High Achieving English Language Learners: The Schooling Experiences of Former Ell Students Enrolled in Advanced High School Courses

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HIGH ACHIEVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS:
THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES OF FORMER ELL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN
ADVANCED HIGH SCHOOL COURSES

A Dissertation

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Educational Doctorate

By
Anthony Vladu
September 2016
HIGH ACHIEVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS:
THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES OF FORMER ELL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN
ADVANCED HIGH SCHOOL COURSES

By

ANTHONY VLADU

__________________________

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# Table of Contents

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... x

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... xi

List of Tables ....................................................................................................................... xii

List of Figures ..................................................................................................................... xiii

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. xiv

Chapter 1: Introduction ...................................................................................................... 2

Background ......................................................................................................................... 2

Rationale .............................................................................................................................. 6

The Work of Teachers Matters ......................................................................................... 7

Teacher Effects .................................................................................................................. 8

Teacher Dispositions and Beliefs ..................................................................................... 9

English Language Learner Instructional Strategies ....................................................... 10

Programs Matter Too ...................................................................................................... 10

The Acculturation Factor ................................................................................................. 11

Rationale Summary ......................................................................................................... 12

Statement of the Purpose ................................................................................................ 14

Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 15

Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 16

Definition of Key Terms .................................................................................................. 17

Chapter 2: Review of Literature ....................................................................................... 21

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 21
Literature Review Purpose ................................................................. 23
Process Overview ............................................................................ 23
Search Terms and Keywords ............................................................ 24
History of English Language Learners in America ............................. 25
  Permissive Period 1642-1856 .......................................................... 26
  Conflicting Period 1856-1917 ......................................................... 28
  Maturation Period 1917-1968 ......................................................... 30
  Expansion and Reform 1968-2002 .................................................. 31
  Restrictive Period 2002-2015 ......................................................... 35
Minority Achievement and Former ELL's ........................................... 38
  The Other ...................................................................................... 40
Introduction of Themes ..................................................................... 45
  Teacher Factors ............................................................................. 45
  Positive Learning Environment .................................................... 46
  Learner Characteristics ................................................................ 47
Why Do Teachers Matter to ELL Achievement? ............................... 49
  Teacher Expectations .................................................................... 50
  Teacher Student Relationships ..................................................... 54
  Teacher Clarity ............................................................................. 59
  Academic Vocabulary ................................................................... 62
Why Does A Supportive Learning Environment Matter to ELL Achievement.................................................................................. 67
  Cultural Capital ............................................................................ 68
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELL Tracking</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner Characteristics That Matter to ELL Achievement</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingualism</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-Setting</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Different Worlds</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3: Method</strong></td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paradigm</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Theory</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling and Participant Selection</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection process</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Generation and Collection</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interviews</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observations</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Interviews</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Delimitations</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Researcher</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Demographic Information

Introduction of Findings

Findings for Research Question 1

Teacher-student relationships

Teacher Expectations

Teacher Clarity

Academic Support Networks

Course Selection Coaching

Findings for Research Question 2

Success Expectancy

Student-School Engagement

Early Family Support

Findings for Research Question 3

School-Family Engagement

English Language Development Threshold

Tracking

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction
Summary of Findings

Summary for Research Question 1

Summary for Research Question 2

Summary for Research Question 3

Discussion

Teacher Factors

Expectations

Relationships

Instructional Clarity

Vocabulary Instruction

School Factors

Course Selection Coaching

Academic Support Networks

Tracking

External Factors

Success Expectancy

Extracurricular Involvement

Family Engagement

Policy and Leadership Recommendations

Grading

Athletic Eligibility

Teacher Standards for ELL Instruction
Appendix E: Student Interview Protocol #1.........................................................243
Appendix F: Student Interview Protocol #2.......................................................245
Appendix G: Classroom Observation Form.......................................................246
Appendix H: Teacher Interview Protocol.........................................................248
Footnotes........................................................................................................250
References......................................................................................................251
Curriculum Vitae..............................................................................................283
Dedication

God
Country
Family
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List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Data Analysis Procedures.................................114
Table 2. Research Questions and Data Collection Alignment..................128
Table 3. Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions..............129
Table 4. Developed Thematic Categories...........................................134
Table 5. Shared Schooling Experiences.............................................136
Table 6. Students Describe Memorable Teachers Frequency Table.............137
Table 7. Quality Teaching................................................................139
Table 8. Classroom Observation of Student Engagement..........................143
Table 9. Low-Yield Indicators..........................................................145
Table 10. Participant Self-Description...............................................149
Table 11. Success Expectancy Frequency.........................................153
Table 12. Word Frequency Table Summary......................................154
Table 13. Participation in Sports, Clubs, and Activities..........................157
Table 14. Sources of Learning English.............................................164
Table 15. Literature Review and Findings Alignment Table.......................180
List of Figures

Figure 1. Implications for Practice Schema.....................................................204

Figure 2. Success Formula for ELL Achievement.................................................230
Abstract

With immigration at record levels, public schools are educating an increasing number of English Language Learners who are less academically successful. There is a dearth of research on academically successful former ELL students. The purpose of this study was to identify the shared schooling experiences, shared success factors, and shared inhibiting factors of former ELL students enrolled in AP and IB coursework at the high school level. This phenomenological study used structured student and teacher interviews as well as classroom observations for the generation and collection of data. Seven students participated in this study. This study found that former ELL students experienced positive teacher-student relationships, high expectations, teacher clarity, academic support networks, and course selection coaching at the middle school level. Participants also shared success factors to include high levels of success expectancy, school engagement, and early family support. Student inhibiting factors were related to low levels of school-family engagement at the high school level, course tracking, and threshold English language development. Student academic networks, explicit vocabulary instruction, and participation in extracurricular activities increased the acculturation of ELL students thus enabled them to access the college prep curriculum. This study found that teacher practice and school programs provided ELL and former ELL students with more positive academic trajectories.
HIGH ACHIEVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS:
THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES OF FORMER ELL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN
ADVANCED HIGH SCHOOL COURSES
Chapter 1

Introduction

Immigration flowed toward America in a series of continuous waves. Every new migration gathered force, built momentum, reached a crest, and then merged imperceptibly into a great tide of people already on our shores. The name “America” was given to this continent by a German mapmaker, Martin Waldseemuller, to honor an Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci. The three ships, which discovered America sailed under a Spanish flag, were commanded by an Italian sea captain, and included in their crews an Englishman, an Irishman, a Jew, and a Negro. (Kennedy, 1964, p. 10)

Background

When it comes to immigration, the more things change the more they stay the same. The current immigration debate is hardly new. From the Know Nothing Party to Chinese Exclusion Act, the current debates on immigration policy and the tension between those that are here and those that are still coming is a continuous reminder of this nation’s history. The story of America is the story of immigration. Waves of English, Dutch, Irish-Scott, German, Chinese, Slavs, Greeks, Latin American, East Asian, South Asian, Africans, Arabs, Persians, and people from Central Asia, have
arrived on these shores not only to escape oppression and poverty, but also to take part in the opportunities that America historically offered to immigrants. Although European immigration has continued on and off since the first permanent settlement at Jamestown in 1607, the proportion of immigrants in the United States continues to grow to unprecedented numbers. As of 2015, the percentage of first generation immigrants is at 15% of the total U.S. population (Pew, 2013. As a reference point, the percentage of immigrants today rivals the highest record established at the height of the immigration boom in 1900 (Keigler & Camarota, 2015).

While America has received almost continuous tides of new comers, it is important to recognize that attitudes over immigration have varied between welcoming them with open arms to building fences and forced deportations. Yet from building America’s railroads, working in steel mills, building of America’s skyscrapers, and the latest inventions from the Silicon Valley, immigrants have and continue to make significant contributions to this country. In 2015, approximately one in seven Americans was a foreign-born immigrant, yet in 2013, four out of nine American Nobel Prize winners were also foreign-born immigrants (Grenier, 2013). In short, immigrants help make America great.

To many immigrants, education is part and parcel of the American dream. As the number and the percentage of immigrants have risen over the past three decades, so has their educational attainment (Pew, 2015). Educational attainment is important for all children. However, it is particularly important for immigrant children who come to this nation with few if any relations, resources, or networks. Among its key purposes,
American schools teach the norms, values, and attributes needed to make contributions to each community and to the nation as a whole. For the majority of immigrants, pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (PK-12) public education plays a critical role to their acculturation to American life. Additionally, in the United States, educational attainment is directly related to income. The difference between graduating from high school and earning a bachelor’s degree can be as much as $36,000 per year (U.S. Census, 2015). Equally important is that tax-paying citizens contribute to the well being of this nation. For many, the difference between earning the high school diploma is the difference between living a life of poverty and living the American dream. Further, having an informed citizenry, whether born here or elsewhere, is in the best interest of the United States. Public schools play a major part in the education and social development of informed citizens that possess the skills and commitment to participate in this great democracy.

The majority of school-age immigrant children arrive in this country with less schooling than their American peers. Once on our shores and in our communities, public schools are required to educate all students, regardless of immigration status (Plyler v. Doe, 1982). Moreover, current policy holds schools accountable on an annual basis for the achievement of students classified as English Language Learners (ELL) by establishing Annual Measurable Objectives (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). It is no secret that immigrant students graduate at much lower rates, are more likely to drop out of school, and achieve at lower rates than their native English speaking peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). Over the past 20 years hundreds of studies have been
conducted to address the achievement gap between immigrant students and their American peers. The overwhelming majority of these studies have focused on minimum achievement standards such as passing End of Course (EOC) exams, grade-level reading and writing achievement, and high school graduation, yet these studies fail to examine the characteristics of high achieving immigrant students after they exited English language programs. Consequently, there is a great need for studies that focus on successful ELL and former ELL students.

High performing former ELL students offer a perspective that is rarely explored. The focus on standardized test scores, school accreditation, Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO’s), subgroup performance, and mandated reporting of ELL performance has led to a wealth of research on instructional strategies and the variables that increase achievement on these metrics. However, once ELL students are mainstreamed, graduate, or drop out, before the passing of the Every Student Succeed Act (2015), schools were only required to monitor their status for one year.

Successful former ELL students that are enrolled in advanced courses may provide valuable insight into what it takes to make a successful transition into the American public schools. By the time ELL students are mainstreamed, they have navigated many barriers. After arriving to this country, or having spoken another language in the home, ELL students enter a world that is unfamiliar in ways that are unimaginable to their American born peers as well as their teachers. While their peers receive instruction that is readily accessible, ELL students must acquire the language skills as well as the cultural context needed to fully master learning objectives, while
attempting to keep up their heads above the water. Depending on their level of proficiency, ELL students sit in classes having little understanding of what is being said, written, or taught, yet are responsible for mastering the same intended learning outcomes as well as completing the work required by all students. And though ELL students incrementally understand the definition and meaning of words, the nuances and the cultural context clues needed to solve, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate schoolwork, are often missing.

ELL students are required to take language proficiency tests on an annual basis to master the six levels needed to reach full language proficiency. Even more important is the acculturation that ELL students must often navigate alone. Cultural practices, beliefs, and norms must often be left at the door of the school building in lieu of American public school culture, norms, practices, and beliefs. Throughout this process, ELL students are little understood by their peers, teachers, or even their parents. Moreover, these students are daily builders of bridges that span differences between the school and the home. When students are able to navigate through these barriers and are academically successful, there is a lot to learn. Most importantly, when students exit ELL programs and are enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level, their peers, their teachers, and educational researchers have the responsibility to learn from their experiences. This study attempts to do just that.

**Rationale**

The rationale of any study answers why the topic is important to the researchers, practitioners, or to the field itself. Teachers matter. The recent work of Hattie (2009),
reveals that teachers are the most important factor to the achievement of all students. The work of Hattie (2009), has done a lot to demystify the factors that impact student achievement. However, the same cannot be said for ELL students. At the national level, teachers have reported that they are untrained and unprepared to meet the needs of ELL students (National Educational Association, 2011). In order to better serve the academic needs of ELL students, knowing what works is the first step in addressing the gap that currently exists. There has been a tremendous focus on meeting minimum achievement standards in the United States since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001. However, despite the increasing numbers of ELL students, the achievement gap continues to widen (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Researchers, teachers, and the educational community have as much, or more to learn from high achieving ELL students as their numbers increase in U.S. public schools. When students do well, it is imperative to find out why and what teachers, schools, and districts can do to replicate their success.

The work of teachers matters. Teachers are not the only factor that impact student achievement. However, they represent the largest factor that makes a difference in the trajectories of student learning, educational attainment, and for that matter success in life. According to Hattie (2003), factors that impact student learning are fourfold: (a) student related, (b) teacher related, (c) home related, and (d) school related. The ability students bring to the table is also critically important. Regardless of where the child comes from, the language he or she speaks, the parents they have, or the financial resources available, the ability the student brings to the table accounts for the largest
factors related to achievement (Hattie, 2003). With all factors being equal, teachers still have one of the largest impact on achievement for all students. Stronge and Tucker (2005) found that student achievement on certain measures can vary by as much as 50 percentage points between effective and ineffective teachers, even when accounting for student ability and other factors related to learning. Moreover, effective teachers enhance student learning for up to three years afterward, while the effect of ineffective teachers negatively impacts student learning for years to come (Stronge & Tucker, 2005).

Children do not choose their parents, the country they are born in, where they live, or the ability they have. Great teachers improve the outcomes of all students. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the teacher factor remains one of the most studied phenomena in educational research.

**Teacher effects.** The language a child speaks is not related to their intellectual ability, or the potential they have. Language and culture are intricately linked. Once students learn the language, there is no reason why they cannot achieve at levels similar to their peers who have been here longer. Once one gets past mechanics and strategies, learning English is no different from learning Spanish, Arabic, Swahili, or Chinese. Math and sciences are languages for understanding the world. Arguably, learning English is not particularly different from learning mathematics or science for that matter (Kenny, Hancewicz, Heuer, Metsisto, & Tuttle, 2005). Whether learning the order of operations or the order words are arranged in a sentence, the process is quite similar. Similarly, whether learning the characteristics, vocabulary of geometric figures, or the critical components of the five-paragraph persuasive essay, the premise of learning is
relatively similar. In this context teachers matter as much to English Language Learners as to any other students or the content area they teach. So important is the impact of teachers on the achievement of all students that a recent study involving 2.5 million students found that students assigned to high achieving teachers are more likely to attend college, earn higher salaries, live in higher SES neighborhoods, and save more for retirement (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011). In the same study, replacing a low performing teacher with an average teacher would increase the present value of a student’s lifetime income by more than $250,000 (Chetty et al., 2011). This study did not examine the value added benefit of a high quality education as it relates to the quality of life and the generational impact of educational attainment.

**Teacher dispositions and beliefs.** Effective teachers offer a lot more to students than just instructional strategies. Although focusing on specific strategies has the potential to narrow what works and what does not, effective teachers offer a lot more. Effective teachers are positive and have an optimistic view of their students. Effective teachers build strong relationships with students and their families. Good teachers are able to see the potential in all students and have high expectations while providing them with support. Effective teachers treat students fairly, but differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all children. Effective teachers get to know their students, their individual differences, the way they learn, and take an interest in their social development in addition to helping them achieve at higher levels. Effective teachers are coaches of students and provide varied levels of motivation and the strategic interactions to bring out the best in their students. Effective teachers know whether students had a bad day before
coming to class and make the best use of available resources. Effective teachers know how to spot the physical needs of children and provide assistance. From offering a breakfast bar to the child that did not eat, to referring students to nurses or school counselors, effective teachers know that they must meet the physical needs of children before they are able to learn. Effective teachers use humor in the classroom and are likable to their students and the parents they serve. Studies that focus on instructional strategies only partially capture the effect of teachers on student learning.

**ELL instructional strategies.** The implementation of specific instructional strategies have shown to have an effect on student learning as Hattie’s (2009) meta-analyses has demonstrated. When it comes to ELL’s, though the research is more limited, some studies show a relationship between student learning and specific instructional strategies. However, ELL students require interventions that are beyond just good teaching and learning (Roessingh, 2004). One such meta-analysis shows that vocabulary and literacy intervention programs, when implemented with fidelity, have a significantly positive impact on student achievement (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, & Ungerleider, 2010). This study also found that SES status among ELL students was a significant factor to student achievement, a parallel finding that holds true for all students (Adesope et al., 2010).

**Programs matter too.** While teachers matter, programs matter as well. Teachers account for as much as 30% of the variability to student achievement; however other school factors and the quality of leadership account for approximately 20% of the variability to student learning (Hattie, 2003; Hattie, 2009). Teachers matter most to
student achievement, however their efforts do not take place in isolation of programs and the school context. Program characteristics are an essential component of English Language Learner’s success. As the number of English Language Learners is increasing, school districts are responding by forming specific sites to house ELL programs. Single site programs help districts concentrate resources and provide services more effectively. As such, there are some program characteristics that are related to ELL student achievement. Programs that provide teachers the opportunity to collaborate, have strong focus on vocabulary development, provide robust administrator support, and those that actively advocate for ELL children have been associated with higher achievement and with more positive outcomes (Roessingh, 2004). The same meta-analysis found that while the inclusion of ELL students is necessary to improve student achievement, it does not go far enough (Roessingh, 2004).

The acculturation factor. English Language Learners that are enrolled in advance coursework at the high school level succeed despite partial acculturation in their new home country. How these students compensate for this lack of cultural context in order to be academically successful may provide valuable insight for other researchers, teachers, and students. Though ELL students meet the criteria to exit language programs and are proficient in English in order to access the curriculum, they continue to learn American culture for the rest of their lives. It takes 3-5 years to reach English language academic proficiency, however it may take as much as 1.5 generations to be fully acculturated (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboagna & Szapocznik, 2013). All learning is contextual and acculturation to the dominant culture is needed for
maximizing the academic potential of students. When students test out of ELL programs and are mainstreamed for being academically successful, they often do so in one single PK-12 context. Too often what it takes to be successful in one context does not translate into another. The cultural deficit of ELL students is manifested in two ways. Immigrant students that are successful in PK-12 schools often become ESL students again once in college (Marshall, 2009). Students that exit ELL programs in the PK-12 setting find ways to compensate for the cultural deficit they bring to the table. Once in college, students must again adapt to the academic and social rigor of college life. Similarly, the SAT test has been critiqued for decades for being culturally biased for ethnic minorities (Freedle, 2003; Santelices & Wilson, 2010). Whether the SAT test exposes educational inequalities that already exists or create these inequalities, the most current results show that ELL students have lower performance on this consequential test (Stevens, 2011). English language acquisition, acculturation, or sheer ability may be responsible for these differences, however current research falls short of providing any definite answers. The deficit in cultural knowledge places immigrant students at a disadvantage in the educational context, however the former ELL students selected for this study have found a way to compensate for this deficit.

**Rationale summary.** In sum, there is a sizable gap in the educational research that identifies the factors that are related to high ELL student achievement. The work of John Hattie (2003, 2009) is broad in scope and size and falls short for accounting the specific factors that impact ELL student achievement. ELL research primarily focuses on program effectiveness and individual strategies, though this research is limited in scope
and generalizability. Moreover, there is a disparity between the professional
development and skills of educators in order to meet the educational needs of the
burgeoning ELL population. To begin addressing this gap, more educational research is
needed, particularly for high achieving students. An examination of available research
reveals an extreme difference between the quantity of research for high achieving ELL
students and all high achieving students to include both the talented and the gifted. ELL
students have shown to be able to learn the academic language needed to exit the
programs within 3-5 years. However, the same ELL students find a way to compensate
for their lack of acculturation to American academic life. Successful ELL students have
the potential to provide insight into the adaptations needed to be academically successful.
Three studies that examine the factors that lead to the high achievement for ELL students
stand out. These studies have been conducted at the elementary, middle, and the
collegiate levels. No high school study that examines the factors related to former ELL
high achievement stands out. All three studies found that many of the factors that are
related to ELL high achievement, such as classroom environment, instructional strategies,
relationships, goal-setting, teacher expectations, family communication, vocabulary
instruction, and feedback can be replicated by schools to better support all ELL students
(Baker, L. L., 2013; Bohensky, 2014; Sylvian, 2010). These findings are promising
because they are within the realm of practitioners and therefore they can be used to better
support the academic development of ELL students. As of yet, none of these studies
have been replicated or expanded by additional research.
Statement of the Purpose

There are numerous factors related to former ELL student achievement. In one school district, students that successfully complete ELL programs enroll in advanced coursework at both the Middle School and the High School levels at higher rates than their American born peers (Acosta, Marzucco, Connors, & Rivera, 2012). When it comes to ELL research, this is the proverbial exception to the rule rather than the norm. Few studies, however, have examined the schooling experiences of former ELL students engaged in advanced course work. One such study investigated the perspectives and experiences of five former ELL students enrolled in advanced course work at the middle school level (Baker, L. L., 2013), but this qualitative study is limited in both scope and generalizability.

At the high school level, this topic has received even less attention. Prior to 2015, schools were required to monitor ELL language proficiency before students exited the programs for at least one year (Tate, 2016). Because schools were not required to monitor the performance of ELL students after they have exited ELL programs for more than one year, there is a dearth of research that accounts for the success of these students. To that end, this study aims to examine the characteristics and schooling experiences of former ELL students enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level. For the purpose of this study, advanced course work is defined as Advanced Placement classes and International Baccalaureate (IB) coursework.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate the schooling experiences of seven high school students who formerly received ELL services and
enrolled in advanced course work, in order to identify the characteristics and conditions that were necessary to overcoming the obstacles of learning English, acculturating to American schools, and acquiring necessary academic skills. This study builds on the research conducted by Baker, L. L. (2013) regarding the experiences of middle school children that have exited ELL programs and then enrolled in advanced coursework. Middle school course offerings are much more limited than at the high school level. Additionally, students at the high school level have greater opportunities, not only to choose to participate in advanced course work, but also to select the academic area of concentration. Whereas Baker, L. L. (2013) studied middle school students that demonstrated English proficiency on standardized tests and were enrolled in advanced course work, in order to identify the schooling experiences and how they constructed meaning, this study aims to replicate her findings at the high school level. The results of this study aim to demystify the characteristics that these English Language Learners deemed essential to overcoming both the language and the cultural barriers in order to earn entry into AP or IB coursework, and experience academic success.

**Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the shared schooling experiences of former ELL students who are currently enrolled in advanced coursework in high school?

2. What are the shared schooling factors that facilitated the success of former ELL students enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level?
3. What are the shared inhibiting factors of former ELL students enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level?

Significance of this Study

A study is significant because it addresses a growing need, fills a research gap, and has the potential to impact practice. The number of immigrant student will continue to grow over the next three decades. Though state and national numbers may seem proportionally small, in some localities, both urban and rural, ELL enrollment makes up a sizable percentage of school populations. For instance, though in Virginia in 2015 there are almost 100,000 ELL students, or 8% of the total PK-12 student population, some school districts are disproportionally represented (VDOE, 2015a). For example, Manassas City, Harrisonburg, and Manassas Park school districts have ELL student populations that exceed 40% of their respective total student populations (VDOE, 2015a). Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Prince William, and Winchester, school districts have ELL student populations that far exceed 20% of their total student populations (VDOE, 2015a). This study aimed to answer the questions why a very small number of students are academically successful despite language and cultural barriers. Current research does not answer why some English Language Learners are successful when the majority of students achieve at lower rates, graduate at lower rates, and are greatly underrepresented in AP and IB classes. Accordingly, this study aimed to provide insight into the experiences of ELL students that found their way to academic success. When educators know the reasons for ELL student success, they may tailor instructional practices, programs, and schools to better serve these students. As schools aim to better respond to
the educational needs of English Language Learners, the findings of this study better inform educators in high need localities.

English Language Learner research requires a paradigm shift. The overwhelming majority of ELL research is based on meeting minimum achievement standards. Moreover, these studies have been conducted to meet an existing educational need. As such, most of the research conducted over the past 3 decades has addressed minimum competency. This study seeks to provide insight from an asset-based approach. This study aims to examines ELL student achievement from the perspective of successful students that have overcame the challenges associated with learning a language and culture in order to be academically successful. To that end, this study contributes to the limited body of research that is potentially consequential to improving student achievement, and through educational attainment, the lives of these new Americans.

**Definition of Key Terms**

*Advanced Coursework:* This study investigates the characteristics of former ELL students that are enrolled in advanced coursework. For the purpose of this study, advanced coursework constitutes of International Baccalaureate courses and Advanced Placement classes. These are weighted courses due to the higher rigor of the work required to be successful. Moreover, many of these courses require prerequisite courses for enrollment. International Baccalaureate is a 2-year college preparatory program. To be able to take IB classes students must maintain a minimum of 3.0 GPA and may not earn any grade lower than a “C” (York County School Division, 2015). While some AP classes do not require pre-requisites, courses that carry this designation are based on a
national curriculum provided by the College Board. Students in AP classes may earn college credits provided they score 3 or higher on end of course comprehensive AP exams. The school district, College Board, and IB require teachers to receive additional training in order to be certified to teach. To be enrolled in these courses students must have consistently demonstrated academic success in their subject relevant classes. Teachers generally recommend students for enrollment in AP classes. Recommendations are based on classroom performance, work habits, and the potential to perform well in a college level course.

*English Language Learners:* There are several terms that are used to identify students whose first language is something other than English. In its strictest sense, English Language Learners (ELL) is a term used to identify a national origin minority who is limited in English language proficiency (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2015b). Whereas students that are provided with language support and are enrolled in English acquisition programs are identified as ELLs, when students exit the program and are consequently mainstreamed they no longer carry this designation. However it is important to note that losing the ELL designation does not imply that the student has mastered the English language. Many ELL students continue to learn vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and the cultural context needed to access the academic content and skills well after they exit language programs. Students officially lose this designation when they earn a language proficiency score on a selected measure that indicates grade-level reading and listening proficiency (VDOE, 2015b).
Limited English Proficiency: The terms ELL and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are often used interchangeably. However, there are some differences. Whereas ELL is growth oriented, LEP is deficit oriented. Accordingly, many educators prefer to use the term ELL. The term LEP is, however, is the legal definition for students that was established by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (VDOE 2015b; Office of Civil Rights, 2015). A student designated as LEP is (a) between the ages of 3 and 21; (b) is preparing to enroll or is enrolled in an elementary or secondary school; (c) is not born in the United States, or whose native language is something other than English; (d) comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and (e) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English is sufficient to deny access to the curriculum (VDOE, 2015b).

English as a Second Language: ESL is a term used to describe specialized instruction and programs for students whose first language is something other than English. Moreover, the term ESL describes methodologies and a targeted curriculum intended to teach ELL students English language skills to include listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary, study, and cultural orientation primarily in the English language (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2015b). The term is often used to describe ELL students.

Formerly LEP: Formerly LEP students are defined by the Virginia Department of Education (2015), as having earned a level 6 language proficiency composite score on the ACCESS test. These students do not receive any instructional or testing accommodations.
These students are placed on *monitor* status for performance on course grades and End of Course test performance (VDOE, 2015b). Former LEP or ELL students are defined as having participated in an LEP program and have been mainstreamed for one or more years.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The law uses a thousand different details to anticipate and satisfy a mass of social needs only vaguely felt in France even now. But it is in the mandates relating to public education that, from the onset, the original character of American civilization is revealed in the clearest light. (De Tocqueville, 2003)

Introduction

On October 25, 1979, at the height of the Cold War, six year-old Sergei Brim and his family landed at John F. Kennedy International airport, having left Moscow just a few short months before. Not speaking a word of English, his family settled in Maryland where he attended a Montessori school and received other religious education during the primary years. Sergei later attended Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, Maryland. Sergei graduated from Roosevelt High School in three years where he earned more than one year worth of college credits by taking Advanced Placement courses (Malseed, 2015). During the mid-1990s Sergei, working with Larry Page, wrote algorithms that were capable of linking web pages during the early years of the World Wide Web. Their work together led to the creation of Google in the fall of 1998.
Currently, the company is worth almost $650 billion and shows no signs of slowing down (Barr, 2015). Most importantly, Google has become the primary reference tool in the modern world with more than one and a half trillion searches during the course of 2015 (Internetlivestats, 2015). With almost 4 billion searches conducted per day, this sharing of knowledge has revolutionized every aspect of modern society by putting almost all of the world’s knowledge at the fingertips of anyone, anywhere, anytime. It is fair to say that the impact of this technology on every aspect of our lives cannot yet be measured. Only through the lens of history will it be known how this technology has changed our world. Although this is the extreme exception rather than the rule for the millions of immigrants that come to America, the education immigrants receive has a profound impact on their life trajectories. The literature reviewed in this chapter will focus on individual student, teacher, and school characteristics associated with the high achieving immigrant students. As history has shown, and as evident in contemporaneous political discourse during the 2016 presidential election cycle, America’s relationship with immigrants is a love-hate affair. As this chapter will also show, the relationship between America and immigrants is mirrored in both educational practice and policy. It cannot be overemphasized that while many immigrants succeed, many more live on the fringes of American economic, cultural, social, and political life. When it comes to the education of immigrants, the research will show that some students are extremely successful when many more are not. School, teacher, and student factors have a lot do with that.

**Literature review purpose.** The study of successful former English language learners does not exist in the vacuum of educational research. Much work has been done
to identify the factors that lead to the academic success of both current and former English language learners. Though not as much work has been done to identify the characteristics of academically successful former English language learners enrolled in college level courses at the high school level, the body of literature researched in writing this literature review goes a long way in contextualizing this work. To this end, the purpose of this literature review is four-fold. First, this review aims to posit this work within the larger body of literature relating to this topic. For instance, Baker, L. L. (2013), conducted a similar study with students enrolled in middle school advanced classes. Baker, L. L.’s (2013) work, as well as several others, will be thoroughly reviewed later in this chapter. Yet a second reason for this review of literature is to fill in the gaps in research. Scanning the literature landscape has identified the factors that lead some ELLs to be academically successful while many others are not. Thirdly, this review of literature aims to summarize the research on this topic by categorizing emergent themes (Creswell, 2012). Fourthly, the body of literature reviewed will serve as a benchmark for comparing the results of this study (Creswell, 2012). Comparing the existing scholarship not only with the results of this study, but also with the methods and processes used in the conduct of this study, will go a long way in making these findings usable, relevant, and meaningful.

**Process overview.** The intent of this literature review is to provide a thorough, systemic, and strategic process for the identification and selection of appropriate and aligned works in order to support the conduct of this study. This review begins with the identification of key terms and terminology associated with this research on this topic.
The Swem Library at the College of William and Mary has been instrumental in identifying, locating, and procuring the sources needed to conduct this review of literature and to meet the other research needs throughout this study. The Summon All in One search engine permitted the author to search keywords and key terms by subject, author, abstract, as well as to select the content type of relevant works. The final selection of studies was determined by thoroughly reviewing the research questions, results, participants, methods, and conclusions sections of the relevant works. Additionally, the Google Scholar database was also used to conduct parallel searches. Although the databases are similar, the use of Google Scholar resulted in the identification of several additional works that were not available through Summon.

Microsoft Excel was used to create a table of the selected studies. The table categories include criteria such as: author, title, year, number of participants, summary of research, grade level/s, methodology, research design, and a summary of the findings. This method facilitated the creation of a timeline of research and the inclusion of diversified methodologies. Equally important, this methodology revealed the frequency of similar findings that were used to identify recurring themes within the body of the selected literature.

**Search terms and keywords.** The terminology used to index and catalog the research on academically successful former English language learners is instrumental to the selection of appropriate and aligned research on the topic of this study. The definition of key terms presented in Chapter 1 was used as the starting point to identifying relevant journal articles, dissertations, articles, and books. While the initial search began with the
key terms presented in Chapter 1, additional key terms were identified through the literature review process. Studies relating to former English Language Learners, former English as a Second Language, and former Limited English Proficiency led to the discovery of additional key terms such as: *language minority students, Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP), Fluent English Proficient (FEP) and Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)*. Additional qualifiers such as *academically successful, AP course enrollment, IB course enrollment, and advanced coursework* were also used to provide additional search criteria. Similarly, the keywords used in each study were reviewed for any additional relevant keywords and search terms. Lastly, a review of each study’s bibliography for additional search terms used in the referenced articles, was also conducted.

**History of English Language Learning in America**

The history of America is the history of immigration. The history of education in America is thus the history of educating immigrants for productive political, economic, and social participation. The education of immigrant students dates back to the beginning of this nation. Throughout America’s history, English language learner education policies mirrors immigration trends. Consequently, the history of English language learners, to a great extent, is the history of education in America. Throughout America’s history, immigration debates have existed at opposite ends of the political spectrum and anywhere in between. Political attitudes have ranged between welcoming immigrants with open arms, tolerating the newcomers, forced deportations, building of walls, the xenophobia associated with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the anti-German movement
of both World Wars, and the Japanese internment camps of the Second World War. Federal and state legislation, as well as case law, has mirrored larger movements within the immigration debate. When it comes to education, policies toward English language learners have ranged between the implementation of bilingual education, in order to ease the transition of immigrant children into American society to English-only policies. To that end, educational policies and practices of English language learners fall into five relatively distinct periods: (a) permissive 1642 – 1865, (b) conflicting 1856 – 1917, (c) maturity 1917 – 1968, (d) expansion and reform 1968 – 2002, and (e) reactive 2002-present.

**Permissive period 1642 to 1865.** Records of teaching English as a second language can be traced to as early as 1642. At that time, the General Court of Massachusetts passed an act that required officials to make periodic inquiries of parents relating to the education and training of their children (Cavanaugh, 1996). Within decades after the first permanent settlements took root in Massachusetts, large numbers of non-English speaking minorities to include German, Dutch, Swedish, Hungarian, and Russian immigrants arrived to this newly settled continent searching for freedom, land, and opportunity. The teaching of English was not limited to European immigrants. Both missionaries and traders taught English to the Native Americans. The first Bible to be printed in North America was not in English, but translated in Algonquian by John Elliot, in 1663 (Cohen, 2015; Library of Congress, 2015). The Elliot Bible was used by many others to teach about God and the English language to the natives through much of the pre-colonial history of the United States.
Beginning in the latter part of the 17th century and throughout the 18th century, large numbers of German immigrants settled in Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley. Enclaves of German communities were found throughout this region and there were many instances of German boys and girls receiving instruction in their native language. The Bible during the pre-colonial period was used as a primary text in the education of young boys and girls. In 1743 the first European language Bible printed in North America was in German; more than four decades before the first English language Bible went to print (Adam, 2005). These German communities had a long tradition of promoting bilingual education in both parochial and public schools during this period (Cavanaugh 1996; Wiley & Wright, 2004). Given the long and protracted war with the British and their expulsion at Yorktown in 1781, there is no record that America’s founding fathers preferred English-only to bilingual education of immigrant children (Cavanaugh, 1996). Moreover, the many that fought and died during the Revolutionary War were united by the universal ideals captured by the Declaration of Independence, not by any common language or cultural bond. It is not surprising that the founding fathers did not have a cultural and linguistic preference as General Washington himself did not hesitate to enlist the help of German soldiers throughout the war as evidenced currently by the German encampments still marked at Yorktown. Similarly, Washington promoted generals based on their competence, not national, linguistic, or cultural preference as evidenced by his promotion of Friedrich Wilhelm Von Steuben as the Inspector General of the Continental Army.
After the Revolutionary War, education and, for that matter, the education of English language learners became a function of individual states through the 10th Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Land Ordinances of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 passed by the Continental Congress granted federal lands to the new states to be set aside and used to fund public schools (Center on Education Policy, 2011). Some of the first federal legislation relating to the education of children is found in the Ordinance of 1787 stating that, “religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools as a means of education shall forever be encouraged.” The intent of this legislation was not only applicable to English speaking American citizens, but to the thousands of immigrants settling lands in the Ohio Valley and throughout the mid-western region of North America. Germans, Dutch, French, Swedish, and Norwegians immigrants settled communities throughout these new states and territories. Instruction in these newly settled communities occurred in both English and the native language of these new settlers (Cavanaugh, 1996; Kunzman, 2006; Ovando, 2003). Accordingly, bilingual education became widespread in the Midwest and beyond. The first bilingual education law was enacted in Ohio in 1839, which supported the large German populations that immigrated to this area (Anderson, 2015). Likewise, Louisiana and New Mexico passed similar legislation to support their respective French and Spanish populations.

**Conflicting period 1856 – 1917.** Language instruction and educational policy mirrored political movements throughout the period leading to the Civil War and the First World War. During this period, Native Americans were moved off their lands into
reservations as an increasing number of territories gained statehood. Education on Indian reservations was primarily in English as an attempt by the federal government to acculturate Native Americans into the newly formed Nation and States.

