals who are knowledgeable about teaching newcomers and other ELs when he stated it would “be amazing instead of having random meetings on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Definitely having those times together to talk; I think that will be so helpful.” He even proposed the idea of having ESOL instructional coaches at the school to support Esperanza Elementary’s EL population and job-embedded professional learning model.

Subject → Community, Rules, Tools → Object. Other secondary contradictions that exist between Esperanza Elementary’s newcomer education activity systems relate to interactions between community, rules, and tools (effective EL pedagogy). Ray has to follow explicit rules and formulas related to Esperanza Elementary’s EL enrollment when he determines how many ESOL teachers he can hire. The amount of ESOL teachers at the school then can impact the type and length of newcomers’ instructional settings. ESOL teachers’ instructional blocks of time in each pull-out and push-in class directly affect the amount of direct instruction, an effective EL pedagogical practice, newcomers receive daily. The implicit rule of embracing rules flexibility also allows the school to not serve all ELs according to GADOE guidelines.

What is stated as a practice and what is actually documented and carried out is not
the same. For example, although Libby shared newcomers “are getting served a
minimum of two segments a day, if not more” due to the newcomer pull-out and push-in
time, this is not actually the case. Harper expressed, “What ends up happening is like
three days of the week, I'll work with the [ELs with more needs], and twice a week I'll
work with the [newcomers].” Ana also illustrated the reality of this contradiction when
she talked about both pull-out and push-in settings. In her newcomer pull-out class, she
could only see the third-grade newcomers on Thursdays and Fridays because she had to
work with the first and second grade newcomers on Mondays, Tuesdays, and
Wednesdays. In push-in mainstream classrooms, she also can only see certain groups of
kids on certain days “because the time is limited.” So, ESOL teachers’ published
schedules show they are providing push-in support to the newcomers for 40 minutes, five
minutes to ten minutes less than GADOE’s explicit rule. However, in reality, when
Harper and Ana are in mainstream teachers’ classrooms, they only provide direct
instruction to newcomers maybe half of that time on a daily basis. Actually, this time is
even less at certain times of the year, which leads to sharing the next secondary
contradiction between just two components: rules and tools.

Subject → Rules (Explicit), Tools → Object. As stated in the previous section,
Ana shared she cannot provide full 40-minute ESOL instruction on a daily basis to all of
her newcomers. In addition to a high EL population, another factor affects this dilemma:
explicit rules related to assessment and student promotion. Therefore, another secondary
contradiction exists between rules and tools (effective EL pedagogy). Explicit rules
about the Georgia Milestones Assessment and promotion requirements affect how
teachers teach and what teachers teach to their newcomers.

Multiple mainstream teachers and ESOL teachers attributed many of their instructional decisions to what explicit rules about testing and promotion state. Karla shared she and Ana were “overwhelmed by making sure that those who are supposed to pass something get what they need” and had to sometimes leave their newcomers “to the side.” Ana further explained this when she discussed how the amount of direct reading instructional time she provided her newcomers changed in late April:

Ana: Now, I have been focusing more on the newcomers because we have done Milestones, the major testing, with the other kids. So now instead of just giving them like 10 minutes, because I did that too and maybe I had two groups on the same day and I could give them 10 minutes and then my other 30 minutes with the other group. So now I can dedicate more time from the week to those kids.

Researcher: Why do you think that has changed from the beginning of the year until?

Ana: I think because the focus, at the beginning of the year, throughout the year, is you know the end of testing and all the things we have to do by the end of the year. So, my other kids, we know where they started. We had to push them harder to pass the Milestone...These kids, obviously because they are Level 1 and still learning the language, so [testing] was not the most crucial thing, at the moment.

Therefore, the explicit rules related to all of Ana’s students’ assessments created pressure for Ana to focus more on students who had to pass the third-grade reading test instead of her newcomers.

When commenting about the multiple assessment mandates, it is also noteworthy to share two points Harper made related to explicit rules and tools (effective EL pedagogy). First, Harper expressed she cannot provide all the direct instructional minutes she can to the ELs she is assigned during the entire school year because she has to
administer standardized assessments to small groups of students:

All year, I had been giving four fourth-grade [district assessments (DAs)] and four fifth grade DAs. So I've been giving eight DAs four times a year. So that’s 32 DAs times an hour and a half at least ...then ITBS, ACCESS, Milestones, I spend hours, hundreds of hours probably, giving tests, which is awful.

In other words, Harper expressed she and her ESOL teammates would be able to accurately follow GADOE’s requirements about the length of ESOL instructional segments if they did not have to administer so many standardized tests. Second, Harper’s concerns about the assessments conflict with another effective EL pedagogy practice: affirming students’ identities. Harper explained that if her fifth-grade newcomers who do not pass the Georgia Milestones mathematics assessment, which Libby explained is still very language-rich, the first time, then they must attend summer school and retake the assessment after 13 days of summer school instruction. If newcomers still do not pass that next time, Harper expressed they typically promote the child because their challenges were language acquisition not academic related. Harper candidly said what she thinks about having newcomers take and retake tests: “I think it makes them feel ‘I can’t pass, I’m dumb.’” In other words, the assessment experiences of newcomers do not promote positive identity affirmation.

Moving forward, in terms of what teachers teach, assessment pressure causes Emma to face the dilemma of “not only just trying to teach [newcomers] English, but [also trying] to teach them the content.” Mainstream teachers know their newcomers need to grow in their English speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, but they also feel pressured to teach content to newcomers since all newcomers have to take the math and
science Milestones assessments. Harper considered what it would be like for her to be a fifth-grade newcomer in China where content is a focus like it has to be at Esperanza Elementary:

They say it takes five to seven years to learn a language, and here they come in in fifth grade and they've just gotten here...I'm thinking okay, if I go to China and you put me in a regular classroom, I'm not going to understand any of it. I have got to have some basic instruction in Chinese. You walk in and you start telling me about Civil War or whatever happened in China, the Huns or whoever, I'm not going to get that. But if you pull me out or I'm in a small group where I'm at a place where everybody's learning (Chinese), then I'm going to get some basics and I'm going to be a lot more prepared.