Before the Civil War, most immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe. After the Civil War an increasing number of immigrants arrived from Eastern and Southern Europe as well as East Asia. A large number of Chinese immigrated to the West Coast and were instrumental in building the transcontinental railroad. Similarly, a large number of immigrants continued to come from Ireland, resulting from both economic and political pressures back home. Italians, Greeks, Jews, and Slavs continued to pour into America to fill the demands of growing industry in last quarter of the 19th century. More and more, these developments led to increasing fears about the loyalties of these new arrivals. Nativist movements and the politics of the Know Nothing party best embodied these fears. While German instruction in both parochial and newly formed public schools continued well into the last decade of the 19th Century, in predominant German enclaves like Chicago and St. Louis, by 1900 compulsory education laws and English-only instruction were mandated throughout most of the United States (Cavanaugh, 1996). It is important to remember, however, that although the latter part of the 19th century is increasingly resistant to bilingual education, at the onset of the English-only legislation movement, in 1900 approximately 600,000 children in the United States were receiving instruction in German (Ovando, 2003).

Language is the carrier of culture. Public education, and schools for that matter, were expected to assimilate not only immigrants, but Native Americans as well (Nieto,
2009; Wiley & Wright, 2004). To that end, Native Americans were Americanized the same way as previous waves of Southern Europeans, Eastern Europeans, and Asians. This process began by denying ethnic groups the very basic ability to convey thoughts, feelings, and needs in the language of their birth (Ovando, 2003). When it comes to the education of Native Americans, after the Civil War, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established English-only boarding schools and deliberately implemented a policy of coercive assimilation (Nieto, 2009; Ovando, 2003; Wiley & Wright, 2004). In the last decades of the 1800s, the Americanization of Italian, Greek, Polish, Russian, Jewish, Chinese, Irish, and other immigrant groups was left up to the schools. Many of these immigrants came to the United States not only illiterate in the English language, but in their native tongues as well. As the number of immigrants increased in the first two decades of the 20th century, anti-immigrant sentiment and the demand for English only instruction increased. By 1917, 34 states had passed English-only legislation (Cavanaugh, 1996; Wiley & Wright, 2004). Things were about to change.

**Maturity 1917 – 1968.** World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II significantly reduced the number of immigrants arriving to the United States. Not until 1990 did the number of immigrants to the United States exceed the pre-World War I levels (Department of Homeland Security, 2013). Between the period marked by the end of World War I and the Civil Rights movements immediately after World War II, English-only instruction continued to be the norm in most U.S. schools. However, there was one exception found in the *Meyer v. Nebraska* Supreme Court decision (1923). Nebraska was one of many states that had passed English-only laws during the first two
decades of the 20th century. Nebraska state law prohibited any private, parochial, and public school teacher from teaching, writing, or reading any language other than English until the eighth grade (*Meyer v. Nebraska*, 1923). In 1920 Robert T. Meyer, a teacher in a one-room Zion Parochial Schoolhouse, was sued by the state for unlawfully teaching a ten year old boy to read biblical stories in the German language. The District Court for Hamilton County, Nebraska, found Meyer guilty and the case was appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled in Meyer’s favor stating that the right of teachers and of parents to teach children in their mother tongue, are within the liberty of the 14th Amendment (*Meyer v. Nebraska*, 1923). Moreover, the high court found that Nebraska state law denied the opportunity of students and parents to learn, and teachers to instruct in their chosen profession, thus violating the Due Process clause of the 14th Amendment. While the Supreme Court acknowledged the need to instruct students in the language that is conducive to their civic development, it found the Nebraska law to interfere with the work of modern language teachers and to deny students the opportunities to acquire knowledge that should be within the control of the parents (*Meyers v. Nebraska*, 1923). As stated however, the education of English language learners mirrors immigration patterns. During this period the number of immigrants trickled to levels that were not seen since the beginning of the 19th century. As such, this Supreme Court ruling did not have a meaningful impact on the education of English language learners in the United States during this period.

*Expansion and reform 1968-2002.* The end of World War II, the increase in immigration, and the Civil Rights movement brought significant changes to the education
of English language learners. For the first time ever, federal legislation took into account the cultural disadvantage of immigrant children and the impact it had on both their academic and social development through the passing of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act under Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Anderson, 2015; Ovando, 2003). Throughout America’s history, the Americanization of immigrant children and bilingual education have been seen as contradictory ideas. In the Supreme Court’s commentary that accompanied the *Meyers v. Nebraska* decision, it was acknowledged that English-only instruction, gets them to think in English, a major feature of the American way of life (1923). However, the main ideal of bilingual education is to provide instruction to the students in their native tongue in order to help them transition into the mainstream (Nieto, 2009). The 1968 Bilingual Education Act was an acknowledgement by the federal government that non-English immigrant children require a period of transition and adjustment that is to be provided through both instructional supports and native language assistance. This legislation provided funding directly to the schools to support bilingual education and as a result, in the wake of this legislation, these programs proliferated throughout the United States (National Association for Bilingual Education, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that two other court cases shaped the education of English language learners in the period leading up to the No Child Left Behind Legislation of 2002. Under *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), the Supreme Court ruled that it is the responsibility of schools to provide appropriate programs and accommodations to students who do not speak English (Nieto, 2009). This case begun when approximately 1,800 students of
Chinese ancestry who did not speak English, were grouped together and were provided with English-only instruction. The parents of the students sued the San Francisco Unified School District alleging that their due process rights were violated under the 14th Amendment. The parents did not ask for Chinese-only instruction, but required the district to apply its expertise to address the problem (Lau v. Nicholas, 1974). Both the District Court and the Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the school district stating that “every student brings to the starting line of his educational career different advantages and disadvantages caused in part by social, economic, and cultural background, created and continued completely apart from any contribution by the school system” (Lau v. Nicholas, 1974, p. 565). The Supreme Court disagreed with the lower courts, arguing that “basic English skills are at the core of what public schools are mandated to teach” (Lau v. Nicholas, 1974, p. 566). Requiring students to participate in educational program that mandates these skills makes a mockery of public education, making their educational experiences “incomprehensible and in no way meaningful” (Lau v. Nicholas, 1974, p. 566). The Supreme Court ruled that San Francisco Unified School district violated Section 601 of the Civil Act of 1964 that bans discrimination based on the grounds of “race, color, and national origin in any program receiving federal financial assistance” (Lau v. Nicholas, 1974, p. 566). Though the high court made it clear that English-only instruction is wholly inadequate, it stopped short of mandating or establishing educational criteria for English language learners.

The criteria for bilingual education, and for the education of English language learners was for the first time established by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in
Castaneda v. Pickard (1981) ruling. The parents of students of Mexican descent filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas claiming Raymond Independent School District violated their rights to bilingual education and discriminated against them by placing their children in classes that were based on ability, ethnicity, and race as ruled in Lau v. Nicholas (Castaneda v. Pickard, 1981). The District Court ruled in favor of the school district and the case was appealed to the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, which ruled in Castaneda’s favor. Although the Fifth Circuit Court rejected Castaneda’s argument that bilingual education must include assessments in the children’s native language, it did establish program standards by requiring them to be: (a) based on sound educational theory; (b) implemented effectively with personnel, resources, materials, and space; and (c) after a period of time the program must be proven to overcome language barriers and handicaps (Castaneda v. Pickard, 1981).

These two cases are important for several reasons. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act represented a departure by requiring schools to take measurable steps to help English language learners navigate the transitional period to English proficiency through bilingual support. The Bilingual Education Act also made bilingual education a Civil Right for the millions of immigrants already here or entering the United States for years to come. Lau v. Nicholas (1974), did for English language learner education what Brown v. Board (1954), did for the desegregation of schools, by ensuring language minorities have access to education through the provision of Bilingual education services. However, this change was short lived. The courts walked back bilingual education in Castaneda v. Pickard (1981), by deconstructing the plaintiff’s argument that students must be tested in their
native language. Because assessments were not required to be in the child’s language, the court’s decision limited the expansion of these programs.

**Restrictive period 2002-2016.** Since the founding of America, bilingual education programs have been blamed for retarding the process of assimilating immigrants into the mainstream culture (Nieto, 2009). The immigration boom of the late 1980s and the 1990s led to increasing anti-immigration political discourse. The late 1990s brought additional English-only legislation to the teaching of immigrant students as evidenced by the 1998 California Proposition 227 (Filippi, 2014). Backed by popular vote, the law prohibited teaching in any language other than English. However Proposition 227 did provide waivers for parents or school districts that could demonstrate exceptional need. In 2000 Arizona followed suit by prohibiting the use of any language, except English, for the teaching of immigrant children (Crawford, 2001). Unlike Proposition 227, Arizona’s law however did not provide waivers to schools or parents. This trend spread throughout the states and by 2013, 31 states, including Virginia and North Carolina, made bilingual education practically illegal through the passing of English-only education laws (U.S. English, 2015). In 2002 the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed. This new law repealed the 1968 Bilingual Education Act and all federal funds used to support bilingual education programs ceased. Moreover, NCLB struck out all references to bilingualism, bilingual education, and dual language from federal Education law (NABE, 2015). NCLB however did provide federal funds to schools districts allocated on the basis of immigrant student membership.
Under the NCLB legislation, schools were required to meet Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) by demonstrating progress for English language learners in English, mathematics, and high school graduation. However, NCLB presented several challenges for school districts. While states were held accountable for the performance of English language learners, they were permitted to create their own measures. As each state created its own assessments, students in Florida were tested on entirely different standards than students in Oregon for instance. Moreover, states were free to set the passing criteria for the tests used to measure progress. NCLB also used a test and punish approach. Schools that failed to show progress for several years in a row could lose federal funding for the education of English learners. As such, schools with students demonstrating the weakest language skills were most likely to lose the critical funding needed to improve the outcomes for these students.

It is too early to tell the impact of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on English language learner education. ESSA was signed into law on December 10, 2015. While the new bill reauthorizes the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), it does wholly replace the 2002 NCLB legislation. As Departments of Education in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia begin to operationalize this new legislation, when it comes to the education of English language learners, ESSA (2015) does provide federal grants to school districts in order to support bilingual and bicultural programs. The new ESSA (2015) legislation also makes provisions for greater school community partnerships for the education of immigrant children.
It has been stated that educational law, policy, and therefore practice mirrors greater immigration trends as well as contemporaneous political discourse. *Where from* and *how many* have been key questions that have influenced English language learner education in the United States. As it has been shown, these trends vary on the background and nationality of immigrants as well as the volume of newcomers. English language learner education policy varied between the provision of bilingual instruction and the sink or swim English language only approach. While the provision of bilingual education for immigrant children may have been feasible in Early American history, the sheer number of languages and the increasingly diverse population of immigrants make it financially impossible to provide bilingual support to all students who may potentially speak more than 2,500 of the world’s languages. Bilingual education programs became unpopular at the end of the 19th century when an increasing number of immigrants came from Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and Asia. Large bilingual education programs in the United States have been predominantly limited to German and Spanish speaking students. Historical trends show that bilingual education was acceptable when these programs suited the needs of Western European immigrant majorities. However, as non-European immigration increased, these programs became unpopular and thus the target of increasing opposition. However, there are other practical factors to consider. With shrinking state, federal, and local budgets, schools are struggling to staff, let alone fund, the bilingual education of all immigrant students. As educators, what is done for one student should be done for all. For instance, a high school in the Southeastern part of Virginia had as many as 40 different languages represented in 2014. While most of the
students spoke Spanish, Arabic, Nepalese, Farsi, Vietnamese, Thai, and Cambodian, 36 other languages were also represented in just this one school. Staffing and managing programs to support every language and culture present personnel and financial resources that cannot be reconciled at the local, state, or even the federal level. While the effectiveness of bilingualism will be discussed later in this chapter, the implications of operationalizing this need in the 21st century immigration context continue to present both logistical and philosophical barriers.

**Minority Achievement and Former ELLs.**

Exploring the schooling experiences of former English language learners enrolled in IB and AP classes at the high school level is uniquely situated within a larger body of research. Though this study will be situated within the larger context of ELL and minority achievement, some recent studies have already examined this topic. Kanno and Kangas (2014), studied the experiences of former ELL students enrolled in high school Advanced Placement classes. This study however, examined the availability of college level courses at the high school level to ELL and former ELL students in one high school situated in central Pennsylvania. One other study examined the success of immigrant students enrolled in IB English classes (McDonald, 2014). The focus of this study was centered on the cultural capital of immigrant students and teacher practice to increase their literacy. Additionally, Ryu (2015) examined the experiences of Korean transnational students enrolled in AP science classes. This study focused on the academic and cultural barriers these students faced in accessing the AP curriculum. Lastly, as it has been mentioned, Baker, L. L. (2013) conducted a study that examined the
schooling experiences of middle school students enrolled in advanced English classes. A review of the before mentioned studies found that the authors relied on Latino, African American, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Black Male, under-represented, bilingual, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Hmong minority achievement. In addition to contextualizing the achievement of former ELL students, there are several advantages for relying on this research. America is a microcosm of the world’s national, cultural, and economic diversity. Within the boarder context, though as of 2015 the United Nations (UN) recognizes 195 sovereign countries, there are 2,465 languages that are spoken (UN, 2015; UNESCO, 2015). Accordingly, it is not surprising that each of the world’s regions or countries contain a tremendous number of minority groups based on language, geography, religion, sect, political affiliation, and numerous other factors. With the number of immigrants in the United States this year approaching 43 million, this context is important because English language learners in public schools may speak any one of these languages or come from any of the before mentioned countries (Camarota & Zeigler, 2016). Moreover, it is also important to contextualize this study within existing research on native minority groups in the United States. To that end, much research has been conducted on Black males, Hispanic males and females, as well as Native Americans. Many parallels exist between these studied groups. These studies are extremely important in situating the research of former ELL students enrolled in IB and AP classes at the high school level as a part of the larger context of minority achievement.
The Other and the Postcolonial Theory. No discussion of immigrant and minority student achievement is complete without exploring the concept of the other. As of yet, no other theory captures what it means to be a marginalized group based on past privilege and power dynamics. Postcolonialism provides the language to understand the historic struggles of underrepresented minorities throughout the world. While constructivist theory explained later in Chapter 3 provides a framework to study former ELL students that are academically successful by focusing on the individual views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies, postcolonial theory provides the language needed to give voice to minority students (Cooke, 2008; Creswell, 2012). Immigrant parents and their children come to these shores seeking freedom and economic opportunity. The direct link between income and education makes schooling a top priority for the majority of immigrant children and their families. Immigrant children often come from countries that are less free, less wealthy, and in many cases, less safe.

Postcolonial theory provides the vocabulary and discourse needed to understand immigrant students and thus make possible the answers to the research questions of this study. For instance, in just one high school, that houses the centralized school district ELL program in Hampton Roads, Virginia, students come from over 40 countries. The overwhelming majority of these countries have been colonized or been part of military action by the United States or a Western nation in the past century. It is not surprising that for better or worse, the United States and its European allies has impacted the cultures, economies, and politics of the world’s people over the past two centuries. A notable number of immigrants and their children come from areas that have been
impacted politically, economically, or militarily by the United States or its Western European Allies. According to Homeland Security (2015) during the course of 2013, 309,321 immigrants arrived to the United States from Panama, Mexico, Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Okinawa, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua, Samoa, Guam, Marshall Islands, Colombia, and French Polynesia. All of these countries and territories listed have experienced some form of colonial interaction with the United States over the past century or so. Other European countries such as Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands had a significantly larger impact on the majority of the world, controlling more than a half of the world’s people. For better or worse, the interactions between the United States, and for that matter the other colonial powers, and these territories impacted their histories and people in ways that are still evident today. Whether they know it or not, the histories of many immigrant students in our schools have been formed by these colonial interactions. Postcolonial theory empowers all people by making discourse possible through a language and vocabulary that takes into effect the power relationships between the former colonizer and the former colonized (Arber, 2006; Cooke, 2008; Joaquin & Johnson 2015). Though proponents of globalization would like to ignore the power relationships that are part and parcel of the current world order, the evidence of these relationships are still seen throughout the world today. The vestiges of colonialism validate that postcolonial theory remains relevant. In its most elemental form, post colonialism is the language used to describe the impact of Western imperialist nations, to include the United States, on less powerful people of the world. Postcolonial theory provides the language
and vocabulary needed to understand people who are of a different race, color, ethnicity, culture, and place (Joaquin & Johnson 2015; Tikley, 1999). Post colonial theory takes into consideration the views of the dominant groups and the other people and groups that are seen as outsider, marginalized, and too often do not have a voice within the dominant culture. Therefore, when it comes to understanding immigrant minority students that look, speak, and act differently from their peers, their teachers, principals, and educational researchers for that matter, postcolonial theory is essential to giving them a voice within the larger dominant group structures of the classroom, school, and district.

In addition to providing the language to understand students who look, act, speak, and behave differently in schools and classrooms, postcolonial theory provides the concept of the other. ELL students arrive to a country and enter schools with well-defined academic and sports cultures. Although in theory, academics are at the core of school mission statements, sports still define the cultures of many schools. In this realm, it takes many years for immigrant students to learn the rules of football, softball, or baseball. Sports such as football, baseball, softball, field hockey, basketball, track and field, and a slew of other activities that are part and parcel of secondary school culture in the United States, are not only new to many immigrant students, but due to their complexity, they serve as a constant reminder of the immigrant’s outsider status. For instance, the very idea of sports and activities in the American school setting, is literally and figuratively a foreign concept to many immigrant students. Due to cultural differences, language proficiency, and GPA requirements, many ELL students are unable to participate in school sports and activities that are at the heart of American public
school culture. Additionally, their American peers have known one another through feeder system used to progress students in districts throughout the United States. Moreover, in many cases, parents have attended the same schools as their children, actively participate in PTAs, attend sporting events, and are involved in fund raising and other activities. In the classroom, ELL teachers are taught by teachers who look, talk, and act differently. The teachers in most cases are unprepared to meet the immigrant student’s educational needs having been prepared by preparation programs that are wholly designed to address the native student’s educational needs (National Education Association, 2011). In this context, ELL students enter schools as literal outsiders, and retain this status for many years. By tapping into postcolonial theory and therefore removing the proverbial colorblind glasses, educators are better able to understand their students. The academic and cultural marginalization of bilingual students, is not the result of discrimination, but as a result of being different, less than, and therefore inadequate (Cooke, 2008; Taylor, 2006).

The postcolonial paradigm has been criticized for being outdated. After all, colonialism is a past phenomenon and in the 21st century globalization is king. The globalization paradigm is most evident in current educational research and practice. A review of the mission statement of five school districts in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia finds the term globalization in all mission statements. Globalization runs counter to postcolonial theory in assuming that all nations of the world operate on the same cultural, economic, and political playing fields. Globalization dispels issues of gender, race, and nationality in favor of an inclusive world with a common economy,
culture, and for that matter, political system. However, let us examine this concept for a few moments. Under the globalization paradigm, students are truly transnational by being able to attend any school, anytime, in any country. Language, ethnicity, color, gender, and race are of little consequence in accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the culture of any school. Teachers have the skills needed to address the learning needs of all children, regardless of language, race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. New teacher preparation and pre-service teacher education programs provides skills, attitudes, and dispositions to meet the needs of all children, not just those that speak English, participate in sports, live in poverty, are raised by extended family members, or have uninvolved parents. Certainly, this is not the case. Tikley, (1999) argues that globalization in education can only be understood in the context of postcolonial outcomes and the role they played in the cultural mixing in our schools. However, while globalization is an ideal to live up to, research, data and practice shows that this is not the reality in the majority of schools. Taylor (2006), took it one step further by asserting that national identity, immigration, and citizenship of immigrant learners can only be understood through the postcolonial framework. Rizvi (2009), however asserts that postcolonialism is useful in the current globalization and contemporaneous education context because it fails to take into account how we got here and ignores issues of identity, difference, nationality, and resistance. When it comes understanding difference, otherness, race, ethnicity, language, and culture, postcolonial theory is an appropriate paradigm that gives voice to immigrant students.
**Introduction of themes.** A major purpose of the literature review is to identify and group centrally common themes to the research topic at hand (Creswell, 2012). The grouping of themes, therefore, will serve as the foundation not only for conducting the literature review, but also to judge the merit of this study and its results. In this case, the achievement of former English language learners who are enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level is related to teacher factors, a supporting school environment, and learner characteristics. The purpose of the following paragraphs is to provide an overview of the factors found to be associated with the high academic achievement of English language learners during the literature review process.

**Teacher factors.** Teachers are the most important factor to the achievement of all students. John Hattie (2009), found that teachers have the largest impact on student learning when considering other variables associated to the student’s home life, student’s background, the student’s school, the student’s friends, where the student comes from, and even the curriculum. Among the teacher factors related to English language learning achievement, teacher expectations play a large role. What the teacher expects or does not expect his or her students to be able to know and do greatly predicts English language learner success.

New students to this country and new students to American public schools need additional supports. Supports are manifested to relationships marked by care and concern for the precarious situation of these new arrivals. To that end, similarly important is the ability of the teacher to create, cultivate, and maintain relationships with his or her English language learners. It make sense that relationships are critically important to the
learning of students with more limited English speaking skills as well as limited school and home networks. When teachers take the time to know their students, learn about their culture, and support these students, it makes a great difference in their academic achievement trajectory.

Above all, clarity is an essential characteristic of effective instruction. Teacher clarity is important to the achievement of all students. However, teacher clarity is more important to students with limited English proficiency. English language learner academic success is dependent on clear instructional goals and success criteria coupled with clear instructional delivery and frequent assessment. When English language learners know what they are expected to do and know and receive the instruction and feedback to meet these goals, they are more likely to reach high levels of academic achievement. While teacher clarity is key to the achievement of English language learners, so is the development of academic vocabulary.

New words, both academic and social, are important to the development of all English language learners. However, academic vocabulary serves as the key to unlocking content specific instruction and therefore achievement. English language learners spend the majority of their time in classrooms and schools trying to make sense of what is being said to them and what they are expected to learn. When vocabulary instruction targets areas that lead to greater understanding and discovery, English language learners are more likely to achieve at greater levels.

*Positive learning environment.* A supportive and nurturing learning environment matters to the achievement of all students, but it is particularly important to English
language learners who arrive to U. S. schools as literal outsiders. One of the most glaring challenges immigrant students face is the realization that they are simply different than most of their American born peers. Simply put, they look, think, act, relate, and live differently. Adolescence is difficult enough as students develop physically, socially, emotionally, and academically. Although there are extreme examples for both American born and immigrant students, for most students adolescence as an immigrant is even more difficult. In this context, the degree of cultural capital an English language learner possesses is related to their school engagement and therefore academic achievement.

This theory will further be defined and operationalized later on in this chapter. Similarly, in some cases English language learners are tracked for lower level classes. Even when students met the achievement criteria to exit English language learner programs and have gained the academic skills to be successful in these classes, they are often less likely to be encouraged to take or be enrolled in weighted IB and AP classes. This finding goes hand in hand with English language learner exposure to less rigorous curricula even when they meet the achievement criteria needed to be successful. Lastly, in the category of a supportive school environment, the level of acculturation was found to also matter. The degree to which a student can navigate not only the academic environment of the classroom, but also the totality of the American schooling experience is important in predicting the academic achievement of English language learners.

**Learner characteristics.** The students themselves bring factors to learning that are detrimental to achievement. Bilingualism is an inherent experience of the immigrant student academic development. As it has been discussed thus far, not all English
language learners have the ability to speak and write fluently in their native language. However, by definition, English language learners speak a different language at home. A student’s primary language is elemental to learning English. As students learn English, they naturally make dozens of analogies and other connections on an hourly basis as they relate the meaning of words and experiences in both English and their native languages. To that end, bilingualism provides a cognitive advantage for English language learners. Yet another student factor associated to ELL high achievement is the ability of students to navigate the school-home environment.

For many English language learners the difference between home and school is a striking as traveling from Boise, Idaho to Cairo, Egypt on a semi-daily basis. Students that are better at navigating these differences are more likely to succeed at higher levels. The navigating different worlds theory explains why some immigrants have an easier time than others in bridging the vast cultural and linguistic differences between home, school, and the community. Because bridging these differences have been found to be a barrier to achievement, some time is devoted to further examining this phenomenon.

Goal setting is the last factor associated with the high achievement of English language learners. Immigrant students, like all students have goals and dreams. For most immigrant students, these goals and dreams are more difficult to achieve. English language learners that are better able to set goals and do the required work to meet them, are naturally more likely to be successful.
**Why do teachers matter to ELL student achievement?**

Teachers are the most important factor to the achievement of all students. Out of all of the factors associated with achievement, teachers account for approximately 30% of the variance related to student learning (Hattie, 2003, 2009). The literature review of academically successful ELL and former ELL students revealed three prevalent themes that fall in the realm of teachers’ work. First, both quantitative and qualitative studies identified teacher expectations as a key component in maximizing student achievement for immigrant students. Students, teachers, principals, and the researchers involved in these studies simply reported that when you expect a lot you get a lot; if you expect little, you will get little. Equally important were the relationships teachers forged with their English language learner students. To bring out the best in others, a strong relationship based on mutual respect, good will, and a consistent and continued interest in the social, emotional, and academic growth of students, must be present. The literature presented unequivocally found that teacher-student relationships were critical to bringing out the best academic performance in immigrant students. Thirdly, English language learners begin their journey in U.S. public schools with little or no comprehension. These students sit in classrooms wondering what they are expected to learn, how to learn it, and how they will be able to pass the next quiz and test. Academically successful current and former ELL students, their teachers, and the researchers involved in the studies reported that teacher clarity is an essential component of impactful instruction at the classroom level. Greater achievement gains are realized for immigrant students when teachers are clear about what will be taught, use precise language and appropriate explanations, and
use formative feedback to clarify any misconceptions in real time. Lastly, many successful ELL students and their teachers identify academic language and vocabulary as a barrier to achievement. The literature reviewed showed that ongoing, purposeful, and relevant academic vocabulary instruction was particularly helpful to the achievement of academically successful former and current ELL students.

**Teacher expectations.** Educators and many others often credit a particular teacher that made a difference in his or her early life. That teacher is often described as someone who believed in them, challenged them to do and be better even when they didn’t think something could be achieved. These types of stories proliferate staff development sessions, faculty meetings, and educational conferences. These stories are important because they tell the power of expectations on the achievement of students as well as their life trajectories. Expectations are defined as a strong belief that something will happen, or will be the case in the future (Expectations, 2015). Expectations are important because they provide the vision for the future. Expectations however exist on a continuum. Positive expectations often lead to success while low or negative expectations often serve as self-fulfilling prophecies. Teachers have expectations of their students. In this realm, expectations are defined as the belief or practice that students will perform at established standards that meets or exceeds commonly established benchmarks (Clardy, 2013). More broadly, in the long term, teacher expectations of their students relate to a vision of success often quantified as college bound. Low and high expectations however, are conveyed to students through teaching behaviors. When teachers fail to start class on time, fail to call on students they perceive to be less smart
than others, fail to plan effective instruction, focus on rote memorization and low
cognitive skills, fail to manage their classes, and accept less than adequate work from
students, the root cause of these behaviors may be found in the expectations they have for
the students they perceive to be lower achieving (Rubie-Davies, 2014). Conversely,
when teachers have high expectations of all students, they are more likely to meet them.
Teacher expectations affect students in real and significant ways. It has also been found
that the verbal and non-verbal messages students receive from other teachers are likely to
affect the student’s self-belief which, in turn, influences motivation and engagement
(Rubie-Davies, 2014). Children are smart. Research has found that students are effective
at knowing the expectations teachers have of them (Clardy, 2013; McKnown &
Weinstein, 2008 Rubie-Davies, 2014). When students know the expectations, whether
low or high, positive or negative, they are very likely to meet them (Barone & Hung Xu,
2008).  

Teacher expectations have been found to have a powerful impact on student
achievement (Hattie, 2009). Hattie’s research (2009) is important because his meta-
analysis on the impact of expectations on student achievement included 674 studies with
an overall effect size of .43. Hattie (2009), considers effect sizes of .4 or more
significant. Successful ELL students have also reported to be willing to work harder for
teachers who provided a safe environment, set goals with high expectations, and
differentiated instruction (Bohensky, 2014). Reportedly, students assigned to teachers
whom they perceived to have high expectations were more willing to take academic risks,
master academic content, and learn English faster (Bohensky, 2014; Conklin, 2012; Rubie-Davies, 2014).

Low expectations however have also been found to have an unintended impact on the achievement of urban minority students. In at least two studies, students internalized the low expectations that have been placed on them as motivation to prove school staff wrong by achieving at higher levels (Clardy, 2013; Morales, 2010). Conversely, a teacher’s erroneous perception of low achieving students in the first grade has predicted lower achievement levels at age 15 (Storhagen, 2013). Teacher expectations impact the interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. Teachers have been found to more frequently ignore students they perceive to have lower achievement levels (Kersaint, Thompson, & Petkova, 2013; Rubie-Davies, 2014; Storhagen, 2013). These findings extended to poor and minority students. These findings are important because they associate expectations with teacher behaviors.

Teacher expectations are found to be more impactful for English language learners and students of color (Rubie-Davies, 2014; Morales, 2010). In the realm of English language learners, it has been found that teachers have lower expectations of these students as they associate academic potential with language proficiency (Bacerra, 2012; Clardy, 2013; Kersaint et al., 2013; Rubie-Davies, 2014). Where the student comes from as well as their cultural background has been associated with varying levels of teacher expectations. Several studies have found that teacher expectations are more positive for students they perceive to be of European descent (McKnown & Weinstein, 2006; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). There are some reasons that may explain why
teachers have lower expectations of English language learners. Student prior
achievement is the largest factor that influences teacher’s expectations of English
language learners (Rubie-Davies, 2014). Whether teachers think a student can or can’t
achieve at a prescribed level is largely dependent on the student’s prior level of
achievement. In the age of accountability and test performance mandated by the 2002
NCLB legislation, is not uncommon for the teachers of rising grade level students to
access, review, and discuss prior achievement data. The data is also used to form
perceptions and expectations even before the first day of school. However, these factors
are also related to teacher competency. Knowledge of effective instructional strategies
for English language learners and the culture of the student plays a large part in the
formation of teacher expectations. A statewide survey conducted by the University of
Florida found that more than two-thirds of teachers had changed the achievement
expectations of ELL students as a result of staff development (August & Hakuta, 1997).

Teacher expectations impacts the quality of instruction (Kersaint et al., 2013;
Rubie-Davies, 2014). English language learner achievement has been shown to increase
as a result of higher teacher expectations (August & Hakuta, 1997; Baker, L. L., 2013).
Conversely, students who are perceived to be lower achieving by their teachers have been
associated with low-yield instructional practices such as: (a) less wait time, (b) quicker
teacher answers when they are wrong, (c) praise for incorrect responses, (d) increased
levels of criticism, (e) less feedback, (f) less authentic praise, (g) fewer teacher
interactions, (h) more marginal seating assignments, (i) acceptance of lower quality tasks,
(j) lower grades, and (k) lower friendliness of teacher-student interactions (Kersaint et al.,
2013; Rubie-Davies, 2014). These findings are more impactful for ELL students (Morales, 2010; Storhagen, 2013). Despite the best intentions of educators, these findings are consistent with the observable realities of students with limited language skills, smaller support networks, and marginalized cultures.

**Teacher-student relationships.** It has been said that kids do not care how much you know until you show them how much you care. This educational truism captures the special role of relationships between teachers and the students in the teaching and learning process. From Socrates to Einstein, the relationship between a teacher and his or her students has defined learning. While teacher expectations are important to student achievement, students are more likely to meet high academic expectations if they like their teacher. Essentially, students are more likely to learn from someone they like. *Caring* is defined as showing kindness and concern for others (Caring, n.d.). In defining teacher-student relationships, the term *caring* appears with the greatest frequency (Allain, 2011; Baker, L. L., 2013; Morales, 2000; Zucker-Conde, 2009). Additional characteristics such as *nurturing, helpful, nice, supporting, and respectful* have been used with frequency to define teacher-student relationships (Allain, 2011; Baker, L. L., 2013; Morales, 2000; Zucker-Conde, 2009).

Teacher-student relationships improve the academic achievement of all students. John Hattie’s (2009) meta-analysis on teacher-student relationships found them to be highly effective to increase the academic achievement of all students. Similarly, ELL students achieve at higher levels when the presence of positive teacher-student relationships exists (Allain, 2001; Baker, L. L., 2013; Bohensky, 2014; Clardy, 2013;

English language learners enrolled in Advance Placement classes and specialized magnet programs reported that the positive relationships with their teachers which in turn increased their ability to be successful in these classes (Baker, L. L., 2013; Zucker-Conde, 2009).

There is a strong relationship between resiliency and academic achievement. As a result of language acquisition, ELL students are not academically competitive with their English-speaking counterparts during the first few years in country. Accordingly, ELL students require additional time and resources to acquire English language proficiency in order to access the full curricula. In this context, ELL students often learn as much from failing to meet academic expectations as from meeting them. However, despite language barriers, successful ELL students reported to be more resilient when teachers took the time to get to know them, took a genuine interest in their academic success, and deeply cared for them as human beings (Boreman & Overman, 2004; Morales, 2000; Yunus et al., 2011). Not surprisingly, the presence and the quality of the teacher-student relationships, predicted the academic success of ELL students (Morales, 2000). Many students arrive to the United States and consequently to public schools with underdeveloped academic identities. When teachers take the time and the interest in immigrant students and their culture, their very academic identities are shaped through these interactions (Allain, 2011).

Positive teacher-student relationships are characterized by mutual respect, caring for the general wellbeing of one another, and commitment. Students like teachers who
they perceive to care for their well-being. Students work harder for teachers they like. To that end, the presence of positive teacher-student relationships has also shown to increase student motivation and engagement of ELL and urban minority students. (Allain, 2011; Casarez, 2014; Clardy, 2013; Ferlazzo & Kypnieski, 2012). This is particularly important because ELL students face additional academic challenges as a result of limited language and cultural development. Due to the overall lower education level of immigrants coming to the United States, in many cases, ELL students are more likely to be first generation high school graduates. The motivation provided by the positive relationships with teachers is more impactful for ELL students. Positive teacher-student relationships have also shown to reduce behavior problems and increase classroom cooperation for ELL students (Ferlazzo & Kypnieski, 2012). Essentially, in the presence of caring relationships, students are more likely to work hard for their teachers in order to make them proud (Allain, 2011).

Negative teacher-student relationships are also impactful for ELL students (Allain, 2011; Mendez, 2013). English language learners are less likely to be able to forge positive relationships with their teachers for several reasons. Language and its use is how relationships are formed. Similarly, cultural differences may also serve as barriers to teacher-student relationships. The added stress caused by barriers to achievement for ELL students, coupled by language and cultural barriers, makes it more difficult for these students to build and maintain positive relationships with their teachers. However, relationships are a two-way street. Teachers also benefit from maintaining positive relationships with ELL students. Teachers that recognize these difficulties and put a
great emphasis on building relationships with their students were found to have increased levels of efficacy and motivation (Zucker-Conde, 2009).

The burden for learning rests on the teacher, the student, the family, and the community. However, as educational professionals, teachers have the great burden of reaching out to all students in order to establish and cultivate positive relationships. Teachers who have made building relationships with their students an important priority, have experienced great levels of success (Bohensky, 2014). The first step to building a strong teacher-student relationship is to take a genuine interest in the student’s background, language, and culture (Hough, 2010; Mendez, 2013; Morales, 2010). Furthermore, the investment of energy, time, and effort demonstrates to students and their families that the teacher truly cares, an important characteristic of any relationship.

However, schools also have a duty to provide the structure and opportunities to develop relationships between ELL students and their teachers. ELL parents and students find schools to be effective when they provide genuine opportunities to build relationships with students (Chhon, Hudley, Brenner, & Macias, 2010; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Immigrant students’ ability to adapt is highly dependent on the school’s ability to provide opportunities for students to build relationships (Casarez, 2014). When this happens, the language and the culture of the ELL student is no longer liability to learning, but an asset to greater levels of achievement (Mendez, 2013).

Access to rigorous curricula, consisting of Honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses, is more limited for English language learners. The absence of the language does not indicate that the ELL or former ELL student is less
smart than his or her American born counterpart. Yet, even when students have exited ELL programs and are academically successful, they are steered away from these rigorous courses (Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Torres, 2010). Positive teacher-student relationships have shown to increase former ELL students access to AP and IB courses (McDonald, 2014; Torres, 2010). Relationships also resulted in increased motivation to do well in AP classes for immigrant students (Torres, 2010). Conversely, in the absence of positive teacher relationships, students enrolled in AP classes were academically delegitimized and culturally marginalized (Ryu, 2015). AP course enrollment requires teacher recommendations. Positive relationships with teachers are important in order to receive information and, therefore, gain access to these courses. Teacher support is essential to academic success in college level courses taught at the high school level. Positive relationships with teachers and school counselors are essential to gain information on these courses and secure the support needed to be successful (McDonald, 2014; Torres, 2010). All students require guidance and navigational support throughout their public school experience. Former ELL and current ELL students require more guidance and navigational support. Students reported that positive teacher-student relationships provided them with the guidance and navigational support to have access to rigorous curricula (Baker, L. L., 2013; Bermudez, 2014; McDonald, 2015). These relationships also provided the trust needed to overcome the language barriers (Bohensky, 2014).

**Teacher clarity.** Great teachers make difficult concepts easy to learn. In answering what makes a great teacher, his or her ability to explain difficult concepts and
communicate the expectations for success is often at the top of the proverbial list. If students are to learn and master difficult material, teacher clarity provides the key to the academic achievement. The problem with teacher clarity is the availability of a universal definition or standard by which to measure this concept. In this regard, observable teacher behaviors, teacher skill, and student definitions of teacher clarity are helpful. What the teacher does, how he or she is being perceived, and the skills associated with these behaviors have been helpful in defining teacher clarity. To that end, teacher clarity consists of two salient components: (a) cognitive clarity, (b) verbal clarity, and (c) instructional clarity.

Cognitive clarity refers to the presentation of material in logical and sequential manner in order to make sense for the learner. To be cognitively clear you must (a) tell the students what you want them to learn, (b) present the lesson in a logical sequence, (c) give explanations that make sense to students, (d) emphasize important points, (e) use appropriate examples, (f) explain the meaning of words, (g) give time for students to think, (h) answer student questions satisfactorily, (i) ask questions to check for understanding, and (k) give an adequate summary of the lesson (Killin, 2006; Powell & Harville, 1990). This definition is particularly effective because it provides a logical sequence for the presentation of material through all stages of the instructional cycle. Essentially, Killin (2006) outlines the natural and logical relationship between the educational trinity of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Verbal clarity is another important characteristic of teacher clarity. Verbal clarity is clear and unambiguous speech that is further manifested through teacher behaviors
such as (a) providing examples of concepts, (b) using concrete everyday examples to explain concepts, (c) using graphs and diagrams, (d) repeating difficult ideas several times, (e) stressing important points, (f) suggesting ways to memorize complicated ideas, and (g) writing key terms on the blackboard or overhead screen (Fendick, 1990; Hattie, 2009; Perry & Smart, 2007). Similarly, instructional clarity refers to the ability of the instructor to communicate the desired meaning of course content and processes in the minds of students through appropriately structured verbal and nonverbal messages (Ginsberg, Friberg, & Visconti, 2012). On the other hand, instructors ensure clarity through the use of frequent classroom questioning and formative assessment (Ginsberg et al., 2012; Hattie, 2009; Killen, 2006). Hattie (2009) has further identified the presence of learning intentions and success criteria to define teacher behaviors associated with teacher clarity.

Student definitions of teacher clarity are also helpful in operationalizing this concept. In answering the question of teacher clarity, students have reported instructional clarity to be the ability of teacher to present information in ways that make it easy to understand (Killen, 2006). Students have also described teacher clarity as (a) explaining the subject matter well, (b) repeating key concepts, (c) presenting material in an orderly manner, (d) using personalized examples, and (e) the use of frequent questioning (Hativa, 2000; Powell & Harville, 1990). Although unquantifiable, student statements such as the ‘teacher makes the material easy to understand’ is perhaps a good indicator of teacher clarity.
The effect of teacher clarity on student achievement is consistent in educational research and literature. Teacher clarity is central to teaching effectiveness and student academic outcomes (Zhang & Zhang, 2005). Hattie’s (2009) meta-analysis found an effect size for teacher clarity of .75 on student achievement, ranking 11 out of more than 200 variables to student achievement. Teacher clarity accounts for 13% of the variance in student learning in another meta-analysis consisting of 46 studies and more than 73,000 students (Titsworth, Maxer, Goodboy, Bolkan, & Myers, 2015). While the literature on teacher clarity and its effect on student achievement is more than consistent, the degree to which it impacts student achievement varies. However, teacher clarity has also been found to have positive outcomes for other academic behaviors. Students were more likely to participate in class and had more positive affect for instruction and course material when taught by a teacher they perceived to be clear (Chesebro, 2003). Teacher clarity has also shown to improve student motivation to learn (Perry & Smart, 2007; Zhang & Zhang, 2005). Students were also more likely to employ information seeking strategies such as referencing material and note-taking as a result of teacher clarity (Ginsberg et al., 2012). Lastly, at the post secondary level, teacher clarity is associated with student satisfaction and more positive instructor course evaluations (Ginsberg et al., 2012).

Abundant literature quantifies the role of teacher clarity in the teaching and learning process. The literature leaves no doubt that teacher clarity has a positive and strong effect on student achievement. Though the literature on the effect of teacher clarity on English language learners is not as abundant, its effect is just as clear. The
clarity of instruction is even more important when teaching students whose language of instruction is not their language of birth (Killin, 2006). English language learners are found to have positive academic outcomes as a result of teacher clarity (Leckie, 2013; Miles, 2013). The provision of examples and analogies are key components in the clear presentation of material. English language learners lack the cultural context and thus it more difficult to relate content and skills to the student’s prior knowledge. However, some studies have found the effect of instructional clarity to remain relatively consistent across cultures (Powell & Harville, 1990; Titsworth et al., 2015). These studies suggest that culture has a small or moderating effect on the relationship between teacher clarity and achievement outcomes for English language learners.

Teacher clarity is arguably more important for English language learners than for other students in order to mitigate the effects of limited English and cultural proficiency. Clarity is also important because when students do well, they are more likely to be motivated by successful experiences in their classrooms. For the English language learners, clarity is important above all other aspects of learning. When teachers present material in a logical, clear, and sequential manner students are more likely to be successful. When teachers make perfectly clear the intended learning outcomes, assess student progress, and provide additional repetition through clear communication, immigrant students are more likely to make achievement gains and progress at all stages of ELL student development spectrum.

**Academic vocabulary.** Speaking English is more than simply mastering vocabulary and grammar rules (Ryu, 2015). To say that academic vocabulary is essential
to English language learners’ academic achievement is simply an understatement. The very definition English language learner is dependent not only on the acquisition of social language, but also academic vocabulary and language. Words are tools for communicating and thinking about disciplinary content (Nagy & Townsend, 2012). For the ELL and former ELL students, academic language is a third language (Johnson, 2012). While ELLs may take as little as two years to acquire the English language needed to communicate with others, the acquisition of academic vocabulary, essential to academic success, takes approximately 5 to 7 years (Alford & Nino, 2011). Academic vocabulary and language is defined as written or spoken communication that is used across disciplines with great frequency facilitating the communication and thinking of disciplinary content (Foehl, 2014; Nagy & Townsend, 2012; Townsend & Collins, 2009). Simply put, academic vocabulary is used in the classroom to access and produce knowledge work in order to meet specific intended learning outcomes (Alford & Nino, 2014; Foehl, 2014).

Whether ELL, former ELL, or English-only students, the acquisition of academic vocabulary is important to achievement. However, ELLs and former ELLs must jump one additional hurdle. Native English students take language for granted. Immigrant students at all levels of the language acquisition continuum require general English proficiency in order to access both the academic vocabulary and the context needed to make sense of academic language. Academic vocabulary acquisition and fluency for ELL and former ELL students is more vital to their achievement (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, & Kieffer, 2006; Nagy & Townsend, 2012). So important is the acquisition of
academic vocabulary that former ELL students repeatedly reported that if they had to do it again, they would focus on deliberate academic vocabulary acquisition strategies (Bermudez, 2014; Bohensky, 2014). Teachers of English language learners have also reported that the acquisition of academic vocabulary is essential to successfully completing ELL program requirements (Bermudez, 2014). The acquisition of academic vocabulary is particularly challenging for ELL students as much of this academic language finds its roots in Latin, Greek, and German languages (Townsend & Collins, 2009; Nagy & Townsend, 2012). As such, students outside these language groups, have few, if any references for the identification of root words needed to contextualize the learning of academic vocabulary. For advanced and proficient ELLs there is a strong relationship between language proficiency and content performance (Johnson, 2012; Slama, 2006). When it comes to the achievement of former ELLs in Advanced Placement classes, the largest barrier to success is the acquisition of academic, not social vocabulary (Francis et al., 2006; Rubenstein-Avila, 2013; Ryu, 2015). Former ELL students that were enrolled in Advanced classes were unsuccessful as a result of failing to understand unfamiliar science terms, complex reading tests, language needed to engage in group discussion, and the vocabulary needed to access the Advanced Placement curriculum (Francis et al., 2006; Ryu, 2015). Not surprisingly, failing to acquire appropriate academic vocabulary impacts several aspects of the English language learner’s schooling experience. Not surprisingly, English language learners who lack academic vocabulary have found school more difficult and experience increased level of academic and behavioral problems (Johnson, 2012).
The first step in meeting the learning needs of children is to define barriers, implement appropriate interventions, and assess progress. To begin, several studies have shown that ELL student academic vocabulary is inadequate for high achievement in the mainstream classroom (Francis et al., 2006; Hwang, Laurence, Mo, & Snow, 2015). Traditionally, teachers have also underestimated the need to focus deliberately, intentionally, and frequently on academic vocabulary for ELL students (Foehl, 2014). Yet, several meta-analyses have shown that vocabulary instruction has a large effect size on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). Vocabulary instruction is more than learning the definition of words. Vocabulary instruction takes the form of direct instruction of word meaning in context, multiple exposures to various contexts, repetition, usage of words, the formation of analogies, identification synonyms and antonyms, and using context to determine meaning (National Reading Technical Assistance Center, 2010). Because vocabulary is a critical component of reading comprehension, it is not surprising that among more than 200 variables associated with student achievement, it ranks 10th, with an effect size of .67 in improving overall achievement (Hattie, 2009). ELL students are more likely to benefit from academic vocabulary instruction, however because they speak a different language at home and in the social aspects of their lives, these students are more likely to slide back during the summer break even when controlling for Socio-Economic Status (SES) and independent reading (Cons, 2012; Foehl, 2014; Lawrence, 2012). When it comes to vocabulary instruction, even when teachers are deliberate in addressing this need, they rarely differentiate to meet the learning needs of English language learners (Foehl, 2014). However, ELL students benefited most from well-
planned and intentional academic vocabulary instruction, even when compared to English only students (Cons, 2012; Hwang et al., 2015). Students were found to use more academic words, make fewer word errors, and increased writing fluency as a result of academic vocabulary interventions (Cons, 2012).

Teachers can do a lot to increase the academic vocabulary of ELL and former ELL students. Increasing the frequency of academic vocabulary instruction that is near the learning task at hand is a step in the right direction (Alford & Nino, 2011). The most effective vocabulary programs provide definitions, contextual information, involve students in deeper processing, and give students repeated exposure of words to be learned (Hattie, 2009). ELL students also need more time to not only to develop academic vocabulary, but to learn the skills of breaking down words into identifying parts, roots, and identifying synonyms, as well as antonyms (Schao, 2015; Walker, 2015). Teachers and school leaders may also require additional professional development on academic vocabulary and its impact not only on learning English, but opening opportunities for ELL students in all other academic areas (Francis et al., 2006).

Academic vocabulary is also essential to academic writing. As such, accessing the rigorous curricula of advanced courses at the middle and high school level requires a robust, growing, and developing academic vocabulary and the language needed to support high-level academic work. In order to learn academic language, teachers must refrain from helping students by using lower level vocabulary. Rather, students should struggle with learning academic vocabulary (Alford & Nino, 2011). Similarly, students should have frequent opportunities to engage in academic writing (Cons, 2012).
Structuring frequent opportunities for students to engage in discussion, work cooperatively, use dictionaries, and technology to expand their academic vocabulary goes a long way in preparing students for the academic rigor of AP and IB courses. Conversely, failing to develop the academic vocabulary of English language learners by lowering expectations, dumbing down the academic language, or infrequently providing academic vocabulary development opportunities denies these students the academic access and therefore opportunities for accessing secondary and post secondary advanced courses and overall educational attainment (Alford & Nino, 2011).

**Why does a supportive school environment matter for ELL students?**

Supportive schools also matter to the achievement of English language learners. Several meta-analysis find that school factors account for 5-10% of the achievement variance (Hattie, 2003, 2009, 2011). Although it does not sound like a lot, individual studies reveal that, a warm, supportive, and caring school environment is particularly important to achieving at higher levels. Immigrant students must not only learn the language, but also social and academic cultures of schools. The cultural capital theory partially explains how educational institutional structures may inhibit the achievement of English language learners both former and present. While the cultural capital theory deals with both individual and institutional structures related to status and achievement, schools are also important in helping immigrant students acculturate to their new environment. The adaptation or acculturation of students is found to impact achievement. Other than language, there are no differences in the intellectual abilities of immigrant children. Yet, fewer immigrants are enrolled in rigorous college-prep classes in public
schools across America. The literature reviewed reveals that tracking and access to rigorous courses is a barrier to the high achievement of ELL students.

**Cultural capital.** In order to gain access to the full curriculum, the English language learner must not only learn the language, but how to interact with teachers, students, and the school system. Knowing how to leverage additional help from teachers, school staff, and peers requires insider cultural knowledge. In a 2013 study of former ELL students enrolled in advanced classes at the middle school level, Baker, L. L. asserted that the cultural capital theory partially explains the success of these students. Baker, L. L. (2013) asserts that the cultural capital theory guided the theoretical framework for her study. As this current study aims to replicate these results at the high school level, this theory requires some additional scrutiny. Since its inception, the definition of cultural capital continues to evolve. Bourdieu (1986) asserted that cultural capital exists in three states: (a) institutionalized forms such as academic institutions and other bureaucratic bodies, (b) embodied in the characteristics of individuals, and (c) objectified in material possessions. Using this theory, immigrant students naturally possessed less cultural capital embodied in social status and the material possessions. Moreover, immigrant students and their families possess less leverage in their interactions with academic institutions. These factors thus appear to be related to the difference in achievement and access to advanced courses for immigrant students. Theory, however, does not fully explain reality on the ground.

The definition of cultural capital has undergone several renditions since its inception. Early definitions of cultural capital were related to highbrow culture. Several
have defined cultural capital as the possession and transmittal of high status culture, behaviors, habits, and attitudes from parents to children that are important to coding and decoding high culture (Bourdieu, 1986; Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990; Stagg-Peterson & Heywood, 2007). In the educational setting, access to books, museums, reading time, and the theater are considered to operationalize the procurement of cultural capital (Kozlowski, 2011).

Others have asserted that cultural capital is defined as the confidence to assume educational expertise, educational knowledge, and educational effectiveness in getting teachers to respond to both deficits and educational opportunities (Cheng, 2012; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Waters, 2006). Under these definitions, competence with the English language and therefore academic skills are another type of cultural capital (Lareau & Weininger, 2006; Sullivan, 2001). Furthermore, in the school setting, cultural capital is evidenced in the student’s support network such as who they talk to, seek advice from, participate in sports and activities with, cheers them up, and provide emotional support in times of need (Hynek, 2012; Kozlowski, 2011).

The cultural capital theory essentially deals with the question of whether the privileged enjoy greater academic success because their schools reward greater social standing (Kingston, 2001). A review of more than three decades of literature on the impact of cultural capital on student achievement has yielded three types of results: (a) significant, (b) moderating, and (c) no effect. Several studies find that cultural capital significantly impacts student achievement (Cheng, 2012; Halpern, 2005; Hynek, 2012; Kingston, 2001; Kozlowski, 2011; Marks, 2005; Stagg-Peterson et al., 2007). Kingston
(2001) defines cultural capital as intellectually stimulating dinner conversations, reading sessions, parental warmth, museum visits, and theater going; his study has found a positive and significant impact on academic achievement. Others have found that the parent’s level of cultural capital was related to the level of their children’s achievement not only by transmitting these cultural traits, but by leveraging interactions with school principals, teachers, and school staff (Roscingo & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Stagg-Peterson & Heywood, 2007).

Race and ethnicity were found to impact the relationship between academic achievement and the cultural capital of students (Kozlowsky, 2011; Roscingo & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Race and ethnicity were a significant factor in whether teachers believed students worked to their full potential and, thus, achieved academically (Koslowski, 2011). Essentially, Kozlowski (2011) study of the academic and achievement patterns of Hispanic, Native American, and multi-racial students, found that teachers believed these students had less cultural capital and thus were less likely to succeed. Conversely, Chinese-American and Korean-American students’ cultural capital, defined as closer connections with ethnic culture which is supportive of academic achievement, is strongly related with academic achievement for these students (Halpern, 2005).

The development of cultural capital takes time, particularly for immigrant students (Hyneck, 2012). Students acquire cultural capital by gaining the knowledge to talk with their teachers, advocate for themselves, develop academic skills, find support in study groups, and join clubs and activities that support their academic development.
When this happens, immigrant student academic behaviors are more likely to match the mainstream school culture and therefore gain the support of teachers and school counselors to enroll in AP and IB classes. To a great extent, cultural capital is about fit and membership (Waters, 2006). Cultural capital influences one’s interactions with peers and school staff, which increases the status of individuals. Individuals perceived to have higher status, by teachers, staff, and their peers find stronger support systems in schools and are more likely to succeed (Hynek, 2012).

As the definitions of cultural capital change, findings vary on its effect on student achievement. Several studies found that while cultural capital has a moderating effect on student achievement, it falls short of reliably explaining the achievement differences between immigrant and native students (Barone. C, 2006; Lareau & Weininger, 2006; Sullivan, 2001; Trueba, 2009). In a meta-analysis involving studies from 25 nations, Barone. C (2006) found that cultural capital provides a relevant, but not a significant explanation of educational inequalities between native and immigrant students. In another empirical study Sullivan (2001), found that cultural capital only partially explains educational achievement as measured on standardized tests. Here again, the difference in the findings is found in the varying definitions of cultural capital. The theory is helpful in explaining why students would not do well from a deficit-thinking paradigm. Simply put, immigrant students are different and as such, they are less likely to achieve at higher levels. However, the theory of cultural capital cannot account for immigrant students that achieve at high levels. Accordingly, the theory is debunked when immigrant students do well in public schools.
The third category of literature review results finds the cultural capital theory to fall short of having any effect on student achievement (Driessen, 2001; Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990; Kingston, 2001). In one study involving more than 1,100 students, Drissen (2001) claimed that interpretation error, not the cultural capital of students, resulted in positive effect findings. Tittenbrun (2014), asserts that the theory of cultural capital is negative, harmful, and not supported by evidence. Tittenbrun (2014), however is overly critical of Bourdieu and provides a theoretical disagreement rather than the proof needed to back his claims. Though the critique is only theoretically justified, Tittenbrun’s (2014) work casts a shadow of doubt on the ability of the cultural capital theory to positively demonstrate an unequivocal relationship to student achievement. Moreover, the cultural capital theory is problematic because working class families are led to conclude that they are disadvantaged. The cultural capital theory is also weakened by studies that find a positive or moderating effect but fail to account for effort and motivation (Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990). Lastly, more studies show that students from working class families achieve at high levels by adapting and taking advantage of opportunities (Barone. C, 2006).

Changing definitions result in changing results. The review of literature on the effect of cultural capital on student achievement finds mixed reviews. On one hand, cultural capital, when appropriately defined, has shown to explain ELL achievement (Cheng, 2012; Halpern, 2005; Hynek, 2012; Kingston, 1999; Kozlowski, 2011; Marks, 2005; Stagg-Peterson & Haywood, 2007). On the other hand, those that critique this theory report its effects to be inconclusive (Driessen, 2001; Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990;
Kingston, 2001). It is important to remember however that the purpose of this review of literature is not to settle seemingly contradictory findings, but highlight the difficulty in attributing any particular theory to the overall achievement of immigrant students. Immigrant students and their cultures are not homogenous. Additionally, students find ways and the support needed to overcome both language and achievement barriers. Moreover, American schools are designed to mitigate the differences between students by closing the proverbial gap, and arguably provide more time, money, and resources to students that are not doing well than students that do well. In education no single theory represents the silver bullet to achievement. Accordingly, attributing this theory, or any single theory for that matter, to the achievement of ELL and former ELL students should be done with caution. Nevertheless, this theory remains important because adaptation, acceptance, and institutional barriers are part and parcel of the immigrant experience. Though flawed, the theory is helpful in analyzing these factors.

Teachers can do a lot to mitigate the effect of language and culture on the achievement of immigrant students. Immigrants now, and generations before, need to possess the skill to acquire new identities and adapt to mainstream culture. Individuals that are able to adapt will function best in their new-found home. Taking the cultural capital theory at face value, immigrant students must have the ability to overcome barriers, build resiliency, and seek academic and social support from peers, teachers, parents, community members, and other school staff. The world has changed a lot since the development of the cultural capital theory. The first decade and a half of the 21st century are increasingly defined by a globalized culture that transcends regional, ethnic,
cultural, and national boundaries. Perhaps the cultural capital of immigrant students is realized in the ability to speak more than one language, relate to different cultures, learn from failure, and mobilize support for greater levels of achievement. Teachers can start to help immigrant students achieve at higher levels by taking into account how the different and varying cultures of their students impact their emotional, social, and academic development (Brooks & Karathanos, 2009). When this happens, teachers will not interpret the lack of immigrant parent attendance at back to school nights and teacher conferences as a lack of interest and commitment to educational attainment, but develop other ways to communicate with immigrant parents. (Stagg-Peterson & Heywood, 2007).

Language, culture, and prior experience are at the core of making sense of new information for current and former ELL students. Teachers can encourage their students to use their native languages for academic purposes in small collaborative groups and enlist parent support in developing native language literacy through learning logs and the translation of academic materials into the student’s native language (Brooks & Karathanos, 2009). This is a tall order of course. With dozens of different cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, and varying levels of both linguistic and cultural development, additional resources to include time, personnel, and professional development are required. More importantly, their implementation requires vision, leadership, commitment, implementation, and assessment in order to appropriately use limited resources and at the same time meet the educational needs of immigrant students.

**ELL tracking.** Human intellect, ability, effort, and happiness transcend language, ethnicity, nationality, or the color of one’s skin. However, immigrant students
must learn English in order to access the curriculum in English-only schools public schools throughout the United States. Schools are also required to test and provide language learner educational services to students whose home language is not English. Within this framework, schools place students in ELL classes and support them in other core academic classes. Schools, however are permitted to assign students to English-learner classes when it helps them acquire language skills, even if these assignments result in disproportionality based on race, color, and national origin, provided appropriate and nondiscriminatory evaluation, placement, and exit criteria are uniformly implemented (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016). However, schools walk a fine line between tracking students in lower level classes and supporting students’ language development. For instance, in interpreting Title VI non-discriminatory class assignments, the U.S. Department of Education (2016), cites that using English-only language tests to assess LEP student academic proficiency is an invalid indicator and therefore these testing results may not be used for class assignments when they do not meet the student’s needs. However, this is not the practice in many schools throughout the United States as all states administer high stakes tests only in English.

English language learning is a temporary condition. Learning a language should not result in missed opportunities, educational attainment, and consequently its impact on the life trajectories of immigrant students. However, throughout the United States, English language learners are routinely assigned to lower track classes based on teacher and school staff perception that they are less able and less smart than their English
speaking peers (Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Oakes & Guiton, 1995). In its truest form, tracking is the assignment of students to classes based on perceived ability. The practice of tracking is based on the assumption that low performing students should be separated from other students and taught a simplified curriculum (Callahan, 2006). Proponents of tracking argue that clustering students by ability will better help teachers meet their needs. Tracking is different from differentiation because it does not integrate, but segregates students based on perceived ability. The tracking of ELL students has resulted in fewer opportunities to advanced courses which in turn has impactful implications for the academic achievement, educational attainment, and life trajectories of immigrant students (Baker, L. L., 2013; Callahan, 2006).

Under tracking practices, some students receive more and some students receive less. Tracking is a way for schools to distribute academic resources. Tracking is problematic because it exacerbates existing inequalities through the allocation of these resources. In schools that track, low students are associated with lower performing teachers; teachers with more experience and seniority more often than not, choose to teach honors, AP, and IB classes (Dabach, 2015). As a practice, the assignment of students based on ability rarely results in improved student outcomes. Several large-scale meta-analyses have found that the effect of tracking on student achievement is negligible (Hattie, 2002, 2009). Any effect on achievement, results from the higher expectations teachers have from students in the higher tracks rather from any change in instruction (Hattie, 2002, 2009). Tracking is particularly problematic for ELL and former ELL students. English language learners are tracked in courses that lead to lower-skill jobs in
the United States (Oakes & Guiton, 1995). Tracking is more impactful for ELL and former ELL students because the line between academic ability and language development is often blurred. Schools too often view ELL students’ abilities, motivations, and aspirations as fixed (Oakes & Guiton, 1995). This is particularly damaging as ELL students academic and language development changes drastically during the first three years of school.

English language learner tracking is also problematic because these students and their parents are more likely to accept the schools’ class placement recommendations (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Even when former ELL students are placed in AP and IB classes, they are less likely to remain there. In one study, teachers asked for students with poorer English speaking skills to be transferred out of the high-level science classes because the material was too difficult; the same teachers retained the Asian students with limited English skills because they would network and keep up with the material (Oakes & Guiton, 1995). In another study, ELL students enrolled in AP science classes were provided less academic support because their teachers reported these students as unqualified to participate in these classes (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Like it or not, or for better or worse, across the nation economically advantaged whites and Asian students have better access to college prep courses at the high school level (Oakes & Guiton, 1995; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

Principals, teachers, and counselors directly impact ELL and former ELL course selection and classroom placement. English language learners are no less smart than their fluent English-speaking counterparts. However, English language learners need
additional time to learn the language, the academic culture of schools, and make up for any gap in education resulting from the too often traumatic immigration experience. One way to provide the extra time and opportunity is through the use of scheduling. Block scheduling provides students with additional opportunities and significantly quicker course completion cycles. For instance, under a seven class A/B schedule, students have the potential to take 28 classes over four years. Under a 4x4 schedule students take four classes each semester for a total of eight classes per year and 32 classes over four years. Accordingly, this type of scheduling creates increased opportunities and access to high rigorous curriculum and college preparatory courses (McCall-Perez, 2000). School counselor’s best practices will also go a long way to provide ELL and former ELL student’s access to IB and AP courses. School counselors who better understand the academic and linguistic skills of ELL and former ELL students are more likely to make appropriate course placement decisions for these students. This can be done by using a cohort school counseling service models and through the reduction of student to counselor ratios (McCall-Perez, 2000).

**Acculturation.** Immigrant students must not only learn English, but learn the culture of their new homeland. Because language is the vehicle through which culture is conveyed, it is often difficult to ascertain the effect language or cultural knowledge has on student achievement. Academic language and therefore academic vocabulary, is conveyed through language. Yet cultural context is essential for unlocking academic vocabulary and academic language. Acculturation is defined as the process of adapting to the host culture as a result of reconciling two or more cultures (Bacerra, 2012).
Acculturation produces changes in attitudes, language, norms, behaviors, knowledge, affiliation preferences, and even the ethnic identity of individuals (Bacerra, 2012; Lopez, Ehly, & Garcia-Vazquez, 2002; Pitts, 2012). However, as evidenced by contemporaneous culture, each ethnic group and nationality leaves its impact on the mainstream culture. To that end, acculturation is a two way process. In this context, acculturation is a constantly changing process that changes both the individual and the mainstream culture (Kim, Newhill, & Lopez, 2013; Pitts, 2012).

While language acquisition, both academic and social, may take less then a decade, the acculturation process takes place over the lifetime (Pitts, 2012; Roja-Cifredo, 2011). While some may acculturate quickly, acculturation for some may be intergenerational. Essentially, the formation of an immigrant’s cultural identity takes place over the lifespan as she or he interacts with the environment (Roja-Cifredo, 2011). English language learners in American schools must learn quickly. Weekly quizzes, learning activities, bi-weekly tests, quarterly exams, final exams, course grades, and annual standardized testing requirements, when coupled with the social aspect of schooling, requires the ELL and former ELL student to adapt to U.S. public school culture rather quickly. Additionally, having to reconcile the native born culture of the individual with the host culture is an incongruence that is at the forethought of the immigrant student. As a result, the acculturation process has been found to cause stress and to result in increased levels of anxiety, depression, and even suicide for ELL and former ELL students (Santiago, Gudino, Baweja, & Nadeem, 2014; Suinn, 2010).
Individual achieve or fail to achieve because or despite the barriers presented by learning a new language and culture. Acculturation is measured by both language proficiency and generational status (Bacerra, 2012). When examining a body of research that is not tightly defined, mixed results are sure to follow. As such, the body of research that follows the impact on acculturation on achievement is both conflicting and inconclusive (Kim et al., 2013). The majority of descriptive, correlational, and experimental studies find that the degree of an individual’s acculturation is positively associated with academic achievement (Lee, T., 2003; Lopez et al., 2002; Pitts, 2012; Pressman, 2007; Rojas-Cifredo, 2011; Salamanson, Everett, Koch, Andrew, & Davidson, 2008). However, there are more than enough studies that show otherwise. High acculturation levels are also associated with lower student achievement levels across the K-16 spectrum (Cheung & Llu, 2000; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Kirchunova, 2003; Ramos, 2009; Suinn, 2010). Whether the degree of acculturation has a positive or negative impact on student achievement is difficult to ascertain across thousands of languages, hundreds of ethnicities, and dozens of nationalities marked by different values, beliefs, family norms, motivations, and a variety of other factors that define these cultures. Acculturation links language acquisition and cultural knowledge. Because both are important to achievement, the studies reviewed failed to account for the level of language proficiency in determining the impact of acculturation on student achievement. Consequently, the research available on the impact of acculturation is mixed. While some studies find acculturation levels to positively predict academic achievement, others find acculturation levels to be negatively related to achievement.
Language and culture are an asset rather than a deficit. Yet the results of some studies suggest that in order to achieve at higher levels, students may have to choose between their native and American cultures (Rojas & Cifredo, 2011; Ramos, 2009). Both of these studies suggest that preference for American culture is related to increased levels of academic achievement. However, when school cultures are inclusive and teachers take the time to learn the cultural background of their students, they are more then likely to achieve at higher levels (Bacerra, 2012). Not surprisingly, students' pride in their native cultures, reliably predicted increased academic achievement and higher GPAs (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997).

Teachers and schools can do a lot to help students mitigate the stresses associated with acculturation. Acculturation is both an achievement and social development risk factor for immigrant students (Bacerra, 2012; Cheung & Llu, 2000; Santiago et al., 2014). Yet, even when accounting for language proficiency, students report that their teachers are unaware of their native cultures and therefore inadequately prepared to meet their needs (Bacerra, 2012). Because acculturation has shown to cause increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, when teachers are more familiar with students' native cultures they are more likely to relate to their students and thus provide them with a supporting classroom culture that values difference and diversity (Bacerra, 2012; Pitts, 2012). Increasing the communication between the school and immigrant parents has also been recommended to ease the acculturation stress for ELL and former ELL students (Pitts, 2012.) A sense of belonging to the school is a more significant predictor of academic achievement than level of acculturation (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). If schools
identify the degree of acculturation as risk factors, they can take steps and implement interventions to better support immigrant students. Similarly, this support may also increase the achievement levels of already academically successful students (Lopez et al., 2002).

**Learner Characteristics that Matter to ELL Student Achievement**

Learner characteristics account for the largest portion of variance related to student achievement. What the students themselves bring to the table predicts achievement more than any other factor (Hattie, 2003, 2009, 2011). The literature reviewed consistently revealed three themes related to the high achievement of English language learners. First, the ability to speak different languages may influence the way students learn. Being able to tap into two or more cultures is an asset rather than a liability to the achievement of English language learners. Once students are able to overcome the language and cultural barriers associated with immigration and ELL status, bilingualism is a factor that impacts achievement to varying degrees. Second, goal-setting, both short and long term, has emerged as another theme during the literature review on student related factors. Immigration begins with a goal. Students, principals, and teachers have weighed in on the impact of goal setting on the high achievement of English language learners. Lastly, immigrant students share experiences that few American born students can relate to. These students must pass between multiple worlds of home, school, and the community in order to achieve. Because one’s focus defines his or her reality, conflict arises as a result of these transitions. The literature review found school-home transitions to be another salient theme for academically successful English
language learners. The bridging multiple worlds theory partially explains this phenomenon.

**Bilingualism.** The use of language is associated with intelligence. The ability to speak two or more languages and its relationship to intelligence has eluded researchers for almost a century. Before following the link between bilingualism and intelligence, it is important to contextualize and define bilingualism and English language learners. By definition, English language learners are not bilingual. Bilingualism is fluency in two or more languages (Bilingualism, n.d.). Fluency, particularly in the academic context implies parity between the native language and the immersive language. It is potentially feasible that some former ELL students approach bilingualism, however full language proficiency, particularly when it comes to academic vocabulary, takes decades to acquire. Arguably, the language one thinks in is the dominant language. The ability to think in two or more languages simultaneously may take as many as two decades to occur. Not surprisingly, the body of literature on the link between bilingualism and intelligence has failed to adequately address the degree of bilingualism and consequently treat it as a binary concept. Whether one is bilingual or not bilingual is the approach the studies reviewed have taken. This ambiguity is thus represented in results relating to these studies.

Linking the academic proficiency to bilingualism has been problematic. In New York City (N.Y.C. Department of Education, 2009), former ELL students outperform all other students, including native English students, on state literacy tests, mathematics tests at all levels, and graduation rates. In comparing the performance of former English
language learners and native speakers, in at least one study, bilingualism has proven to be an advantage to academic achievement (Ardasheva, Tretter, & Kinni 2012). However it is unclear whether these students achieved academically at higher level as the result of bilingualism or participation in bilingual programs. The authors of this study attribute the academic achievement advantage of ELL students to the presence of balanced bilinguals, defined as proficient in both languages (Ardaşheva et al., 2012). Yet in another study, bilingually schooled children outperformed students on course performance in all subjects after 4-7 years of bilingual education supporting prior findings (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

The research on whether or not bilingualism offers a cognitive advantage is inconclusive. On one hand, several large studies including two meta-analysis have found bilingualism to be associated with increased attention, working memory, reasoning, flexibility, problem-solving, and planning (Adesope et al., 2010; Bailystock & Martin, 2004; Barac, Bailystock, Castro, & Sanchez, 2014; Hakuta & Diaz, 1985). However, others have found no difference between the working memories, processing speed, and the academic performance of monolingual and bilingual students (Dunabeitia et al., 2014; Engel de Abreau, 2011). When it comes to differences in intelligence, similar patterns are found. Some have found bilingual students to possess higher intelligence while many others have found no difference, or even a negative relationship between bilingualism and intelligence (Baker, C., 1988; Barac et al., 2014; Lambert & Aisfeld, 1969; Pearl & Lambert, 1962). Even after almost one century of research on the link between bilingualism and intelligence, a strong relationship has yet to emerge. To understand the
relationship between bilingualism and intelligence, appropriate definitions are needed. In this realm, both concepts are multifaceted human dimensions that continue to change and accordingly have resisted to be defined (Baker, C., 1988).

While the link between bilingualism, intelligence, and academic achievement is at best inconclusive, a strong link between bilingualism and creativity exists (Hommel, Calzato, Fischer, & Christoffels, 2011; Lee H., & Kim, 2011; Leikin, 2012). These experimental studies have found a significantly positive effect between bilingualism and creativity (Kharkhurin, 2010). There are many definitions of creativity. However, in its elemental form, being creative means having original and high quality thought (Brookhart, 2013). From the student’s perspective, being creative is putting new information in new ways to generate new meaning (Brookhart, 2013). English language learners make hundreds of associations between what they see, hear, touch, taste, and feel in their native and English language throughout each day. These constant references naturally result in an increasing number of associations in order for the students to make meaning not only in academics, but the entire world around them. The creation of analogies, metaphors, and general comparisons are aligned to the creative process.

For English language learners and former ELLs, knowing an additional language and culture is an asset rather than a deficit. Bilingual students have the innate ability to draw on more than one language and culture to make new connections, rearrange, categorize, and relate to new information. Essentially, bilingual students have an additional bank of information. For instance, in the United States there is no relationship between finishing the food on one’s plate and showing gratitude to the guests. In Eastern
Europe as well as throughout East Asia, it is considered rude, ungrateful, and a rejection of the host’s hospitality to leave food on the plate. In Japan however, leaving a little food on the plate demonstrates a cultured upbringing, a behavior associated with class and economic status. For bilingual students, this information is more than a matter of knowing. It is a matter of experience through personal connection to history and culture. Having this additional information provides an additional bank to rearrange and categorize information in new and creative ways. In regards to achievement, bilingual students outperformed monolinguals on creative problem solving tasks, innovative capacity, and fluid intelligence (Kharkhurin, 2011). Creativity has also shown to increase for monolinguals temporarily exposed to a different culture or language. Students that are exposed to different languages or immersive cultural experiences demonstrated increased levels of creativity over the control group (Lee, H., & Kim, 2011; Leung & Chiu, 2010; Tadmor, Statterstorm, Jang, & Polzer, 2012; Yi, Hu, Scheithaurer, & Niu, 2013).