Harper expressed it would be difficult to learn the content without understanding enough basic social language vocabulary. However, despite feeling empathy for that type of learning situation, she and the mainstream teachers feel pressured to focus on teaching both complex academic vocabulary while simultaneously teaching basic English survival vocabulary.

Overall, the primary and secondary contradictions shared in this chapter exhibit that complex tensions exist at multiple levels in Esperanza Elementary’s upper-elementary newcomer activity system. The focus and effectiveness of newcomers’ English language instruction is impacted by factors such as explicit rules and mandates and decisions related to instructional settings. It is clear that when educators engage in the activity related to the outcome of newcomers’ English language proficiency growth, there are many issues that impact the object and outcome.
Summary

To summarize, the purpose of this chapter is to present the results of this study’s data collection. I introduced the chapter by reviewing my study’s two primary research questions and sub-questions. Then, I illustrated the activity system to answer my first research question. In this illustration, I began by explaining how I chose the research site, Esperanza Elementary, and then I described Esperanza Elementary’s location, history, and student and staff demographics. After, I specifically shared demographic information related to Esperanza’s large and culturally diverse EL population and newcomer population. Prior to moving on to the first activity system component, I also provided information about Esperanza Elementary’s ESOL department, school culture, and achievement data.

Once I provided an adequate picture of the research site, I began to share about the six components of the activity system. First, the subject of the activity system consisted of educators at Esperanza Elementary who work with upper-elementary newcomers. Participants in this study were Ray, Libby, Pamela, Karla, Emma, Lucas, and Brooke. I introduced each research participant with descriptions of their past teaching experience and current experience with newcomers.

Second, the object of the activity system was upper-elementary newcomers and the outcome of the activity system was growth in newcomers’ English language proficiency levels.

The third component of the activity system that I addressed was division of labor. Esperanza Elementary’s administrators, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers have
multiple roles. I informed how data indicated individuals had some unique roles. I then shared how many of their roles at Esperanza Elementary overlap.

The fourth component of the activity system that I revealed in great detail was the community. At Esperanza Elementary, participants taught newcomers in different types of instructional settings and had various collaborative relationships. Therefore, I defined and portrayed how Esperanza Elementary educators teach in mainstream, push-in, and pull-out instructional settings. I then shared what collaboration looks like between various members of Esperanza Elementary’s professional community.

The fifth component of Esperanza Elementary’s newcomer education activity system was rules. Participants in the study adhere to the explicit and implicit rules to varying degrees. I first revealed what data shared about explicit rules related to ESOL teacher staffing and scheduling, standardized assessments procedures for newcomers, and newcomers’ grade promotion. I then presented that implicit rules related to leniency with explicit rules and lack of accountability also are a part of the activity system.

The sixth component I illustrated was tools. In this section, I presented both what tools the subject uses in the activity process of upper-elementary newcomer education. Since tools can be both tangible and intangible, I revealed data about participants’ beliefs and professional learning experiences. I then demonstrated how participants use a variety of effective EL pedagogical practices when teaching. Specifically, I reported about collaborative and welcoming classroom environments, differentiation, visuals, integrating newcomers’ L1 into classrooms, direct instruction of literacy skills, peer collaboration, and culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogy.
In the last section of this chapter, I discussed various contradictions that exist within the activity system. I sought to share the tensions educators face as they work to support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth because disclosing tensions can lead to transformation. I focused on exploring both primary and secondary contradictions. Data revealed primary contradictions existed amongst tools, community, and division of labor components. For tools, there were tensions related to lack of resources and lack of professional learning. For community, participants revealed they had differing perspectives on effective instructional settings and on the student makeup of mainstream classroom populations. For division of labor, I presented the data indicated a tension existed related to newcomers’ enrollment procedures. In terms of secondary contradiction, I presented about three significant contradictions that appears multiple times during data analysis: (1) division of labor, collaboration, and tools, (2) community, rules, and tools, and (3) rules and tools. The first contradiction dealt with how the rigid administrator-created professional learning model prevents upper-elementary teachers from engaging in professional learning related to newcomers’ education. The second secondary contradiction revealed how both explicit rules and implicit rules impact the type of instructional settings newcomers engage in and the amount of effective EL pedagogy they experience. Finally, the third secondary contradiction presented how explicit rules about the Georgia Milestones Assessment and promotion requirements affect how teachers teach and what teachers teach to their newcomers. All three of these contradictions directly impact the object and outcome of the activity system.
To summarize, in Chapter 4 I presented the data that answers this study’s two research questions:

1. How do educators support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner newcomers?
   a. What rules impact how administrators and teachers support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   b. How does the school’s division of labor support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   c. How does the school’s community support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   d. What tools do administrators and teachers use to support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?

2. What contradictions exist when a school’s educators support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth?

In the subsequent chapter, Chapter 5, I will include a discussion of and conclusions about the results presented in this chapter, implications, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The activity system of how Esperanza Elementary educators support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers involves multiple components. Factors related to rules, division of labor, community, and tools all impact the newcomers’ education. According to Engeström (2009), the prominent sociocultural activity theory researcher, the task for activity theory is “bringing together the big and the small, the impossible and the possible, the future-oriented activity-level vision and the here-and-now consequential action” (Engeström, 2009, p. 328). Therefore, activity theory research of how educators at Esperanza Elementary support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers cannot end at illustrating the different components and contradictions of the activity system. This chapter will bring together all the parts of the activity system into a meaningful discussion.

Organization of Chapter

In this chapter, I will briefly summarize the purpose of the study and the research questions. I intend to discuss in detail my findings and conclusions. After, I desire to provide a description how this study has implications for educators and administrators, the local school district, and educational policy. Finally, I endeavor to clarify this study’s limitations and my recommendations for future research.
Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe the activity system of how educators at an elementary school support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner (EL) newcomers. I collected data about Esperanza Elementary’s newcomer education activity system from multiple administrators, mainstream educations, and ESOL teachers. I studied how tools administrators and teachers use, how Esperanza Elementary’s community, how explicit and implicit rules, and how Esperanza Elementary’s division of labor support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers. I also analyzed how various components in the activity system interact and create contradictions. Therefore, the research questions for this study were:

1. How do educators support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner newcomers?
   a. What rules impact how administrators and teachers support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   b. How does the school’s division of labor support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   c. How does the school’s community support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
   d. What tools do administrators and teachers use to support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers?
2. What contradictions exist when a school’s educators support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth?