**Goal-setting.** Setting goals and doing the work to achieve them is elemental to progress and therefore, achievement. The goal-setting theory is well aligned to the English language learner experience. Immigrants come to America in order to do well. Educational attainment and therefore achievement is part and parcel of the goals and dreams of many immigrants. English language learners, present and former, achieve as a result of setting goals and working hard to achieve them. At its very core, learning is a goal-oriented activity (Gillepsie, 2002). The goal theory is simple. The basic premise is to have a vision for success, set achievable goals, give direct attention to these goals, and
ignore distractions from non-relevant activities that take focus and energy from the goals set (Morisano, Hirsh, & Peterson, 2010). Others have defined goal-setting as a process of establishing clear, achievable, and usable benchmarks of performance (Moeller, Theiler, & Wu, 2012). Successful goals, however, must be clear, achievable, realistic, marked by commitment, supported by others, and be accompanied by feedback toward meeting them (Munoz & Jojola, 2014). However, goal setting is only the first step to academic progress and educational attainment. They must be accompanied by implementation intentions quantified by *when, where, and how* (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006).

Goal setting is elemental to achievement. Yet, teachers rarely engage their students in setting goals for themselves (Moeller et al., 2012). Not to be confused with daily learning targets, posting learning intentions or objectives on the board, goal-setting works best when the students themselves are encouraged and supported in setting and meeting learning goals (Hattie, 2009). There are many types of goals. Short-term classroom goals may be used to meet daily or even semi-daily benchmarks. Longer term goals may extend to earning good grades on assignments, course grades, earning credits required for graduation, graduating from high school, attending college or trade school, and getting the career of one’s choice. Mastery goals, however are needed to successfully meet intended learning outcomes and learning objectives. School, district, and state standards of performance often define mastery performance goals. Mastery goals are associated with deep levels of engagement and academic achievement while performance goals focus on the motivation related with avoiding failure (Moeller et al., 2012). Most students want to earn good grades and do well on individual assignments.
Most students also want to do well in order to avoid failure. English language learners, both present and former, are no different. This review is not concerned with the intentions and motivations behind goal setting. Rather, this review aims to define goal setting, outline its impact on ELL and former ELL student achievement, and summarize how teachers and schools can engage in this effective student achievement practice.

The research literature on goal setting and its effect on student achievement is relatively consistent. Simply put, goal setting interventions and treatments improve student achievement outcomes (Andrissen, Phalet, & Lens, 2006; Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006; Hattie, 2009, 2013; Moeller et al., 2012; Morisano et al., 2010). Academic achievement increases in the presence of both short-term and long-term goals, particularly when it is connected to present school-work (Andrissen et al., 2006; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Setting goals has also shown to improve motivation while lack of clear goals have resulted in decreased motivation and increased levels of academic failure (Andrissen et al., 2006; Morisano et al., 2010; Rinthapol, 2013). Similarly, goal setting reduces negative behaviors that take focus and attention away from the goals set (Morisano et al., 2010). Setting goals also increases student confidence (Munoz & Jojoa, 2014). It is said that success breeds more success. In a study of 24 former ELL valedictorians, goal setting in grades k-8 played an important role to earning this distinction because perceived academic success resulted in the increased frequency of this effective practice (Martinez, 2009).

Engaging students in setting their own learning goals is the educational low hanging fruit. ELL teachers must learn to appropriately facilitate goal setting for their
students in order to meet learning objectives (Munoz & Jojoa, 2014). Immigrant students respond well to both short-term and long-term goal setting practices (King, 2007). When teachers facilitate goal setting for immigrant students, they figuratively and literally open the doors to educational attainment and a life these students would not otherwise have imagined. As such, educational goal setting and college planning should not only involve students, but collaboration with the parents of these students (King, 2007). Teachers however must take the time to frame the goal setting process and provide opportunities for their students to personalize goals (Moeller et al., 2012). Most importantly, for goals to be sustainable, progress toward meeting short term, and particularly long term goals, must be accompanied by sustainable feedback (Muno & Jojoa, 2014; Moeller et al., 2012).

**Navigating different worlds.** American public schools are designed to reinforce community values and prepare students for citizenship and productive economic participation. Immigrant students bring a unique perspective to the American educative process. Though immigrants come to the United States in search for both freedom and economic opportunities, their cultures inevitably clash with the American way of life. Differences in both culture and language result in misunderstandings. Accordingly, cultural clashes are a normal part of the immigrant adjustment process. In this context immigrant children act as the *de facto* buffers between the parents’ traditional culture and American culture. This is not an easy task and each situation varies depending on the depth and width of the cultural gap. Cultural adaptation and language acquisition, often measured by time in country, narrows this distance. However, parents and children learn
the English language and American culture at different rates. Consequently, the adaptation of children and adults follows different timetables. This results in increased conflict between children, parents, and the community. Children often navigate these different worlds alone, but also with varying success rates. The bridging multiple worlds model goes a long way in shedding some light on this process (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991).

There are many definitions of culture. For the purpose of this analysis, culture is defined as the acquired knowledge, values, beliefs, and expectations that guide people’s perspectives and behaviors (Chhuon et al., 2010). Within the course of one day, a typical immigrant, ELL, or former ELL student literally wakes up in one culture, spends his or her day in another, and returns home to another culture. Different expectations, values, aspirations, goals, norms, social hierarchies, family structures, and varying roles mark these transitions. These transitions presenting ongoing challenges for immigrant students. Children have attributed challenges to being successful in school to boyfriends, girlfriends, peer pressure, temptation of friends dropping out, friends as bad examples, bad friends, enemies, drugs, sex, and having babies (Cooper & Dominquez, 2005). In dealing with these challenges, the multiple worlds model traces how ethnically diverse children develop their sense of identity by navigating across worlds of families, peers, schools, and communities on pathways to college and adulthood (Cooper & Dominquez, 2005). The multiple world’s model is two-fold. First, the model describes family, school, and peer worlds, the interrelationships between them, and in particular how meaning and understanding affect the student’s engagement with learning. Second the model seeks to
uncover how students perceive boundaries between worlds and the adaptations strategies used to move from one context to another (Chhuon et al., 2005; Cooper & Dominquez, 2005; Phelan et al., 1991).

There are three questions are at the core of bridging multiple worlds: (a) who helps me, (b) who causes me difficulties, and (c) how do I adapt and overcome these difficulties (Cooper, C. R., Cooper. G. R., Trinh, Wilson, & Gonzalez, 2013). A vision for success is essential in overcoming the inevitable derailleurs and developing the support systems to meet both educational achievement and attainment goals. However, the multiple world’s model does not explain all cultural conflict. The theory is only helpful in explaining conflict that deals with the child’s adaptation to American public schools and the particular challenges students encounter upon entering the college-ready pipeline (Cooper et al., 2013). College readiness includes successful participation in college preparatory courses at the high school level such as Honors, AP, and IB courses. The very factors that lead to academic success of ELL students however, may also serve as potential sources of conflict as students transition between these worlds.

There are too many differences, between cultures that ELL and former ELL students navigate, to list. However, one example clearly illustrates the experiences of immigrant students as they navigate different cultures. American culture values individualism and self-determination while many Eastern and Latin cultures value collectivism and filial obedience. Regardless of ethnic background, in the school setting, students are encouraged to study hard, enroll in difficult classes, go to college, and take a job that will likely require relocation. Many immigrant students are expected to work
around the house and in their family business from very early ages. Additionally, in many immigrant communities, families practice and expect extended family cohabitation well into adulthood. Advanced classes and rigorous college preparatory classes take an inordinate amount of time dedicated to reading, writing, and research. Moreover, immigrant students also face language barriers and it may take them a lot longer to complete these studies. These differences in expectations range from mild to extreme. A three-year longitudinal study of academically successful immigrant high school students revealed four patterns in bridging multiple worlds: (a) congruent worlds with smooth transitions, (b) different worlds with manageable boundaries, (c) different worlds with hazardous crossings, and (d) different worlds with insurmountable crossings (Phelan et al., 1991). The severities of the differences are based on various cultural attributes, personality types, and family dynamics. However one thing is sure, how a student navigates cultural expectations between home and school is essential to their high academic achievement.

The academic achievement of immigrant students is affected by the cultural clashes between parents’ traditional values and children quick adaptation to public school norms and expectations (Chhuon et al., 2010). Schools, principals, and teachers can do a lot to support students as they navigate the incongruent worlds between home and school. Public schools are set up to provide social, emotional, and academic support to all students. To begin, teachers, counselors and others must learn about the challenges immigrant students face by learning about their cultures. With this knowledge, teachers, program staff siblings, school staff, and friends can serve as cultural brokers to ease the
transition between home and school (Cooper et al., 2013). Additionally, engaging the family through culture nights, coffee with the principal, involving Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that support immigrant communities, and hosting other outreach events, extend the student’s support system as they travel between these different worlds (Cooper et al., 2013). When it comes to getting academic support, the College Board (2009), asserts that teachers are the most important learning influence in the lives of immigrant students. In one study, academically successful immigrant students that navigate multiple worlds, cited school cultures that provide access to college preparatory courses, explicit guidance, and high expectations, as essential supports in meeting their educational attainment goals (Chhuon et al., 2010). When it comes to academic support, academically successful ELL and former ELL students report that enrollment in honors, AP, and IB classes increased their academic achievement and overall school engagement (Chhuon, et al., 2010). Furthermore, students reported that participation in these high track classes was important to developing academically peer supportive networks (Chhuon, et al., 2010).

Principals and schools can also help students better navigate these different worlds. Scheduling options that increase course completion frequency provide additional opportunities to both take the classes needed to become English proficient and enroll in academically rigorous courses (McCall-Perez, 2000). English language learner academic advisement has been cited a best practice in both providing opportunities to enroll in rigorous courses, but also supporting students once enrolled in these classes (McCall-Perez, 2000). Additionally, counseling assignments may also help staff learn more about
the students on their caseload. By assigning staff to serve ELL populations using a cohort model, counselors have the opportunity to better learn about immigrant students, their aspirations, and the challenges they face in navigating these different worlds.

**Chapter Summary**

This literature review begins with the research questions in mind. Determining the common schooling experiences of successful English language learners that are involved in advanced coursework at the high school level led to the identification of search terms that support this query. A thorough review of journal articles, books, governmental and non-governmental reports, statues, and case law identified 10 recurring themes. Moreover, each of these themes were further researched and a balance of qualitative and quantitative studies was sought. The studies in each of the identified themes were further reviewed for the alignment of results. Extreme care was taken to present the positive, inconclusive, and negative findings of the studies reviewed. Another goal of this literature review is to thematically tell the story of what has been found to work and not work in helping immigrant students achieve at high levels. To further contextualize the review of literature, a historical overview of English language learners in America frames the review of literature, the methods used, the analysis conducted, the research findings, and the implications of this work. Overall, the three themes reviewed thus far are related to student success in terms of: (a) teacher factors, (b) school factors, (c) and student factors. Ten subthemes were further identified, presented, and critiqued. The themes and sub-themes attempted to capture the factors deemed important to
achieving at high levels by English language learners, their teachers, principals, and educational researchers.
Chapter 3

Methods

Born in other countries, yet believing you could be happy in this, our laws acknowledge, as they should do, your right to join us in society, conforming, as I doubt not you will do, to our established rules. That these rules shall be as equal as prudential considerations will admit, will certainly be the aim of our legislatures, general and particular (Randall, 1858).\(^1\)

The purpose of this chapter is to lay the theoretical and procedural foundation of this study. The chapter serves as a roadmap that is used to contextualize and, desirably, make possible the replication of the results. To begin, the chapter restates the research questions that serve to guide the methods that are used to answer them. The qualitative paradigm section of the chapter introduces the lenses through which this research is conducted, with particular attention to the analysis and synthesis of the results. Moreover, the chapter identifies how participants are selected as well as how the data is generated, collected, and analyzed. In working with students who are still enrolled in public schools, a section is devoted to the ethical considerations that are employed to ensure they are minimally impacted by this work.

Little is known about former ELL students enrolled in advance coursework at the high school level. This study is based on assumptions that are fundamentally essential to uncovering the truth. As such, a section is devoted to the assumptions as well as the

\(^1\) Thomas Jefferson to Hugh White on May 2, 1801 from Washington D.C.
limitations and delimitations of this study. The role of the researcher within both the selection of this topic and the methods that objectifies this work are further outlined. Lastly, the summary section of this study provides a 10,000-foot overview of the methods used.

To understand why some former ELL students are successful when many more are not, a qualitative approach that focuses the perspectives of the students themselves is employed in this study (Creswell, 2012, 2014). A qualitative approach further reveals the perspectives of these successful former ELL students in order to understand this phenomena and better serve students at the intersection of immigration, cultural difference, the curriculum, and the acculturation process. There are more ways than one to interpret the world. When it comes to studying immigrant students, world-views are essential to providing the language and the perspectives needed to uncover the truth. Accordingly, paradigms are lenses through which meaning is formed. To that end, a constructivist paradigm is used to frame this phenomenological research design. The data used for this study is generated and collected through structured interviews and classroom observations. School district student transcripts and enrollment records provide additional contextual information throughout this study. The selection of this design provides insight into answering the following research questions:

1. What are the shared schooling experiences of former ELL students who are currently enrolled in advanced coursework in high school?

2. What are the shared schooling factors that facilitated the success of former ELL students enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level?
3. What are the shared inhibiting factors to the academic success of former ELL students enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level?

**Paradigm**

There is no secret that how the world is perceived varies greatly among individuals and groups. The worldview through which individuals create meaning has a great impact on how problems are identified, viewed, analyzed, and synthesized. Moreover, how a problem is framed influences how questions are formulated and the approaches used to answer them. Paradigms serve as theoretical lenses through which the world is interpreted (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). Paradigms are important not only because they serve as worldviews for interpreting phenomena, but because they guide the identification and investigation of both problems and solutions (Krauss, 2005). The appropriate selection of a paradigm provides a better vantage point to truly understanding a problem as well as possible solutions. Due to its alignment to the immigrant experience as well as its deep roots in educational theory, the constructivist paradigm is thus used to situate the learning process for both the individual as well as the context in which learning takes place.

**Constructivism.** Former ELL students that are academically successful were able to gain the language and academic skills needed for enrollment in advanced coursework at the high school level by progressing through programs and learning situations in the public school setting. The overwhelming majority of former ELL students are first generation immigrants. Though some former ELL students are born in the United States, their spoken language at home is something other than English. In
both instances, the students selected for this study consist of first and second-generation immigrants students spanning three continents. Constructivism has also been selected as a paradigm for examining this phenomenon due to its alignment with the research questions of this study. In essence, this constructivist design takes into account the participants views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies (Creswell, 2012). In this study the constructivist paradigm guides the conduct of this study, its synthesis, as well as its analysis.

The definition of constructivist learning theory, as it applies to this study, is critical to its application. To begin, it is important to define and situate the constructivist learning approach within the scope of this study. Simply defined, constructivism is how the individual creates meaning and knowledge in order to better understand the world around them (Fox, 2001; Williamson, 2006). Others have defined constructivism as the essence of learning or the acquisition of new knowledge (Barevelt, 2013; Fox, 2001). Constructivism posits that learning results from the active process of the learner where knowledge is invented, socially constructed, essential to understanding the world, and uniquely personal (Bareveldt, 2013; Fox, 2001; Lieu & Matthews, 2005; Williamson, 2006). For the purpose of this study constructivism is defined as the uniquely personal acquisition of knowledge resulting from meaning creation through the social interactions with peers, teachers, and school staff in the school setting.

How learning can be uniquely personal as well as socially constructed requires some additional exploration. The role of the individual and groups as situated in constructivist learning theory has been hotly debated. This dichotomy reaches back to
the inception of constructivist theories. Though Piaget and later on Vygotsky, the fathers of the constructivist theory, agreed that knowledge is constructed, the former stressed the construction of knowledge by the individual while the latter stressed the construction of knowledge as a social process (DeVaries, 2000; Phillips, 1995; Williamson, 2006). Under a constructivist paradigm the individual, as a result of interacting with others in his or her learning environment, constructs all knowledge. For instance, the former ELL student brings prior knowledge and experiences from his or her former country to the learning task. The student interacts with the teacher and his peers in the classroom around the learning task at hand. Whether through classroom discussion, listening to his peers, cooperative learning, or reciprocal teaching, the learner discovers the definition of new words, how to relate the newly learned words to similar words in his native language, the use of the new words, the context, and how to combine them with other words to express ideas. English language learners students think and process in their birth language well into adulthood. As such, all learning is situated between the formation of new knowledge and its relationship to the primary language of the student. When the prior knowledge and experience of the learner is used vis-à-vis the active learning experience, the construction of new knowledge, and therefore learning occurs (Bareveldt, 2013; Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). As such, the experiences of the learner in the classroom or school environment result in the invention of new knowledge that is particular to each individual. This construction of new knowledge is based on the active engagement of the learner, prior knowledge, as well as the social interaction of the individual in the learning environment (Bareveldt, 2013; Liu & Matthews, 2005). As described thus far,
constructivism and, therefore learning, occurs both as a result of interacting with others and within the individual. Learning is both a social act, through the interaction with others to create knowledge, and an individual effort, through the active participation of the learner. As interpreted, it is not surprising that constructivism has existed as a two pronged theory. Fox (2001), in defining constructivist learning theory, asserts that all knowledge is personal and learning is socially constructed. This study accepts that learning occurs both within the individual and through the social interactions within the learning environment.

There are several reasons why the constructivist paradigm is most useful to answering the research questions of this study. First, language development is at the core of the constructivist theory and the very definition of former ELLs. Though former ELLs have passed a language proficiency test to exit the program, language acquisition and development, continues for decades to come. Constructivist learning theory is particularly aligned to language acquisition through, the meaning of words, how they are associated with other words, how they are used, and how they related to similar words in the learner’s native language (Fox, 2001; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000; Liu & Matthews, 2005). The misconceptions that occur both within the English language and with the learner’s primary language are at the heart of both the learner and the theory.

Former ELL students that are enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level have academically acculturated more quickly then their peers. The social interaction with English speaking peers is important to both language acquisition and academic development. Constructivist theory is particularly important to understanding
the academic development of former ELLs because it takes into account the role of culture and the acculturation process (Fox, 2001; Hong et al., 2000). To acculturate, the individual learns the language, social norms, and acceptable behaviors in light of his or her primary culture and language. Due to its inherent design, constructivist theory provides insight into the individual’s language acquisition and acculturation processes, which are critical to academic success in the secondary public school setting (Hong et al., 2000).

Culture is a construct. A constructivist approach is more appropriate in capturing the identity-shaping experiences of minority groups (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000; K. Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). Students are not the proverbial *tabula rasa*, waiting only to be filled with knowledge. Former ELL students in this study come from Eastern Europe, Southwest Asia, East Asia, and South Asia. Students speak different languages at home, related to their families in different ways, may have learned in different ways, and some have attended schools that looked and operated quite differently from those in the United States. English Language Learners, both past and present, arrive to the United States, their schools, and classrooms with experiences that are quite different from their peers. The learning that occurs is born out of peer, teacher, and school staff interactions vis-à-vis the other experiences the student brings to the school building. Essentially, ELL students adapt, construct, internalize, and develop their worldview as a result of interactions with peers as well as the learning environment. Constructivist theory provides valuable insight into this process. Moreover, it is useful for understanding the student’s transcultural experiences through analysis of both
observable behaviors and the individual’s point of view (Hong et al., 2000; Williamson, 2006).

Theory has limits. Constructivist theory is prone both to misinterpretation and misapplication. Users of the theory are prone to its literal interpretation and neglect its overarching principles (Liu & Matthews, 2005). In looking at the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, it is important to understand that knowing, are both an individual and a social act. More importantly, social components of the theory works to support the individual construction of knowledge. Additionally, while the constructivist theory may explain the nature of knowing and learning, it fails to give a full account of the learner, her motivations, intentions, and goals (Bareveldt, 2013). The myopic view of student’s construction of knowledge and knowing has the potential to ignore the totality of the student and numerous other factors that lead to academic success. These limitations are consistently considered through the conduct of this study.

**Research Design**

Several factors were considered in selecting this phenomenological research design. As stated, there is a dearth of research on former ELL students that are enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level. The variables that are related to the academic success of this group have not been clearly identified. Accordingly, when the variables are unknown and when research on the topic is sparse, a qualitative design is most appropriate (Creswell, 2014). The research questions themselves drove the selection of this phenomenological research design. To uncover the factors that former ELL students consider important to academic achievement, when little is known about
this phenomenon, a design that suspends theory, and looks at the true experiences of these individuals is most appropriate.

Before proceeding any further, it is important to know what phenomenology is and what it does. While it is known that the selected participants are considered to be academically successful, little is known about their common experiences. Phenomenology is an appropriate design because rather than theorizing first and proving it second, the goal of this research is to describe what the selected participants have in common through their experiences (Creswell, et al., 2007; Giorgi, 1997). In its simplest form in phenomenological research, the researcher identifies a human experience, collects data, interprets the experiences, and develops a description of the essence of participant experience (Creswell, 2014; Creswell et al., 2007; Giorgi, 1997). Though phenomenological design focuses entirely on the experiences of the individual through his or her worldview, it has been misinterpreted to be entirely free from theory. In order for the theory to emerge, phenomenological research design suspends theory during the data generation, collection, and analysis processes. In order for the themes to emerge in their true form, the procedures are discussed later in this chapter. Once the theories themselves emerge, a constructivist lens is used to interpret and contextualize the findings. Through a participant focus and the suspension of theory in its initial stages, this phenomenological approach gives voice to the participants in this study. This research design is fitting to answering the research questions, acknowledging the real world and therefore the realities of the immigrant students, and the way the students make sense of this world (Husserl, 2013). Through a process called reduction, the
experiences of the participants are boiled down to the true essence of their individual and collective experiences (Creswell et al., 2007; Lester, 1999). The strength of this selected methodology lies in its ability to narrowly focus on the experiences of individual students and the phenomenon of displacement, immigration, struggle, adjustment, and academic achievement (Giorgi, 1997; Lester, 1999). Most importantly, a phenomenological design provides the pathway to gaining insight into the motivations and actions of the immigrant students and how they are related to academic success. Phenomenology is a powerful tool for cutting through theoretical assumption and underpinnings that cloud the understanding of this phenomenon (Lester, 1999). Phenomenology uncovers the real experiences of the individual immigrant students, and therefore the findings of this research design may be used to impact practice, theory, research and policy (Lester, 1999).

The phenomenological method has been misinterpreted as being immune to other epistemologies. The transcendental component of phenomenology means that everything must be free from pre-existing conceptions and assumptions for the first time (Creswell et al., 2007). In order to be open to the discovery of unexpected meanings, the researcher must suspend all pre-existing assumptions, pre-conceptions, and essentially be free of theory (Giorgi, 1997). However, this is where the misinterpretation of this methodology begins. It is true that during the interview and data collection process, phenomenology is an interpretative process where the researcher must make a final interpretation of the meaning and lived experiences of the participants (Creswell et al., 2007). Moreover, though a large part of phenomenology is descriptive, the application of theory to interpret
the findings of this study, during the final phases of the analysis, does not in any way weaken its use and its findings. The validity of this study rests in the relationship between the experiences of the participants, the meaning the participants created, and the description of their experiences. After the individual experiences are described, grouped, and common themes emerge, they must be put back into the educational context. It is during this time that the constructivist paradigm is used to contextualize the meanings, rather than the actual experiences of the participants.

The accuracy of descriptions in phenomenological research can be problematic. For instance, because participant interviews are conducted well after their experiences have occurred, a retrospective viewpoint is used. As such, the rearview mirror effect is introduced into the study. In this context, distortion naturally occurs due to the passage of time. However according to Hycner (1985), the description may be fuller due to the passage of time through the introduction of reflection. This phenomenon is true of any experience that is described and highlights the limitation of language to capture the full effect of the experience (Hycner, 1985).

Another problem raised by the phenomenological method, and for that matter with interview research in general, is confabulation and psychological defensiveness (Hycner, 1985). The former occurs when the subject answers to highlight or fill in content that supports a favorable view while the latter refers to the avoidance of topics that may be sensitive to the participant (Hycner, 1985). The views students have as first year immigrant may be quite different from those of a naturalized American citizen. The views individual participants hold in the first year in American public schools may be
naturally different five years later. How students answer when they are academically successful and when they face the frustration of learning a language may also be quite different. Add current events, the focus on national security, the immigration debates that permeate the 2015 news cycle, and the potential for students to unconsciously answer in ways that support a particular viewpoint is a real possibility. This, however, can be true in investigating any phenomenon through interviews. Care must be taken to flush out these factors and by using an instrument that has been validated. Moreover, there is an opportunity to learn from this phenomenon. Although Baker. L. L. (2013) has performed a similar study at the middle school level, the literature review conducted back in Chapter 2 serves as a guiding post to both participant descriptions and their interpretations. While both of these factors are considered, it is important to remember that the validity of the phenomenological method lies in accurately capturing the lived experiences of the individuals as they remember them, and refraining from applying any pre-existing notion of theory, assumptions, or beliefs (Creswell, 2014; Giorgi, 1997; Hycner, 1985).

**Sampling and Participant Selection**

The research topic, design, questions, and population size were used to select an appropriate sampling technique. The purpose of phenomenological research in answering the research questions was to inform practitioners, fill in gaps in research, and identify the variables associated with former English Language Learners that are academically successful. As such, the purpose of this phenomenological research was to shed light on the experiences of the selected students and therefore inform the research and practice, rather than to generalize its findings (Baker. L. L, 2014; Creswell, 2007;
Hycner, 1985). To that end a purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants (Creswell, 2012. Considering the total size of the population to be studied was less then 20 individuals, the focus on the lived individual experience, and the purpose of this study, convenience sampling was an appropriate sampling technique.

The participant selection criteria are aligned to the research questions, the methodology used, and the applied theory. As stated, this study focused on former ELL students that are enrolled in AP and IB classes at the high school level. The selected students maintained grades of “C” or higher with a cumulative weighted GPA of 3.0 or higher. The “C” standard has been selected as school the school district places additional weight on AP and IB courses. Additionally, the selected students have met ELL program requirements, and therefore exited the programs within four years of the interview date. The four-year standard has been selected to increase the number of participants, make the study feasible, and to limit the time between the experiences of students and the interview process. This study takes place in a school district in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. The school district consists of approximately 12,600 students. In 2015 there were 276 students in grades K-12 who had received Limited English Proficiency (LEP) services. LEP students made up approximately 2.2% of the total population.

**Selection process.** Phenomenological research design requires 5 to 25 participants (Creswell et al., 2007). There were approximately 20 students that met the participant criteria outlined. A minimum of 10 participants were further identified to potentially participate in this study. Additional participants were considered based on both feasibility and availability. The selection process begun by analyzing the WIDA
ACCESS scores that were available upon request from the school district testing coordinator. Scores of six or higher indicate that students have met the program exit criteria and were considered to have gained the English language and the academic proficiency needed to be successful. The GPAs of the students that meet these criteria was also retrieved through the school district’s ASPEN electronic database. Only students that are in grades 9-12 and have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher were selected. Participants were also grouped by school zone. Student schedules were retrieved through ASPEN and only students that were enrolled in AP or IB classes participated. Furthermore, only participants who were at the time of the selection process earning a grade of a “C” in the advanced classes met the criteria to participate. Additionally demographic data, to include the date of enrollment, date of arrival to the U.S., language spoken at home, and the nationality of each participant, were also retrieved. This data is generally accessible in the student’s cumulative folder located at their zone school. This data was then used in selecting participants that represent the diversity of all ELL and former ELL students in this school district.

This study follows the College of William and Mary Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. After the approval of this study and the selection of participants, the principal at each participating school was informed of this study’s description, the research questions, and the participants involved. A meeting with each participant at each school has occurred during the student’s elective class, lunch time, or after dismissal. The initial meetings was 5 minutes in duration with an additional 5 minutes of travel to and from the meeting location. The meetings were held in the school counseling
office areas. Prior to the data generation and collection process, the students were asked to participate in this study and were provided with a letter of consent as well as a letter outlining this study. Parental approval, an opt out option, and the telephone number of the researcher was included in the documents sent home with the student. Two school days were provided to students to return the form to the school’s front office.

**Data Generation and Collection**

The data generation and collection process consisted of two interviews, one class observation, and one teacher interview. The student and parent consent form are available in Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C. The interviews were scheduled two weeks in advance of the first meeting. As stated, the interviews were conducted in a neutral location such as the school’s counseling office. The interviews were recorded in digital format. The recording provided the opportunity for the researcher to observe responses and the non-verbal communication patterns of the interviewee in real-time. At the end of the interview, the participants were given an opportunity to ask questions and were informed of the next interview. The digital file of each interview was uploaded into NVivo 11 for Mac. The interview notes were typed and were also uploaded to NVivo 11 for Mac.

The classroom observations were scheduled one week in advance. Each participant provided input in scheduling the observation in the AP or IB class of their choice. The teacher was informed of the classroom visit one week in advance of the observation. The observation notes were scripted with particular attention on the student’s actions, interactions with peers, the teacher, and academic skills such as
participation in discussion, note-taking, and other instructional and social interactions. Additionally, the quality of both instruction and the impact on student learning was recorded using the indicators of student engagement form that will be described later in this chapter. Immediately following the observation, the notes were uploaded to NVivo 11 for Mac. The summary of the classroom observations were used to prompt additional participant responses during the second interview.

**Student interviews.** Interviews were used as the primary data generation and collection tool for this study. Interviews are the primary data generation and collection tool in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). As such, interviews are an effective method for collecting data this phenomenological designed study (Creswell et al., 2007, 2012, 2014; Giorgi, 1999; Hycner, 1985). This present study attempted to replicate Baker, L. L. (2013), work successful former ELL students enrolled in advanced classes at the middle school level. Whereas Baker, L. L. (2013), studied middle school students enrolled in advanced classes, this work focused on former ELL students enrolled in AP and IB courses at the high school level. Accordingly, the instruments used by Baker, L. L. (2013), have also been modified for use in this study. Dr. Baker, L. L. was contacted and provided permission for their use. The permission is available in Appendix D. Due to the age and social development of high school students, the photo elicitation method used by Baker, L. L. (2013), was not used in this study. The establishment of good rapport with the participants of study was essential to gathering accurate data. Additionally, asking open ended questions and giving participants the psychological space to elaborate on answers was essential to capturing the true meaning of their
experiences. Participants have a strong stake in their acculturation process. Rapport and empathy went a long way in setting the stage for participants to provide detailed and accurate information that was relevant to answering the research questions of this study (Lester, 1999). Accordingly, each interview session begun with a participant engagement segment that provided the interviewer with the opportunity to build rapport. The student interview protocols for the first and second interview are found in Appendix E and Appendix F.

**Classroom observations.** Observation is the process of capturing open ended first hand information (Creswell, 2011). The purpose of the classroom observation was to gather data on the participant’s instructional experience, his or her academic behaviors, and the teaching practices employed. The research questions of this study focused on the academic behaviors of students. Accordingly one classroom observation in the participant’s AP or IB class was conducted. A modified version of the indicators of student engagement form was thus used. The indicators outlined on this form were grounded in Hattie’s (2009), research on practices that have the greatest impact on student learning. As such, the indicators of student engagement form identified the top 11 high-yield practices and the most frequent lower-yield practices in order to quantify the degree of best practice implementation. There were other advantages for using this form as well. The College of William and Mary School University Research Network (SURN) provided training on using this form to hundreds of principals across the region where this study took place. Much work has also been done by school principals to increase inter-rater reliability. Examples and non-examples of the student engagement
indicators thus help principals and teachers determine the degree of alignment between teacher practice and impactful instruction. This observation process also provided the opportunity to script each participant’s behaviors such as classroom seating as well as interactions with peers and teachers. The student selected the time and the class for this observation at the end of the first interview. The student was then asked to select a representative class to be observed in, avoiding days of test preparation and the administration of tests and exams. A copy of the classroom observation form is provided in *Appendix G*.

The purpose of the classroom observation was also to relate the shared schooling experiences, success factors, and inhibiting factors with the observed student academic behaviors. The classroom observation was conducted after the first interview and before the second interview. During the second interview, the classroom observation data was used to debrief with the student. Furthermore, the classroom observation was used to relate the observed student behaviors with the information provided during the two interviews. During the analysis phase, the classroom observation data was used to further contextualize the participants’ common schooling experiences. The classroom observation also served a similar role in the conduct of the teacher interviews. In all, the classroom observation provided another data point to provide depth and context to the shared experiences of the participants.

**Teacher interviews.** Three data points were used for the data collection and generation process. In addition to classroom observations and student interviews, teacher interviews provided an additional perspective. The student participants were informed of
the teacher interview well in advance and had the option of selecting the teacher for the interview. The student participant provided permission in advance for the interview and the teacher interview lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. To better align to the research questions, the questions of the student interview were modified to access the same topics and areas of interest during the teacher interview. The teacher interview protocol is found in Appendix H.

Data Analysis

Hycner (1985) and Creswell et al. (2007), provided the framework for the data analysis used throughout this phenomenological study. The data analysis protocol used in the study was a 14-step process consisting of: (a) conduct the first interview, (b) transcribe interview, (c) bracketing, (d) listening to interviews, (e) delineation units of general meaning, (f) delineate units of general meaning into the study’s research questions, (g) eliminate redundancies, (h) cluster units of relevant meaning, (i) determine themes for the units of meaning clusters, (j) conduct the second interview, (k) modify themes, (l) identify general and unique themes for all the interviews, (m) contextualize themes, and (n) write a composite summary. These steps were further reorganized into three phases. The first phase (a-d), consisted of data collection, listening, and reading the interviews and observations. The second phase (e-j), consisted of forming natural clusters of meaning and identifying emerging themes. The third and final stage (k-n) consisted of summarizing the interviews, relating the clusters to the research questions, modifying themes, and contextualizing the major themes.
### Table 1

**Summary of Data Analysis Procedures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Procedures</th>
</tr>
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</table>
|       | Conduct the first interview  
          Transcription  
          Bracketing  
          Listening to interviews  
          Delineate units of general meaning  
          Delineate units of general meaning to the research questions  
          Eliminate redundancies  
          Cluster units of relevant meaning  
          Determine themes for the units of meaning clusters  
          Conduct the second interview  
          Modify themes  
          Identify general and unique themes  
          Contextualize themes  
          Write a composite summary |

NVivo 11 for Mac was used throughout this study to organize, transcribe, code, search, and analyze both the interview and observation notes as well as the audio recordings (QSR International, 2015). Interview and observation notes and recordings were uploaded to NVivo 11 within one week after they are conducted. The first step of the process was to transcribe the audio from each interview. During this step the researcher focused on the inclusion of literal statements to the greatest extent possible (Giorgi, 1997; Hycner, 1985). The interview and observation notes were also entered into the NVivo database, and particular attention was placed on non-verbal communication such as pauses, fillers, tone, body language, and facial expressions.
The validity of phenomenological research rests on the ability of the researcher to record the true meaning of the participant’s experience free from theory, assumption, or preconception (Giorgi, 1997, 2012; Hycner, 1985). Bracketing is a process of putting aside, or rendering non-influential, the researcher’s worldviews in order for the participant experiences to emerge in their true form (Giorgi, 1997). The first step in bracketing is the identification of the participant’s role, background, and worldview so they can better be isolated during the data collection, generation, and recording process. As such, journaling was used to identify the researcher’s views during the listening process (Bednall, 2006). Additionally, an inventory of the researcher’s worldviews was conducted within the participant’s interview responses, not to eliminate them, but to verify their true existence. Moreover, the researcher has outlined his life experiences in the limitations, delimitation, and curriculum vitae segments of this written work. It is important to remember that bracketing however only occurred while listening and recording the participant’s statements. During this phase it was important to listen to what was truly communicated by the participant. Finally, the researcher listened to the interviews three times during three different sessions to provide multiple opportunities to capture the meaning the participants had developed.

The purpose of the second phase of the data analysis protocol was to create units of general meaning and identify emerging themes. To identify units of general meaning, the researcher combed over every word, sentence, paragraph, and non-verbal communication to elicit the meaning of what was being expressed by each individual participant. The crystalized condensation of the meaning expressed formed units of
general meaning (Hycner, 1985). To create general units of meaning, the researcher listened to interviews several times and condensed literal words or phrases. The units of general meaning that emerged were used to determine their alignment to the research questions. Each research question was further scrutinized with the available units of general meaning to determine both its relevancy and alignment. Statements that were not relevant to the research questions were then set aside. However, the researcher aired on the side of safety when considering the removal of units of general meaning. Following this process, the remaining units of general meaning were compared to the totality of the interviews as well as the general context in order to generate units of relevant meaning. Units of relevant meaning were formed when the each unit of general meaning was found to relate to the research question and fit within the general context of the participant interview. The next step in this phase was to note the frequency of similar units of relevant meaning and eliminate redundancy. The frequency of relevant meaning served as exclamation points for the participant experiences. The significance of relevant meaning was thus formed by both frequency and the content of relevant meaning (Giorgi, 1997; Hycner, 1985).