Discussion and Conclusion

Given the data gathered from interviews, document analysis, and observations, I can draw several conclusions about the activity system of how educators at Esperanza Elementary support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers. The first conclusion is Esperanza Elementary’s activity system for upper-elementary newcomer education is multifaceted, interconnected, and not rigid. The second conclusion is explicit assessment rules strongly impact the activity system as a whole. The third conclusion is Esperanza Elementary teachers use researched-based instruction and desire the best for their newcomers’ education despite facing challenges related to voids in resources, collaboration, and professional learnings. The final, most significant, conclusion of the study is due to contradictions that exist within Esperanza Elementary’s activity system, there is a need for transformation and expansive learning. Each of the conclusions based on this study’s findings coincide with previous research and literature, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Esperanza Elementary’s Multifaceted and Dynamic Activity System

The first conclusion of this study is Esperanza Elementary’s activity system for upper-elementary newcomer education is multifaceted, interconnected, and not rigid. In a sense, this activity system aligns exactly with how Boer et al. (2002) described activities as “multilevel, multidimensional, dynamic, collective, [and] context-sensitive (p. 8).” Data clearly indicate that upper-elementary newcomers’ education is influenced
by a multitude of factors at Esperanza Elementary, which is illustrated by Figure 10’s intersecting lines. Administrators, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers all make decisions on a regular basis that affect where, when, what, and how newcomers learn. The decision-making relates to the activity system’s components of rules, community, and tools. It is not just the administrative team that makes important decisions about how newcomers are educated at Esperanza Elementary; ESOL teachers’ voices are also strong in the activity system. ESOL teachers are regularly looked at as the experts and make decisions as a collaborative team that impact upper-elementary newcomers’ education. Also, it is interesting to note that all the mainstream teachers and ESOL teachers indicated they have what Russell (2012) identified as strong collaborative unity despite not having enough time during the school day to engage in strong collaborative practices. They work together to make decisions about how to best meet the needs of newcomers in mainstream classrooms while also considering how to support the needs of the other ELs in the classroom. It is beneficial that there is a collective vision (Levine & Lezotte, 2001) and a supportive school culture that welcomes collaboration between the school’s leadership team and ESOL teachers (Russell, 2012).
Figure 10. Esperanza Elementary’s activity system of how educators support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. This figure illustrates the various components of the school’s activity system for upper-elementary newcomer education. Figure is adapted with permission from Engeström’s (2014) triangle model from Learning by Expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research, by Y. Engeström, 2014, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (See Appendix B).

Moreover, the activity system is not rigid; it is dynamic because factors change throughout the school year. For example, many of the decisions about newcomers’ class schedules and ESOL support were made during the beginning of the year, but it was evident that the ESOL teachers and administrative team adapt to changes and present needs after the school year begins. Ana, Pamela, and Ray chose to alter the amount of instructional time third-grade newcomers received in their newcomer class due to
increases in newcomer enrollment. Also, mainstream teachers, such as Karla and Lucas, demonstrated they rearranged their instructional blocks during the year so newcomers’ needs could be better addressed. I argue the flexibility and changes that occur within the activity system is valuable. Although some of the past decisions made during the school year do not always provide newcomers with additional instructional time, the flexibility within the activity system is needed. Rigidity would cause additional challenges and frustrations, which would only negatively impact newcomers’ education.

The Strong Impact of Explicit Assessment Rules

The second conclusion of this study was explicit assessment rules strongly impact the activity system as a whole. Just as Menken (2006) described, assessment mandates greatly impact Esperanza Elementary’s teachers’ instructional practices, instructional time, and content objectives. Assessment rules impact what is taught because Emma, Harper, and Brooke shared they feel pressure to focus their instruction more on academic content, such as social studies and science, than on the four facets of language proficiency: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Likewise, Karla, Brooke, and Ana revealed they feel pressure to teach ELs who have to pass the state tests more often than newcomers who do not have to pass the state tests. This impacts how often the newcomers receive direct small group instruction. Furthermore, Harper shared she has to administer tests multiple times a year. Each time she administers a test to a group of students, Harper cannot provide the push-in ESOL support to upper-elementary newcomers in their mainstream classes. Based on Harper’s description of which tests she administers, I calculated that she spends at least 208 hours during one school year
administering tests. In other words, she spends at least 14% of each school year out of the classroom instead of engaging in quality instruction with newcomers and other ELs. This is a disservice to the ELs she serves.

Moreover, it is important to point out that none of Esperanza Elementary’s teachers described pressure related to the current ESSA legislation, which focuses more on increasing ELs’ English proficiency levels (ESSA, 2016). All challenges, frustrations, and pressures they shared had to do with Georgia Department of Education’s (2016) Milestones End of Grade content-based assessments. It does not appear there is not currently a sense of urgency at the school level related to ESSA’s new EL legislation requirements. The state assessment rules are a stronger force in impacting how mainstream and ESOL teachers educate newcomers than ESSA’s EL rules. Teachers are less pressured to ensure their newcomers and other ELs are exhibiting English language proficiency growth and feel more pressure to prepare all of their students, newcomers included, for state-administered standardized tests. It appears this is largely due to the state’s promotion requirements for upper-elementary students. However, since newcomers are deferred from taking English language arts content assessments due to being in the country less than one year, data in this study illustrated that sometimes newcomers’ literacy growth is not a primary focus in the classroom during their first calendar-year in the country. Both mainstream teachers and ESOL teachers have to make decisions about which ELs need to receive the most attention. Since there are not any accountability requirements for newcomers’ literacy growth in their first year, in a sense, the newcomers are overlooked and not provided with as much instruction because the
teachers feel pressure to focus more on the students who do have their literacy test scores connected with promotion. I propose this understanding about the impact of state’s promotion requirements and the pressure connected with content-assessments versus EL language proficiency assessments is a contribution to current literature. As time progresses and ESSA becomes more known and enforced, it will be interesting to see whether explicit rules about newcomers’ promotion are added and if ESSA’s EL mandates will become greater forces in Esperanza Elementary’s newcomer education activity system.

Teachers’ Research-Based Instruction Despite Challenges

The third conclusion is despite facing challenges related to voids in resources and professional learning, Esperanza Elementary teachers consistently use researched-based pedagogy for their newcomers’ education. Both observations and interview data corroborate this conclusion. The challenges mainstream teachers face are consistent with previous literature. Esperanza Elementary’s mainstream teachers do not feel prepared to teach newcomers (Coady & de Jong, 2011, Orosco & Klingner, 2010, Roy-Campbell, 2013) and do worry about newcomers’ progress because they do not have a framework or resources to guide their instruction (Farris, 2011). Lucas, Emma, and Brooke all expressed that they wish to have more formal training related to newcomers’ needs (Roy-Campbell, 2013) so that they could learn how to choose appropriate learning materials and assessments (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2001). Nonetheless, data revealed that the ESOL teachers’ and mainstream teachers’ lack of preparation and resources do not hinder them in providing research-based instruction to their newcomers. Esperanza Elementary
newcomers receive direct instruction (Crevecoeur et al., 2014; Cruz de Quiros et al., 2012; File & Adams, 2010; Solari & Gerber, 2008; Vaughn et al., 2006a) and frequently receive that instruction in effective small group homogeneous instructional groups (Calderon, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998; Denton et al., 2004; Geva & Farnia, 2012; Kamps et al., 2007; Vaughn et al., 2006a; Wanzek & Roberts, 2012). In these small groups, teachers facilitate conversations about academic content so that newcomers can develop both their English language proficiency and academic knowledge (Reznitskaya et al., 2001). It is fortunate that Esperanza Elementary educators regularly implement research-based instruction because a teacher’s instructional activity is the factor that can lead to “educational success or failure” (Tharp et al., 2000, p. 2). The teacher has the strongest influence on successful school learning (Hattie, 2009).

The only aspect of research-based instruction that did not consistently appear in interview data and observation data was pedagogy related to EL identity affirmation. Although teachers, such as Emma, Karla, and Ana, all shared they allow students to use their first languages (L1) in their classrooms, which is a beneficial instructional practice (Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Myers-Scotton & Ury, 1977; Somé-Guiébré, 2016), few teachers shared or showed evidence during observations of intentionally using instructional practices that affirm students’ identities. I cannot deduce that this does not occur at Esperanza Elementary due to my limited observations and interviews, but it does make me wonder if teachers are intentional about being linguistically and culturally responsive during instruction on a regular basis. Perhaps if teachers received more professional learning or had more opportunities to collaborate
regularly, conversations about and pedagogy related to EL identity affirmation would become more of a focus in daily instruction. This notion leads to the last conclusion: contradictions, which are illustrated in Figure 9, exist within the activity system and show transformation is needed.

Figure 9. Contradictions within Esperanza Elementary’s upper-elementary newcomer activity system. This figure illustrates the primary and secondary contradictions of Esperanza Elementary’s activity system for upper-elementary newcomer education. Figure is adapted with permission from Engeström’s (2014) triangle model from Learning by Expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research, by Y. Engeström, 2014, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (See Appendix B).
Contradictions Illustrate Transformation is Needed

The final, most significant, conclusion of the study is due to contradictions that exist within Esperanza Elementary’s activity system, there is a demand for transformation and expansive learning. Engeström (2009) said, “The task of activity theory is to recycle rubbish and turn it into diamonds” (p. 305). Since activity systems are not meant to be looked at as static and instead are meant to be responsive to changes when contradictions occur, it is crucial to that Esperanza Elementary leaders and educators address contradictions so that “an expansive transformation is accomplished” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). I argue there are three contradictions, portrayed in Figure 9, that can be addressed immediately to positively impact how educators support upper elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. These contradictions are the primary contradictions related to division of labor and tools and the secondary contradiction related to division of labor, collaboration, and tools.

Enrollment procedures. In terms of the primary contradictions, it is essential to address the primary contradiction related to division of labor. Multiple educators shared tensions related to the topic of how newcomers are enrolled at Esperanza Elementary. Only Ray mentioned there was an academic screening that took place before class placement; multiple teachers shared concerns about a lack of screening. Thus, the evidence shows there was a discrepancy between what the principal believes occurs with newcomers’ enrollment and what actually occurs. I recommend Esperanza Elementary brings together the administrative team, ESOL teachers, and registrars to develop a streamlined process for newcomers’ enrollment throughout the school year. It would be
beneficial to provide students with some sort of pre-screening prior to class placement and the student’s first day. The pre-screening could consist of a questionnaire about students’ previous educational experiences and a short academic screener related to foundational math and alphabetic concepts. This will allow ESOL teachers and assistant principals to have a better understanding when making decisions about class placement. It will also provide mainstream teachers with a bit more information about the student’s current level and previous educational history when he or she arrives at their classroom doors. Since the district office has an International Newcomer Center, Esperanza Elementary should consider reaching out to individuals at that center to receive pre-screening resources that then could be adapted for elementary ages.

Newcomer professional learning at Esperanza Elementary. The other primary contradictions and secondary contradictions that need to be addressed are strongly connected to one another within the activity system. The two primary contradictions related to categories within the tools component of the activity system are lack of resources and lack of professional learning. The secondary contradiction related to division of labor, collaboration, and tools focused on how the administrator-created rigid structure of the school’s current professional learning model is preventing upper-elementary teachers from engaging in collaborative professional learning related to newcomers’ education. Multiple educators, such as Brooke and Lucas, identified they wished to receive more newcomer-specific professional learning. This does not occur within their job-embedded grade-level collaborative teams because they are one of the only teachers on the grade levels who teach newcomers.
Thus, I propose upper-elementary teachers who work with newcomers must engage in professional learning related to newcomers’ needs. They also need time to collaborate on resources they use. In order for this to occur, it is crucial the administrative team reflect upon the rigidity of Esperanza Elementary’s current professional learning model. Instead of mandating professional learning time always occurs either in grade-level collaborative teams or vertical-learning content-specific teams, is there a way for Esperanza Elementary faculty across grade-levels to meet in flexible collaborative professional learning groups that center around a current need that they want support in? This would allow ESOL teachers and upper-elementary mainstream teachers to collaborate and learn together about how to best support newcomers in their classrooms. They could share resources and converse about current challenges they face. This collaborative relationship could even lead to creating opportunities for the teachers to observe each other in their classrooms because one of the most effective ways teachers can learn is through engaging in opportunities that work directly with ELs (Coady & de Jong, 2011).