The propose of the third and final stage of the study’s data analysis protocol was to identify themes and contextualize them into the larger body of educational research. In phenomenological research, clustering units of relevant meaning forms the themes. At this juncture, it was important to go back to the interview recordings, transcripts, and notes to elicit meaning from the context provided. The units of relevant meaning were then grouped to form one or more themes. Prior to the second participant interview, a
summary was generated. The summary was created around the emerging central themes and it was provided to the participant at the time of the second interview. During the second interview the participant had the opportunity to accept, modify, or add further information to the summary. After the second participant interview was conducted, the data analysis protocol steps a through i were followed with this additional data. The data from the second interview was used to modify or support existing themes. If however individual responses varied greatly, the individual summaries were rewritten and summarized. Next, the researcher looked at emerging themes and grouped them into common and unique themes. Common or shared themes were those that spanned the experiences of most participants while unique themes were those that stood out in isolation. The isolated themes were used as counterpoints to the common themes (Hycner, 1985).

The final step of the data analysis protocol was the contextualization of themes and the generation of the composite summary. As stated, it is important to note that phenomenological research design is not entirely paradigm free. While the judgment, beliefs, assumptions, and worldviews of the researcher were suspended throughout the data generation and collection process, it is important to note that phenomenology is not only a description, but an interpretative process where the researcher makes a final interpretation of participants lived experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). The researcher discovered the meanings within the data by capturing the participant experience without the filter of theory or paradigm (Giorgi, 1997). Once the data was recorded and the participant meaning captured, the researcher used constructivism and the literature review
findings to contextualize his or her experience within the larger world of the English Language Learner educative process. Additionally, the researcher was particularly sensitive to the phenomenon being investigated (Giorgi, 2012). The discovery phase of this protocol involved an interpretative process that used a constructivist paradigm, to provide the sensitivity previously described, in order to contextualize the findings into the larger body of educational research. The final summary was then written to capture the totality of all interviews, with particular attention given to communicating the essence of the lived experiences of the participants.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study presented several ethical considerations. All of the study participants were between the ages of 15 and 18. Informed consent from both the student participants and their parents was secured before any data collection took place. Due to the small sample size of this study, the names of participants were protected through the use of pseudonyms. The participants of this study were provided with the opportunity to select his or her pseudonym at the beginning of the first interview. The data reported throughout Chapter 4 and 5 uses these pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. The data collected for this study was stored physically on a secure remote drive. Access to this data is strictly limited to the researcher of this study.

Parent, teacher, and student participants were provided with a general narrative description of this study. Participants were informed that the questions in this study may have caused increased levels of discomfort and stress. Both the parents and the students were informed of the potential discomfort and stress well in advance of the first
interview. The participants had the opportunity to refuse to participate and three participants choose this option. Several studies have shown that immigrant students experience increased levels of stress and intergenerational conflict with both parents and extended family members (Briman, 2006; Dufrensne, 1993; Rosenthal, Raneieri, & Klimidis, 1996; Ruben, 1994; Titzmann, Silbereisen, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2011).

Because adolescent immigrant students acculturate at much faster rates than their parents, these levels of stress vary in degree for all immigrant groups. To that end, great care was taken to communicate with both the students and the families using the language line as well as translating the consent form in the parent’s language. Ruben (1994), found lower levels of self-esteem, and greater levels of depressive affect in immigrant students.

Identity formation is hard enough for teenagers. Immigrant students in many cases experience increased difficulty in making friends and connecting to the school culture due to differences in both language and culture (Limbert & Lambie, 2011; Phalean, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). The emotional well being of students was addressed by (a) informing them participants of their role in the study, (b) maintaining confidentiality, (c) informing students of mandatory reporting requirements, (d) informing participants and their parents that anxiety and discomfort may result from answering the questions, (e) providing the participants the opportunity to stop the interview, (f) keeping the school principal informed, (g) and providing counseling as needed.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

This study is limited by several factors. Some of these weaknesses are within the researcher’s control, and thus care was taken to limit their impact. Other factors that also
weaken this study may not be controlled for as they fall outside the researcher’s control. However, these limitations must be stated and taken into consideration, as they are critical to contextualizing this research, the findings, and the consequential validity of this study. Accordingly, there are three limiting factors that are inherent in this study. Similarly, there are also four delimiting factors that are found in the design of the study.

Firstly, this study involved seven participants. It is worth noting that the small number of participants in one school district may not be representative of all former ELL students that are enrolled in advanced coursework across the region, state, or the national level. The small number of participants may also not reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of all immigrant students that are academically successful in this setting. While the researcher selected students that represented the cultural and ethnic diversity found in one school district, the total number of former ELL high school students that are enrolled in advance coursework is less than 20 students in a school district consisting of approximately 74 former ELL high school students and 12,500 students across the district’s 19 schools.

The duration of this study was also another limiting factor. Subjects were interviewed two times over a period of two months. Participant interviews, classroom observations, and teacher interviews were conducted in the second semester of the academic school year. However, the participants of this study acquired the English language proficiency and were mainstreamed as far back as 6-12 semesters. The period for the data collection represents a small fraction of the total time required for these students to be academically successful.
In addition to the small number of participants involved in this study, these former ELL participants may not be representative of all former ELL or all students for that matter. The innate academic ability, intellect, and academic drive, are characteristics that are not measured by this study vis-à-vis all students across national origin, ethnicity, cultural, language and ethnic lines. These students may be more representative of all students enrolled in advanced coursework and as such they may possess above average academic ability, intellect, and drive to do well. Accordingly, the findings of this study are not generalizable to all students as not all students possess the ability to be successful in advanced coursework. However, the findings of this study have the potential to help all students increase their academic performance and thus make progress on the attainment of their educational goals. This study provides a guide to educators for students who have the academic ability to complete advanced coursework, but language and acculturation continue to be barriers to maximizing their academic potential. Lastly, though all of the students in this study were transient prior to arriving to this school district, the students in this study were in the same district from elementary school to high school. As such, this study does not account for student transiency, which varies considerably for ELL and former ELL students.

This study is subject to several delimitations. Firstly, the mere selection of this topic is a delimiting factor. There are other challenges related to the improving the performance of ELL and former ELL students. Most approaches include the testing specific instructional strategies and their effect on ELL student achievement. Other studies, examine the characteristics of successful ELL programs. Few studies examine
the characteristics of successful ELL students. Even fewer studies examine successful former ELL students. Two studies appear to look at successful former ELL students from the perspective of the student. This narrows this study to a great degree.

Secondly, the research questions themselves are delimiting factors to this study. Students were asked questions relating to their schooling experiences that may have occurred over a period of several years. How students remember these experiences and what they deem important to their academic success has the potential to vary across the participants. This delimiting factor however is controlled through instrumentation, the selected epistemology, data collection, data analysis, and the use of multiple data sources.

Thirdly, another delimiting factor is the researcher himself. The researcher is a former ELL student, former enlisted soldier, teacher, and school administrator having immigrated to the United States over 30 years ago while in middle school. However, though the researcher is a former ELL student, he does not share the criteria of the subjects selected for this study.

Lastly, this study takes place in a high performing school district located in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. The school district consists of 3,800 high school students. The ELL population is approximately 2.2% of the student population. Of the 5 surrounding school districts, this represents the second lowest percentage of ELL students. Overall, the school district is ranked in the top 10 of 131 school districts in the state. This ranking is based on graduation rates, performance of students with disabilities, performance of all students, SAT, ACT, Governor’s School for Science and Technology enrollment, and AP exam performance.
**Assumptions**

In this study the researcher assumes that all students that are enrolled in advanced classes and are earning grades of “C” or higher, are academically successful students. Accordingly, only students in good standing, earning grade averages of “C” or higher have been selected for this study. The “C” or higher standard was selected because the school district provides weighted credit for students enrolled in IB and AP coursework.

In this study, the researcher also assumes that the seven participants are representative of all former ELL students who are enrolled in similar advance coursework.

**Role of the Researcher**

The data collection, analysis, synthesis, findings, and recommendations resulting from this study followed the framework outlined in this chapter. Despite any and all theory, practice, and contextual research, the role of the researcher is still a factor throughout all the stages of this research. This study used an interview instrument that has already been validated (Baker, L. L., 2013). However, how the questions are asked, what is emphasized, under-emphasized, participant-researcher roles, the timing, and numerous other factors were left up to the researcher. The researcher was as much a part of the instrumentation as the instrument itself (Xu & Storr, 2014). The values, world views, and prior experiences of the researcher have shown to impact the selection of research paradigms as well as the research itself (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Greenbank, 2003). To that end, was important for the researcher to be as transparent as possible in order to take the appropriate steps to reduce bias throughout this work.
There are several factors, experiences, and views the researcher holds that may impact this study. The researcher immigrated to the United States from an Eastern European Communist Block country in 1984 at the age 12. At that time, the researcher participated for one year in a public middle school ELL program during the sixth grade in a large metropolis on the East Coast of the United States. Between grades 7 and 12 the researcher was mainstreamed and did not participate in any type of ELL language instruction. The researcher was not enrolled in AP or IB coursework at the secondary level. The researcher enrolled in the U.S Army 6 days after graduating from high school. The researcher used the GI Bill to earn both a BA in History and MAT in teaching secondary Social Studies. The researcher served as a teacher, lead teacher, assistant principal, and principal at the secondary level. As a principal, the researcher supervised a district-wide secondary ELL Academy consisting of 180 students from 42 countries. Currently, the researcher is a district administrator at the secondary level. The areas of responsibility of the researcher include principal supervision, curriculum development, and instructional technology. The researcher is a father of two girls, both of whom are currently enrolled in post-secondary coursework.

Three mechanisms used account for the role of the researcher this study. Firstly, efforts have been made to outline the epistemology that guides the conduct of this study. The research process, methods, decisions, and the logic used were made transparent through the epistemological awareness of the author (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). Secondly, the researcher has used an instrument that has been validated in order to replicate the research conducted by Baker, L. L. (2013). Thirdly, the
first step to limiting potential bias is its identification. Accordingly, the author does not claim that his past experiences and views do not impact this study. Rather, by providing them in plain view to the reader, a reflexive tool is provided to not only limit bias but to highlight the potential subjectivity (Mruck & Breuer, 2003). Lastly, notes about the researcher’s thoughts during the interview, observation, analysis, and synthesis of this research grounded the researcher to the essential questions of this study.

Chapter Summary

This study was concerned with the schooling experiences of former ELL high school students that are enrolled in AP and IB classes. This chapter serves as a procedural blueprint for answering the research questions. Using a phenomenological design, this study was further concerned with how students perceived their schooling experiences and the meaning they created as a result of these experiences. To address the nature of learning a new language, academic acculturation, and bilingualism of former ELLs, a constructivist paradigm was selected. Former ELL students are minority students attending majority schools. Former ELL students speak, look, act, behave, and think differently from their American peers and their teachers. To give students a voice and account for the power relationships that are inherent in being immigrant and minority, the postcolonial paradigm was discussed back in Chapter 2. Former ELL research is sparse, particularly as it relates students that are academically successful. This study aimed to inform, rather than generalize. To that end, this phenomenological design was open enough for themes to emerge, allowing for appropriate interpretations that helped contextualize the findings, implications, and recommendations of this study. This design
was also selected to uncover the truth through the participant worldview. There are 20 former ELL students that are enrolled in IB and AP classes the school district selected for this study. Ten students were selected. Three students declined to participant. Seven students completed the requirements of this study. The participant selection criteria and the procedures for the selection of participants have been outlined throughout this chapter. Two participant interviews, one teacher interview, and one classroom observation was conducted. Additionally, interview notes that focused on verbal and non-verbal behaviors during the interviews and the observation were used to add depth and emphasis to the recordings. The data for this study was uploaded to NVivo 11. This program was used for transcribing interviews, coding, clustering, conducting searches, identifying relationships, and referencing the data throughout this study. The procedures for data analysis included: (a) data collection and the formation of units of general meaning, (b) forming natural clusters of meaning and identifying emerging themes, and (c) identifying major themes and contextualizing findings. Immigrant students have increased levels of conflict in the home, stress, depression, and have more difficulty making inroads into the cultures of their schools. The questions asked had the potential to cause stress and discomfort for the participants. The participants however did not exhibit any stress or discomfort during the interviews. Care was taken to inform the participants of the rationale and description of this study, its possible effect on students, and to keep the parents informed along the way. The researcher assumed a detached role during the participant interviews, classroom observation, and the teacher interview. Overall, this chapter aimed to provide the epistemological awareness and outline the
mechanism used to increase both its validity and reliability. The findings and discussion of results follows in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4

Results

When I was a kid, my Chinese parents used to say to me as they sat me in front of my homework while my white friends were out playing, “You not White! You work twice as hard to be equal!” That just made me roll my eyes at their naiveté. Later in life as a single mother looking for work, suddenly, the light dawned, it was me, not my immigrant parents, who was naïve and I would indeed be expected to work twice as hard as the other “girls” for the same pay. I later discovered that many other children of color had gotten the same message from their parents. (Lui, 2015)

Introduction

This study examined the shared schooling experiences of academically successful former English Language Learner (ELL) students at the high school level. Throughout this study, academically successful students have been defined as students enrolled in AP and IB coursework. The data for this phenomenological study were generated and collected through two student interviews, one classroom observation, and one teacher interview. As stated in Chapter 3, phenomenological research design typically requires 5 to 25 participants (Creswell et al., 2007). Nineteen students in one school district in the
Hampton Roads region of Virginia met the criteria to participate in this study. Ten students were selected to participate in the study. Out of the 10 participants selected, three students declined the invitation to participate. A total of seven participants completed the required two interviews, one classroom observation, and one interview with his or her teacher. The participants represented all four of the school district’s comprehensive high schools. In regards to the ethnicity of participants, two participants were of Chinese ancestry, two participants were of Korean ancestry, one participant was of Jordanian ancestry, one participant was of Pakistani ancestry, and one participant was of Russian ancestry. There were no participants from Latin America or Africa who met the criteria to participate in this study.

The presentation of results in this chapter aims to use the stated research design and the data in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the shared schooling experiences of former ELL students who are currently enrolled in advanced coursework in high school?
2. What are the shared schooling factors that facilitated the success of former ELL students enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level?
3. What are the shared inhibiting factors of former ELL students who are enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level?

Student and teacher interview notes and audio recordings were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using NVivo 11 qualitative analysis software. The classroom observation forms were coded using the College of William and Mary School University Research Network (SURN) Indicators of Student Engagement form and the accompanying
descriptors. Lastly, one interview with each of the participant’s advanced class teacher was also conducted. The table below summarizes the research questions and the data collection sources.

Table 2

Research Question and Data Collection Alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shared Schooling Factors</td>
<td>Student Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Shared Success Factors</td>
<td>Student Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Shared Inhibiting Factors</td>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each interview protocol consisted of more than one dozen questions that directly related to one or more research questions. Furthermore, all interview questions were reviewed for direct alignment to the research questions. Table 3 displays the relationship between the data collection process, the research questions, and the interview questions. The table represents a summary of the process used to ensure the questions asked of the participants were directly aligned to the research questions.
### Table 3

**Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Protocol</th>
<th>Shared Schooling Factors</th>
<th>Shared Success Factors</th>
<th>Shared Inhibiting Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Interview 1</td>
<td>2a-2d</td>
<td>3b-3d</td>
<td>2c, 2d, 3c, 3d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b-3d</td>
<td>5a, 5d, 5g,</td>
<td>4a, 4c, 5c, 5d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5a-5c, 5f, 5h</td>
<td>5f, 5h</td>
<td>5g, 5f, 5i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interview 2</td>
<td>1b, 1c</td>
<td>1b, 1c, 2a-2d</td>
<td>1b, 2a-2d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2b, 2d, 3a,</td>
<td>3a-3c, 3g,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b, 3f, 4b</td>
<td>4c, 4e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Interview</td>
<td>2c, 3b</td>
<td>2c, 3b, 3c</td>
<td>1a-1c, 2a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a, 4b</td>
<td>3e, 3f, 4a</td>
<td>2b, 2g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4c, 4d</td>
<td>4b, 4c, 4d</td>
<td>3a, 3d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Demographic Information

The review of school district records for students who received ELL services, successfully exited the program, and enrolled in Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate coursework, revealed 20 students who met the criteria to participate in this study. Ten students were selected to participate in the study. Three students declined the invitation to participate. Seven students completed the requirements of the study.

Among the seven students that completed the study, three participants were classified as 9th graders, two participants were classified as 10th graders, and two participants were classified as 12th graders. There were no 11th grade students that met the requirements to participate in this study. In regards to their age, all participants were on grade level. For instance the 9th graders were ages 14-15, 10th graders were ages 15-16, and seniors
were 18 years old. Prior to high school, all the participants qualified for ELL services because they spoke a different language at home or their primary language was not English. In regards to participant’s country of birth, one participant was born in China, one was born in Korea, one was born in Pakistan, and one was born in Russia. Three participants were born in the United States; however, their primary home languages were Arabic, Chinese, and Korean, respectively.

All participants that completed the requirements of the study began receiving ELL services during elementary school. As stated, three out of seven participants were born in the United States. Two of these participants exited the ELL program at the completion of fifth grade. One participant that was born in the U.S. exited the ELL program at the completion of third grade. Three of the born abroad participants entered U.S. schools in the middle of fourth grade and exited the program at the completion of eighth grade. The last participant born abroad entered U.S. schools in fifth grade and exited the program in 2015 at the completion of eighth grade. Participants born in the U.S. received ELL services for an average of 4.5 years. Participants originating abroad received ELL services for an average of 4 years. Furthermore, all participants had attended elementary, middle, and high school in the same school district. Only two participants attended schools outside the U.S. during the early elementary grades.

The school district uses English Language Proficiency (ELP) scores to assign English literacy metrics to students receiving ELL services. ELP scores were determined according to student performance on the WIDA ACCESS test, which is administered on an annual basis for students receiving ELL services. For five of seven participants, scores
on the ACCESS tests varied from level 3 to level 6 during the 2010-2011 school year. One participant entered the U.S. later in 2011 with an ELP level of 3. One participant entered U.S. schools in 2012 with an ELP level of 4. As stated earlier in this study, under NCLB students that score in the 5-6 range on the ACCESS test are considered to be English proficient and are thus placed on monitor status. While on monitor status, students do not receive ELL services. However, as the term implies, the ELL team considers the student’s progress as it relates to course grades, teacher reports, and test performance. After completing two years on monitor status the ELL identifier is archived in the Electronic Student Information System. However, the student’s cumulative records continue to reflect the student’s participation in the ELL program. In regards to standardized testing, Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) reading tests are administered annually in Grades 3 through 8. At the middle school level, the writing SOL is administered in Grade 8. At the high school level both reading and writing SOL tests are administered in Grade 11. It is noteworthy that all participants failed the reading SOL tests while ELL services were provided.

Introduction of Findings

Context and words are important. While the procedures for collecting the data from the participants have been outlined in detail throughout Chapter 3, providing an update on the conduct of the interviews adds the valuable context needed to make meaning of student voices. As a research paradigm, phenomenology has been chosen to give voice, meaning, and agency to the participants. Not only did the voice of the participants come through their words and gestures, but also throughout the interview
process. For instance, participants had the option to conduct the interviews at a time and place of their choosing. The interviews took place one month before the end of the school year, which is considered one of the busiest times for both teachers and students. During this particularly busy time teachers are preparing their students for the End of Course tests required to meet graduation requirements. Additionally, during this time of the year, students and teachers also are preparing for the administration of IB and AP exams. Given this context, the students were asked to choose the time for the interview that worked best for their schedules. Three students chose to have their interviews during their Physical Education class, two 12th grade students selected a time after their scheduled dismissal, one student came out of an online class, having completed the all course work for this particular class, and one student came to the interview during the scheduled lunch period. Through the interview scheduling process, all students made declarative statements prioritizing core class time, test reviews, and the required testing. As themes will be presented in this chapter, this information aligns with the findings. While students completed the requirements of this study, the focus on academic achievement came through loud and clear for all participants. To that end, all student requests were honored and encouraged as they were provided with complete control over scheduling the interview events.

The detailed data analysis procedures have been described in Chapter 3. In addition to capturing audio recordings, detailed notes were taken during each interview. After the audio recordings were transcribed, coded, and themes were identified, the audio and transcript files were reviewed again to ensure the themes that emerged captured the
essence of words, context, and meaning of the participants. As results will be reviewed throughout this chapter, a summary of the themes has been provided to guide the reader along.
Table 4

*Developed Thematic Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q1. Shared schooling experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Factors</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>kind, helpful, time, encourage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>expect, more, expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>expectations, clear, easy, different freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Environment</td>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>teachers, friends, help, homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course Selection</td>
<td>counselor, teacher, advice, persist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q2. Shared success factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Characteristics</td>
<td>Success Expectancy</td>
<td>future, college, focused, goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>diligent grades, difficult, consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>precise, inquisitive, quality, driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Environment</td>
<td>School Engagement</td>
<td>friends, team player, leader, band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Involvement</td>
<td>Early Support</td>
<td>sports, acting, theater, drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mom, dad, brother, uncle, aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q3. Shared inhibiting factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Characteristics</td>
<td>Family-School Engagement</td>
<td>teacher conferences, visits, emails,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Factors</td>
<td>English -Language Development</td>
<td>pronounce, writing, grammar structure, TV, friends cartoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Environment</td>
<td>Tracking</td>
<td>never expect, told me not insist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings for Research Question 1: What are the shared schooling experiences of former ELL students who are currently enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level?

An analysis of Research Question 1 uncovered five themes. Firstly, evidence of teacher-student relationships was found throughout the interview data. In addition to being considered good teachers by the participants, the most memorable teachers took an interest in their wellbeing. For instance, teachers provided encouragement, were considered helpful, and in the participants’ views, cared for their social and emotional wellbeing. Secondly, as another theme, teachers had high expectations of students, but also provided the support to meet those high expectations. The most memorable teachers were those that provided the students with freedom to learn, made content accessible, and had high expectations. Thirdly, teacher clarity was another theme that was manifested by making content accessible through the use of feedback and the presence of best teaching practices. Fourthly, over time, the participants of this study had developed wide academic support networks consisting of classmates, teachers, friends, school counselors, and extended family members. Lastly, the participants in this study received course-selection coaching from teachers, school counselors, and school staff to enroll in advanced coursework at the middle school and high school level despite low English proficiency levels and failing SOL scores.
Table 5

*Shared Schooling Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Joe</th>
<th>Jay</th>
<th>Joel</th>
<th>Jane</th>
<th>Jill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Relationship</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teaching</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Courses Enrollment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher-student relationships.** Relationships have been defined in Chapter 2 as showing *concern, kindness,* and *caring* for others. Educational research has found effective teacher-student relationships to be characterized as, *nurturing, helpful, nice,* *supporting,* and *respectful* (Allain, 2011; Baker, L. L., 2013; Morales, 2000; Zucker-Conde, 2009). As Table 6 displays a summary of the terms used to describe teachers the participants remember as having made a difference in their schooling experiences. Among the characteristics of teacher-student relationships, *helpful* was used with the most frequency by the participants in describing their teachers. During the first interview John stated, “I remember my fifth grade teacher because she would stop and talk with every student about their work, it was like a one on one experience when I was writing;
she was an encourager.” Jan also described her teacher as “my favorite because she was really understanding and she listened to my stories when no one else would listen.”

Similarly, Joe described his favorite teachers as passionate about their jobs and caring. Jay described his teachers as “definitely very helpful, very fun, and very kind.” Joe also remembered stories when his teachers would take him out of the room to read tests to him and to help him with his work when he fell behind. Joel described his favorite teacher as nice and helpful. He went on to say that this teacher would “push kids to reach for the stars, to go a bit further than before.”

Table 6
Students Describe Memorable Teachers as “Helpful” Frequency Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yet, Jane described her favorite teacher as, “she was able to connect with us.” In Jane’s words, “she was more than a teacher, she was a friend, if someone was crying or having a bad day she went out of her way to make sure they were okay.” Jane also remembered her first teacher after enrolling in U.S. schools. She describes one experience as follows: “My fourth grade teacher, when I first started here, he really
helped me with everything, like going to lunch…all kinds of stuff.” Jill remembered her fifth grade as “the best teacher for me because she is very caring and slowed down to my pace.” Jill went on to say that she learned a lot from this teacher because “she not only taught us stuff, but she helped us and made learning fun.” As described in these instances, academically successful former ELL students remembered teachers that cared about them beyond their academic performance. Though terms such as encourager, caring, and fun were used to describe memorable teachers for these students, helpful was used with the greatest frequency.

Expectations. The students credited teachers for their academic success throughout the data collection process. Throughout the 14 student interviews conducted, there were a total of 225 references to teachers. Only the term English was used with greater frequency than teachers and teaching throughout this study. In differentiating between effective and less effective classes and teachers, students used the following terms: (a) expect/expected/expectations, (b) easy/easier, (c) deep/depth, (d) feedback, and (f) vivid. Table 7 summarizes the teacher qualities the participants related to effective teachers.

Back in Chapter 2, Clardy (2013) defined teacher expectations as the belief or practice that students will perform at an established standard that will meet or exceed commonly established benchmarks. It is also important to remember that teacher expectations are communicated through teaching behaviors. As such, effective teaching behaviors do not occur in a vacuum, but are based on the foundation that all students will learn and all students will progress, regardless background, deficits, or levels of prior
knowledge. Hattie, (2009) found teacher expectations to have an effect size of .43 on student learning. As a reminder Hattie (2009), found that instructional strategies, with effect sizes of .4 or greater, to be highly effective. In discussing the characteristics of effective teaching, it is noteworthy that the students, throughout this study equated advanced classes with good teaching. For instance, students said they learned more in advanced classes. In this regard, John stated, “there is a big difference between what different teachers expect from you.”

Table 7
Quality Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Student Pseudonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect/Expectations</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep/Depth</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivid</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also in regards to teacher expectations, Jan had the same teacher in both an advanced and regular class. In describing the differences between these classes, with the same teacher, Jan stated that, “the teacher takes it easier on us in the regular class because she expects less.” Jay however stated that, “in the advanced class the teacher expects us
to do more, and we do; after a couple of weeks it becomes normal.” During the second interview, Joe stated that his “advanced teachers expect more but give more freedom and are more laid back.” Yet Jane stated that her AP teacher expects more and gets more work done from their students than in regular classes. Jill also stated that teachers in her advanced classes “expect more, they help you more, and you get more done.”

**Teacher clarity.** From the student’s perspective Killin (2006), describes teacher clarity as the ability of the teacher to present information in ways that make it easy to understand. Teacher clarity is observed when teachers explain the subject matter well, represent key concepts, present material in an orderly manner, utilize examples, and use frequent questioning and feedback (Hativa, 2000; Powell & Harville, 1990). John, for instance, stated that teachers in his advanced classes are easier because, “you know exactly what you are doing in class, there is no busy work.” In referring to his IB classes, John stated, “learning is more vivid; it is as if all the information is being siphoned into us in a clear cut way.” Also in discussing good teaching, John singled out his 11th and 12th grade IB English teacher for “finally helping me understand grammar.” He specifically stated that, “she basically helped me understand why grammar was related to the style of writing, why authors write in certain ways, and how to conduct a rhetorical analysis.” He further stated that, “you can get your questions answered pretty easily in advanced classes and the teachers provide instant feedback.” Joel stated that in advanced classes “the classwork coincides with what you previously learned and it is easier to understand.” Joe stated some teachers spend more time with their students because they know what they are doing. In her advanced classes however, Jan stated that learning is
not necessarily harder because “the teacher goes deeper and we learn more vocabulary and definitions.” In discussing the difference, Joel explained how some teachers connect all of the day’s teaching activities under a few central themes. He further stated that, “other teachers give us busy work such as work sheets not related to what we are learning.” Alternatively, Joe stated that, “some teachers push us more than normal and there are many more opportunities to learn.” Moreover, teachers in advanced classes provide more help outside the class according to Joe. In referring to another class she had taken the previous year, Jane stated that her teacher made it easy to get an “A” because “she made the material easy to understand.”

The classroom observations provided additional insight into the quality of instruction. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the SURN Indicators of Student Engagement form was used to collect classroom observation data. This form was selected as it measures the impact of teachers on student engagement through visible learning indicators that are grounded in the greater body of educational research. Both the high-yield and the lower-yield indicators are based on Hattie’s (2009), meta-analysis. Moreover, teachers, administrators, and district personnel have used this form since 2011. Accordingly, definitions of examples and non-examples have been vetted and operationalized by principals, assistant principals, and district personnel. Lastly, their peers and school administrators have familiarized teachers in this school district with these forms through classroom observations conducted.

Permitting students to make choices in selecting reading material or how to demonstrate knowledge has shown to have a .48 effect size on learning (Hattie, 2009).
Students were provided the opportunity to make choices in four out of six classroom observations. In one class the teacher presented several general literary concepts and students were provided with the opportunity to select books and reading passages in order to substantiate the examples provided. As a strategy, writing was observed in two out of six classroom observations. In one class, after the teacher reviewed the daily learning target and conducted a short review of the previous lesson, she engaged her students in sustained silent reading. Upon completing the reading assignment, students were asked to write in their journals on a topic of their choice. At the end of the writing assignment, the teacher called on students to share their work. During this time, students received immediate feedback from the teacher and from each other.

Student discussion of text has shown to have a varying effect size of .41 to .48 (Hattie, 2009). During two instances students were engaged in peer led discussions of text. During one observation the classroom was arranged into an inner and outer circle. The teacher presented the class with several high engagement topics. Students seated in the inner circle debated the points and counter points of the presented topics. When the discussion lost momentum, the teacher provided the students with appropriate wait time and strategies to continue arguing the merits of the topic from a variety of perspectives. Students from the outer circle volunteered to join the discussion by replacing a member of the inner circle.

Problem solving has demonstrated .61 effect size on learning. This learning strategy was observed in one out of six classroom observations. The teacher grouped students into clusters of four. Students were provided with real-world math problems and
were encouraged to develop various solutions to solve the assigned problems. Upon completing each problem, the teacher called on students and provided immediate feedback. Students were asked to explain the methods used to solve the problem. The focus during this activity was on process, rather than on the correct answer.

Table 8

*Classroom Observation of Student Engagement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Yield Indicators</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal-setting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making choices</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing text</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates products</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative learning structures</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognition strategies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced/graphic organizers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives/receives feedback</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Cooperative learning* has shown to have an effect size of .41 on learning (Hattie, 2009). This strategy was observed in three of the six classrooms visited. In one classroom, students worked in pairs analyzing text, while in another classroom students took turns participating in small group discussions. Moreover, in an advanced math class, students worked in groups of four to solve problems. *Metacognitive strategies*, defined as the construction of meaning while reading texts that promote thinking about one’s thinking, through the use of graphic organizers, visualizing, determining big ideas,
determining importance, summarizing, and synthesizing, were used by all teachers (Hattie, 2009). In all instances teachers succinctly, used clear and direct language, to help students make connections to the larger concept or theory. As stated earlier, some of the students in this study described difficult material as \textit{easy}.

The use of \textit{graphic} and \textit{advanced organizers} was observed in two out of six classes. The uses of these learning strategies have shown to have an effect size of .41 on learning (Hattie, 2009). The most direct example of advanced organizers was observed during a social studies class where students were seated in pairs as they organized different landmark Supreme Court cases using criteria provided by the 1\textsuperscript{st} Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. \textit{Self-assessment} was observed in one out of six classrooms. As students had completed the AP examination during the previous class, they were provided with iPad’s to assess their knowledge of location, language, population, and other cultural characteristics. Students were provided with immediate feedback while the teacher monitored student work.

\textbf{Table 9}

\textit{Low-Yield Indicators}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1 Homework in class</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2 Responds orally with limited depth/breadth/wait-time</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3 Interrupts flow of ideas</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4 Listens passively</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5 Engages in off-task behaviors</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feedback was observed in five out of six classrooms. In order to learn, students must be provided with immediate feedback related to the learning task at hand. Because feedback is essential to learning, it has shown to have an effect size of .73 on learning; the highest among the 12 high-yield strategies on the SURN indicators of student engagement form (Hattie, 2009). Throughout the learning activities both teachers and peers provided feedback. It is also noteworthy that during the teacher interviews, two out of seven teachers commended their former ELL students for being more responsive to feedback than their peers. Lastly, as shown in Table 9, lower-yield practices, with an effect size of less than .4, were not observed during all classroom visits. Moreover, all students were on task and no off-task behavior were observed.

Academic support network. IB and AP coursework is by design academically challenging. However, language and culture make these courses particularly difficult for former ELL students. Due to the stratification of students that naturally occurs in high school as a result of the coursework, AP students are more likely to be scheduled with their peers, not only throughout the day, but also as they progress through high school. Six of seven participants in this study reported academic support networks consisting primarily of friends, teachers, and school staff. In discussing schoolwork, the term, "friends," was used 110 times by the participants. John describes one such instance that captured both the depth and breadth of the support network students have developed as follows:

Yeah, I basically...last year, when we were working on long essays, I basically created a Skype network between us. So now we have a large network of group
calls, we might have sometimes 7-8-9 people in a group call at like 12:00 in the morning, and we’ll sometimes stay up all night and I feel like that wouldn’t occur in a regular class. Teachers also know we help each other outside the class. We as a class know that if something needs work, it is pretty easy to connect with one another.

John went on to say, “I could text my classmates any time when I misses school to get missing assignments and the homework.” Yet, Joe also commented on his friendships as they relate to schoolwork.

For our history class, we have different questions and stuff. So we’d split the questions and get each other the answers to other parts and we would text each other. And if we’d ever have a problem, we call…but that’s pretty rare. And we also have video chats sometimes…Skype. We also hangout over Skype sometimes.

Jay, having enrolled in school during the 4th grade, stated that he attended middle school with many of the same people in his advanced classes. He also describes his academic support network as follows:

Yeah, there are people that I would actually call or text them…close friends, not because of that class but maybe before, because of the class. There are other people I would text…any person in any of my classes, I would just come up and ask.

During the class observation Jay also did not hesitate to ask for help from the teacher or the other classmate he was sitting next to. Similarly, Joel stated that when he needs help, he feels comfortable to ask his friends, specifically stating “I have their
numbers and we can talk whenever, its usually like asking for homework, or hey do you understand this…can you help me out here?”

Each participant shared how he or she felt at ease in using technology such as Skype, Edmodo, and texting not only to collaborate, but also to seek additional help with assignments when needed. These academic support networks also motivated students to do well. John explained the phenomenon best when he said:

*It’s more like showing up to school and being around people…having, you know, interaction, I guess. Which, basically is an incentive for me to do my work…as people do their work, it’s more of an indicator that I should be doing work as well.*

John’s network of IB friends, who share similar goals, serve as a monitoring tool for him to gauge his performance. Additionally, from an organizational perspective, his network of friends is a constant reminder not only of deadlines, but of the progress that is needed in order to meet them.

John, Joe, Jay, and Joel expressed no reservations about connecting with classmates and friends when they needed academic assistance. However, Jan, Jane, and Jill communicated some reluctance in reaching out to classmates for help. For instance, Jan stated that it is still difficult for her to connect with others as a result of not speaking English. However, Jan’s teacher describes her as a team player and always willing to interact with her friends in order to complete the assigned work. While Jane stated her friends would describe her as “loud” and “outgoing”, most of her interactions were with one friend. While scheduling the first interview in the school’s counseling office, Jane
insisted for her friend to accompany her. In talking with Jane’s teacher, during group assignments, she consistently works with the same student. Jane’s teacher stated that, “even when she is not in class, she is always with the same girl”. Lastly, Jill stated that while she enjoys her advanced classes, she misses many of her friends that are taking regular classes. Her teacher describes her as a leader during group assignments. It is noteworthy that male participants stated their friends would describe them as, funny, social, leader, easygoing, outgoing, and passionate. The female participants used the following terms to describe themselves: disciplined, smart, outgoing, leader, loud, and language barrier. Table 10 provides a summary of the participant’s self description.
Table 10

*Participant Self-Description*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Student Pseudonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easygoing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun/Funny</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Barrier</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Course selection coaching.** As stated, in a school district consisting of 12,500 students and approximately 74 former ELL students at the high school level, 20 students qualified for this study. These 20 students make up approximately 28% of all former ELL students in the school district at the high school level. While seven students completed the study, all participants were encouraged by teachers, guidance counselors, or school staff members to enroll in advanced classes at the middle school level. Four of seven participants were encouraged by school counselors to enroll in AP or IB classes. For example, John became interested in the Middle Years Program (MYP), a middle
school pre-IB program, during the fifth grade when he was invited to an interest meeting and was provided with a program brochure. John applied to the MYP program and was accepted to begin the program at the start of sixth grade. While in the pre-IB program, the counseling director routinely helped John when he had trouble keeping up with his math classes and provided encouragement from sixth through the eighth grade. John was not accepted into the pre-IB program in the ninth grade like most of his peers. He stated that he was persistent in visiting the IB Coordinator’s office and it took him several times to get into the IB program. For John, at the middle school level, staff both encouraged and supported him. However, John did have to overcome some additional barriers during the ninth and 10th grade before being accepted into the program.