I suggest a more flexible professional learning model would not just benefit the professional learning goals of teachers with newcomers; this type of collaborative community could positively impact the professional learning and collective efficacy (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011) of the staff as a whole. As a collective team, Esperanza Elementary can work together to diminish the contradictions within the activity system of upper-elementary newcomer education. Not only do disturbances weaken when people show determination (Engeström, 1999), but also a school’s
academic performance is higher when faculty members share positive collective efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1993).

Conclusion Review

To review, I drew several conclusions about the activity system of how educators at Esperanza Elementary support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers. I used data from interviews, document analysis, and observations to draw these conclusions and shared how these conclusions relate and add to previous literature. In short, the conclusion of this study are: (1) Esperanza Elementary’s activity system for upper-elementary newcomer education is multifaceted, interconnected, and not rigid, (2) explicit assessment rules strongly impact the activity system as a whole, (3) Esperanza Elementary teachers use researched-based instruction and desire the best for their newcomers’ education despite facing challenges related to voids in resources, collaboration, and professional learning, and (4) there is a need for transformation of the activity system of Esperanza Elementary’s upper-elementary newcomer education due to the contradictions that exist. These conclusions connect with the implications of the study, which will be discussed in the next section.

Implications

I will now address the implications of this research for practice. Activity theory “relies on establishing a bridge between theory and practice” (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009, p. 7). “For Engeström…theoretical developments require activist involvement in concrete human practices” (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009, p. 15). Therefore, it is crucial to consider how this activity theory research can connect to
practitioners’ daily actions. I will share implications for educators and administrators, local school districts, and education policy.

Implications for Educators and Administrators

This study demonstrates how a principal’s collective vision and a school’s inclusive culture do impact newcomers’ education. There is a sense of empowerment when administrative teams and teachers make instructional decisions about newcomer education together. Also, this study suggests educators can use effective research-based pedagogy with newcomers despite facing systemic challenges, pressure from explicit rules, and not being prepared. Nonetheless, one might be tempted to attribute the fact that teachers are using effective instruction to the argument that no additional professional learning is needed. Although teachers are giving their best and doing what they can, this study’s data pointed out that both administrators and educators desire that there are more professional learning and collaboration opportunities to better meet newcomers’ needs. They want professional learning and want to engage in collaborative professional learning communities that are related specifically to newcomers’ education. Therefore, administrators and instructional leaders must intentionally provide mainstream and ESOL teachers with professional learning and resources that specifically focus on the needs of upper-elementary newcomers.

In addition, this study provides enlightening information about how assessments impact the amount of instructional time newcomers receive. For example, when ESOL teachers read aloud tests to third-grade ELs, the ESOL teachers’ other scheduled classes do not receive instruction. Therefore, on days when there are standardized assessments,
other ELs, such as upper-elementary newcomers, do not receive the number of instructional minutes they are supposed to receive daily from an ESOL teacher. Administrators, ESOL teachers, and mainstream teachers need to collaboratively think about how ESOL teachers can instruct more and read aloud tests less. Perhaps, schools could investigate using technology tools, such as screen readers, to read aloud tests to ELs.

Furthermore, this study’s first conclusion suggests the importance of understanding the complexity of activity that occurs. All decisions educators and administrators make impact about newcomers’ education impact the activity system as a whole. Activity theory research “is less designed to dictate what one does than to provide information that agents, both teachers and students, can use in making informed decisions about what to do in the multiple and varied contexts in which they work” (Olson, 2004, p. 25). Since activity systems are multifaceted and dynamic, administrators and educators need to intentionally try to understand all the components that can be impacted when making decisions related to newcomer education.

Implications for Local School Districts

Although this study’s activity system analysis did not analyze what occurs at the district level, this study did point out important implications for local school districts to consider about upper-elementary newcomers’ education. The way newcomers are enrolled in elementary schools in the district needs to be examined. It would be beneficial for Esperanza Elementary’s school district to study other districts’ newcomer enrollment procedures and how they utilize International Newcomer Centers. Then,
perhaps the local school district can work with local elementary schools to provide pre-screening resources related to students’ previous educational experiences and foundational academic skills. I recommend districts look at how they can utilize technology to help with the initial language proficiency screening process at the elementary level. If local schools can learn more about students’ academic needs prior to the students’ first day at the school, I believe administrators and ESOL teachers will be able to make more informed decisions regarding newcomers’ grade and class placement. This will also allow mainstream teachers to receive more information about the newcomers before they enter their classrooms.

There needs to be more focus on newcomers specifically at the district level; Ray, Brooke, and Ana shared how they wish the district EL department would address newcomers’ education more. Brooke stated:

What does [the] county do to support them?...I heard on the radio we are probably the most diverse county in the entire country, and for us to know ahead of time that we’re going to be definitely getting newcomers into a lot of our schools, I feel like it's kind of a disservice not to provide something for those kids. Why are we not doing anything?...We have an ESOL department for the county...If you want them to be successful long-term, if you want them to graduate high school in your county and you want them to go to college and you want them to make the most that they can out of themselves, if you're really embracing them as students within your county, they deserve their own set of resources, I guess, or it would be nice to supply teachers with a set of resources that would truly help them prepare for the rest of their education.

It would be beneficial for the local school district’s EL department to consider how they can better provide both resources and professional learning that relate to newcomers’ education. Since this study illustrated that teachers are using their own time to create resources that meet both the academic and linguistic needs of their newcomers, local
school districts should consider creating an electronic database where upper-elementary newcomer teachers can share their self-created modified resources. Both ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers of newcomers throughout the district would then be able to have access to these resources.