Jan was encouraged by her uncle and brother to apply for the IB Program. Moreover, Jan’s seventh grade Spanish teacher encouraged her to sign up for AP classes only two years after arriving to the U.S. Although Jan did not remember her school counselor’s name, she did remember that he had recommended her for the IB program. Joe’s 5th grade teacher also recommended him for the pre-IB program. In remembering the event Joe stated, “I think my fifth grade teacher, she said all my work was in on time and she thought I would be a good fit for advanced classes.” Joe also said that his brother, 10 years his senior, also pushed him to enroll in the pre-IB program. Jay also remembered learning about high school AP classes during the eighth grade stating, “one of those guidance counselors came to describe all of the classes and I felt I needed to be in advanced classes.” Though Jay sat through this classroom presentation, he was not personally recommended to take the only AP class offered to ninth grade students. As a
practice in this school district, high school counselors recruit eighth grade students in middle school advanced classes such as Algebra, Geometry, and Advanced English 8. For Joel, though he could not remember any staff member encouraging him to enroll in AP classes, his mother and brothers encouraged him to try college-level work. Joel went on to say that his counselor does tell him the courses he will need in the future. In this regard, Joel stated that, “he kind of helps me decide on what I am going to do in the future and helps me plan accordingly.” Jane was encouraged by the Director of School Counseling to take at least one AP course. For Jill, only three semesters after enrolling in U.S. schools, at the completion of the first semester during the sixth grade, her teacher requested for her to be placed in Advanced English. This occurred while she was still receiving ELL services, she was failing the SOL tests, and had an ELP level of 3.

**Findings for Research Question 2: What are the shared schooling factors that facilitated the success of former ELL students enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level?**

The analysis of Research Question 2 revealed 3 themes. Firstly, students consistently and deliberately worked to earn good grades and to meet both immediate and longer-range goals. Secondly, student-school engagement developed as a theme for this study’s participants. Throughout the data generation and collection process, students were observed to be engaged in their respective school community. Participants put great weight on being involved in school sports, clubs, and activities. Thirdly, while during the conduct of this study the participant’s families did not appear to be engaged in the
schooling process as evidenced by both student and teacher responses, family members provided a great deal of support to students early on during their schooling experiences.

**Success expectancy.** Goals must be accompanied by consistent, appropriate, and sustained effort. The expectancy theory deals with the relationship between success, performance, and the belief that goals will be achieved (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). All students talked about the relationship between academic success and the work required to meet goals. The participants shared both immediate and long-range goal during the interviews. Table 11 captures the stated academic expectancies of participants. In regard to long-range goals, four of seven participants talked about going to college. Two of the participants further related work efforts to meeting their college goal. The participants references to hard work, persistence, diligence, and achievement, were aligned to the expressed goals. The word frequency analysis summarized in Table 12, shows that after the term teacher, English, and learning, work was the most frequently used word.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Student Pseudonyms/Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
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<tr>
<td>College</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP/IB Exams</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jan, having just completed the ninth grade, stated that, “the work and the pressure counts because I am going to college.” Similarly, as a 10th grader, Joel stated that the work is important because “I need an educational base that will help me in college or school in general.” With weeks before graduation, and having completed the requirements for the advanced diploma, both John and Jane stated that they will be attending college in the fall. Jane stated that her hard work in advanced classes will help her do well in college as well as to prepare for the future. Jill talked about the importance of doing well on tests stating, “in high school you have to have self-discipline, to know that you have to get all these things straight because it matters to your future.” Joe also
stated that, “if I get anything lower than an 85, it means that I really didn’t prepare for the assessment and I will try harder next time.”

Table 12

*Word Frequency Table Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Weighted Percentage</th>
<th>Similar Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>teacher, teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learn</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>learned, learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>help, helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homework</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.65</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* This statistic was calculated in NVivo 11 for Mac as the frequency of the selected word relative to the proportion to the total words counted.

Table 12 summarizes the frequency of words used by participants during the interview. Furthermore, the weighted percentage column displayed in Table 12 shows the use of terms as a proportion of total words used during the interview. For instance, *work* counted for 3.53% of all words used by the participants. The students consistently talked about the relationship between course grades and hard work. In this regard two participant statements stand out.

*My grades are now good. I get A’s and B’s. I try to get A’s in all the classes, and when they’re B’s, they’re high. I set a goal for myself, and I get close to it. I get*
all A’s every once in awhile, I think at least once every year on every report
card…I get straight A’s. I don’t get anything lower than a B.

As a senior, Jane also clearly explained the relationship between grades and the work required to earn them.

At the moment, I could do better because I’ve just gotten lazier, but the past few years…yes. I feel like I’ve worked hard for them…which I could be doing now but, I am so close to graduation. I’ve worked hard for my grades.

The participants also related low grades with the effort and the work needed to improve them. For all students a “C” was considered a bad grade. For two students, grades below “85” were also considered “bad.” When the participants identified an area of needs improvement, the specific reason was also provided. In one such example John states that any grade lower than a “C” is “bad” because in his words, “I suck at test taking.” John went on to say that “I can pinpoint those tests unlike other people can, its usually math and writing that plays a factor for me.” Jill also related lower grades with work and effort.

Below 85…it’s only for average grade. If I got an 82 for a test...like English test, I think I would be fine with that. I’d probably think that I have to practice more and jot down more notes in the textbook.

The teacher comments substantiated the participant’s work habits. To begin, according to their teachers, all participants were in good standing and there was a great deal of alignment between what the students said and the teacher’s impression of the participants. Moreover, the teachers commended the participants for positive work habits.
that have led to positive outcomes. Jan’s advanced math teacher describes her as focused, attentive, disciplined, precise, and accurate. Jill’s advanced English teacher describes her as follows:

*She’s very focused, she’s very determined. If there is a concept that she is not very sure of, she is a student who will come back to me, let’s say during lunch, ‘Mrs. Johnson, can you please explain this,’ or, ‘we worked on this in class, can you show me another example?’ It could be vocabulary, we are using a new vocabulary term and I urge them not only to incorporate in their writing, but also their speaking in and out of class, and she’ll ask me for examples of, ‘when would I use this particular word, just in conversation at home.*

Teachers valued the hard work of the selected participants. During the interview, the teachers recognized the role of intelligence and achievement. Joel’s English teacher shared one such example:

*Because it’s not just about intelligence, it’s about work ethic and understanding of how to interact and when to pay attention and when to write something down. He exhibits all of those things. If I compare him to students that aren’t as successful though, I would say he’s drastically different. But that’s because they’re not doing the things that he’s doing.*

**Student-school engagement.** Jill reported to her first interview with an oversize book bag on her back, a binder in one hand, and a large musical instrument case in her other hand. In addition to academic engagement, all participants communicated strong connections to the school through involvement in sports, clubs, and activities. Also,
when it comes to the word frequency analysis, *friend* was mentioned 66 times by the seven participants. The participants developed friendships, not only in their classes, but also by participating in sports, clubs, and activities.

Table 13

*Participants Sports, Clubs, and Activities Participation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Student Pseudonyms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film Society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Club</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 provides a summary of participant involvement in school sports clubs and activities. John, for instance, played soccer. Jan played the flute and tennis for the school. Joe also played tennis for the school and describes his school as “community oriented, everyone knows each other.” Jay is involved in drama and theater at his school. Jay is also an active member of the Key club. Joel too is a member of the Film Society and plays tennis for his school. Jane plays volleyball for her school. Last but not least, Jill plays tennis for her school as well as the flute for the school’s band. Making connections and building relationships was particularly important to Jill. She stated that
if she could change one thing about the school would be the formation of a club for ELL students so they can talk and connect outside the class. Jill also stated that it is important for the other kids in the school to learn about the culture of ELL students.

Though the participants often described school as “tedious”, they looked forward to coming to school to socialize and spend time with friends. With less than one month before graduating from the school’s IB program, John reflected on his schooling experiences.

*Probably I will miss being in that class environment, the small class environment.*

*The IB, we were the same 19 students, we see each other every day. Going to college, there’s going to be more people. Finding like a friend group is going to be quite similar, but it’s going to be quite difficult, but that’s probably the only thing I’m going to miss about high school…and teacher interaction.*

Joel also stated that he looked forward to coming to school because he has gained a lot of friends over the years. Jan however stated that when “I came here I felt isolated, now that has changed as I have made many friends.” Joe also stated he looks forward to coming to school because “it is a good social experience to hang out with a lot of friends in most of my classes, they are really helpful.” Joel was also very insightful stating that, “I like the social aspect of school because it makes me learn.” It is worth noting that participants made the connection between socializing with friends and academic success.

Not only did the participants state that friends are their favorite part of school, these friendships were also important for five of seven participants because friends was a key factor to learning English. Joe stated that, “I learned English by mostly talking with
friends and trying to communicate in English”. John also stated that he learned English by interacting with friends when completing assignments together. Jan stated that, “friends were the major thing that helped me learn English.” Lastly, Joe stated, “I didn’t learn English until the 3rd grade, when I learned English it was mostly from friends”.

**Early family support.** At the time of this study, teacher and student interviews revealed that one out of the seven participants families routinely communicated with teachers. Six of seven teachers stated that they are not aware of the parent involvement in teacher conferences, welcome night, or back to school night. Six of seven teachers also did not have knowledge of this study’s participants former ELL status. However, according to student interviews, four of seven participants received academic support with homework during the first two years of adjusting to U.S. schools and learning English. It is also important to note that the participants faced great challenges in both adjusting to school and learning English. For instance, one student stated that, “teachers for some reason did not appear to know that I did not speak English.” However, during this adjustment time, the family played a critical role in providing support to these students. During the fifth grade, or the first year for Jan in U.S. schools, she received homework help from her uncle. For instance, Jan describes her early experiences as follows:

*Back then...fifth grade, I used to get help from my uncle. He used to just check all my homework; I had to bring down my homework to him. Well, sometimes if I had questions, he’d help me. But most of the times I’d do my homework and then bring it down and he checks it, checks for grammar mistakes and something like*
that. Even though he knew he wouldn’t check it and mark as a grade, he always checked it and signed the agenda.

However, Jan stated that the following year she did not need help, claiming to have understood the subject much better. Jay also credits his mother with providing help early during the fifth grade, the first year in U.S. schools. Joel however has a brother who is ten years older than him. In this regard he stated, “I can just call my brother or go to his room if he is home and ask for help, he was always willing to help me.” In describing who had assisted her in the past, Jane stated, “nobody helps me anymore, my dad used to help me every night when he came home from work and I needed help with my homework; it was English he would help me with, everything else I could do on my own.” Jill however did not receive assistance with homework as members of her family did not speak English. Jill states that she overcame this by “taking notes, looking things up, and spending more time studying”. It is important to remember that 3 of the 4 students that credit family members with providing help with homework entered U.S. schools during elementary school.

Findings for Research Question 3: What are the shared inhibiting factors of former ELL students who are enrolled in advanced coursework at the high school level?

Shared inhibiting factors relate to the barriers the students faced not only in enrolling in AP and IB course work, but also in performing at a high level once enrolled. To that end, the data analysis process revealed three themes. Firstly, although family support was provided within the first two years of language development and adjustment
to U.S. schools, during the current academic year family involvement was evident for only one of seven participants. Secondly, English language development and adjustment to U.S. schools was particularly hard for the students. *Friends, teachers, cartoons, family, TV, and books* were credited with helping the participants learn the English language. From this perspective, the language and culture gap of the participants was eventually bridged through sheer determination, repeated failure, hard work, and, finally, braking the English language development threshold. This phenomenon required grit and the hard work needed to overcome these challenges. Lastly, while school counselors and teachers played a tremendous role in recruiting and encouraging students to enroll in advanced classes, 4 of 7 participants found enrolling in AP and IB classes difficult due to factors that will be explored in this chapter.

**School-family engagement.** Although the students received family support in the early years of learning English and adapting to U.S. schools, the absence of family-school engagement was found for six of seven participants. Structured and institutionalized parent – school – teacher interactions occur at *Open House*, for new students, *Parent Welcome Night*, and *Parent Conference Night* events. School open house events take place for new students to middle and high school as well as for new students. The parent welcome night occurs during the third week of each school year. While the parent conference night occurs during the second week of October and the first week in March, teachers routinely communicate with guardians through the year via email and texting. In regards to teacher responses to family involvement, comments such as “I don’t remember; not much; never texted or called me; and I don’t have any
interaction with them” were consistent for six of seven teacher interviews. One teacher however stated that the participant’s parents are very supportive through email. Lastly, another teacher remembered that one participant’s legal guardian “came in to complain about something a while ago,” however, no other interactions took place with this parent.

**English language threshold development.** While most students can remember and relate to the first day of kindergarten, middle school, and high school, few can relate to being suddenly and completely immersed in a new language, new country, and new culture. This sudden experience and its impact on the student’s English language development was a shared experience for the participants. While these students were successful in making this transition, many others are not. As such, without overcoming the sudden immersion process of learning English and adjusting to school culture, academic opportunities such as enrollment in IB or AP courses will never be an option for these students. It also is important to remember that although many advancements have been made in ELL instruction in the past decade, the language and culture of instruction for non-English speaking students is still English. As such, this experience is foreign and often traumatic as much as any other experience encountered by the students in their new country. For the participants that were born in the U.S., however, this culture and language shock appeared to have been much less. In sum, the process of muddling through language development has been characterized by initial shock, adjustment, hard work, and breakthrough.

The participants shared similar barriers in learning English in the school setting. One participant that was born in the U.S. stated that, “the teacher didn’t really understand
the fact that I basically don’t really know how to speak English; the biggest problem in those years was learning English.” Jill also describes her experiences by stating, “the first two years were hard for me because I was just starting the language so I didn’t know a lot of things that were going on at school.” Jill went on to say, “in the first two years, I had to just focus on English and then, after I learned some basic English, I moved to a bunch of different subjects.” Joe however captures the challenges of learning English from teachers, staff, and classmates who do not share his language as follows.

Learning English was all hard. I didn’t learn English until third grade. I was like 10 years old, I think. I remember from kindergarten to second and third grade, I didn’t know what was going on in class so I had trouble keeping up with what people were saying and I didn’t do well on my assignments.

While the participants recognized the efforts of teachers, Jane, also expressed the isolation they experienced during the first two years in school.

It was very difficult at first. I don’t know why, for some reason we had those teachers that come in but they didn’t really help me at all. I didn’t feel like they helped. The ones when I first started in elementary, we would sit down and do spellings and basic grammar and all that. That was helpful. But after 4th and 5th grade, I didn’t receive any type of help from them. It was difficult.
Table 14

*Learning English Participant Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Joe</th>
<th>Jay</th>
<th>Joel</th>
<th>Jane</th>
<th>Jill</th>
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</thead>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>TV News</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students however learned English by relying on multiple sources. Watching cartoons, teachers, TV, friends, and books were cited by participants as factors to learning the English language. Learning vocabulary by watching cartoons was the most prevalent factors as cited by six of seven participants. In recollecting how he learned English, John shared that, “I watched a lot of cartoons, stuff like that, TV, and local news, that is how my mom learned English, by watching CNN.” Jill also shared how she learned English by stating that, “I liked to watch SpongeBob and that teach me a lot of words.” Having arrived to the U.S. in the fifth grade, Jan describes how she primarily learned English as follows:

>I had another younger cousin, he was like 3, and he watched those Nickelodeon a lot...like Dora, Blues Clues, and those stuff. Actually, I kind of watched with him because I was trying to understand what they were saying. When I first watched
Finding Nemo or those Disney movies, I really had a hard time understanding, but I kept watching and then I kind of understood. I kind of understand what their saying, pick up on some words. I could tell I was improving.

Four out of seven participants cited teachers as being instrumental to learning English and adjusting to school. In this regard Jan recollected a teacher, during her first year in U.S. schools, who recommended a book that was particularly memorable as she learned English.

My fifth grade teacher recommended this book, Junie B. Jones. It was like a little kid’s books. It was really fun for me because it was easy for me to understand and it had...what’s that called...some phrases people use a lot. I read a lot of those and had fun reading it.

Jay entirely credited his teachers with learning English by stating, “teachers definitely helped, I had a special English teacher, second language teacher in the fourth and fifth grade who help me all the time, she was really helpful.” Joe also cited the “special education teachers who pulled me out of class to provide one on one help.”

Students had to overcome failure while learning English. A review of records shows that all students failed the reading SOL tests while receiving ELL services. John describes this period of time as follows, “basically the way I learned English through interacting with people, assignment-wise; those three years report cards sucked, I had nothing.” As discussed, the participants viewed friends as a support system but also credited them with learning English. Four out of seven participants credit interactions with friends as being an important factor to learning English. Jan describes this
phenomenon best by stating, “the major thing that helped me speak English were mostly friends and my cousin.” This is particularly important as both culture and learning a new language is a social phenomenon that is constructed through interactions with others. These occurrences support the constructivist theory, that language is socially constructed. As these students succinctly capture, language is learned best through interactions with others. The interactions with friends, family, peers, and people in general overshadowed all other factors throughout the English learning process for the participants of this study.

At the time of this study, the participants continued to struggle with various aspects of the English language. The participants were well aware of their areas of needed improvement. It is also worth mentioning that ESSA requires schools to monitor students for a minimum of 2 years after they exit English language programs. However even after 2 years, former ELL students continue to struggle with various aspects of the English language. While these students found ways to overcome their English language deficits, others may not have in their possession the language knowledge and skills needed to be successful in advanced classes. Additionally, as a rule, students do not advertise that at one time or another they received ELL services for a variety of reasons. All but one student exited the ELL program before 2014. It is not surprising that six out of seven teachers were unaware that the participants of this study had received ELL services early on during their schooling experiences. This information is important because it has the potential to provide teachers with opportunities to further support students that continue to struggle to read and write for many years after exiting the ELL program successfully.
Though John had exited the ELL program at the completion of fifth grade, he stated that “only in the 11th grade I basically understood why grammar was tied to the style of writing.” Though John’s teacher made quite an impact on his ability to understand, analyze, and write better, he was unaware that he was a former ELL student.

Joel also continues to struggle with completing essay assignments stating as follows:

*I guess for me it’s hard to complete writing assignments. Just like writing essays because ...I can usually pull it off...although, on occasion, I kind of just can’t think at all. I like to just spend a few minutes...plan everything out. In the end, I know it has to be done by tomorrow or I’ll get a really bad grade and I know this will affect me for the whole quarter...probably for the whole year if I don’t do it so I just push through it. Just get it over with.*

Though John was a high performer in this teacher’s class, the instructor was also not aware that John had received ELL services. Jill also continued to struggle in her advanced English class. While Jill was currently earning an “A” in the class and the teacher held her in high regard, the comments below show that she needed additional support in order to improve.

*“I would say an essay that I had to do for English because I kind of struggle writing sometimes. So, I kind of had to find what’s the best way for me to write all the stuff. So, I went to a website that told me how to do basic structure for writing so I kind of had to learn how to become a better writer from this kind of website or from a teacher.”*
**Advanced coursework enrollment barriers.** As already found, school counselors and teachers provided encouragement and support to students to enroll in middle school advanced classes. However the presence of this theme occurs in the presence of the academic coursework coaching theme under research question two. At the very same time that the students received support to enroll in advanced classes at the middle school level, covert or overt barriers were also faced by these students to enroll in AP and IB coursework at the high school level. Participation in advanced and AP classes require passing SOL scores, teacher recommendations, and earning ”A’s” and “B’s” in prerequisite courses. Participation in the IB program requires an extended application process. To apply to the program students must earn a minimum GPA of 3.25 in the ninth grade and 3.4 in the 10th grade. Additionally, at the time the participants of this study applied to the program, there were 30 slots available to almost 1,000 high school students. It is also noteworthy that while students may be enrolled in pre-IB courses during the ninth and 10th grade, students are formally inducted into the IB program upon completing the 10th grade. As you may remember, John applied to the MYP, the Middle School Years IB prep program at the completion of fifth grade. John completed the MYP program and transitioned to high school. John describes his experiences prior to being admitted to the IB program as follows:

*I got rejected from the whole application but I was kind of pissed off for awhile. Some people from my class got in that I would never expect would have gotten in and I didn't get in so I was like kind of pissed off at basically all this work for nothing. Then I kept insisting on applications, I'd always come to Ms. John’s*
office and be like "hey, what’s up?" And she knew I was touching on the IB thing, basically I was very insistent on being...there was no 'no' for an answer, I had to be in it. It was mostly me, I really wanted to be in the IB program. I tried applying to Gov. school but, see, there were two grades that kept popping up in my transcript. It was like a C in math and that was pretty much it, and you know, a lot of B’s, that's the problem.

As evident, John persisted and eventually he was able to gain acceptance into the IB program. During early May 2016, he took the required IB culminating examinations. Recently, John had passed all the required IB exams and is expected to be awarded the IB diploma at the ceremony scheduled in January 2017. Jay, having first enrolled in U.S. schools during the 4th grade, insisted on enrolling in AP classes. As a district practice, students have the option of taking only one AP class during the ninth grade. This course is important because it serves as a gateway into AP coursework at the high school level as more AP courses become available in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. Jay describes his experiences as follows, “I never really asked them if I should take World History or AP Human Geography, I think I just said, hey I am taking Human Geography and waited for their reaction.” Jane and Jill were also determined to take AP level classes.

Although Jane was encouraged to take one AP class, she was discouraged from taking an additional AP class during the 11th grade. Jane shares her experience by stating, “a teacher told me not to take two AP courses but I took two because I didn’t have a job at the time so I could focus more on the school.” As a ninth grader, Jill also made the decision to take the only AP course she had available to her. She shares this
experience as follows, “during the eighth grade I really decided to take AP human by myself because I know my abilities and I could handle this kind of course; I picked this course all by myself.” At face value, it appears that advanced course work coaching and tracking are contradictory themes. However, these students have experienced both themes during their schooling experiences and were persistent in overcoming both barriers and challenges.

**Chapter Summary**

The phenomenological approach to this study was chosen to highlight student voices and how they interpret the world around them. Student and teacher interviews as well as classroom observations generated the data for this study. A thorough analysis of the data revealed that the participants of this study experienced strong teacher-student relationships, high expectations, teacher clarity, academic support networks, and academic course selection coaching. Similarly, the participants of this study shared three success factors. First, while the participants expressed short and long-term goals, they were willing and able to work hard to meet them. Second, the students over time had developed wide-ranging academic support networks consisting of friends, classmates, teachers, school staff, and family members. Yet another success factor was exhibited in the support students received from their families during the early years of adjusting to U.S. schools and learning the English language. Students however also faced three inhibiting factors. Family-school engagement was not present for most of the students that participated in this study. Furthermore, the participants had to overcome the culture and language barriers in the early years of the program. Lastly, the presence of course
selection coaching at the middle school level occurred while the participants faced IB and AP enrollment barriers at the high school level.
Chapter 5

Summary, Discussion, and Implications

Learning English is very hard. You probably have to not be afraid to speak to people because if you’re very shy, you don’t want people to discriminate against you because you have an odd accent, so you have to speak up for yourself. I think that the school should also have a very small program for the people, ELL students, because when you move here, you probably found different cultures and they don’t resemble your own culture. So you should have a mini lesson for them like how this culture in the United States is going to be like. I think that this will make the students more accomplished because they learn about the background of this country so next time they get along with the local people, they would be more comfortable. (Former ELL Student)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the research findings, relate findings to the literature review, and make suggestions for both practice and research. Let's be clear, without students, the work of teachers, school staff, and educational leaders would
not be possible. It is only logical to listen to the needs of our students throughout the school improvement process. Although some may argue with the premise of students as customers, without them the work of educators would not be possible. Despite much criticism of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the identification of gaps in the proficiency of student subgroups has been highlighted vis-à-vis the performance of all students. Though much criticized, the legacy of NCLB was the provision of district and school laser like focus on closing the gaps in achievement between subgroups.

Accordingly, the genesis of this study and the consequent research questions emerged out of a growing need in America’s public schools. With immigration levels at record numbers, schools are facing increasing difficulties in meeting the learning needs of immigrant students. In turn, immigrant students achieve at lower rates, are much less likely to take AP or IB classes, graduate high school at lower rates, and are less likely to attend college. When students beat these odds, it is important to stop, listen, investigate, and act. The research methodology, literature review, data analysis, and presentation of the results were conducted to highlight student voices and the meaning they have made through their shared experiences. As a research methodology, phenomenology was selected in order to amplify student voices and the meaning they have created throughout their journey to academic success. To that end, the goal of this study was to listen to academically successful former ELL students in order to identify their shared schooling experiences. The students in this study overcame great challenges. Learning the English language, and for that matter, the American culture, was the first order of things. Moreover, learning the language of learning and the subculture of schools was essential.
to accessing the curriculum. These students found a way to be successful despite incredible challenges and accordingly, this study aimed to share their experiences in order to inform practice and research.

**Summary of Findings**

Despite the best of intentions, there are factors that teachers and schools can control, factors they can influence, factors they cannot control. This study focused on the factors that teachers and schools can directly control as well as those they can influence. In support of this approach, the participants of this study spoke loud and clear about the impact of the teachers on academic achievement. Furthermore, the participants credited school friends, as well as the relationships they have developed in schools, to their academic success. The good news that came out of this study is that teachers and schools can control the overwhelming majority of success and inhibiting factors that impact the educational outcomes of immigrant students. The results of this study are promising because both teachers and schools have a tremendous opportunity to improve the educational outcomes of immigrant students through best practices.

**Summary for Research Question 1.** The first research question of this study aimed to identify the shared schooling experiences of academically successful former ELL students enrolled in AP and IB coursework. Five significant shared schooling factors were identified in the results section of this study: (a) teacher-student relationships, (b) high teacher expectations, (c) teacher clarity, (d) academic support, and (e) course-selection coaching. Teacher practice makes the largest impact on the educational achievement of immigrant children. Although this is a tremendous
responsibility, the teachers of the students that participated in this study took the time to build relationships that were later essential to learning. Knowing the students, their challenges, as well as providing hope was elemental to adapting to a new country, language, culture, and school. These relationships continued to be important as students transitioned from English Language Learning programs to general classes and finally to AP and IB classes.

Teacher expectations and academic coaching rounded out the teacher factors found in the results section of this study. The requirements for enrolling in AP and IB coursework were not lowered for these students. In fact, through discussions with both teachers and students, the participants of this study were performing above average in their advanced coursework. As evidenced in six out of seven instances, the teachers of these participants did not know they formerly received ELL services. Teachers expected a lot from these students, provided them with time and resources, and monitored their work along the way. Conversely, from the students’ perspective, they recognized that some teachers have higher expectations than others and came to appreciate them.

For the participants of this study, learning was and continues to be a social act. The interaction with friends and teachers were found to be significant for all the participants of this study. Students cited their relationships with teachers, school counselors, as well as classmates and friends as being critically important to academic achievement. Students throughout this study, as it related to learning the English language and academic achievement, used friends with great frequency. In this regard, the participants of this study, particularly when it came to learning English and
completing academic coursework, socially constructed the knowledge and skills needed to be academically successful. The participants of this study may have lacked the language and cultural knowledge upon entering public schools, but possessed the drive, goals, and the work ethic to be successful. The success they experienced was in large part grounded in the friendships and relationships they developed with peers and teachers. To that end, these findings validate the constructivist learning theory as an appropriate and aligned paradigm for this study. In thinking about school environments that facilitate the learning of ELL and former ELL students, those that provide opportunities for students and teachers to interact are more likely to facilitate positive academic outcomes. The participants of this study were able to form wide academic support networks they relied on to get academic help, complete homework, classwork, meet deadlines, and complete group assignments. Lastly, the participants of this study found that teachers and counselors provided advice and support to enroll in the advanced classes at the middle school level that led to meeting the prerequisites for participation in IB or AP coursework. From the participant’s view, supportive comments, academic assistance, and encouragement from school counselors and school staff were the stepping-stones needed to reach high levels of achievement.

**Summary for Research Question 2.** The second research question aimed to identify the common success factors of former ELL students that are academically successful at the high school level. As for all questions, academically successful was defined as participation in AP or IB coursework throughout this study. Firstly, the students expected success and were willing to invest the determination and hard work
needed for the intended outcomes. Likewise, students had high expectations of themselves and a grade lower than a “B” was considered a bad grade. Most importantly, the students had to overcome repeated failure, having failed numerous SOL tests. Equally important, the students held themselves accountable for high academic performance. Secondly, yet another common success factor for the participants of this study was participation in school sponsored sports, clubs, or activities. These findings complemented the academic support networks the participants of this study also developed.

Early family support was the third common success factor for the participants of this study. School is an immersive experience for immigrant students. These students were impacted by their initial inability to learn the language and therefore, access the much-needed curriculum to be successful during the first two years of school. For most students, this initial shock was expressed by their inability to understand the teacher, connect with peers, and overall disengagement from school. However, the participants of this study broke through the language and cultural barriers of school upon exiting the ELL programs. Common among the participants of this study was the support provided by family members during the difficult time of adjustment to school and learning the English language. With one exception, a brother, uncle, mom, or dad helped with homework and school assignments during the first two years of adjustment. One student, however, used Internet resources as her parents were not able to assist with homework and school assignments. In navigating the different cultures of participants and the schools, these home support networks appears to be a consistent factor.
Summary for Research Question 3. The third and final research question aimed to identify the common inhibiting factors of academically successful high school students enrolled in AP or IB coursework. Three common themes that were prohibitive to academic success were identified in Chapter 4. School-family engagement has been found to be associated with positive academic outcomes consistently in educational research (Constantino, 2015). Yet, there was little to no evidence of school-family engagement throughout this study. These findings do not imply that families did not want to be engaged. Rather, the data yielded from the participants resulted in these findings. Furthermore, this study did not aim to identify school efforts to engage these families. On the contrary, all families and all schools have the common interest in the academic success of students. However, school-family engagement does not have to look the same for all students and their families. As it is the case with immigrant families, schools and teachers must not meet them half way, but meet them where they are. The discussion that follows later in this chapter will show that a lot can be done to engage the families of ELL and former ELL students.

It is one thing to learn a language because you want to. It is another thing entirely to have to learn a language in order to survive. When language is a barrier to the goals and dreams of immigrant students, there is tremendous pressure on them to learn English and transcend this threshold. The fact of the matter is that the overwhelming number of teachers, administrators, and school staff cannot begin to relate to the challenges immigrant students face in overcoming the language barrier. Despite our best efforts as

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2 Jack Balderman in a Solution Tree presentation on Professional Learning Communities to school administrators on July 28, 2016.
educators, immigrant students are taught in a language that is absolutely foreign to them. This very phenomenon makes learning English and the American culture a swim or sink experience for the millions of freshly arrived immigrant students. The findings of this study showed that students succeeded in overcoming this barrier by relying on outside resources such as the TV, Internet, and friends. Once they succeeded in overcoming the language barrier, the participants of this study experienced high levels of academic success. Interestingly enough, the participants were still learning English at the time of this study, however, their situation was vastly different as compared to the first two years of language and cultural immersion. It is very hopeful that this time around the students had the tools to continue to learn, but most importantly grow from their experiences.

Academic course selection support and tracking occurred simultaneously for the participants of this study. While students received support to enroll in advanced coursework at the middle school level, when it comes to enrolling in AP and IB coursework at the high school level, not only were the students not selected for this level of work, but some participants overcame enrollment barriers through resilience and persistence. For instance, it took one participant repeated attempts to get into the IB program as a result of grades and the application essay. However, just recently the same participant recently completed all the rigors of the IB examination requirements. This student is scheduled to participate in the IB diploma ceremony that is held on January 11, 2017. For this student, persistence paid off. Additional discussion on tracking as it relates to these findings as well as the literature review will be conducted later in this chapter.
Discussion

The former ELL students that participated in this study contributed to the identification of 10 themes associated with academic success. Among the themes identified, four were related to teacher factors, three were related to school factors, while an equal amount of external factors were related to individual factors and family support. As such, the purpose of the discussion that follows is to relate the findings of this study to the literature review. Additionally, the discussion will also focus on the alignment and misalignment of the literature review to these findings. For the reader’s reference, Table 15 shows the alignment between the literature review themes with the themes identified by this study. The literature review findings as well as the findings of this study have been categorized into teacher, school, and individual or external factors. The rationale for this format was to increase their accessibility and further make them practical as they may potentially inform practice and research. The discussion that follows aimed to address each category as it relates the literature review with the findings of this study.
### Literature Review and Findings Alignment Table

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Review</th>
<th>Finding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Factors</strong></td>
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<td>LT1 Expectations</td>
<td>FT1 Expectations</td>
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<td>LT2 Relationships</td>
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<td>LT3 Teacher Clarity</td>
<td>FT3 Teacher Clarity</td>
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<tr>
<td>LT4 Vocabulary Instruction</td>
<td>FT4 Language Development</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Factors</strong></td>
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<td>LS1 Cultural Capital</td>
<td>FS1 Academic Support</td>
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<td>LS2 Tracking</td>
<td>FS2 Course Selection Coaching</td>
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<td><strong>External Factors</strong></td>
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<td>LI1 Acculturation</td>
<td>FE1 Extracurricular Involvement</td>
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<td>LI2 Bilingualism</td>
<td>FE2 Success Expectancy</td>
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<td>LI3 Goal-Setting</td>
<td>FE3 Family Engagement</td>
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<td>LI4 Navigating Different Worlds</td>
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*Note.* The literature review findings are subdivided into teacher, school and individual factors coded as LT, LS, and LI. The findings of this study are similarly categorized as FT, FS, and FE.

**Teacher factors.** This study found four themes related to teacher practice.

Firstly, teacher expectations were a consistent theme for all the participants in this study.

Secondly, teacher-student relationships were also a common theme for six of seven participants. Thirdly, teacher instructional clarity was another common theme as
observed in the classrooms of these participants as well as their descriptions of the most memorable teachers. Teacher clarity appeared to be important because the participants of this study experienced pronounced difficulties in developing English language skills. For instance, even at the time of this study, the participants were very much aware of their English language limitations and continuing to learn the English was a high priority. Lastly, English language development, as it relates to writing and vocabulary instruction, rounded out the teacher factors.

Teacher factors are important because they are within the direct control of teacher professional practice. While the school context and leadership behaviors impact teacher practice, and therefore student achievement, the teacher is in direct control of his or her classroom. Accordingly, everything a teacher does or fails to do impacts student learning. It is thus not surprising that teacher practice accounts for 30% of the variance related to student learning (Hattie, 2003). This level of impact is only second to individual factors that account for approximately 50% of the variance associated with learning (Hattie, 2003).

**Teacher expectations.** Just outside the locker room of the Pittsburg Steelers a slogan that reads “the standard is the standard” is affixed to the wall³ (Coolong, 2013). The coach of the Steelers understands that on Sunday afternoon, his team must perform despite any other factor. Essentially, after the game is played, no one will care who was on the injured list, the effect of bad weather, the shortcomings of its players, or why the quarterback was having a bad day. Rather, it is performance that matters. It is the

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³ Graduation speech given to the class of 2016.
performance that determines the trajectory of the team. The link between expectations and success is a short one. Success is defined by performance. Performance is defined by expectations. The students in this study recognized their teachers had high expectations of them. Moreover, students in this study were grateful for the opportunity to be enrolled in AP or IB courses and performed above average in their selected classes. As mentioned, in all but one case, the teachers in this study were entirely unaware that the participants were at one time or another in the ELL program. The teachers had high expectations of these former ELL students and the standard of performance was the same for all.

This study found that high teacher expectations was a consistent theme for all participants. The review of literature found the effect of teacher expectations to be positively related to student achievement. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hattie’s (2009) meta-analysis, consisting of 674 studies, found teacher expectations to have an effect size of .43 on student learning. When it comes to ELL achievement, students were perfectly willing to work harder for teachers that had high expectations of them. As it has been mentioned, working hard to meet goals consistently emerged during the student and teacher interviews. Moreover, students assigned to teachers, whom the ELL students perceived to have high expectations of them, were more willing to take academic risks, master academic content, and learn English faster (Bohensky, 2014; Conklin, 2012 Rubie-Davies, 2014). Teacher expectations have thus facilitated the hard work of students. The same was true of the participants of this study.
The teacher expectations in this study were exhibited through two domains. First, the most memorable teachers saw the potential in the participants of this study and expected them to do well in advanced classes at the middle school level. These teachers were able to see past the failing SOL scores and the low English proficiency of these students. As you may remember, Jill’s sixth grade teacher made a world of difference in her academic trajectory. After only 18 months in this country, while still receiving ELL services, and after the first semester in the sixth grade, Jill’s teacher switched her to Advanced English 6. The second way teacher expectations manifested themselves were through their behaviors during classroom observations, selection of high-yield strategies, and student interviews. Students were provided with ample opportunities to write, read, discuss text, solve problems, use feedback, engage in cooperative learning activities, use meta-cognitive strategies, and self-assess. Moreover, ELL students and their English-speaking peers were held to the same standard of performance. Most importantly, the students themselves recognized that they were held to higher expectations in their AP and IB classes and were grateful for the opportunity they were provided. In all, there was a great deal of alignment between the consistency of this theme and the literature review.

**Teacher-student relationships.** The students in this study experienced positive relationships with the teachers they remembered most. In connecting research, practice, and experience, the effect of teacher-student relationships on student achievement is unequivocally consistent and robust. Back in Chapter 2, teacher-student relationships were found to have an effect size of .72 and rank seventh on a list of more than 138 variables associated with learning (Hattie, 2009). Hattie’s (2009) research on the impact
of teacher-student relationships on learning included 229 studies and found 1,479 effects. However research is not needed to do something that has proven to work for as long as people have been talking, writing, and reading about good teaching. In this case, research reinforces, rather than discovers the need for good educational practice.

The adjustment to U.S. schools immigrant students must make cannot be underestimated. The new faces, places, and the daily cultural adjustment between home and school make relationships with teachers particularly important to student learning, achievement, and consequently educational outcomes. The students in this study also credited their teachers with learning the English language, helping them to enroll in advanced coursework at the middle school level, and holding them to high expectations. Most importantly, the teachers provided the developmental support needed to make the transition from ELL programs to experiencing academic success in AP or IB coursework.

The literature review found that teacher relationships were highly impactful on the academic success of ELL students (Allain, 2001; Baker, L. L., 2013; Bohensky, 2014; Clardy, 2013; Mendez, 2013; Reyes, 2012; Yunus et al., 2011; Zucker-Conde, 2009). Positive relationships increased motivation, resilience, and predicted academic achievement while decreasing behavioral problems of ELL students (Allain, 2011; Ferlazzo & Kypnieski, 2012; Morales, 2013). Through dozens of hours of interviews, the students in this study experienced the same benefits of these positive relationships.

In this study however, teacher-student relationships did not occur in isolation. Rather, teacher-student relationships were a vehicle to learning, not an end in itself. Too often educators credit relationships with learning. Relationships must be accompanied by
strategy, work, consistency, feedback, and the ongoing commitment to common goals. Arguably, relationships by themselves are the means to learning. Essentially, relationships provide the grease without which the learning machinery would come to a grinding halt. For the students in this study, relationships served to facilitate the learning, but also their social development. Teacher-student relationships for the students of this study were described as helpful and caring. Finally, providing the participants with access to advanced courses, higher teacher expectations, coaching, and support further operationalized teacher-student relationships.

**Teacher clarity.** The quality of instruction, described by students as *easy, clear, deep, feedback, and vivid,* directly related to the qualities and definitions of teacher clarity. Teacher clarity was a common theme that emerged throughout this study. As it was stated in Chapter 3, teacher clarity consists of three salient components: (a) cognitive clarity, (b) verbal clarity, and (c) instructional clarity. Cognitive clarity begins with telling the students what you want them to learn. Additionally, the presentation of material must make sense for the learner. Similarly, the use of examples and definitions make additional connections for the learner. Lastly, giving time to think and providing opportunities for questions and feedback rounds up the qualities of instructional clarity. In addition to student interviews, the classroom visits yielded the use of effective high instructional practices as found in Chapter 4.

The participants of this study stated that in their IB and AP classes it was clear what they were expected to learn. One student described learning as *vivid* in his IB classes. Six of seven students described learning in IB and AP classes as *easy.* This
description was not related to the content to be learned, but to the teacher’s ability to take
difficult concepts, theories, skills, and knowledge and make them accessible to the
learner. The classroom observations found that teachers gave clear directions and
students knew exactly what they were expected to accomplish. Moreover, the students
had ample opportunities to ask questions. In this regard, the teachers answered the
questions satisfactorily. For instance, when Jane asked a question about a math problem,
the teacher listened well, asked clarifying questions, and provided her with examples both
verbally and on the board. Jane’s teacher had the ability to read her throughout the
process. When the way she answered Jane’s question to the problem did not appear to
work, the teacher provide an alternate method for solving the problem. She then
provided time for the class to use the solutions given and several peers also contributed to
the process. Lastly, throughout the lesson the students received feedback from both peers
and the teacher.

The literature review found teacher clarity to have an effect size of .75 and was
ranked eighth out of 138 variables related to student achievement (Hattie, 2009). The
effect of teacher clarity on the learning of ELL and former ELL students cannot be
overemphasized. As you may remember, the students in this study experienced
tremendous difficulty with the English language and learning in general during their first
two years in the ELL program. The language barrier had an isolating effect on the
participants and although they eventually learned enough English, going through school
without the ability to understand the teacher was a traumatic experience for these
students. If the teacher is the lifeline to learning and achievement for immigrant students,
and the research shows exactly that, then there are a few best practices that can be implemented, particularly during the period of time when they do not understand the primary language of instruction. As you may remember, Jill did not receive help at home during this difficult transition. Jill persevered by using the Internet to complete her schoolwork while she was learning the English language. Intentional learning targets that are communicated at key points throughout the lesson, checklists, rubrics, non-linguistic representations, feedback, frequent questioning, and vocabulary instruction, will mitigate, though not eliminate, the difficult time students have in adjusting to English-only instruction.

**Vocabulary instruction.** English language development was a recurrent theme throughout this study. However, *vocabulary* did not develop as a theme in this present study. It is worth noting, that one student, in discussing the teachers that made an impact on her, referred to her elementary teachers who helped with spelling, grammar, and words. Moreover, another student stated that in her advanced classes the teacher focuses on vocabulary and definitions thus making it easier to learn. According, the vocabulary instruction emerged as an area of further investigation for two out of the seven students that participated in this study. Similarly, the review of literature found vocabulary to be an important element to the achievement of ELL students. It is important to remember that the studies reviewed were much larger in size than the present study, often including thousands of students (Lesaux, Kieffer, Faller, & Kelly 2010; Francis et al., 2006; Hattie, 2009; Hwang et al., 2015; Nagy & Townsend, 2012).
Vocabulary is at the core of language development. This partial alignment between the findings of this study and the literature review may be found in the relationship between language and culture. This study revealed that English language development was an inhibiting factor for the participants. Language is the carrier of culture. In turn, culture is expressed through language and its many components. Culture and language cannot be separated. For instance, figurative language, including figures of speech such as *similes, metaphors, personification, idioms, and hyperbole*, are deeply rooted in cultural context that takes more than just a few years to master. For many immigrants, it takes more than a generation, not only to master the English language, but the cultural context required for complete fluency of the language.

As stated, vocabulary instruction did not develop as a theme in this study. Rather, vocabulary instruction is a component of English language learning and the academic development of ELL and former ELL students as found back in Chapter 3. As you may remember, although John was born in the United States in a family whose primary language is Arabic, it was not until the 11th grade when he stated “I finally understood grammar.” John and Joel admittedly continued to have difficulties with written assignments. Similarly, Jill, Jay, and Jane continued to struggle with the English language. During the interviews, the students experienced difficulty in finding the words to convey their thoughts and ideas. As evidenced by their exiting WIDA ACCESS scores, participation in advanced classes at the middle school level, and academic success in AP and IB coursework, the participants of this study possessed the skills to be academically successful. However, the students were also aware of the need to continue
to improve their language skills. Essentially, the students learned enough vocabulary, but more importantly enough decoding skills and strategies, to perform on par with peers whose primary language is English.

In her advanced classes Jan stated that learning is not necessarily harder because “the teacher goes deeper and we learn more vocabulary and definitions.” The literature review also found vocabulary instruction to significantly impact ELL student achievement. Hattie’s (2009), meta-analysis, consisting of more than 301 studies, found vocabulary instruction to have an effect size of .67, and to be ranked 15th out of more than 138 variables related to student achievement. Vocabulary is at the core of learning any language. It is not surprising that English language learners benefited more from well-planned vocabulary instruction as compared to their English only speaking peers (Cons, 2012; Foehl, 2014; Lawrence, 2012).

For ELL students, vocabulary development and accessing the curriculum is akin to a mathematical formula. On average, students learn approximately 3,000 vocabulary words per year in Grades 3-12 (Drucker, 2003). As a point of reference, a typical third grader reading vocabulary averages about 10,000 words while 12th graders average around 40,000 words (Graves, August, & Mancilla-Martinez, 2013). When students arrive to U.S. public schools, or enter schools not speaking English, their vocabularies must catch up to their English-only speaking peers. However, while the number of vocabulary words are important, it may be mathematically impossible to catch up with English speaking peers for most ELL students. As such, vocabulary instruction that
includes decoding strategies provide immigrant students with the survival skills needed to be successful in all classes (Graves et al., 2013).

**School factors.** Several factors that are within the control of the school were found to impact the achievement of the participants in this study. Among the shared schooling experiences of former ELL students, course selection coaching, academic support networks, and tracking were found as common themes. Academic support networks were found to be a highly defined and developed theme throughout this study. On one hand, the students received academic coaching from teachers and school staff at the middle school level. On the other hand, at the high school level, one student encountered difficulties in meeting the requirements to enroll in the IB program, while three other students were not recommended by their teachers for AP courses. All of these students were in good academic standing once enrolled in AP and IB coursework. School factors are important because they account for another 5-10% of the variance related to learning (Hattie, 2003). School factors are also important because the school has the power to directly impact ELL achievement through the implementation of best practices that are within the reach of building based educational leaders. As it has been stated throughout this study, the term *friends* was used with great frequency as it related to academic support networks, learning English, and school engagement. Consequently, this theme is directly aligned to the research on peer effects, which accounts for another 5-10% of the variance related to learning (Hattie, 2003).

**Course selection coaching.** The students that participated in this study reported to have received both support and guidance in selecting advanced courses at the middle
school level. Course selection emerged as a well-developed theme throughout the study. Seven of seven participants were encouraged by teachers, school counselors, and school staff members to enroll in advanced classes at the middle school level. As you may remember, John’s middle school counselor helped him when he needed assistance with math homework and encouraged him to enroll in the IB program when he got to high school. However, once in high school, he had difficulty doing so. It is important to also note that course selection coaching came from a variety of sources. Jill’s teacher, for instance, recommended her for advanced classes in the middle of sixth grade. However course selection coaching did not emerge as a theme during the literature review for both ELL and former ELL students.

Teacher relationships, high expectations, and course selection coaching speak to seeing the potential in immigrant students. In this study, course selection coaching is a defined theme because these students received specific and targeted information on courses and programs years before they were available to them. In addition to providing specific course and program information, the teachers and counselors of the participants in this study planted the proverbial seeds thus providing both the opportunity and the efficacy to be academically successful. It is also important to note that there are no school district programs that aim to provide this level of support to high achieving ELL students. Rather, the participants shared these experiences as a result of caring and supporting staff who had the wherewithal to see the potential and provide them with the pathway and the encouragement to excel in IB and AP coursework once in high school.
Although the literature review did not find course selection coaching of ELL and former ELL students to be a defined theme, it is worth mentioning that academic coaching is a well-defined theory and practice at the post-secondary level. Coaching students capitalizes on the theory self-actualization by (a) building confidence, (b) relating goals with persistent hard work, (c) and the provision of positive feedback to sustain the ongoing investment in problem solving and overcoming obstacles (Ben-Yehuda, 2015). The totality of former ELL student experiences in this study is aligned to the process of academic coaching. As a consequence, additional action and university research may provide the impetus to further explore this potential strategy for maximizing the academic development of ELL and former ELL students.

**Academic support networks.** The participants of this study developed and maintained academic support networks. As reviewed, students could network during and after school hours to complete IB and AP coursework. However, the review of literature did not find academic support networks to be a defined theme that contributes to the achievement of ELL and former ELL students. As defined by this study, the presence of well-defined academic support networks is well aligned with the acculturation of ELL students. In this regard, acculturation was a highly developed literature review finding. A short definition and review of acculturation and its impact on ELL and former ELL achievement is in order. Additionally, a comparison between the findings of this study and the literature review will be conducted in the paragraphs that follow.

To begin, acculturation is not an event, but an ongoing process of learning a new culture while negotiating aspects of one’s primary culture. As such, acculturation may be
thought of as the distance between cultures and the bridges that are formed in the exchange of cultural knowledge. Some bridges are easier to build than others. Bridges that require long spans and many supports take much longer to build. Conversely, crossing narrower distances may require much shorter bridges. Depending on the degree of cultural differences, students acculturate at different rates. The American political and socio-economic system is primarily a Western system. Accordingly, the acculturation process differs for immigrants from Europe, Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia. The term itself is defined as the adaptation to the host culture as a result of reconciling two or more cultures (Bacerra, 2012). The acculturation process is the adaptation to the language, norms, attitudes, behaviors, and affiliation preferences of individuals (Bacerra, 2012; Lopez et al., 2002; Pitts, 2012). The majority of findings revealed in Chapter 3 discovered a positive association between high levels of acculturation and academic achievement. It is worth noting that in a much smaller number of studies, identification with one’s culture was more positively related to higher academic achievement.

High levels of acculturation are important for two reasons. First, students that have the cultural and linguistic proficiency will find it easier to communicate and consequently develop the relationships needed to form supporting academic networks. For instance, a participant in this study had difficulty relating to women. His academic network consisted entirely of men. The teacher went to great lengths to make seating assignments in order to deal with some of the conflicts that had developed over the years between female students and the participant in this study. Yet another student stated that she had trouble making friends and often felt alone. In another example, a student in this
study recommended the development of classes or programs to teach American kids about other cultures. Lastly, though not directly related to academic support systems, high acculturation levels make content more accessible.

**Tracking.** Academic course-selection coaching developed as a theme at the middle school level in this study. However, at the high school level only two out of seven students reported to have received information about course options, support, and encouragement to enroll in AP or IB coursework. The remaining students enrolled in AP and IB courses through individual determination. As reviewed in Chapter 2, tracking is the assignment of students to classes based on perceived ability. ELL, LEP, or ESL students are by definition perceived to have lower reading and writing proficiency levels. The same holds true for former ELL students. It is not surprising that the literature review found that ELL students are more likely to be assigned to lower level and remedial classes based on the perception that they are less smart and less able than their English-speaking peers (Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Oakes & Guiton, 1995).

In this study, tracking represented a subtheme only at the high school level. As such, this subtheme raises the following question: why are ELL and former ELL students recommended for advanced courses at the middle school level, yet once in high school this level of support fizzles out? To answer this question it is important to consider some factors. First, the nature of middle school is more developmental. The participants of this study failed SOL tests during elementary school, yet they were recommended for advanced classes at the middle school level. At the high school level, the enrollment of former ELL students that fail SOL tests in AP or IB courses is simply inconceivable.
However, at the middle school level, failing prior SOLs did not raise any eyebrows for the teachers that recommended the participants of this study for advanced courses. High school teachers often emphasize content over ability and potential. Particularly at the high school level, when students are perceived to have lower English writing and reading skills, they are less likely to be both recruited and recommended for AP and IB classes (Kannon & Kangas, 2014). Those that ascribe to this practice fail to consider that intelligence is not in any way related to language proficiency. Moreover, peers and expectations have a positive effect on student achievement (Hattie, 2003, 2009).

Essentially, students will learn just as much from one another. As also supported by the constructivist theory, if knowledge is socially constructed, the enrollment of former ELL students in AP or IB coursework puts them on academic trajectories not otherwise available. As we have already seen, once in these classes, the participants in this study thrived both academically and socially.

**External Factors.** This category discusses both individual factors and external factors. Individual factors account for 50% of the variance related to learning (Hattie, 2003). As it relates to individual factors, the theme of success expectancy, supported by goal setting and the work required to meet the goals, was also manifested throughout this study. External factors by definition are not within the control of both teachers and schools. However when students spend 7-9 hours per day in the school setting, it is within the realm of educators to exert some influence over both individual and external factors. One such example is parental engagement. For schools, as they work to maximize the achievement of all children, it just makes sense to engage every parent
(Constantino, 2015). Extracurricular involvement has also developed as a theme throughout this study. Schools may encourage and incentivize participation in sports, clubs, and activities. However it is worth noting that success expectancy is one of ten factors in this study directly related to the individual effort, his/her motivations, and the view of the future. Even in this realm, well-intentioned educators continue to find success one child at a time by motivating students through mentoring and coaching approaches.

**Success expectancy.** The success expectancy theory is defined by the individual’s ability coupled by motivation, goals, efficacy, and the sustained effort required to meet both short and long-range goals (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). The success expectancy theory is also different from goal setting, as an instructional strategy, which is used by teachers and students in creating daily learning targets and objectives (Moss & Brookhart, 2012). As one component of the success expectancy theme found in this study, the review of literature found goal setting research to be both prolific and positively associated with student achievement. Moreover, as it has been presented back in Chapter 2, goal setting reliably predicts academic achievement for both ELL and Non ELL students (Andrissen et al., 2006; Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006; Hattie, 2009; Hattie, 2009; King, 2007; 2013; Moeller et al., 2012; Morisano et al., 2010). This study found a relationship between hard work and goals to be a consistent and well-defined theme. The success expectancy theory combines these two findings to capture the meaning and the essence of participants common schooling experiences.
It is important to remember that this study found that work and working to be a well-defined sub-theme. The goals of the participants related to earning “B’s” and higher grades in all coursework. Moreover, the participants had longer-range goals relating to college and careers. According to course grades, the participants were successful in AP and IB courses. All participants at the time of this study were earning “B’s” or higher. Based on these findings, the participants have the ability, not only to complete AP and IB coursework, but consequently college coursework.

The outcome of motivation is effort. Motivation, as it relates to the investment of energy to meet a goal, was also observed during classroom observations and teacher interviews. As a concept, motivation was not identified as a theme in this study. The outcome of hard work is learning the English language, overcoming failure on End of Course SOL tests, teacher recommendations for advanced middle school classes, persistence in enrolling in AP and IB classes, earning good grades, and completing the rigors of the IB program. Although motivation as a concept did not emerge as a theme in this study, the evidence suggests that the participants in this study were motivated to do well.

Teachers and schools do not get a pass when it comes to student motivation. Too often well-intentioned and well-meaning educational practitioners place motivation entirely in the student’s locus of control. “The student is not motivated to learn” is a common phrase in the lexicon of reasons provided by teachers when students do not succeed. The research on motivation does not entirely support these assumptions. As you may remember teachers and school staff encouraged the participants of this study to do
well and provided academic support early on during their transition out of the ELL program. Early during the ELL programs these students were not successful, having little understanding of what was going on in class. During middle school, teachers and school staff provided course selection coaching and in several examples, they provided academic assistance. Later, as observed in classes, the participants of this study had teachers who implemented impactful student engagement teaching strategies.

Student motivation is impacted by teacher behavior. For instance, teacher enthusiasm was found to increase student intrinsic motivation (Patrick, Hinsley, & Kempler, 2000). Moreover, teacher nonverbal immediacy and credibility also increased student motivation in an experimental design study involving 586 high school students (Progue & AhYun, 2006). Similarly, teacher clarity reduces learner apprehension and increases motivation (Chesebro, 2003). Lastly, teacher-student relationships have also been found to increase the motivation and achievement of ESL students (Yunus et al., 2011). The students in this study had teachers that demonstrated teacher clarity, cared for them as individuals, and were attentive to their needs.

**Extracurricular involvement.** The participants in this study were involved in sports, clubs, and other school sponsored activities. Extracurricular involvement was a consistent and well-defined theme throughout this study. However, the review of literature did not yield the extracurricular involvement of ELL and former ELL students as a theme. In this regard, it is important to remember that the literature review on former ELL students is sparse. A second review of the literature on the relationship
between extracurricular involvement and achievement finds one study at the college level (Saif, 2000). Yet the research on this relationship for all students is quite prolific.

There is no doubt that sports, clubs, and activities play a big role in U.S. schools. Across the nation, as many as 60% of high school juniors and 70% of seniors are involved in one or more extracurricular activities (Shurluf, 2010). The American public education system is a reflection of American culture made possible to the next generation through the transmission of its values, norms, and aspirations. To a great extent, the values, norms, and aspirations of this nation’s diverse communities are reflected in the local school. Extracurricular participation in sports, clubs, band, chorus, orchestra, and other school related activities are thus a reflection of the community culture. Friendships, teamwork, cooperation, and networking occurs both on the field of play and in the classrooms, band rooms, and the auditoriums of schools throughout America (Holloway, 2000; NCES, 1995). Additionally, Holloway (2000), found that for marginal students, academic achievement was higher while the student was actively participating during the season, as opposed to out of season. These results are not surprising. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that participation in sports, clubs, and activities is associated with increased attendance rates, reduced skipping, higher GPAs, higher math scores, higher reading scores, and higher expectations of college attendance for high school students (NCES, 1995). When it comes to ELL students, Saif (2000), found that at the college level, average performing ELL student achievement increased as a result of extracurricular participation. It is worth mentioning that a more recent meta-analysis on the relationship between extracurricular participation and achievement found the majority
of these studies lack the methodology to show causation (Shurluf, 2010). As such, extracurricular participation is associated with improved academic outcomes, and not the direct reason for greater levels of achievement.

The participants of this study had wide academic support networks that extended outside the classroom. In the participant’s words, they communicated with friends on assignments by texting, Skyping, and forming study groups, even after midnight. The participants of this study also valued involvement in extracurricular activities. Though it is difficult at best to determine the origin of these relationships that form the framework for the participants’ academic networks, participation in extracurricular activities has been associated in this study as well as in research with improved educational outcomes. This study does not imply that former ELL student participation in extracurricular activities caused improved academic outcomes. Rather, participation in extracurricular activities and the presence of supporting networks are associated with improved educational outcomes of these former ELL students.

**Family engagement.** Early family support, provided upon entering school and before exiting the ELL program, developed as a theme throughout this study. However, at the high school level, there was no data to support the presence of consistent and reliable family-school engagement. As you may remember, back in Chapter 2 the literature review found navigating different worlds to be a recurring theme. The multiple worlds theory deals primarily with questions such as (a) who helps me, (b) who causes me difficulties, and (c) how do I adapt to these difficulties (Cooper et al., 2013). Family-school engagement is not an *either or* phenomenon. Family-school engagement is the
degree to which the family and the school communicate in order to meet the needs of the student. While family-school engagement did not develop as a theme at the high school level, the families provided critical support to students when they needed it most. It is feasible that once in high school and once the participants learned enough English to be academically successful in AP or IB classes, parent assistance waned off. Similarly, it is also a natural phenomenon for parent involvement to be greatest at the elementary level and drop off proportionally as the student matures and becomes more independent.

Immigrant students make the transition between native and American culture at least twice daily. As you may remember in Chapter 2, the transitions between home and school are characterized as (a) congruent worlds with smooth transitions, (b) different worlds with manageable boundaries, (c) different worlds with hazardous crossings, and (d) different worlds with insurmountable crossings (Phelan et al., 1991). The students in this study appeared to have transitions between home and school that were characterized as smooth and manageable. Six of seven participants in this study reported to have received help with homework from dads, moms, brothers, and uncles. Four of seven participants were encouraged by family members to enroll in AP courses or the IB program. In her 2013 study on the common schooling experiences of middle school students enrolled in advanced classes, Baker, L. L. also found the role of family to form a developed theme. Three of five students in Baker, L. L.’s (2003) study received academic support and advice from siblings and family members. These findings are important because they negotiate the transitions between home and school. They are
further important because family members play an integral role during the difficult 
transition into public schools and ELL programs.

Parents want the best for their children. Parents want their children’s quality of 
life, and therefore their educational attainment, to exceed their own. In his recent book 
on family engagement, Steve Constantino (2015), stated that the secret to family 
engagement starts with the belief that every family wants to be engaged because doing so 
will have a positive impact on the children served. Furthermore, Constantino (2015), 
asserts that just because a family is a minority family, non-traditional family, or special 
needs family, their desire is for their child to succeed. Family engagement is also integral 
in preventing dropouts and increasing the educational outcomes of minorities, including 
ELL students (NEA, 2008). Similarly, the recently passed Every Student Succeeds Act, 
(2015), puts parent engagement at the front of educational policy for years to come. Not 
surprisingly, many educational grants now require a parent engagement component 
(ESSA, 2015). In retrospect, this study found that family-school engagement occurred 
for one of seven participants. This is not a critique of families, teachers and schools, 
however family engagement is an untapped resource that has been underutilized since the 
one room schoolhouse. Family engagement is resource that has the potential to improve 
the educational outcomes not only for minority students, but also for all students.

Policy and Leadership Recommendations

In education, policy and leadership drives practice. Moreover, the 
implementation of sound policy will improve the educational outcomes for immigrant 
students. If we are to learn about the impact of policy and leadership on student
academic outcomes, the field of special education provides a viable pathway for moving forward. Through legislation, policy, and leadership the outcomes of millions of disabled students are dramatically different since the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Although some attention has also been focused on immigrant students, given the history of immigration and the current mood in the United States, more can be done to both protect and maximize the outcome of these students. Accordingly, as we have seen in this study, in the absence of direction provided by both policy and leadership, while some students will get lucky while many others will fail to achieve their innate potential. The students in this study overcame the odds. They were motivated by nurturing relationships with their teachers, access to quality teaching, academically supportive networks, and the grades needed to meet both short and long-term goals. Essentially, these students had dreams and aspirations beyond high school. In this sense, they were fortunate to have the people and the processes needed to materialize these dreams and aspirations. In the absence of policy, this is what made them lucky. The findings of this study and their alignment to the literature review warrant four policy and leadership recommendations.

**Grading.** For best or worse success in America’s public schools is measured by grades. Though the philosophical underpinnings of grading will not be discussed in this work, the students in this study aimed to earn grades higher than a “B”. As the success expectancy theory was discussed earlier in this study, for these students earning good grades was essential to getting into middle school advanced classes, AP classes, IB classes, the GPA required to get into college, and achieving their career goals. The students in this study expressed the relationship between work and earning good grades.
They put forward the effort required to be academically successful. However, the students in this study, particularly early on, were disadvantaged when compared with their American born peers. Not only did they lack the language, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge needed to access the curriculum and thus earn good grades, they expressed feelings of isolation and failure during this difficult time. Grades are important and too consequential for immigrant students that lack language and cultural skills. As such, this study recommends states and districts to develop policies that grade immigrant students while in ELL programs on effort rather than achievement. These successful students were willing to work harder than their peers to achieve. As Tables 11 and 12 showed in Chapter 4, the concept of work and its relationship to goals was directly related to the academic outcomes of these students. Because work is critically important to achievement, this study recommends that states develop policies that grade students on effort. Indicators relating to the student work and effort vis-à-vis relevant learning objectives such as exemplary, satisfactory, developing, and unsatisfactory are important for both acknowledging and rewarding one of the most important attributes related to the achievement of immigrant students.

The recommended policies need to be specific, relating to time in school, grade level, and students’ language proficiency. Report cards and interim reports must report on the academic effort the student exerts relevant to the same learning objectives required for all students. The author of this study realizes that grading is a hot topic in the field of education. Additionally, some may criticize this policy recommendation given its seemingly contradictory relationship to the high expectations also found by this study.
However, this association reflects a rudimentary understanding of both the findings of this study and the academic development of immigrant students. This policy recommendation does not argue for lowering the standards. To the contrary, this policy recommendation argues for having the same high standards for all students, recognizing that work and effort combined is the one critical element to achieving goals, while taking into account the linguistic, social, and academic development of immigrant children.

From a practice and leadership development, this study recommends that school principals and district administrators provide teachers with resources, training, guidance, and professional development needed to implement this policy recommendation. The development and use of rubrics and checklists that gauge the level of work will ensure that effort is systemically applied. Additionally, school leaders must lead the implementation of rubrics and checklists that are appropriately operationalized. In other words, principals must inspect what they expect when it comes to the grading of English Language Learners.

**Athletic eligibility.** This study found that students liked school, worked hard and achieved at high levels. The motivation for working hard and liking school was related to the academic support networks these immigrant students developed. As we have seen earlier in this Chapter as well as back in Chapter 4, the students in this study participated in one or more sport, club, or activity. Luckily, the students in this study had earned the grades needed to maintain athletic eligibility. However, the majority of immigrant students, particularly while in ELL programs, are not eligible to play sports. In Virginia, athletic eligibility is based on the health of the student, the conduct of the student, and
academic performance defined by passing grades. To be eligible, students must pass five or more classes on the full year A/B block schedule and three out of four classes on the 4x4 semester schedule. While students may take a one time exemption to this rule coaches and teachers are reluctant to use this rule due to the potential impact on teams and programs.

The grading policy recommendations just described goes a long way in improving the athletic eligibility of ELL students. Because athletic competition at the state level occurs primarily at the high school level, letter grades and/or numerical grades are required for eligibility. There are no know provisions for eligibility based on the work effort of students at the high school level that are used to meet athletic eligibility requirements. Accordingly, in the absence of passing criteria, athletic eligibility based on effort is not recognized. In this regard, state superintendent associations have tremendous influence on drafting and implementing athletic eligibility requirements through state athletic organizations. State superintendent associations, educational leaders, and legislators must coordinate their efforts to draft policies that take into consideration grading systems based on effort. Learning English and the culture needed to fully access the curriculum is not a permanent condition. Because ELL student English proficiency is achieved in 3-4 years, eligibility using effort rather than grades is not permanent, but proportional to the time it takes to learn to gain language proficiency. The author of this study realizes that when it comes to athletic eligibility, the politics of high school athletics, immigration, the barriers to implementing this policy recommendations are
large. However, by educating teachers, educators, parents, and the public about what is good for students, progress is possible.

**Teacher standards for ELL instruction.** Over the past decade states have developed standards for effective teaching. In Virginia the Department of Education, working with the General Assembly, passed the Code of Virginia Standards of Quality (2015) that define public instruction throughout the state. The students in this study were fortunate to have high quality teachers that used research based practices as observed by classroom observations and as demonstrated by their shared experiences. Clear and unambiguous speech, coupled by the presentation of material in sequential and logical manner was found to improve the academic outcomes of students. Additionally, the frequent use of feedback improved achievement and the motivation of students to do well. As these qualities have shown to improve the academic outcomes of these students, and are also supported by the findings of the literature review, this study recommends that states develop standards for effective ELL instruction.

Just as effective instruction was defined by states through the development of performance indicators, the same can be done for effective and impactful ELL instruction. It is important to remember that ELL instruction is not limited to ELL teachers. All teachers that teach English Language Learners, particularly in the inclusion setting, will benefit from specific indicators related to professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional delivery, assessment of and for student learning, learning environment, and professionalism. Additionally, state legislatures will have to allocate additional resources for the implementation of these standards. Similarly, as the
number of immigrant students public schools serve continues to increase, states will have to both mandate and allocate the funds for additional staffing.

**Cultural competency.** All relationships are based on reciprocal respect and mutual understanding. There is no better way to connect to ELL students, than to understand both their cultural background and the challenges related to being a stranger in a new land while learning a new language. Teachers have reported to be unprepared to serve the educational needs of ELL students. Moreover, the students in this study reported to benefit from positive, caring, and nurturing relationships with their teachers.

The majority of teachers cannot begin to relate to the experiences of their ELL students. When it comes to understanding the developmental needs of immigrant students as well as their cultural background, teacher programs fail to adequately prepare them to meet these needs. This study recommends state legislatures, state departments of education, and teacher education programs to develop policies that require the demonstration of cultural competency for teacher licensure. These policies should take into account veteran relicensure that is required every 3-5 years.

**Implications for Practice**

The implications for practice are organized into what teachers, schools, and the individual students and their families can do to increase their chances of success.

Teachers make the difference. Teachers are also overworked. Focusing on what matters, as it relates to impact, addresses the needs of teachers to work smarter, not harder.

Schools are also facing increasing demands while receiving fewer resources. Shrinking budgets and the competing demands of localities will all but ensure that additional
personnel and resources will not be readily available. With dwindling resources focusing on what matters really counts. Focusing on the best practices that have the greatest impact on students ensures schools are good stewards of public resources while maximizing the educational outcomes of all children. First, the most impactful practices on the achievement of immigrant students are within the realm of teacher practice. Second, the findings of this study also lead to the implementation of impactful best practices at the school level. Lastly, immigrant students and their families may also choose to take these recommendations to maximize their academic outcomes. Although the reader will decide, the implications for practice may already be aligned with existing best practices. Rather, it may be a matter of priority and level of implementation that will make a difference in the achievement of ELL and former ELL students. The implications for practice are summarized in Figure 1. As the reader interprets Figure 1, it is necessary to observe that the findings of this study have been recategorized into teacher, school, and external factors. The purpose of this recategorization was to make these recommendations more accessible and further operationalize them for practitioners.
Whether one ascribes to the *salad bowl* or to the *melting pot*, immigrants must do what they have always done, learn English and learn the culture. However, teachers and schools have the moral responsibility to facilitate this process. Teachers and schools also have the technical expertise to help America’s growing ELL student population. Acculturation, or learning the English language and American culture, may happen in a decade, a generation, or two. But, acculturation must nevertheless happen in order to

*Figure 1. Summary of implications for practice categorized by teacher, school, and external factors. This schema relates research findings to the implications for practice.*
fully access the curriculum and therefore improve the educational outcomes of immigrant students.

**Teachers.** The participants of this study spoke loud and clear. Teachers and schools have a great impact on the success of ELL and former ELL students. Without their teachers, the educational achievement and, therefore, opportunities of these students could have been much different. To that end, teachers have the responsibility to see the potential in these students and realize the impact best practices have on their achievement. Too often teachers complain about the reading level of students. However, the new norm for ELL students is making several years of gains in reading and writing proficiency in just one year. First and foremost, teachers must develop relationships with ELL students that are characterized by *patience, caring, and helpfulness.* Secondly, teachers must have high expectations for ELL students. In fact, the expectations must be the same for all students. However additional support will be needed to help ELL students meet them. During the first 1-2 years in U.S. schools, ELL students have difficulty simply adjusting. Some students navigate this struggle and overcome this barrier while many more do not. When it comes to learning English, words and their usage is particularly important. Vocabulary instruction is part and parcel of good instruction that supports ELL students.

**Classroom environment.** The teacher is the classroom leader responsible for creating an environment that is not only conducive to learning, but to engage all students. It is certainly a tall order, however best practices and a thoughtful and caring approach will go a long way in reaching this goal. Teachers would do well to focus on making
students feel welcome, particularly during the first year in U.S. schools. Additionally, learning about the culture of each ELL student will help teachers build and maintain relationships that are critical to learning. Similarly, having students learn about each other’s culture is particularly important in helping them navigate the difficult transition once in U.S. schools. Having students learn about each other’s cultures will also help them build relationships with one another. As you may remember, friends formed a network of support that eventually facilitated the enrollment and success in AP and IB coursework. Opportunities for students to form friendships must also be provided. As the years progressed since entering U.S. schools, the ELL students in this study remembered teachers that listened to their stories and cared for them as individuals. For the participants of this study, it was not all about grades in the first few years in U.S. schools. That is not to say that the expectations teachers had of these students were any lower. It makes plain sense that these students needed additional support and time to meet the same high expectations required of all students. A warm, inviting, and caring classroom environment is created and maintained by focusing on common norms and classroom expectations.

Once the ELL students exit ELL programs, it is helpful for teachers to continue to know about their former ELL status, not to track, but to provide opportunities and support. ELL students learn English throughout the lifetime. Accordingly, access to this information will help teachers tailor the classroom environment to make students feel welcome. The 2015 ESSA requires districts to monitor student academic progress for at least two years after exiting the ELL program. Some districts however, now
appropriately require ELL students to be on monitor status for four years after exiting the program. These changes will permit teachers to monitor the needs of former ELL students and further assess program effectiveness.

**Relationships.** Relationships matter to all students. Because ELL students come from other countries or from homes whose primary language is not English, relationships matter more to ELL students. It does not cost any extra money to build and maintain positive, caring, and helpful relationships with students. Similarly, no school district or school initiatives can ever guarantee that positive relationships exist between every ELL student and his or her teacher. Teachers are the lifeline, not only to academic achievement, but the social development of ELL students. The students in this study remembered teachers that went beyond the academics. Relationships however are grounded in similar interests, beliefs, and understandings. In this regard, it is important for teachers to take an interest in these students by learning about their background. Moreover, building relationships with students motivates them to work hard. Teachers that are clear, energetic, and attentive to their students increase their motivation to set goals and sustain the hard work required to meet them.

AP and IB teachers can also do well to build and nurture relationships with former ELL students. The teacher interviews as well as the examples the students provided during the interviews revealed that relationships with teachers were more memorable during the middle and elementary school years. Moreover, course selection coaching occurred at the middle school level with far greater frequency. It was at the middle school level where students were encouraged by their teachers to enroll in IB and AP
courses more frequently. High school is about content. Too often at the high school level, content trumps relationships. The findings of this study posit that both are equally important. Once students are enrolled in AP or IB classes, they can benefit greatly from nurturing relationships with their teachers. Going past the content, as one student has remembered her teachers, forms the basis of these effective relationships. In turn, greater levels of achievement and motivation have been associated with this approach.