In terms of professional learning, districts need to create professional learning opportunities that relate to teaching newcomers specifically. Local district leaders should also consider learning about what kind of professional learning teachers who are ESOL certified still need. Moreover, it is not just ESOL teachers that need opportunities to attend professional learning related to newcomer education; mainstream teachers and administrators also need them. As an alternative to face-to-face professional learning sessions, the local school district could consider show they could utilize technology to transmit this information. For example, they could use a social media platform, such as Twitter, to share resources, short instructional videos, and relevant instructional materials and methods for teachers of newcomers.

Implications for Educational Policy

The contradiction related to explicit assessment rules sheds light on the importance of revisiting explicit educational policy. This study problematizes how assessment policies are negatively impacting upper-elementary newcomers’ education. The amount of direct small-group instructional time newcomers receive on a daily basis and the content that is taught to newcomers could be different if assessment pressures were not as pervasive throughout Georgia third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade classrooms. Thus, it is important to consider how to improve current educational policy related to EL
assessment, the amount of standardized testing for all upper-elementary students, and accountability policies for newcomers’ education. Since legislators will rarely hear upper-elementary newcomers’ voices directly, educators and administrators must be the advocates for appropriate educational policy related to newcomer education.

Limitations

As with all research, I acknowledge that there are several limitations of this study. I will indicate various limitations of this study in this section, although I admit there may be other limitations that I do not specifically address.

First and foremost, I am aware there is potential for researcher bias. Since this study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, I recognize my interpretations strongly guide and influence the results of this study. I also am aware that my personal experience with teaching newcomers and my connection with the district where the case study took place may have influenced my interpretations. To minimize my personal bias, I followed the research process and followed all dependability and credibility safeguards I noted in Chapter 3. When analyzing and presenting my study’s results, I intentionally relied solely on the interview data, document data, and observation data I gathered. I did everything I could to share the case study research through the lens of my participants’ beliefs and experiences, not my own personal beliefs and experiences.

Moreover, I recognize that I did not explore the experiences of how Esperanza Elementary’s newcomer education activity system personally impacted two important stakeholders at Esperanza Elementary: newcomers and their parents. Their voices would have been a valuable addition to this study. Also, since this is a single case study, it is
not possible to generalize these results to other populations. In some scholars’ eyes, the qualitative nature of this study and absence of empirical data may be pointed as limitations of this study.

Furthermore, I conducted limited observations and interviewed a relatively small sample of individuals at Esperanza Elementary that work with upper-elementary newcomers. Given the scope of this dissertation, there was limited opportunity and time to observe extensively and explore the experiences and perspectives of all educators involved in educating upper-elementary newcomers at Esperanza Elementary. It would have been beneficial to do this to gain a deeper understanding of the activity system as a whole. This leads to recommendations I have for future research.

Recommendations for Further Research

After this study, I am left with several questions related to future research. First, I wonder if other administrators, mainstream educators, and ESOL educators who work with upper-elementary newcomers at Esperanza Elementary would share comparable results related to collaboration, division of labor, rules, and tools. I also question if other elementary schools within the district have similar activity systems. Therefore, it would be insightful to conduct a similar study that has the same research questions but either has a greater number of participants or takes place at a different research site to see if results to the research questions would produce comparable results. It would also be interesting to either replicate the study in a middle school or high school environment or at the local school district level to cast a wider net.
Second, further research could more deeply explore the various components of Esperanza Elementary’s activity system. Gay and Hembrooke (2004) warned an activity system should not be solely looked at as isolated parts even though it helps with identifying and defining each factor, so it would be insightful to conduct other qualitative studies that use other qualitative methodologies to gain a better understanding of a specific component of the activity system. For example, a narrative study that sheds more light about the intricacies of ESOL teachers’ and mainstream teachers’ collaborative relationships could be meaningful to other educators.

Third, it would be worthwhile to conduct additional research that focuses more on Engeström (2009) third-generation of activity research, which primarily focuses on how multiple activity systems that share an object interact. This could shed additional light on quaternary conditions that exist within the site. Engeström (2009) stated,

Third-generation activity theory expands the analysis both up and down, outward and inward. Moving up and outward, it tackles multiple interconnected activity systems with their partially shared and often fragmented objects. Moving down and inward, it tackles issues of subjectivity, experiencing, personal sense, emotion, embodiment, identity, and moral commitment” (p. 308).

To engage in this deeper analysis, one activity system can be separated into a network of several detailed activity systems (Boer et al., 2002). Future research could compare multiple activity systems that exist within Esperanza Elementary’s upper-elementary newcomer education activity system. For example, how does the activity system of Lucas, a first-year mainstream teacher, educating upper-elementary newcomers compare and contrast to Karla’s, an educator with sixteen years of experience? How does the activity system of Ana, who had firsthand experience of being a newcomer in the United
States, compare and contrast to Harper’s, who was born and raised in the United States? Analysis of these questions could shed light onto additional contradictions, which could lead to participants within the activity system addressing the contradictions and positively transforming Esperanza Elementary’s upper-elementary newcomer activity system.

Fourth, in this study, it was clear that experienced administrators, mainstream teachers, and ESOL teachers all had mixed feelings about whether newcomers should receive instruction in pull-out or push-in settings. I argue it is critical to collect both quantitative and qualitative data related to the efficacy of upper-elementary newcomers’ instructional settings. Research needs to specifically look at how various newcomers’ instructional settings impact upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. This will allow future scholarly work to intricately describe an ideal instructional model for upper-elementary newcomers.

Last, it could also be beneficial to analyze upper-elementary newcomers’ education using a different theoretical lens. I recommend research on this topic could also be grounded in complexity theory. According to Byrne (1998), complexity theory gives a framework to understand how complex systems operate. Complex systems have various connections and relationships that need to be understood holistically. I am curious how the results of a study rooted in complexity theory would compare to this study’s results.

Review of Chapter

To review, I began this chapter by reviewing the purpose of this research study and listing each research question. All research questions focused on understanding how
a school supports the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers. I then discussed the conclusions that can be drawn from this study’s data analysis. I concluded that (1) Esperanza Elementary’s activity system is multifaceted and interconnected, (2) explicit rules about assessment strongly impact the activity system, (3) Esperanza Elementary’s educators use research-based pedagogy and desire the best for their newcomers despite facing challenges, and (4) there is a need for transformation within the activity system due to the primary and secondary contradictions that exist.