To say that the participants of this study were hard workers is an understatement. Classroom observations, teacher interviews, student stories, and achievement results combine to tell the story that these students overcame tremendous odds through hard work. Accordingly, it is easy to assume that these students were motivated to learn. However, in digging deeper, teacher behaviors such as clarity, high-yield strategies, expectations, and relationships were associated with the student’s willingness to engage in the hard work needed to overcome these tremendous obstacles. This study argues that motivation is not entirely in the realm of the individual, rather how the teacher behaves impacts student motivation.

**Instruction.** This study showed that the instructional practices that were effective with former ELL students are already on the list of best practices for the learning of all students. Among the common success factors related to instruction, vocabulary instruction and teacher clarity trumped all other impactful instructional practices identified by this study. As it has been stated, by the time students graduate from high school they possess vocabularies approaching 40,000 words (Graves et al., 2013). Depending on the entry grade level of ELL students, their vocabularies may be as small
as a few hundred words. On average, public school students learn around 3,000 vocabulary words every year (Graves et al., 2013). These factors combine to paint a picture that the vocabularies of ELL and former ELL students cannot catch up with their English-speaking peers by the time they graduate from high school. As such, teachers must not only focus on increasing the vocabularies of ELL and former ELL students, but also on decoding and comprehension strategies that exponentially expand their abilities to access the curriculum.

Teacher clarity is particularly effective in increasing the achievement of ELL students. In this regard, making learning intentions perfectly clear at the beginning of the lesson, ensuring they are understood, checking on the progress toward meeting them, and determining the extent to which they were met before the bell rings, are best practices. The work of Moss and Brookhart (2012), on learning targets operationalizes the effective implementation of clear, achievable, aligned, and measurable daily learning goals. Time is the greatest resource for ELL students. This approach ensures the instructional time is maximized and feedback is provided proximally to the learning task at hand.

Teacher clarity is also defined by frequent checks for understanding and the provision of feedback. The students in this study had AP and IB teachers who provided opportunities for both teacher and peer feedback. The use of frequent questioning and formal structures for soliciting and providing feedback is fundamental to teacher clarity. Formative assessment is an effective practice to solicit feedback, in a non-threatening manner, from students. Because the purpose of formative feedback is to provide
correction, ELL students stand to benefit greatly from the coaching and support that results from this highly effective practice.

Teacher clarity is also operationalized through the provision of examples and analogies. In this regard, the teacher must proceed with caution, as the ELL students may not have the cultural background needed to make connections. Repeating important points and teaching students to take notes, and frequent checks of their binders also increase the chance that misunderstandings are cleared up before moving on to the next concept, quiz, test, chapter, or unit of study. ELL and former ELL students just don’t have enough time to catch up to the background knowledge and vocabularies of English-speaking peers of equal intelligence and ability by the time they graduate. Teacher clarity maximizes the time available by closing the distance between curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Schools. Schools can also do much better to maximize ELL student achievement. For instance, the students must be given the opportunity and access to advanced courses at the middle school level. Many schools and districts require teacher recommendations and standardized test scores, on assessments such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) or Stanford 10, in the 75-90th percentile in order to qualify for enrollment in advanced courses at the middle school level. Reading comprehension, language, spelling, and listening comprehension are some of the subtests measured by these assessments. Because placement of ELL students is so consequential, these tests fail to measure the ability and potential of ELL students. Provided the ability and potential is commensurate with the advanced course, ELL students will work hard to achieve, despite the scores
earned on these tests. Moreover, as we have seen with the participants of this study, they had failed tests, yet they had the innate ability and the hard work to match. The results of these tests and other qualifiers for ELL access to advanced courses should be used with extreme caution in determining course placement.

Once in high school, students must be also provided with opportunities to enroll in AP and/or IB coursework. However opportunity is not enough. Students must be encouraged, supported, and recruited for AP and IB classes. When students have ability and potential, schools and teachers must look past standardized test scores. Schools can also provide networking opportunities for ELL students. The students in this study reported that friends were critically important to learning English and receiving the support needed to complete rigorous assignments in AP and IB classes. Schools also have the power to recruit students for involvement in sports, clubs, and activities. Lastly, engaging the families of ELL students is an underutilized resource that promises to have a high return on investment as it relates to ELL academic achievement.

**Extracurricular participation.** America is unique. Participation in sports, clubs, and activities is part and parcel of the common schooling experiences of all students. It is safe to say that attendance at Friday night football games is much higher than attendance at back to school night. This phenomenon is uniquely American and ELL and former ELL students have no cultural comparison. For the majority of ELL students and their parents, school was entirely academic in their former country. The students in this study were involved in one or more school sponsored sports, clubs, or activities. When looking at the research associated with extracurricular participation, it is not surprising that ELL
students also benefit from additional support networks consisting of teachers, coaches, and peers. These networks were also used by the participants to access help with homework. Moreover, for these students, friends were a major reason for learning English.

State athletic associations, school districts, and schools have minimum academic performance requirements for participation in sports. For instance, some districts have a GPA requirements of 2.0 for participation. Additionally, at the state level, the student must pass five credited subjects each year in order to participate. These rules are strictly enforced and schools are sanctioned severely for any violations. Some exceptions are made for students with disabilities, but no exceptions are made for students that do not speak, or have limited English language skills. Schools cannot control eligibility requirements at the state level. However, schools can work with students to provide them with academic assistance to be eligible to play. Reviewing fair and equitable grading practices that focus on progress rather than achievement are also important. For instance, schools are exempt from the impact of ELL SOL scores on accreditation for the first 11 semesters in country. In other words, for 4.5 years schools get a pass for the performance of ELL students regardless of how they perform, yet the students themselves must pass these tests at the high school level in order to earn the verified credit needed to graduate. As such, schools can work within existing policies to have learning plans that have developmentally appropriate accommodations and modifications to the curriculum.

Moreover, it is within the locus of school control to actively encourage, recruit, and retain
ELL students in sports, clubs, and activities. It is important to do so because ELL student participation in these programs is an extension of the curriculum.

**Family engagement.** There are many reasons why immigrant families are not engaged in school. Family members past schooling experiences, time constraints, working two or more jobs, and the cultural divide are just some of the reasons parents are not engaged (Constantino, 2015). Immigrant children and their parents acculturate at vastly different rates. Although parents and their children start in the same place when they enter the school system, children learn English and the American culture at much faster rates. This difference is exuberated as the children mature into teenagers. It is also worth considering that the concept of “family” varies according to ethnicity and economic status. For instance, brothers, sisters, uncles, and even friends are considered members of the immediate family in many cultures. Moreover, the relationship between schools and parents are often radically different in their native country.

Parent engagement requires courageous leadership. ESSA (2015) references parent engagement 56 times. Through the passing of ESSA, leaders have the institutional support, which requires states to develop family engagement programs to support the learning needs of all students. School engagement begins by challenging some commonly held assumptions. When parents do not attend back to school night, sporting events, and/or teacher conferences, it does not mean they do not care. However, teachers and school leaders too often equate attendance with not caring. This could not be more false. Moreover, these assumptions lack the empathy and cultural competency that stand in the way of building relationships characterized by respect, trust, mutual understanding,
and common goals. Leaders that have the wherewithal to challenge these commonly held assumptions and take the first step in leading change are thus needed. However, talk is cheap. Principals that learn along their staff are more likely to succeed in improving parent engagement efforts. Involving others is key. Teachers and school counselors are great resources, that when led properly, can provide the structures needed to engage every immigrant family.

Schools engage parents on their own terms. Back to school night, open house, conference night, coffee with the principal, transition night, and many other events take place at times when immigrant families may be working. The majority of these events also take place in the school building. It is important to remember that teachers are not contracted at the times these events occur and accordingly they can only occur a handful of times throughout the year. Making connections with immigrant families begins with making them a priority. Personally reaching out to families and inviting them, whenever their schedule permits, to visit the school is one way to kindle relationships with immigrant parents. Additionally, engaging local churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples frequented by immigrant families shows an investment by the school to build relationships. Inviting members of the ethnic community into the school, or meeting them on their terms, builds inroads into the ethnic communities the school serves. As the leader of the school, it is important for the principal to lead family engagement efforts. Principal leadership communicates to teachers, staff members, parents, and the community that family engagement is a priority.
Teachers are a big part of immigrant family engagement. Simply put, parents want to hear from their child’s teacher. When parents do not attend school events, rather than making a judgment, engaging them is as simple as picking up the phone or getting into a car. Making alternate arrangements with immigrant families goes a long way in working out the logistics that too often get in the way. Simply put, the one time *take it or leave it* approach does not work for most immigrants and poor families. Teachers can also engage other teachers in learning the culture of ELL students and their families. For instance, several years ago a school organized a culture day. At that time, the school served approximately 180 immigrant high school students from more than 40 different nations. Information about culture day was shared with local churches and temples well in advance of the event. Culture day included student led presentations and ethnic food throughout the school day. Parents, teachers, and community members visited throughout the day to partake in the presentations as well as the delicious food. When the school day ended, the students organized a soccer game for both girls and boys. The event included cold drinks and more food. After the game, the school put on a culture night event with dances, presentations, and even more food. The event was well attended by community members, parents, students, and teachers. At the end of the day, the students wrote thank you notes to teachers in more than 40 different languages.

*Counseling programs.* The role of school counselors, in providing support and opportunities for ELL students to enroll in advanced middle school classes and AP and IP coursework at the high school level, was a recurrent subtheme throughout this study. Counselors have the opportunity to lead ELL and former ELL student enrollment in
advanced coursework at the middle school and high school level by advocating for these ethnic minorities, providing professional development, mentoring students, and engaging families. Thus, this study makes four school recommendations. Firstly, counselors must gather and monitor ELL and former ELL classroom performance data. Moreover, counselors may form Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and develop SMART goals in order to increase ELL and former ELL enrollment in advanced middle school courses and IB and AP courses. Secondly, counselors may provide professional development to peers and the teaching staff on ELL best practices and family involvement. Counselors may serve as the mediating agent between the teacher, the school, the student, and the student’s family. Accordingly, counselors are in a position to advocate for ELL students to all stakeholders. At the secondary level, counselors often meet with families on an annual basis to provide parents with information on academic courses and programs. Furthermore, at these meetings, academic planning takes place for each individual student. This is a great opportunity to engage these families. Thirdly, counselors must involve ELL parents in the academic programming that takes place on an annual basis. When parents are not available for meetings, counselors may conduct their work by visiting homes, temples, synagogues, and community centers. Finally, states, school districts, and schools may facilitate the work of counselors by considering the reduction of the student to counselor ratio.

The work of school counselors has changed over the past decade. With increasing demands, school counselors are asked to do more with less. The American School Counselor Association (2016), recommends student to counselor ratio not to exceed
250:1. However the Code of Virginia Standards of Quality (2015), mandates that middle school counselor to student ratio may not exceed 400:1, while high school ratios may not exceed 350:1. Shrinking school budgets and conflicting demands lead to realistic counselor to student ratios that are much closer to the maximum limit set by the state and much higher than those recommended by the American School Counselor Association. Additionally, school counselors are already inundated with increased counseling demands. This action step would provide counselors with the most precious resource needed to do their work.

**Implications for Research**

Baker, L. L. (2013) research on the common schooling experiences of former ELL students enrolled in advanced classes at the middle school level opened the door for further research at the high school level. As the passing of ESSA requires schools to follow ELL students for at least two years after exiting ELL programs, more monitoring will potentially yield more research. Because immigrant students continue to learn English throughout the PK-16 spectrum, monitoring the academic success of students must follow them throughout their education. In the meantime a dearth of research, on all aspects of former ELL achievement, continues to exist throughout the K-12 spectrum. The findings of this study warrant four research recommendations.

*Recommendation 1: Conduct large-scale quantitative research studies with former ELL students.* The research on former ELL students enrolled in AP and IB classes is characterized as sparse at best. This phenomenological study included seven participants. Baker, L. L. 2013, middle school study included five participants. This
study identified 4 teacher factors, 4 school factors, and 3 external factors related to the shared schooling experiences, shared success factors, and shared inhibiting factors. However, it is important to remember that the size of this study limits the generalizability of results. Accordingly, this study calls for large quantitative research on the shared experiences, shared success factors, and shared inhibiting factors of former ELL students.

**Recommendation 2: Conduct studies on the effect of school counseling programs on the achievement and acculturation of ELL students.** The role of school counselors in the course selection and support provided to the participants was instrumental to their success. This study calls for qualitative research on the effect of school counseling programs on the achievement of English Language Learners. Additionally, as this study found acculturation to be related to ELL achievement, the effect of school counseling programs on the acculturation of ELL students is further suggested. Lastly, as ELL students historically have been tracked into lower classes, this study calls for action research on the effectiveness of counseling programs in providing opportunities for enrollment in AP and IB coursework.

**Recommendation 3: Conduct studies on the relationship between ELL extracurricular participation and academic achievement.** Academic support networks and friends were found to be critically important to the English language development and academic assistance of ELL students in and outside the classroom. The research on the relationship between extracurricular participation and student achievement for non-ELL students is conclusive. However, conclusive research on the relationship between ELL and former ELL student achievement and extracurricular participation is not yet
available. This study thus calls for both qualitative and quantitative research on the relationship between extracurricular participation and ELL and former ELL achievement. Once schools begin to better track and monitor ELL students that exit these programs, the data needed for these studies will be more readily available.

**Recommendation 4: Conduct studies on the relationship between family engagement and ELL achievement.** The families of the participants in this study provided help with schoolwork and homework during elementary school. At the same time, students were having difficulties learning English and understanding the language of instruction in the classroom. Also at this time, the students did not have the academic support networks they later developed in high school. However, at the high school level, family engagement was largely absent. This study calls for additional research on the effect of family engagement on the academic achievement of former ELL students. Because parental engagement is greater at the elementary and middle school level, high school family engagement should receive additional attention. Accordingly, schools may choose to conduct action research to provide immediate value. This study also calls on principals, teachers, and counselors to initiate ELL and former ELL parent engagement efforts.

**The Formula For Success**

The findings of this study are consequential for ELL and former ELL students. Yet, no single factor identified by this study is solely responsible for the success of these former ELL students. Relationships are important, but they do not solely account for student success. Having high expectations and the support needed to meet them still does
not entirely account for the success of these students. Quality teaching and access to advanced courses is important, but many students still fail in these courses when they lack the motivation needed to be successful. Parent involvement is also important, but too much or too little involvement can thwart student achievement efforts. Having friends and networks is important, but having the right friends and the right network is even more important. Having the wrong friends and the wrong network can be even more detrimental to success. As such, it is important to remember that the students in this study were successful because they shared the same schooling experiences while overcoming several inhibiting factors. The students in this study were further successful because their common schooling experiences and inhibiting factors resulted in the right combination that maximized their academic opportunities and altered their trajectories in ways otherwise not possible.

The right combination of factors are related to teacher practice, school leadership, and individual or external factors. Figure 2 provides a summary of the key ingredients that form winning formula for ELL student achievement. The recipe for student success begins at home with parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and other extended family members that are willing to help the student during the first two years in school. During this difficult time, marked by extreme isolation due to language proficiency, the family is a lifeline to the student’s success. Because supportive parents or extended family members may not be an asset to all immigrant students, schools should reach out to these families and involve the greater community to garner support. Additionally, teachers and schools should extend these relationships past the two year mark and find ways to
appropriately involve parents and extended family members throughout the elementary, middle, and high school years.

**Figure 2. ELL Achievement Formula**

*Note.* No single factor solely accounted for the academic achievement of former ELL students. The combination of the factors in this diagram is associated with the former ELL high academic achievement.

Teachers provide the majority of the ingredients that make up the ELL formula for success. As we have seen, teachers must build relationships with students and care
for them as individuals. Clear and simple language as well as the use of feedback and vocabulary instruction is another key ingredient that adds to this winning combination. Language development and acculturation must further be developed through vocabulary instruction. Similarly, vocabulary instruction that provides students with value added skills and strategies combine to unlock the curriculum across the content areas.

Schools also provide several ingredients to the conditions required to maximize achievement. School counselors must provide coaching and support to ELL students at all stages of development. Providing access to advance courses at the middle school level, even when the students have the potential, but lack the achievement to meet the criteria, makes a world of difference. The academic trajectories for students begin early. Even a few degrees at the beginning of the journey affects students tremendously further down the road. Ensuring that students have access to rigorous curricula while ensuring these students are not tracked into lower classes directly and permanently impacts their academic trajectories. Additionally, schools must encourage students to get involved in extracurricular activities. By being deliberate and intentional about involving every ELL students in a component of the school’s culture, schools will maximize the language development of students as well helping them develop supportive academic networks.

As reviewed, student motivation is a function of effective teacher practice, high expectations, support, and commitment. Motivation is improved in light of teacher clarity, positive relationships, involvement in school activities, and a grade system that recognizes effort over achievement. It is entirely too easy, and very tempting, for practitioners to blame students when they do not appear motivated. Rather, the
proverbial finger must be pointed in both directions. Given the right effort, anything is possible. When it comes to student motivation, expressed by the success expectancy theory throughout this study, the cart must not be put in front of the horse. Students will be motivated and work hard when the right conditions are in place. The students in this study were successful because all of these conditions were present. This winning formula provides a pathway to reproducing these conditions, informing policy, leadership, and practice.

**Limitations that Emerged during the Study**

This study is about seven students that are academically successful. This study also is about the shared experiences of these seven students whose families came to this country for the opportunities it provides. Regardless of background, the families of these seven participants had one thing in common even before they arrived on these shores. The seven students that participated in this study are smart, vibrant, determined, and have big dreams for their futures. I am confident that years from now these students will make lasting contributions to both their families and the community. In my experience, though these students came from various regions of the world, their schooling experiences were rather similar. However, it is important to note that four of the seven students that participated in this study came from East Asia. One student came from Russia, another from Jordan, and another from Pakistan. As other researchers and practitioners aim to generalize the results of this study, replicate its results, and further build on its findings, it is important to recognize that students’ background is an important characteristic. Yet, while East Asian students are overrepresented in this study, it is also important to note
that when comparing each participant, the findings were consistent for all students regardless of background. Despite their ethnic or geographic background, while their experiences were similar, their personalities and backgrounds were as different as any other high school students. For instance, while one East Asian student came from an affluent background, another had few resources and support. Similarly, while one parent was involved at the high school level, the same was not found for the remaining six participants. The literature review thus contextualize the results of this study and has served as a goal post throughout its conduct.

**Final Thoughts**

From its inception this study aimed to give voice to the students. Being new in a school is hard. Being new and different is even harder. Being new and lacking the language, social, and cultural background to understand basic things is something most Americans can’t even begin to relate to. When students overcome these barriers, it is important to listen to their stories and how they made meaning from their experiences. The findings of this study are hardly revolutionary. There is no one thing that guarantees success. For that matter, that one thing has eluded educators because just like parenting, education is a process. In other words, educating children takes a combination of things also called best practices. The combination of best practices identified by this study made a tremendous difference for these students. Time is the greatest resource for both teachers and students. While teachers have 30 years to improve their practice, students do not. My mother, with only seven grades of education once said, “copiii au un potențial și ai un timp limitat pentru a le dezvolta.” In other words, children have
potential and you only have a limited time to develop it. The combination of strategies in this study made the best use of that time for these academically successful former ELL students.
Appendix A: Participant Informed Consent

PARTICIPANT (STUDENT) CONSENT FORM

HIGH ACHIEVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES OF FORMER ELL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ADVANCED HIGH SCHOOL COURSES

The College of William and Mary

You are invited to participate in a study of academically successful former ELL students. This study aims to identify the common schooling experiences, schooling factors, and identify common barriers that both inhibited and facilitated the success of former ELL students. The purpose of this study is to inform teachers, administrators, and researchers in order to better create the conditions necessary for ELL student academic success.

Presentations and manuscripts may result from the analysis of these data. Information gathered through this study may benefit and inform others on helping ELL students succeed academically. There are no anticipated risks or benefits to participating other than those encountered in daily life. The researcher is conducting this study as part his doctoral dissertation at the College of William and Mary.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact the principal investigator, Anthony Vladu at axvlad@wm.edu, 757-871-5761; my faculty advisor, Dr. James Stronge, 757-221-2339, jhstro@wm.edu; or Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC), 757-221-2358, tjward@wm.edu.

PROCEDURES
The total amount of time you will spend in this study is 2-3 hours. I will do my best to schedule the two interviews at times that do not interfere with your academic classes or school activities. All interviews will be conducted before or after school, evenings, and/or weekends, depending on your availability or preference. If you choose to participate in this study you will:

1. Participate in one 45 minute – 1 hour interview
2. Be observed in your classroom of your choice for 30 minutes
3. Participate in a second 30-45 minute interview
4. Giver permission for me to talk with one of your teachers

BENEFITS
This study will not benefit you directly. It will however help educators better serve the needs of ELL students as it relates to the quality of teaching, availability of courses, and fostering a school context that will better prepare ELL students achieve academically.
COMPENSATION
By participating in this study you will receive a $40 gift card to compensate you for your
time and effort.

Please read the following statements and indicate your permissions below.

I understand that my involvement in this study is purposeful in that permissions and
consent will be obtained only for those included in the narrative.

I further understand that the researcher will hold my information in strict confidence and
that no comments will be attributed to me by name without my specific permission. I
have the option to provide a pseudonym of my choice, but I also recognize there is a
possibility of identification given the nature of the study.

I recognize that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation in
this study at any time or decline to give permission in a particular instance. Any artifacts
provided or created during the course of the study may become part of the permanent
research files unless otherwise requested.

By signing below, I give consent that my involvement and interactions may be included
in the study.

Participant _______________________________ Date ______
Pseudonym (if desired) ________________________
Researcher ________________________________ Date ______
Appendix B: Parent Consent Form

PARENT CONSENT FORM

HIGH ACHIEVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES OF FORMER ELL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ADVANCED HIGH SCHOOL COURSES

The College of William and Mary

Your child has been invited to participate in a research study. This study involves former ELL students that are currently enrolled in IB and/or AP classes. This study aims to identify the common schooling experiences, schooling factors, and identify common barriers that both facilitate and inhibit the success of former ELL students. The purpose of this study is to inform teachers, administrators, and researchers in order to better create the conditions necessary for ELL student academic success.

Presentations and manuscripts may result from the analysis of these data. Information gathered through this study may benefit and inform others to help ELL students succeed academically. There are no anticipated risks or benefits to participating other than those encountered in daily life. The researcher is conducting this study as part his doctoral dissertation at the College of William and Mary.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact the principal investigator, Anthony Vlad at axvlad@email.wm.edu, (757) 871-5761; my faculty advisor, Dr. James Stronge, 757-221-2339, jhstro@wm.edu; or Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC), 757-221-2358, tjward@wm.edu.

PROCEDURES

The total amount of time your child will be involved in this study is approximately 2 hours. I will do my best to schedule the interviews at times that do not interfere with his/her academic classes or school activities. All interviews will be conducted before or after school, evenings, and/or weekends, depending on his/her availability or preference. If you give permission for your child participate in this study he/she will:

1. Participate in one 45 minute – 1 hour interview
2. Be observed in one classroom of your choice for 30 minutes
3. Participate in a second 30-45 minute interview
4. Give permission for me to talk with one of his/her teachers

BENEFITS

This study will not benefit you or your child directly. It will however help educators better serve the needs of ELL students as it relates to the quality of teaching, availability
of courses, and fostering a school context that will better prepare ELL students to achieve academically.

COMPENSATION
By participating in this study your child will receive a $40 gift card to compensate them for their time and effort.

Please read the following statements and indicate your permissions below.

I understand that my child’s involvement in this study is purposeful in that permissions and consent will be obtained only for those included in the narrative.

I further understand that the researcher will hold my child’s information in strict confidence and that no comments will be attributed to him or her by name without their specific permission. My child will have the option to provide a pseudonym of his/her choice, but I also recognize there is a possibility of identification given the nature of the study.

I recognize that my child’s participation is voluntary and that she/he can withdraw their participation in this study at any time or decline to give permission in a particular instance. Any artifacts provided or created during the course of the study may become part of the permanent research files unless otherwise requested.

By signing below, I give consent that my child’s involvement and interactions may be included in the study.

Parent Name____________________________________ Date________________
Student (Participant) Name __________________________ Date ______________
Pseudonym (if desired) ______________________________
Researcher ___________________________ Date ______________
Appendix C: Teacher Consent Form

TEACHER INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

HIGH ACHIEVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS:
THE SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES OF FORMER ELL STUDENTS ENROLLED
IN ADVANCED HIGH SCHOOL COURSES

*The College of William and Mary*

You have been invited to participate in a 45 minute interview because you are currently teaching one or more students who have previously received ELL services and are currently enrolled in an Advanced, AP and/or IB class. This study aims to identify the common schooling experiences, schooling factors, and identify common barriers that both inhibited and facilitated the success of former ELL students. The purpose of this study is to inform educators and researchers in order to better create the conditions necessary for ELL student academic success.

Presentations and manuscripts may result from the analysis of these data. Information gathered through this study may benefit and inform others to help ELL students succeed academically. There are no anticipated risks or benefits to participating other than those encountered in daily life. The researcher is conducting this study as part his doctoral dissertation at the College of William and Mary.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact the principal investigator, Anthony Vladu at axvlad@email.wm.edu, (7570 871-5761; my faculty advisor, Dr. James Stronge, 757-221-2339, jhstro@wm.edu; or Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC), 757-221-2358, tjward@wm.edu.

PROCEDURES
The total amount of time you will be involved in this study is approximately 1 hour. I will do my best to schedule the interview at a time that does not interfere with your teaching duties.

BENEFITS
This study will not benefit you directly. It will however help educators better serve the needs of ELL students as it relates to the teaching characteristics, availability of advanced courses, and fostering a school context that will better prepare ELL students to achieve academically.

Please read the following statements and indicate your permissions below.

I understand that my involvement in this study is purposeful in that permissions and consent will be obtained only for those included in the narrative.
I further understand that the researcher will hold my information in strict confidence and that no comments will be attributed to me by name without my specific permission. I have the option to provide a pseudonym of my choice, but I also recognize there is a possibility of identification given the nature of the study.

I recognize that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation in this study at any time or decline to give permission in a particular instance. Any artifacts provided or created during the course of the study may become part of the permanent research files unless otherwise requested.

By signing this form, I give consent that my involvement and interactions may be included in the study.

Participant ___________________________ Date ________
Pseudonym (if desired) ___________________________
Researcher ___________________________ Date ________
Appendix D: Interview Protocol Permission

Baker, Lottie
To: Vladu, Anthony
Re: Former ELL Research Question

March 18, 2016 at 8:42 AM

Dear Anthony,
Thank you for your email. I'm delighted that you're interested in research on former ELLs in AP/IB courses. I think it's an important topic and one that needs more research from student perspectives. You can certainly use my interview protocols. I am assuming you can access them from my dissertation appendices?

I'd also love to talk more with you about your work. I'm in DC now, so not too far from you. Will you be attending TESOL in Baltimore or AERA in DC this year? If so, perhaps we can set up a time to chat!

Best,
Lottie

On Thu, Mar 17, 2016 at 8:58 PM, Vladu, Anthony <avladu@ycsd.york.va.us> wrote:

Hello Ms. Baker,

My name is Anthony Vladu. I am currently conducting research on former ELL students enrolled in AP and IB classes at the high school level with the College of William and Mary. I am familiar with your research on former ELL students and I am particularly interested in doing more research on the topic. I am a former ELL student myself and currently I serve as the Director of Secondary Instruction for the York County School Division. I am also writing to ask for permission to use your interview protocols with students at the high school level. I would love to chat to hear more about your work and to discuss this topic.

Sincerely,

Anthony Vladu

Work: (757) 898-0409
Mobile: (757) 871-5761

Lottie L. Baker, Ed.D.
Visiting Assistant Professor
Department of Curriculum & Pedagogy
Graduate School of Education & Human Development
The George Washington University
Washington, DC
Appendix E: Student Interview Protocol #1

Student Interview Protocol #1

Introduction:

1. First, tell me about yourself? (probe as needed)
   a. What kinds of things do you like to do
   b. How do you think your friends would describe you?
   c. How do you think your teachers would describe you?
   d. How do you think your family would describe you?

2. Tell me about your schooling experience so far? (probe as needed)
   a. What are 5 words that describe school for you? Why did you choose these words? What do they mean to you?
   b. What has it been like going to school?
   c. Can you think of any events that stand out as particularly memorable in school? What are they?

3. Tell me about your schools when you were younger? (probe as needed)
   a. Where did you go to school? (more than one place? In the US? Or in your native country too?)
   b. If you went to different schools, what are some of the differences between those schools and this one?
   c. What about the similarities?
   d. What about the differences and similarities between middle and high school?

4. Tell me about how you leaned English in school? (ESL, LEP, ELL classes, Regular Classes)
   a. What was it like to learn English? (what were the easy parts, what were the hard parts)
   b. Who or what helped you lean English? (teachers, friends, parents, TV, books, internet, etc.) How did this help you?
   c. What is school like now that you are not ESL, ELL, LEP?

5. Tell me about your classes and teachers? (probe as needed)
   a. Think about your one or two teachers who are your most memorable teachers? What are/were your teachers like? Can you describe them and tell me why they are memorable?
b. What courses are you taking this year? Which courses did you take last year?
c. How did you decide to take these courses? Who helped you make these decisions?
d. What kinds of work do you do in school in both advanced courses and regular? Can you think of any memorable project or assignment (good, bad, interesting, challenging)? Can you describe it?
e. What kinds of school subjects are the most interesting? The most challenging or difficult? The easiest?
f. What kinds of homework do you do? (a lot, subject areas, when, where, who helps you)?
g. Can you think of a time when you had difficulty on an assignment or test? What did you do to complete the assignment/test?
h. Were there other adults in your school, besides your teacher, that helped you? Tell me about them?
i. If you could change anything about the way school was for you, what would that be?

6. Wrapping-up

a. Is there anything else that I didn’t ask or you would like to add
b. Do you have any questions for me?

Before you leave, let me explain the next few activities that will take place over the next few weeks

1. Classroom Observation

2. Schedule 2nd Interview
Appendix F: Student Interview Protocol #2

Interview Protocol #2: Current Schooling Experiences

1. **Observation**
   a) How have the past few days gone for you since the classroom visit? (good, bad, explain)
   b) When I saw in school, I noticed that the teacher/student ___________________. What do you think of that?
   c) When I saw in school, I noticed that you _____________________. Why did you do/say that? What were you thinking about when you asked/did that?

2. **Perception of School**
   a) What is it like attending this school? What parts do you like/dislike?
   b) If you had to tell a new student about this school, what would you tell him/her?
   c) Do you look forward to coming to school? Tell me more/what do you mean by that?
   d) Are you happy with the grades you make in your classes? Why/why not?
   e) What would be a bad grade for you? How do you feel? Or would you feel if you got that grade?

3. **Advanced Coursework**
   a) Were you in advanced classes last year? Why/why not? How were these classes different and the same from your other classes?
   b) How would you describe your advanced classes? Compared to other classes? Are they hard/easy?
   c) How are your teachers in advanced class/es? Compared to your regular classes?
   d) How is the homework different between advanced and regular classes?
   e) How is classwork different between advanced and regular classes?
   f) Do you make good grades in your advanced classes?
   g) What and how much are you learning in your advanced classes?

4. **Advanced Course Class Characteristics**
   a) Who else is in your advanced class/es? (other ELL or students who used to be ESL? Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, Boys, Girls, etc.)
   b) Do these other students make good grades?
   c) Are you friends with these students? In class, outside class?
   d) Are these students in your other classes too?
   e) Do students get along?

**Closing**
1. Is there anything you would like to add
2. Do you have any questions for me?
### Appendix G: Classroom Observation Form

#### Student Classroom Observation Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSERVATION “LOOK-FORS”</th>
<th>OBSERVED</th>
<th>EXAMPLES AND NON-EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicators for High-Yield Active Student Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in setting learning goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in making choices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in discussing text and other input</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in problem solving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in peer tutoring, cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, and other cooperative group structures: <strong>Specify</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies meta-cognition strategies, <strong>Specify</strong>: a) concept mapping; b) Inferencing/Generating Hypothesis/Predicting; c) Asking/generating questions; d) Determining importance/big ideas; e) Summarizing; f) Visualizing; g) Synthesizing; h) Monitoring and clarifying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates/uses learning tools, <strong>indicate</strong>: a) Concept mapping; b) Advance/graphic organizers; c) Manipulatives; d) Technology; e) Other, <strong>Specify</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in self-assessment of his/her work, what it is learned and how it is learned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in asking for and giving specific feedback to peers and to the teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Lower-Yield Practices for Students

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completes homework in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks out of turn and interrupts flow of questions/ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds orally with limited depth/breadth/wait-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens passively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in off task behaviors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Narrative Information
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script Interactions with Peers</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Script Interactions with Teachers/Instructional Staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** This form is modified with permission from the College of William and Mary SURN Principal Academy. High and lower yield indicators are generated from Hattie’s (2009), meta-analysis.
Appendix H: Teacher Interview Protocol

Teacher Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this project. I realize this is a busy time of the year. I will keep this interview to 45 minutes. Everything you share that identifies you or your students will be kept entirely confidential. Your name, class name, and subject you teach will also be kept entirely confidential. I may however write about general patterns and non-identifying characteristics in my work. You may refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time during this meeting.

In order for me to be able to remember this meeting, I will be using a digital audio recorder. This recording will be used strictly for this research project. Once this project is complete, the recording will be permanently deleted.

The purpose of this interview is to understand what school is like for your former ELL students from your perspective. I will ask you a series of questions relating to the student’s academic work habits, strengths, weaknesses, and interactions with peers. You may share additional information that is not asked during this interview about the student at any time.

I. Teacher Background
   1. How long have you taught this advanced course?
   2. Do you teach any other advanced classes?
   3. What is your experience with teaching ELL and former ELL students

II. Student Background
   1. How long have you known the student?
   2. What do you know about the student outside the school?
   3. What do you know about the student’s family?

III. Student Advanced Course-Work Performance
   1. When I visited your class the other day, was that a typical day for the student?
   2. How does the student generally behave in your class?
   3. How is the student currently performing in your class
      a. Classwork
      b. Tests
      c. Quizzes
      d. Homework
      e. Writing
      f. Reading
      g. Collaboration with peers
4. How has the student’s performance changed since the beginning of the year
5. What are three words to describe the student’s academic performance
6. How is this student different and the same from your other students in your class
7. How is this student different and the same from other former ELL students?

IV. Student Interactions with Peers
1. Does the student have any friends in your class?
   a. If so, how does the student interact with his friend/s in your class?
2. Does the student have any friends in school?
   a. If so, how does the student interact with his friend/s in school
3. Describe the student’s interaction with peers during group assignments?
4. How does the student interact with other students that is the same/different as his peers?

Closing
1. Is there anything about this student that I did not ask?
2. Is there anything you would like to add?
3. Do you have any questions for me?
Footnotes

1. Thomas Jefferson to Hugh White on May 2, 1801 from Washington D.C. in answering a congratulatory address of foreign born residents of Beaver county Pennsylvania and the government policy toward immigrants.

2. Jack Balderman in a Solution Tree presentation on Professional Learning Communities to York County School Division leadership held on July 28, 2016. Balderman talked about meeting students where they are in response to teacher reluctance to meet the needs of all students.

3. Graduation speech given to the class of 2016 by the superintendent of the York County School Division Dr. Victor Shandor. The superintendent’s graduation message challenged students to have high expectations and work hard to meet them.
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Curriculum Vitae
Teofil Sebastian Vladu (Anthony Vladu)

1971  Birthplace: Bucharest Romania
1984-1985  P.S. 239: Ridgewood, Queens New York, NY
1985-1986  I.S. 61: Corona, Queens, New York, NY
1987-1990  Narrowsburg Central School: Narrowsburg, NY
1990  US Army Basic Training and Advanced Individualized Training
1990-1991  Private: 82nd Airborne Division, Gulf War 1 Saudi Arabia
1991-1993  Specialist: 82nd Airborne Division, FT Bragg, NC
1993-1994  Special Warfare Training Center Selection and Candidate School:
            Training FT. Bragg, NC
1994-1997  Senior Special Forces Engineer Sargent 10th Special Forces Group, FT.
            Carson, CO
1997-1999  BA History: SUNY Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY
1999-2000  MAT Social Studies 6-12: SUNY Binghamton University, Binghamton,
            NY
2000-2008  Teacher: Newport News Public Schools, Newport News, VA
2006-2008  M. Ed, K-12 Administration: The College of William and Mary
2008-2012  Assistant Principal: York High School, York County School Division,
            Yorktown, VA
2012-2015  Principal: Denbigh High School, Newport News, VA
2015-Present  Director of Secondary Instruction, York County School Division, York
              County, VA

283