After sharing the conclusions, I argued there are two contradictions that Esperanza Elementary’s educators should prioritize and address now to transform the activity system. First, it would be beneficial if educators work together to improve the enrollment process of all newcomers at Esperanza Elementary. A streamlined process that incorporates pre-screening prior to class placement can provide administrators, mainstream teachers, and ESOL teachers with valuable information that can help them make informed decisions. Second, the administrative team at Esperanza Elementary needs to reflect upon the rigidity of the school’s current professional learning model and consider allowing flexible grouping instead of only grade-level or content-specific teams. This will allow teachers who have newcomers to collaborate and learn how to better support their students.

Finally, at the end of the chapter, I addressed this research has many implications. This study recognizes how administrative teams and educators can impact newcomers’ education and they desire to have more effective professional learning and collaborative communities so they can further enhance newcomers’ English language proficiency
growth. I also shared how this study has implications for local school districts and educational policy. To finish, I acknowledged there are several limitations of this study and I have recommendations for further research.

The Finish Line

In this study, I explored the activity system of how educators at an elementary school support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. At the end of this study, it is important to reiterate that “the concept of activity is poorly rendered by the English word” (Ryle, 1999, p. 413). Instead, Ryle (1999) shared, “In activity theory the implication is high-level, motivated thinking, doing and being of an individual in a given social context” (p. 413). I am encouraged that Ray, Libby, Pamela, Karla, Emma, Lucas, Brooke, Harper, and Ana spoke openly and honestly to me about their experiences of teaching newcomers at Esperanza Elementary. Despite challenges, each of them truly exhibited the “high-level, motivated thinking, doing and being” that Ryle referred to. As I listened to them and shared about how they collectively work to impact newcomers’ education at Esperanza Elementary, I could connect some of their teaching experiences to my teaching experiences. More importantly, I am inspired by each educator’s endurance in supporting upper-elementary newcomers. They never stop trying to support newcomers, students who must run to catch up academically, linguistically, and socially.

In a sense, each weekday educators throughout the United States are on the sidelines supporting newcomers run a long race. Even though the upper-elementary newcomers arrive late to the race and begin behind their English-speaking peers, there are
educators who never stop running alongside the race’s course supporting them. The educators’ constant encouragement pushes these students to believe they are capable and have something to show the world. As the runners run, the educators work collaboratively to delegate and share responsibilities with others to ensure the course is safe and supportive. They give the runners tools so they can successfully make it to the next mile marker without thirst, fatigue, or confusion. The educators follow explicit race guidelines and create their own implicit norms to ensure equity exists and the runners’ wellbeing remains a priority. The educators themselves might even be ill-equipped and not prepared to keep following the course, but they do not stop trying. Even when the race pauses at the end of the day, the educators sometimes leave feeling like they did not do enough and go home wishing they could do more to support these runners. Just as the runners need support, the supporters also need support. Some may have the opportunity to get that support from race leaders, mentors, or their own self-initiated learning, but there could always be more provided. Nonetheless, despite feeling sometimes fatigued and inept, the activity does not stop. The educators always show back up the next day on the sidelines ready to give the runners whatever they need so they can get closer to the finish line.

It is my hope that educators and all individuals who read this understand why it is critical and how it is possible to support upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth. It is possible for newcomers to reach the finish line successfully. To do that, we all need to have the endurance and embrace what is set before us.
REFERENCES


Cowdrick, K. E. (2016). “It's challenging for us, but for them it's probably even more challenging.” - The experiences of elementary educators teaching immigrant newcomers. Unpublished manuscript.


APPENDIX A

MERCER UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL
Thursday, April 13, 2017

Ms. Kara Cowdrick
Mercer University
Tift College of Education - Atlanta
3001 Mercer University Dr
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: A school’s activity system of supporting upper-elementary newcomers’ English language proficiency growth (H1703094)

Dear Ms. Cowdrick:

On behalf of Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 13-Apr-2017 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 55 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under category[ies] 5, 7 per 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Your application was approved for one year of study on . The protocol expires on . If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:
This study aims to describe how educators at an elementary school support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English language newcomers. Use of observations, interviews, and audio recordings.

NOTE: Please report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and ALL accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Ava Chambless-Richardson, Ph.D., CPR, CIM.  
Associate Director of Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)  
Member  
Institutional Review Board

“Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization’s (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice.”
APPENDIX B

PERMISSION TO REPRINT ACTIVITY THEORY TRIANGLE
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APPENDIX C

EMAIL SENT TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS
Hi _____,

I am currently a Curriculum and Instruction Ph.D. candidate at Mercer University’s Atlanta Campus. I am seeking educators who teach 3rd, 4th, and or 5th grade English learners to participate in my study. Participants will allow me to interview them at least 2 times and observe them teaching at least 1 time. The interviews should not take more than 1 to 2 hours of your time in a two-month period. Your name and identity will be kept confidential throughout the research study process.

Would you be willing to speak to me regarding your experiences of teaching English learners, particularly newcomer students?

I look forward to hearing from you!

Respectfully,

Kara Cowdrick
Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators
Kara Cowdrick, M.Ed, B.A., Doctoral student, Mercer University - Tift College of Education, Curriculum and Instruction
3001 Mercer University Drive, Atlanta, GA, 30341, 404-839-1589, kara.e.cowdrick@live.mercer.edu

3001 Mercer University Drive, Atlanta, GA, 30341, 678-547-6390, bush_lj@mercer.edu

Purpose of the Research
This research study is designed to describe how educators at an elementary school support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary English learner newcomers.

The data from this research will be used in a dissertation study that describes how an elementary school can effectively support the English language proficiency needs of upper-elementary newcomers.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will allow the principal investigator to observe your classroom and interview you for no more four audio-recorded semi-structured interviews.

Your participation will take approximately one hour, between two to four times in a three-month period.

Potential Risks or Discomforts
The risks associated with this study are minimal as the questions will be limited to discussing your experiences of teaching and interacting with upper-elementary English language newcomers. The principal investigator will do everything in her power to honor your dignity and privacy and protect your physical, social, and psychological welfare.

You may stop participating in this study at any time.

Potential Benefits of the Research
There are no guaranteed benefits of this study. However, participation in this study may benefit you personally because it will offer you the opportunity to reflect on your teaching experience.

Overall, this study will help practitioners in the field of education better understand how to support the English language proficiency growth of upper-elementary newcomers.

Confidentiality and Data Storage
Your name and identity will be kept confidential throughout the research study process. During your interview and observations, the principal investigator will take anecdotal notes and audio-record the interview using a digital voice recorder. Then, the audio-recorded interview data will be transcribed using audio-transcription recording software.

Merger Approval Date: 04/13/2017
Protocol Expiration Date: 04/12/2018

Rev. January 2017
written data and forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Transcribed data from interviews will be stored on a
computer that is password protected. The only individuals who will have access to the raw data are Kara Cowdrick and
Dr. Lucy Bush, my faculty advisor. All data collected from your interview will be stored in the office of Dr. Lucy Bush
for three years after the completion of the study. All raw data, including the data from the personal laptop, written
anecdotal notes, audio files of the interviews, and the transcription data, will be destroyed following the three-year
minimum requirement for keeping raw data.

**Participation and Withdrawal**
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a participant, you may refuse to participate at any time. To
withdraw from the study please contact Kara Cowdrick (kara.e.cowdrick@live.mercer.edu) or Dr. Lucy Bush
(bush_lj@mercer.edu).

**Questions about the Research**
If you have any questions about the research, please speak with Kara Cowdrick (kara.e.cowdrick@live.mercer.edu) or Dr.
Lucy Bush (bush_lj@mercer.edu).

**Audio Taping**
Audio-recorded interviews will be used for analysis. The audio files of the interviews will be stored in a locked file
cabinet. All audio-recorded files will be labeled using pseudonyms so they cannot be linked to your identity.
Your signature on this form grants Kara Cowdrick permission to record you while you participate in the above-referenced
study. She will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than what is stated in this consent form without receiving
your written permission.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University’s IRB. If you believe there is any infringement upon
your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Chair, at (678) 301-4101.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to your satisfaction. Your signature
below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this research study.

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APPENDIX E

INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS
Initial Interview Protocols

**Principal**

1. Share with me some background about teacher points and how you determine how many ESOL teachers you can hire.

2. What do you look for in ESOL teacher hires?

3. When you observe and assess teachers who have ELs in their classrooms, what do you look for?

4. Can you describe to me how decisions related to ESOL push-in and pull-out scheduling are made?

5. Share with me how teachers at your school receive professional learning.

6. How do your school’s educators enhance their professional learning about teaching ELs and newcomers?

7. Describe how newcomers are placed into 3rd, 4th, 5th grade classrooms at your school.

8. Describe one or two memorable experiences you have had with a newcomer.

9. What is some advice would you give new teachers who are teaching newcomers?

10. Your challenge as an administrator is to reflect and think toward the future. I want you to think about the future of EL and newcomer education at your school. Tell me about what you hope to see in the future.

11. I am speaking with you, APs, multiple 3rd-5th classroom teachers, and multiple ESOL teachers. Do you think there is anyone else I should speak who could provide insight about how your school supports newcomers’ growth?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add or share that you have not had the opportunity to speak about?

**Assistant Principal**

1. Please tell me about how your school chooses to educate newcomers in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades.

2. Can you describe to me how decisions related to ESOL staffing and scheduling are made?
3. Describe how newcomers are placed into 3rd, 4th, 5th grade classrooms at your school.

4. Describe one or two memorable experiences you have had with a newcomer.

5. Tell me some the standardized tests newcomers must take and whether these are tied to student promotion.

6. How do your school’s educators enhance their professional learning about teaching ELs and newcomers?

7. What is some advice would you give new teachers who are teaching ELLs?

8. Your challenge as an administrator is to reflect and think toward the future. I want you to think about the future of EL and newcomer education at your school. Tell me about what you hope to see in the future.

9. Is there anything else you would like to add or share that you have not had the opportunity to speak about?

Mainstream Teacher

1. What kind of experience have you had with teaching newcomer students?

2. Describe one or two memorable experiences you have had with a newcomer.

3. What kinds of things do you do in your classroom that you think helps your newcomers learn more English?

4. How did you learn to partake in those actions and use those strategies in your classroom?

5. What kinds of things does your school do that helps your newcomers learn more English?

6. How do other people in your building impact your newcomers’ English growth?

7. Is there anything else you would like to add or share that you have not had the opportunity to speak about?
ESOL Teacher

1. What kind of experience have you had with teaching newcomer students?

2. Describe one or two memorable experiences you have with a newcomer.

3. Describe what it is like to teach newcomers in mainstream classrooms during your push-in segments.

4. What kinds of things do you do that helps your newcomers learn more English?

5. How did you learn to partake in those actions and use those strategies when teaching newcomers?

6. What kinds of things does your school do that helps newcomers learn more English?

7. How do other people in your building impact newcomers’ English growth?

8. Is there anything else you would like to add or share that you have not had the opportunity to speak about?
APPENDIX F

MEMBER CHECK LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS
Hi, ______,

I want to share with you paragraphs I am including in my dissertation. The paragraphs in the attached document describe what you shared with me during our interviews and what I observed during our time together. I am sharing this for two reasons. First, I want to verify I shared truthful information. Since I am so grateful you openly invited me into your classroom and shared your free-time with me, I want to give you the opportunity to read everything over for clarity and validity. Please feel free to share with me any feedback you have regarding the descriptions of your interviews and observations.

Second, I desire to share these descriptions with you because I want to assure you that I protected your identity and your students’ identities. For example, I used pseudonyms for the school name and all the students you spoke about. If you feel like there are any other identifiers written in the attached document that should be slightly changed or omitted, please let me know.

Please feel free to call me at (404-xxx-xxxx) or email me at (________) if you have any questions or would like to discuss this more. I appreciate all your input.

With gratitude,

Kara Cowdrick
### NVivo Codes & Frequencies

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